



Controlling Content and Building an On-line Brand with a CMS

| Building a Powerful Online Brand that is Simple, Functional, Interactive, and Customer-Focused |

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Controlling Content and Building an Online Brand with a CMS

The word 'brand' has come to mean a lot more than just corporate identity. A brand is no longer a logo, or a tagline, or the 'look and feel'; a brand is a promise. A promise not just of a good product, but of an entire range of user experiences in an ongoing relationship between company and consumer. The best-known global brands today are instantly recognizable – and instantly associated with a certain set of attributes. Building such a brand in today's wired world can be easier and more difficult at the same time.

Establishing this identity online is vital because, as Reuters points out, "Internet companies are becoming more important to people than firms that operate in the real world". The Internet clearly presents unprecedented opportunities to build online brands, and some unique challenges as well. Communicating an online brand requires centrality of structure, empowerment, and collaboration within global Web implementations.

Many global corporations, however, are still slipping up in implementing their own brand guidelines. Errors with design, presentation, content and code can fragment the online brand and undermine trust. In this context, the right Content Management System (CMS) can go a long way in maintaining brand identity by:

- ▶ Speeding up content publishing
- ▶ Preserving content and site consistency
- ▶ Ensuring content accuracy
- ▶ Maintaining control

The Importance of an Online Strategy

The Internet puts a global audience within easy reach of textual, visual, and emotional messages. The Web identity of an organization, however, is perceived by a vast, multicultural audience very quickly. A recent Canadian study found that users form first impressions of Web sites in as little as 1/20th of a second. This initial impression colors all further judgments of quality, credibility and usability; and whether a customer will transact with a company.



Key Stakeholders

- ▶ Customers – current and prospective
- ▶ Business partners
- ▶ Media
- ▶ Senior Management
- ▶ Employees
- ▶ Marketing

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Having a sound online strategy is thus vital. Developing this strategy begins by identifying key stakeholders; those involved in creating, managing, and using your Web site. These include prospects, customers, business partners, employees, marketing, and the media. The equation is complicated by the fact that all online content is mediated through various channels, which in turn multiplies stakeholder inputs affecting the brand.

Content Management Challenges

It is a significant challenge for marketing managers to keep tight control of company branding across borders - especially online. How do you retain control of your online content, and at the same time remain flexible enough to adapt quickly to localized needs or marketing initiatives? Controlling brand content centrally can help develop a consistent image across numerous external and internal Web sites; but then it's harder to stay agile enough for quick responses to market shifts. A decentralized approach is not the solution; there is less control on branding, and this can also lead to mounting maintenance costs over the long term.

This is where a Content Management System (CMS) can help. Investing in the right CMS can:

- ▶ Empower the people that work with your content by allowing subject matter experts to contribute content.
- ▶ Ensure that brand guidelines are maintained by enforcing templates and limiting or granting access based on roles.
- ▶ Allow non-technical users to create, manage and distribute new content across formats and platforms.
- ▶ Ensure that work-flow and security are maintained so that proper approvals are received before content goes live.

CMS and Marketing

Defining a clear-cut objective for a Web site is essential to address marketing objectives. Essentially, a site must be able to address your target audience, project your values, and your value proposition. Complicating the process is the dynamic and highly interactive nature of online marketing today. The top-down, linear models of information distribution of the past have been replaced by myriad interlinking content processes affected by inputs from employees at all levels, consumers, customers, partners, industry observers, and media.

Even though marketers have to project the company-approved line of thought, they cannot really control discussions about products or services. Real-time conversations between stakeholders within and outside the organization have made it imperative for marketers to not only distribute the company line, but also aggregate and respond to inputs contributed by diverse stakeholders. Here, the closed loop functionality of leading CMS solutions comes into play.

The Closed-loop: Now Possible

A good CMS solution integrated with functional platforms such as Web analytics and CRM, lets marketers develop and monitor highly targeted strategic campaigns based on customer histories and behaviors. By continuously analyzing customer responses and refining the communications process and message, you can adjust the marketing campaign to deliver highly targeted and appropriate content and advertising. The up-to-the-minute, accurate feedback of closed loop systems also helps optimize tactical functions such as media planning, merchandising and promotion.

Why a Hosted CMS?

The first criterion for choosing a CMS solution is viability. For organizations with limited resources, an installed software solution is simply too expensive, time-consuming and complex to maintain. An on-demand solution or software delivered as a service, however, offers top-of-the-line functionality without added resource strain. Strategic tie-ups with leading solutions providers in web analytics, email management and CRM allow hosted CMS solutions to provide the added benefit of integrated best-of-breed offerings, helping companies leverage the full potential of their CMS solution.

Conclusion

Companies choosing a CMS solution must remember that a CMS is not merely an application, but rather a commitment to a business strategy. A CMS implementation should therefore be undertaken only after a comprehensive analysis of the company's business needs. Once in place, it can help you control content and build a powerful online brand that is simple, functional, interactive, and customer-focused.

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