

CONFERENCE REPORT

WEB SITE CONTENT MANAGEMENT FOR TRAVEL

The Kingsway Hall, London, 25-26 January 2001

This two-day conference, organised by IQPC, explored a theme at the centre of numerous debates over the past few months: the production, ownership and use of quality content on corporate web sites and Internet trade portals. An informal survey conducted among delegates at the beginning of the conference revealed that the issue currently provoking the most thought and interest is the use of content to enhance customer loyalty and improve site ‘stickiness’. Consequently, much thought was given on how to use content to enhance CRM and one-to-one marketing opportunities.

On the first day speakers included Nick Stafford, Content Director for TheFirstResort, who explained that content should be regarded by businesses as a long-term investment, contributing to overall profitability. Its effectiveness, however, is determined by appropriate categorisation and propagation by different media; sharing or outsourcing content to suitable partners was also envisaged as a successful strategy. The concept of effective content storage was discussed in greater depth by Alan Kersley, Managing Director of Worldof.Net, who argued the importance of flexible database structure for the classification and storage of diverse types of content in highly specific subcategories, allowing multiple output possibilities. A similar message was conveyed by Nathan Clapton, Business Development Manager UK for Lonely Planet Publications, who introduced a case study based on the categorisation of content on the Lonely Planet web

site; through the use of a sophisticated Knowledge Bank, the company was able to streamline, and therefore vastly improve, the efficiency of its intellectual property creation process and delivery to customers. Dr. Elizabeth Hyde, eBA Commercial Manager, presented another case study, this time concerning the use of content within leisure and corporate extranets. British Airways' extranet strategy will enable the airline to establish single-point trade communications with individual travel consultants, tailoring information to individual users and therefore increasing extranet usage rates and customer satisfaction. Richard Hammond and Jonathan Berry, representing Internet Travel portal Travelmole.com and its parent company, Sift Group Limited, offered yet another perspective of the use of content on the Internet, introducing the concept of web communities. These enable users to undergo an essential transition: from being simple customers to acquiring 'member' status. As a result, community members feel a sense of ownership and belonging, which generates return visits.

The second day saw interesting contributions, among others, from Tony Seaman, Group Sales Director for Holiday Autos International Ltd., who discussed the importance of strategic partnerships between suppliers, travel agencies and portals with compatible objectives, where each of the partners plays a distinct role in the creation and delivery of dynamic and creative content to customers. Ben Mullard, E-commerce Developer for Leisurehunt.com Ltd, expanded on the concept of 'stickiness' according to three variables (lengths, depth and frequency); he explained how each of these variables plays a different role according to the typology of a site (advertising-, transaction- or subscription-based). By understanding the level of stickiness needed, companies can

develop content which suits the purposes of customers. The theme of targeted content development was further discussed by Telme.com's Sales Director, Peter Muller, who introduced the concept of customer profiling according to social values and beliefs rather than traditional demographics. By observing a customer's *modus operandi*, Mr. Muller explained, it is possible to ascertain his/her preferences and value to the company; ultimately, this information may be used to determine which marketing methods that should be used and what type and style of site the customer should see. Martin Halpin, Business Database and Revenue Analysis Manager for The Savoy Group reported on the redevelopment on the Savoy Group's web site and online booking engine, currently underway, highlighting the importance of effective site content and management to obtain the highest possible Return on Investment. Finally, Olivier Dombey, Partner, of Partners in Marketing, briefed the audience on new EU legislation on Data Protection, affecting companies that retain customer records. Mr. Dombey also presented the results of a customer survey on privacy, which revealed that, while the majority of customers agree in principle with the personalisation of online services, they are less likely to reveal personal or sensitive information about themselves. As a result of legislation and customer attitudes, it is therefore necessary for businesses to develop a privacy strategy, which allows for better information handling and control.

The main consideration that emerged from the speeches and consequent interactive discussions over the two days is that, while the traditional belief that 'content is king' still holds true, careful consideration must be given to the process of creation and propagation of information. The analysis of present customer attitudes and the forecasting of their

future preferences should guide the choice of the type of content that should be developed. Companies should also ensure their databases have multiple output capability and flexible, accessible structures which allow information to be broken down in highly specific categories. Incorporating content from third party sources should also be considered, since it reduces editorial costs and allows for greater variety. However, content partnerships should be established between companies with similar objectives, which are able to provide customers with a seamless service under a single brand.

Maria Cristina Licata

Genesys Information Limited

cristina.licata@genesysinformation.com

www.genesysinformation.com