The issues with managing multi-channel content
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1. Introduction:

The rapid and accelerating rate of change brought about by the Internet and advancements in technology is leaving many businesses struggling to adapt. Twenty five years ago B2C operations were straightforward: you either had a physical shop or a mail-order catalogue or a combination of both to reach your customers. While B2B operations employed sales staff to identify and sell to their customers directly.

Now, all that has changed and this presents a great opportunity for those organisations willing to embrace the changes. There are now so many channels and ways for your customers to obtain information that it is vital you present a consistent and regularly updated message across everything you do. From printed catalogue to web site and Facebook page to email special offers the need to effectively acquire, manage, process and consistently publish media rich assets is necessary for success.

Businesses now need to think and behave like publishers and establish:

- Acquisition and storage strategies
- Workflows to control all aspects of production
- Publishing tools and strategy

Only this way will they be able to deliver timely and consistent content to the appropriate channel.

About this white paper:

With this white paper we have attempted to cut-through the ‘fog’ currently surrounding multi-channel marketing. We have done this by firstly identifying the ways that businesses now use to reach customers.

Then, we have outlined the issues that organisations who want to market to multiple channels face. Finally we have very briefly featured the Matrix CMS solution that can overcome these problems.
2. The importance of multiple channels and the need to engage with them

Over the last few years technological innovations have totally changed the way that individuals and organisations buy. We are now in what is called the post-PC era - the trend of declining PC sales in favour of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

According to VC firm KBPC, global PC shipments were overtaken by smartphone and tablet shipments back in Q4 2010. It is also predicted that the global installed base of PCs will fall behind smartphones and tablets by Q2 this year. To back this up MIT says smartphones are spreading faster than any previous technology in human history – from 5% to 40% in 4 years.

So what does this mean for businesses?

**Diversification is key to success:**

These changes have impacted on what is effectively a static market caused by the economic recession of 2008. So organisations have had to fight to maintain market share by adapting their traditional business approach. Every business now has a website but how they use this differs greatly from organisation to organisation. Some (albeit a decreasing minority) have a basic brochure site whilst many now embrace full e-commerce.

Diversification is key and this is represented by the full range of ways that organisations now try to attract customers:

**Customers use multiple devices:**

Customers now tend to utilise a laptop as a high-speed, large format platform, a tablet for more mobility and a smartphone to respond quickly to offers or for impulse purchases.

**The use of Social media:**

This is a very cost-effective way to reach large numbers of customers. Accordingly many businesses are now present on sites like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

**Multiple offerings:**

Here the main online web site is complemented by micro-sites for particular products or markets. These sites can exist as an independent URL or as part of the main site.

**Working with partners and competitors**

By working with independent partners such as Wowcher, organisations can reach far more potential customers than they can themselves. Similarly, some have gone as far as working with a competitor on a specific promotion to increase market share.

**Offers:**

Frequently refreshing or adding new offers to the web site and all other channels is an important way of keeping your name in the customers mind.

**The physical shop:**

Many shops now have in-store devices for providing extra information when a customer is buying or to support flexible fulfilment of their order.
Multiple brands:
Many businesses have bought existing brands or created new ones that need to be promoted individually but within the overall corporate guidelines. Managing the content across these brands is a major headache that needs to be addressed to prevent confusion and loss of identity.

Multi-language:
The search for new markets and the corresponding language requirements is also a factor that needs to be considered. For e-commerce multi-language sites are a necessity, while a brochure or catalogue will need to be reprinted in the appropriate language.

All the above factors are changing the way that businesses operate but the common theme behind all these initiatives is consistency of content. Without that brand loyalty will be compromised, the customer will become confused and ultimately business lost to a competitor.

This is the real challenge of multi-channel marketing.
3. The issues in managing multi-channel content

Managing the volume and different types of information that are now available is one of the biggest challenges faced by marketers today. In this section we are going to outline the issues that need to be addressed to ensure a successful multi-channel strategy can be executed.

3.1 Managing the content:

Let’s start by looking at the content itself. Twenty years ago this would have been a relatively straightforward task as the only types of content that would need to be considered were images and written descriptions. These would be combined into a brochure/catalogue produced on a regular basis and the whole process would have been considerably simpler than today.

Now there are 4 things to consider:

**Different types of content** – from videos to apps, the digital world has greatly expanded the types of content that now need to be acquired, stored, managed and processed in the overall production process. Typical information that will need to be stored includes: product item information, product categories, non-product copy for marketing content that appears on category pages and other landing pages, site templates for page definition layout, non-product images and animation or video assets and third-party syndicated copy content.

**Source of content** – both internal and external content are likely to be used in the production of marketing collateral. These need to be easily accessible and editable to ensure the correct message is delivered in a timely fashion.

**Form factor** – the eventual device the content is going to be delivered to also has to be taken into account. For example large video files would not be delivered to a mobile app.

**Channel** – Most importantly you need to consider the channel your content is going to. This may be simply different lengths of description, but it could include language variations or crucially changes in marketing message. For different markets you may want to highlight different features or attributes.

These 4 factors combine to greatly increase the volume of content that needs to be managed and processed for even the simplest catalogue or web site.

3.2 Managing the process:

The creation, composition and management of content for frequent site refreshes and new catalogue production for large amounts of product can take up many man hours and be a long and costly process.

According to marketing agency SapientNitro there are four major processes that need to be considered:

**Digital planning and asset acquisition** – the process of creating, buying or searching for assets given the specification of a new user experience or a new campaign.
Digital asset ingestion and storage – how created or purchased assets are uploaded into a common Digital Asset Management (DAM) system, associated with folders and metadata for use by content management workers and to create user experiences within the CMS or other tools.

Web content management – where templates are created and content assembled into components or pages. This is also where the review and approval workflow is run, version content controlled and the creation of multiple versions required for the different form factors.

Content publishing and delivery – the process of selecting the subset of the content that will be deployed at a given time.

Typically, these processes take place against the backdrop of geographic dispersion both for the employees/contractors carrying out the job and the actual content itself. Also, regulatory issues, global operations and even disclosure of corporate financial information are factors that many companies need to address.

Simply having content approved via e-mail is not enough in many environments as there is a need for multiple levels of approval. Consequently, it is vital that workflows are established so that all stakeholders are involved in the process.

3.3 Publishing consistently to multiple channels:

Multi-channel publishing is the ability to use a single source of product information to drive multiple communications across all publishing channels in a consistent way. This means you enter data once without re-keying for changes for each channel, saving time and ensuring consistency.

Such a process will not only enable you to get your products to market faster but also improve your efficiency and ultimately reduce costs or increase capacity.

The channels that this covers include:

Printed catalogue and brochure production – any type of printed material from technical or consumer catalogues through to short run brochures, order forms and product information sheets.

Web site and e-mails – the need to automatically generate a variety of web-ready images from print-ready originals, irrespective of the source and destination is vital in ensuring that all digital channels can be serviced.

Packaging – extract up-to-date information onto any packaging materials.

Store – link shop tills to provide product information and images. POS shelf-edge tickets should also be generated automatically.

Call centre – retrieve centralised information for call centre staff to answer questions as well as cross-sell and up-sell.

Warehouse – product data and images can be used for labelling swatches, product samples, label racking with images and descriptive text as well as barcodes and standard product ID.

It is important to take into account here that although certain factors, such as a product’s physical dimensions, are consistent across all channels, other information is not. So, for example, the benefits you want to stress can vary dependent on the channel and expected customer, also particular features will sometimes need to be highlighted to tie in with a specific promotion or offer.
3.4 Localisation and multi-language capability:

The great thing about e-commerce is that there are no geographic boundaries. Retailers can sell and deliver their products to anywhere in the world. The only real barrier is language.

Although English is estimated as having 765 million speakers in 2013, it still lags heavily behind Mandarin with 1,026 million and even third placed Spanish with 466 million is catching up fast.

This means that if you want to reach out to these markets you must be able to deliver your content to them localised to their language. Doing this will greatly increase your chances of a sale.

Any content management system you deploy needs to be able to effortlessly handle multiple languages.

4. The Matrix CMS solution

In the previous sections we have seen why marketing to multiple channels is important and the issues this creates. This has highlighted the fact that a comprehensive system is needed to ensure that multiple channels can be properly addressed.

Whilst there are many products available to help with parts of this process, there are very few that can deal effectively with the entire problem and help to simplify and streamline your product publishing process.

The Matrix CMS platform has been designed to provide a comprehensive and integrated solution to product publishing requirements for multiple channels.

It offers a sophisticated solution that:

- Efficiently stores and manages all types of content
- Controls the entire process of publishing, workflow and sign-off, no matter where the asset or staff member is located
- Quickly, easily and consistently enables publishing to all types of channel
- Effortlessly handles multiple languages

The overall effect is that designers are free to create compelling designs, data is accurate, web sites are updated quickly, production time is reduced and deadlines are met.

4.1 The benefits of Matrix CMS

Implementing Matrix CMS to look after your multi-channel content management and publishing delivers many benefits:

Reduce Costs:

Manpower costs – Because employees no longer spend hours searching for assets, styling text and organising layouts, the use of external agencies or freelancers can be eliminated. This significantly reduces the physical traffic between departments, national and overseas offices, suppliers etc

Overhead costs – Instead of having other departments or external bodies asking for assets, they can take text or image assets from the system self-service.

Increase productivity – Create catalogues and web sites in days instead of weeks.
**Increase Revenue:**

Reduce “time-to-market” – A faster system of working, re-use of assets and automation mean you can update your catalogue or website quicker.

Increase marketing – Using the same staff numbers you have today, you can increase the number of catalogues you create, make more targeted catalogues or spend more time on design.

Faster e-commerce – Quite often, web sites are populated from printed pages, meaning product can’t be sold online until it’s been added to a catalogue. Using the Matrix CMS products can be approved and passed to e-commerce independently of print.

Quickly respond to changing market requirements – Prices can be changed automatically, minutes before print, allowing you to react quickly to changing circumstances or markets.

Increase sales – Cross-selling, up-selling and comparative tables can be managed from within the CMS.

**Improve Flexibility:**

Target markets – With reduced production times and the ability to re-use assets you can create more targeted publications.

One-off publications – Test markets, remove redundant or dormant stock from your warehouse and try regional or customised publications. These are all possible with the speed and flexibility gained from a Matrix CMS.

Freshen your look – By storing all imagery for your products and keeping a history of what has been used when and where you can create fresh new looks by using assets not used before.

**Streamline production** – Product information can be collated, updated and checked throughout the year thus eliminating a bottleneck at peak production times. Feed your web presence on or before the catalogue launch date.

**Reduce risk:**

Roll-back to earlier versions – The system keeps different versions for a user specified length of time. So when things are changed erroneously or someone just changes their mind, you can go back to earlier versions.

Audit trails – Track all the production history and changes to data with real time job/page tracking.

Improve quality of your data – Reduce errors by making the CMS your single repository for your product data. Type once and use anywhere.

Protect valuable assets – Access to the system is protected by a password, this allows you to control which people or groups can add, delete, view or amend data in any particular part of the system.

**Improve accuracy** – Improved accuracy of information via single entry updating giving brand consistency.

To find out more how Matrix CMS can help you with your multi-channel marketing, visit our web site at www.matrixcms.com
5. Conclusion

Marketing to multiple channels is now an important part of everyday business for many organisations. As an organisation increases its presence across different channels so their customers will come to enjoy a greater and more unified experience providing the message and content is brand consistent.

Managing these digital assets and product information can be an extremely complex process if not approached in the right way with the best tools. This requires a fully integrated approach as consistency and continuity have been shown to be important factors in driving brand trust and recognition and any solution to manage content must embrace this.

We all want to be able to see the same core content and have the same level of experience and engagement whether we are viewing a printed catalogue, web site on a laptop, a tablet or a smartphone or a special offer e-mailed to us. Yet with the flexibility of content variations for different channels, languages and markets.

For most businesses, the content they produce is for their customers, and the simple fact is that if the customers aren’t getting the information they need from your catalogues and online systems, they will simply go somewhere else.

As the competition for people’s attention becomes more fiercely contested and people demand more of their online experience, so getting your product information and digital assets in order is becoming increasingly important to your business.