



Technologies CAN Get Along

How content management, search and analytics that work together can turn your site into a marketing powerhouse.

A challenge I've been seeing more of lately is the struggle of online marketers to manage Websites with technology components that aren't integrated together. The site search system is often completely separate from the content management strategy, which in turn has no tie to the analytics or other marketing functions on the Website.

As a kid growing up in the '70s, I was taught some of the best lessons in life by the iconic wisdom of Mike Brady (didn't we all?). And as I started thinking about this integration challenge for online marketers one of Mr. Brady's best quotes came to mind: "Alone, we can only move buckets. But if we work together, we can drain rivers." In all fairness, that was from the movie (circa 1995), but give me a break – it works.

If you take full advantage of the technology components that are powering your Website, you have the opportunity to create even more value for both your site visitors and your organization. There are two keys. First, these technology components need to work together. Your search system should drive value for your content, your content management method should help your search results be more relevant and your analytics tool should provide meaningful results that provide actionable (if not even automated) feedback into driving decisions for the first two aspects. Secondly, making these three work together shouldn't break your back, or your budget.

In 2005 it's the message, not the medium

Unless you're an art site, stop thinking about your Website in terms of "look and feel" and start thinking about it as a body of content that can be delivered to as many interfaces as possible. I'm not suggesting here that "look and feel" is meaningless (that's actually the topic for another article), but what I am suggesting is that your users are accessing the content on your Website through an ever-growing number of interfaces. The output of your Web content should be available to as many of these as makes sense for your business. But your content management strategy (including the tool you use) should allow you to seamlessly and painlessly create as many different outputs as you need – whether it's a foreign language, an RSS Feed, WAP, WML, syndicated or a HTML version of your site. The "write once/publish many" paradigm is one of the main reasons you have a content management system in the first place.

Whether you are managing a 20,000 SKU ecommerce site, or a 200-page corporate brochure site, the content is the most valuable asset you have. The method you use to create and publish that content is incredibly important. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) experts are fond of saying that true SEO is more about copywriting than it is any technical tricks. You've got to appeal to both the search engines, *and* your users – all without running afoul of any rules.

Making your content more relevant to Google *is* important. But maybe more important than that is making your content relevant to *your* site search and *your* analytics engine. Sure, you've all heard the mantra of "keywords" and "meta tags" that help search engines find your content, but identifying the content using XML or other kinds of "tags" can accomplish a number of things as well:

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- ▶ Identifying your content can affect its relevancy, which in turn makes it easier for your search system to find your content and deliver the best results to your users.
- ▶ It makes it much easier to reuse content in a number of formats – whether it's RSS or other syndication methods.
- ▶ Your analytics can get much more granular about the "what" you're measuring from a content perspective.

Search and ye shall find...

Consider that 80 to 90 percent of most Website content is never discovered. Ask yourself how many times you've had to move content to a more visited part of the site – just to make sure that it is seen. Maybe it's buried deep in the navigation, Google isn't indexing that page very well or your own site search just doesn't find it. Hidden content is the proverbial tree in the forest – it might as well have never been written. Delivering your site visitors to exactly the content they're looking for is the key of making your content and search work in tandem.

However, what if you could deliver not the most technically "relevant" document for the top search result – but rather the search result you want to the top of any query. How many times has the CEO searched for his/her name and gotten the company retreat page as the top result instead of his/her bio? Instead, you could set this search result to automatically move the Bio Page to the top result for any of those queries. Or, what if you had a feature a la "Google Alerts?" Why not allow your site users to get an email or RSS Feed update every time one of their "triggered" content items gets updated on your site. So, the next time you post an update to that obscure product data sheet the four people to whom this is relevant get an email. Now, you're delivering value to your site visitor.

Don't measure for measurement's sake

So many times analytics is just a series of relatively meaningless numbers. So, the site's traffic increased on Wednesday and Thursday by 10 percent, but what does that mean? We have more traffic, but do we have more leads?

Whether you use an on-demand or a log file analysis tool as your Website, analytics isn't important here. What *is* important is that you should use this information to not only feed your site's performance on page views, hits and referrers, but also on how the content on your site is being used. And you should be able to take action on these metrics. For example, you could use a combination of your analytics tool and your content management tool to feature an article more prominently on the home page based on its popularity.

Put it all together: driving value

If you're using some combination of a content management system, search and analytics, consider these three actions. As with any set of technology and marketing strategies – some of these will make sense to your particular business, and some won't. But again, the key here is that in today's market, none of these are "break the bank" types of features. Any good set of site management tools out there should have most of these capabilities out of the box.

1. Content Management strategies should be focused on delivering the most relevant content to the most users in the easiest way possible. Consider the use of RSS Feeds, email and multiple formats of content so that users have a choice in how they access information from you. Other than setting this up, you shouldn't have to go through any additional effort in order to deliver this content ongoing. Consider identifying your content so that you can reuse it in a

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syndicated fashion and so you can provide for more "advanced" types of searches for your content.

2. Site Search should allow you to manipulate search results easily. No search engine in the world (no matter how big the company is) is better at telling you what's relevant than you are. Use the search engine administration interface to get reports of the queries that are most popular and (more importantly) not found on your site search and make sure that these queries are delivering the most relevant content. Consider strategies to deliver content automatically to the user based on a query, such as automatically delivering the CEO's bio page when his/her name is searched. Consider the use of "alerts" that allow you to illicit feedback from customers and allow them to "subscribe" to site updates based on key words.

3. Analytics are meaningless unless they provide actionable research. Look beyond the hits, page views and referrers to how users are actually using the site content, what they are and are not finding. Consider strategies that allow you to take action based on metrics, either by measuring search results and automatically raising the visibility of the most frequently searched items, or by allowing for A/B (comparison) testing where content is automatically removed and/or added to the site based on a metric that you decide.

At the end of the day, your Website is a machine with many moving parts and integrated technology allows you the mechanism to tune that machine and continually improve the value of your most valuable asset – the content. As Mike Brady would say, "A deck consists of 52 cards, and if the hearts didn't work with the diamonds and the spades with the clubs, then how the heck would we ever play a game of Gin Rummy?" So, deal the cards...