



Win the Battle for Web Operations

CrownPeak Technology's VP of marketing and product strategy discusses how in today's digital marketing landscape, you can use efficient Web operations to build a better business case and more opportunity for your business.

Okay, let's be honest. Marketers hate math. But you need to do a little math to ensure your Website redesign gets the infrastructure it needs.

Now, I know some of you direct marketing database geeks are out there right now delighting over the decimal point of your latest survey. But, for the most part, we hate math. As a general rule, we'd much rather work on the creative aspects of our new campaign and wring our hands over whether the headline looks more "organic" in Arial or Helvetica font.

And, I have a big secret to share: Everybody else in your organization hates math, too. Well, except for the guy in the corner who freaks out if you mess with his red Swingline stapler. But that's right, you heard it here first: Everyone hates math, and specifically, marketing math. If you don't believe me, try this experiment:

Walk around your office and try to put together a committee to look at your Web analytics reports to determine whether the open rate, click through rate or conversion metrics are trending, and which trend is most significant. Then, walk around with new Web site designs in your hand and ask for opinions. The old cliché is right; everyone has two jobs: their own and marketing. That is, unless you want them to do math.

Why is it so easy for us to get stakeholder and executive buy-in to do a Web site redesign, but so difficult to get buy-in to acquire the tools necessary for us to manage the Website we're about to redesign?

The Website has a huge emotional pull for everyone in the organization, but in today's world, we have to be a bit savvier about how we structure our new Web operations. From adding new Web 2.0 capabilities like social networking, blogging and RSS feeds to other management components like content management, email campaign management and Web analytics, we need to build the business case for why these technologies make sense. In short, we need to do the math.

So, ride the coattails of presenting your Website redesign project, or even after you've launched, and consider a few tips that can help make your case. You'll certainly have to do some math initially, but I promise you, if you do it now you'll not only be more successful, but six months from now you'll have significant ammunition to change that flaming, spinning logo the CFO loves.

Building the business case for your Web operations

Adding technology to your Website operations can feel a bit like installing new electrical and plumbing in your house. When it's all done, you've spent a lot of money and you can't see any of it. But the fact that you're saving money on electricity, the shower works and you don't have a flood in the basement is a definite ROI. And your house is so much more valuable for having done the internal improvements.

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So, there are two tactics for building the business case to purchase Web operations technology. The first, of course, is the tried and true "efficiencies" that are created. This is the "saving money on electricity" argument. Let's just use a simple example. If it currently takes you 10 staff hours at \$50/hour to get a press release live on your Website, then it's costing you \$500 to post each press release. Using a content management system to empower the business users to do the same task in three hours (approvals included) is a 30 percent savings. At 15 press releases per year (and we're only talking about press releases), that's a meaningful savings in just press release production.

However, the lesser of the two arguments explored in building a business case is how much more valuable your new Website is by having added management technologies. And this, frankly, is where it starts to get interesting. I think you'll get no argument from anyone that the Web is an enormously efficient way for us to expand our business, regardless of what our "success conversion" is. Whether it's a new customer, a qualified lead, a satisfied site visitor or a banner ad impression, we all realize that the Web is important. If it isn't, why are we spending so much time trying to figure out how to redesign our sites?

So, if it *is* that important, then it follows that we should continually find ways to optimize it. Inherently, this optimization means that we will drive more success conversions.

Let's look at three examples.

Web operations software drives more success conversions

It's a bold headline, but it's true. Using a content management system to drive your Web site content enables you to be much more flexible about A/B testing of landing pages, publishing your new blog and adding RSS feeds. Any good content management system should also make your site more search engine optimization friendly. A good CMS allows you to optimize the content based on user experience, and it allows you to continually drive more and more content out to your Website, which creates more "Google food" and drives more traffic.

Then, creating loyalty programs using email campaign management systems and RSS to communicate with your customers will also drive more conversions. By feeding relevant content to your frequent visitors/customers, you'll create more "customer evangelists" (to borrow from Guy Kawasaki), which drives more success conversions.

Finally, utilizing Web analytics to measure and segment all of that traffic is the key to completing the 360 degrees of the content lifecycle. And, today, good Web analytics, email campaign management systems and content management systems work together so you can automatically take action based on how users are utilizing your content.

Okay, now it's time for some math...

Certainly your own mileage will vary, but let's say you can generate even a modest 15 percent lift by using Web operations technology. This is a significant bump to your success. And, I bet you can easily beat that number. Add to that the argument (above) that you are 30 percent more efficient, and you've now got an amazingly compelling argument. You can walk into the presentation and say, "With this redesign and new Web operations software, we can boost success conversions by 15 percent and be 30 percent more efficient."

Any executive -- whether they hate it or not -- understands that math.

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Putting it all together

So, when the request comes down that says, "Let's redesign our site," take that opportunity and build your business case for adding in a new operations center.

Here is some advice to get you started:

1. Consider operations technology from a "best-of-breed" approach, rather than investing in a one-application-fits-all approach. Software should and will be the least of your concerns from an investment point of view. The biggest expense to consider when building your business case will be the services needed to support whichever solutions you choose. So, by diversifying your investments, if one aspect (e.g. Web analytics) doesn't meet the needs of your organization or ends up costing too much to support and maintain, you can replace it.
2. When considering Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions, or open source solutions supported by a third party, make sure there is support, maintenance and SLA that guarantees your costs over the life of the contract. While no one can predict the next time the CEO will want to redesign the site (therefore introducing new unexpected costs), any solution provider should be able to guarantee all upgrades, patches and maintenance costs for the life of your software support contract with them.
3. Don't forget that internal resources also cost money. When building your business case, it's often easy to fall into the trap that, *"Bob, the developer, is a sunk cost so I can't count that."* That's true, Bob is a sunk cost, but Bob's "value" is variable. So, when Bob is hand-coding HTML pages for a press release, he's not nearly as valuable as when he's building a new Web application that gives your organization a competitive edge. The cost to the organization for not maximizing the value of Bob is just as real as hard dollars out the window.

The bottom line is, as you build your business case for Web marketing operations, you don't always have to rely on the argument that you can be more efficient. In today's digital marketing landscape, you can use efficient Web operations to build a better marketing engine, and that creates much more opportunity for your business.