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Guidance on Content Strategies, Practices, and Technologies

Content Immediacy: The New Marketing Imperative

Social-Local-Mobile is the New Currency of Content Marketing

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Social-Local-Mobile and Content Immediacy

Marketing content, in order to drive buying behaviors, has to be interesting and readable, timely, and most of all, relevant to the intended audience. In the not-too-distant past, “relevant” meant that content was germane to a fairly broad demographic engaged in an undertaking such as buying a car or planning a vacation and was accessed by going to a website or reading print media.

In recent years, however, fueled by social and technology upheavals, the notion of relevancy has changed dramatically, requiring significant adjustments on the part of marketers in how they create and present their content. In particular, prospects and customers increasingly:

- Use mobile devices to access cloud applications,
- When using mobile devices, have a high interest in content that is relevant to their locale,
- Do not want marketing content pushed at them, but rather want to engage on a level playing field in social networks and spaces.

Add to that the crushing amount of noise and distractions on the web and you have a thorny challenge for marketing executives. Marketing content competes with and sometimes masquerades as tweets, likes, posts, pokes, and other user-generated content—a vast and rapidly growing pool of content that dilutes the strength and appeal of content created by businesses.

With that changing landscape, it stands to reason that traditional ways of creating and distributing content and the web content management systems that were designed to support those ways will not make the grade in this new “social-local-mobile” (So-Lo-Mo) world. On the other hand, savvy marketers equipped with the right technology to achieve “content immediacy” will have a significant advantage over their less nimble rivals. Content immediacy means content that is:

- Targeted by a user’s demographic, interests, and location;
- Delivered to all forms of mobile and other devices and rendered appropriately;
- Delivered to and accessed from social media and networking sites and applications;
- Delivered simultaneously across all channels with consistent brand image and messaging.

The term “immediacy” has several different connotations, including the dimensions of time, adjacency, and impact. Users expect content to be timely and dynamic, location-sensitive, and reflective of their wants and needs. Gartner predicts that social and mobile content and marketing will affect 80% of consumers’ discretionary expenditures by 2015, and a study by MarketingProfs, a marketing advisory service, and Junta42, a content marketing service provider, found that 86% of surveyed marketers indicated that relevant content drove their buyers’ decisions. Content that does not meet the needs and interests of viewers is screened out or ignored, whether editorial (informative) or persuasive (marketing and advertising). For example, a vegetarian is not going to be interested in a coupon for a hamburger, no matter how steep the discount nor how close the establishment. Content that is immediate and that satisfies the So-Lo-Mo imperative will be key to monetizing content, products, and services.



Why Content Immediacy and Why Now?

On average, marketers spend about 26% of their budgets on content marketing, according to a 2010 survey by Junta42 and MarketingProfs. Content marketing is the technique of creating and distributing content that is relevant and useful to a well-understood target audience, aimed at converting prospects to buyers.

The same study reveals that although 90% of marketers use content marketing, only about 41 % believe that their content marketing is effective. One reason is that there is altogether too much content, and much of that content is not relevant to the person who is viewing it due to a lack of effective targeting—in other words, the content is not relevant to their immediate needs. Another reason is that marketers must content with more channels, making it difficult to determine the right channel at the right time to reach a prospect or customer.

In defense of marketers, content targeting, always difficult, is being made even harder by the confluence of So-Lo-Mo forces and technologies, arguably the most powerful and disruptive to marketing since its inception.

The Path to Social-Local-Mobile Content

Since the beginnings of oral and written communication, people have had to go to the place or “container” in which content was stored or presented in order to access and use it, whether spoken word, books, television, or web sites. The dawning of the Internet and web era saw some cracks in that edifice. The advent of the social web coupled with mobile smart devices finished the demolition, and completely upended traditional publishing, not to mention marketing and advertising.

Now, content consumers expect content, whether editorial or persuasive, to come to them. That was challenging enough when the target audience was using laptops in relatively fixed locations to access content via a handful of channels. Add smart, mobile devices and social networks and media to the mix, and the challenge becomes significantly more difficult—like finding a needle in a haystack while both the needle and haystack are on the move. For many marketers, the challenge of finding that needle in the haystack is becoming too complex and costly, due to the difficulty of tailoring and targeting content to growing numbers of channels and devices.

At the advent of the web, sites were comprised primarily of static content served from file systems. From that humble beginning, web sites progressed rapidly, adding:

- Dynamic content served from repositories;
- Personalization based on logins or cookies;
- Rich media;
- Analytics and behavioral targeting;
- Mobile delivery of content;
- Integration with social media, networking sites and applications;
- Localized content.



Add these up, and the good news is that the technologies needed to support content immediacy are largely available today and provide a rich tool kit for assembling content marketing solutions. The bad news for marketers is that if they don't have those technologies, achieving content immediacy will be a costly and frustrating experience. A WCMS (web content management system) that speaks fluent So-Lo-Mo is a key ingredient, arguably a pre-requisite for cost-effective content immediacy in the So-Lo-Mo era.

More Channels, More User Data

The evolution of marketing principles and practices has been significant. In the early days of marketing, targeting was based on broad demographic segments such as race, education, and place of residence. That gave way to the use of deeper demographic data enabled by more powerful computing capabilities. With the web, it became possible to understand users, both by learning from their behaviors and also by directly soliciting information. And most recently, with the addition of mobile and social technologies, targeting is further driven by the user's location and social interests and affinities.

At the same time, the number of channels or ways to reach prospects and customers has proliferated, and now poses both opportunities and challenges to marketers. The opportunity lies in selecting the most effective channel to deliver specific content to a specific individual. The challenge lies in managing content across all of the channels, presenting branding and messaging in a consistent manner, while also taking advantage of deeper, richer targeting information. Imagine trying to create and deliver relevant content across the channels and devices in Figure 1 without the ability to automate much of the targeting and formatting of content.

Figure 1: The Targeting Challenge

Social	Local	Mobile
Twitter	DMA's	Android
Facebook	Regions	iPhone
LinkedIn	Cities	iPad
foursquare	Towns	Nokia
Google +	Businesses	Blackberry
delicious	Suburbs	Laptops
Myspace	Public Space	E-Readers

Source: Outsell, Inc. 2011

Historically, marketers have had to invest significant technical and manual work to format and repurpose content for different channels and devices—content that works well on a website may work less well on a tablet, and even less so on a smartphone. Unfortunately, because of the multitude of channels and devices, marketers often have to pick and choose which channels and devices to focus on due to budgetary constraints.

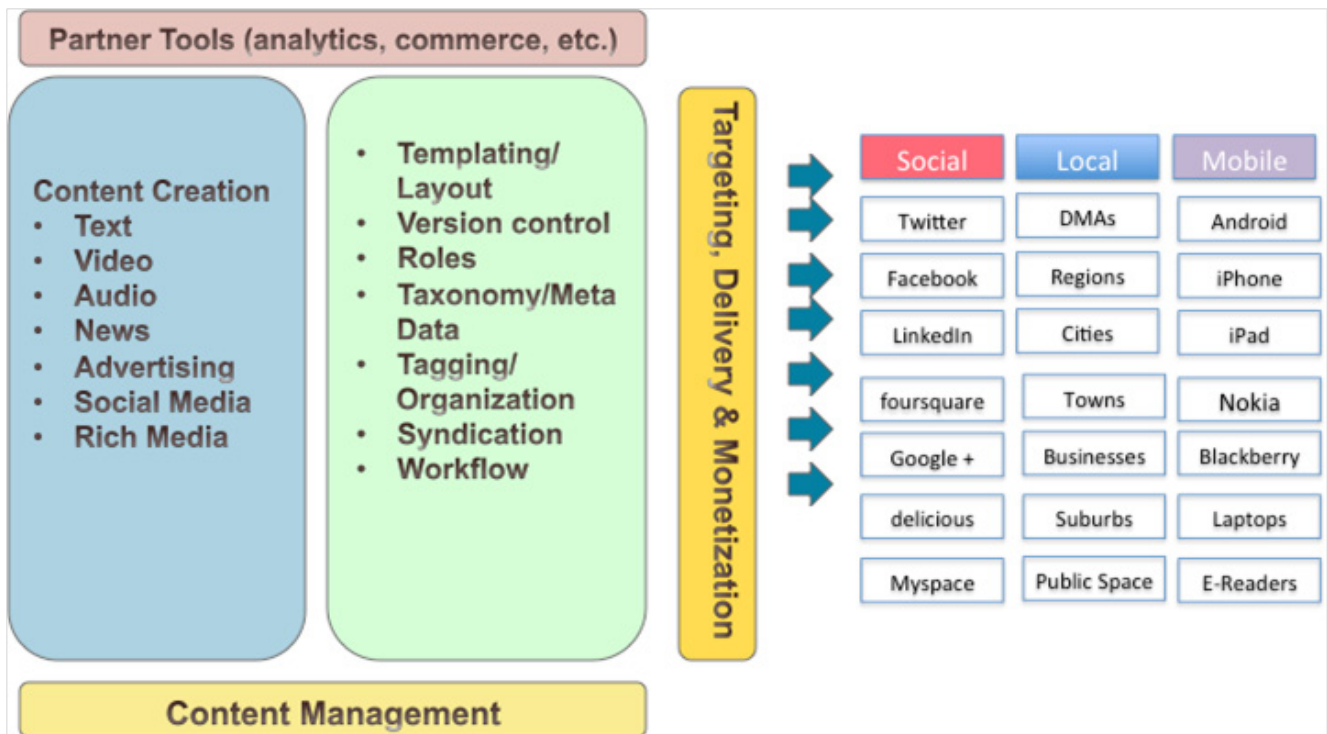
For example, in the diagram above, a marketing director might have budget to develop and present content to Android devices but not iPhones and also not social media sites. Moreover, most marketers can't afford to be experts across all of the channels. Selecting a vendor that provides solutions for and expertise in cross-channel content and brand management is a key consideration in buying a WCMS, as it is the only cost-effective way to reach prospects and customers on their own turf.

Achieving Content Immediacy

Having discussed the need for and challenges of achieving content immediacy, the next step is to outline the functionality needed by a WCMS in order to implement and manage such a capability. Basic components of a WCMS support content acquisition and creation, content management and enrichment, content distribution, and content optimization and monetization. Perhaps most important is the ability for marketing staff to easily target and send content across channels and devices without having to manually purpose and format the content for each channel and device.

It's important to note that most WCMS will not (and perhaps should not) incorporate all of the functionality described below. They do, however, need the ability to integrate with other partner-supplied technology to provide the whole solution. Figure 2 illustrates a "content immediacy-ready" WCMS.

Figure 2: WCMS Functionality for Content Immediacy



Source: Outsell, Inc. 2011



Going deeper, on the content creation end, authoring and acquisition increasingly will be done in the field and often on an unplanned basis. It will also take place on the move, so support of mobile devices for content creation and management is critical including strong workflow capabilities. Mobile support means that content can be optimized and customized with a presentation that is unique to the mobile environment and its mobile user.

Creating fresh, dynamic content tailored for mobile is one of the key ways to improve the signal-to-noise ratio of content. Using our example of the vegetarian from earlier in the paper, a mobile coupon for a meal discount combined with an enticing description of specials presented at meal time when the viewer is in the vicinity of the restaurant is likely to cut through the noise and convert that prospect to a buyer.

Most organizations will not be able to, or even want to supply all of their own marketing content. That makes the ability to use content from third-party information providers important, as is the ability to integrate with third-party applications and support for all forms of rich media. In essence, the WCMS needs to support any form of content from any source, without significant handling and transformation.

Any WCMS worth its salt has version control, check in/check out, and roles and permissions, along with content publishing workflow tools and the ability to create themes and manage layout. Supporting content immediacy also requires the ability to tag content with metadata (including locational), using text analytics and/or taxonomies to lessen or remove workload for authors and editors. Tagging enables the matching of interests to specific content and is a key component to achieving relevancy. Web analytics enable companies to analyze user behaviors, likes, and dislikes and determine what content is relevant to a user.

On the output side, as on the input side, mobile device support is key. But that support must include the ability to render content across many device types and screen sizes and resolutions. In fact, the ability to manage content across devices and channels in a largely automated fashion is essential in the era of proliferating channels and device-types. By example, social media integration is rapidly growing in importance with Nielsen citing that “in the U.S., social networks and blogs reach nearly 80% of active Internet users, and represent the majority of their time online.”

The advent of services like foursquare and Groupon have made users aware of and heightened their expectations surrounding the use of geographic location in targeting content, making the ability to target content based on user or GPS-supplied data a key attribute. A recent Microsoft survey found that 41% of mobile users use their devices to access restaurant reviews, 37% to find retail locations, and 33% for coupons and shopping. At the same time, privacy concerns should induce marketers to tread slowly and lightly in geographic targeting—it is a double-edged sword, powerful when used well, disturbing when not.

A final set of key features center on the ability to monetize content, products and services using advertising, SEO (search engine optimization), and SEM (search engine marketing) measured by analytics to gauge effectiveness. Web analytics and A/B and multivariate testing are all tools to fine tune the presentation of content based on actual user behaviors, not editorial instincts. They are essential to the creation and presentation of an engaging user experience and also underlie the ability to monetize content and/or use content to monetize products and services.

Content Immediacy In Action

The best way to understand content immediacy in action is to look at it through the lens of the marketer—the person that has to orchestrate the complex dance that converts prospects to buyers. The following narrative



describes how a WCMS can help marketers by doing the heavy lifting that enables simultaneous delivery of marketing content and advertising to a wide range of devices and online environments.

Picture marketing director, Stephanie, at SportsWorld, a sporting goods manufacturer. She is tasked with implementing marketing campaigns in support of a new line of celebrity endorsed baseball gear. Being a savvy digital marketer, she knows that she has to get her marketing and advertising content out, not only to traditional channels, but also to a variety of social media and networking sites and applications as well. The demographic she is targeting, young male baseball enthusiasts, is also a heavy user of mobile devices.

She plans a multi-faceted campaign that simultaneously feeds traditional media outlets with information and advertising about the new line, but also engages prospects in baseball-oriented social sites to build buzz for the launch. She recognizes the need to engage with her audience, not just push advertising to them, and so incorporates their comments and other content into her campaign. She is also pressed for time, as the launch is imminent, and she must create and deliver marketing messages to a number of different channels. Research has shown that SportsWorld's customers are evenly split between using Android and iPhone smartphones, also frequent SportsWorld's information-rich website, and use social tools such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Stephanie's WCMS enables her to create her marketing messages, then blend in some user-generated and third-party content to add appeal and authenticity to her messaging. She is also able to easily target prospects and customers with messages that are tuned to their locales, and also to the device they are using and the online venue in which they are viewing the content.

She does this without having to worry about the way content is presented and rendered, as the WCMS handles that automatically. In the past, Stephanie had to work with a number of IT staff to format content for each type of device and channel—a time-consuming and frustrating process. Meeting deadlines was challenging and getting content out simultaneously and consistently to all those devices and channels was impossible.

Her WCMS, in short, has solved a major problem for her by letting her focus on the content and not the mechanics of how to format and distribute it. Better yet, she knows that in the future, her WCMS will be able to accommodate new devices and channels as they appear in the marketplace.

What is clear from this is that a traditional WCMS is not going to be able to make all of these things happen, at least not in a cost-effective and scalable manner. More important—the trends driving these new ways of interacting with prospects and customers are still nascent and morphing rapidly. The WCMS acquired today has to be able to evolve to handle needs that cannot yet be imagined.

Future Proofing A WCMS Decision

Historically, WCM systems were not architected for speed and agility as they were designed to manage content for web sites—not the plethora of devices that now must be served. Moreover, while some support mobile devices for content delivery, that content is often either not adapted to device attributes and constraints, or requires extensive human intervention to optimize for each device type. More importantly, they don't fully support today's world of 24x7 mobile content creation and management. Content immediacy demands a fully mobile, real time capability to acquire, author, and distribute content.



A significant consideration in selecting a WCMS is that the trends and technologies that are driving content management needs are largely still in their infancy. That means that solutions that are architected solely to meet today's needs will be challenged to meet needs that can barely be anticipated, much less predicted.

Picking a future proof system that is architected for flexibility and a vendor that understands and embraces extensible architectures will obviate the need to "rip and replace" systems that were not built with flexibility and extensibility in mind. Some significant considerations in selecting a WCMS that will support both current and future needs include:

Architecture and Technology: WCMS solutions that reside in the cloud adhere to industry standards, have modular and extensible architectures, and have a proven ability to scale and evolve to meet changing market needs. Solutions should be architected for the cloud, not just ported to run there.

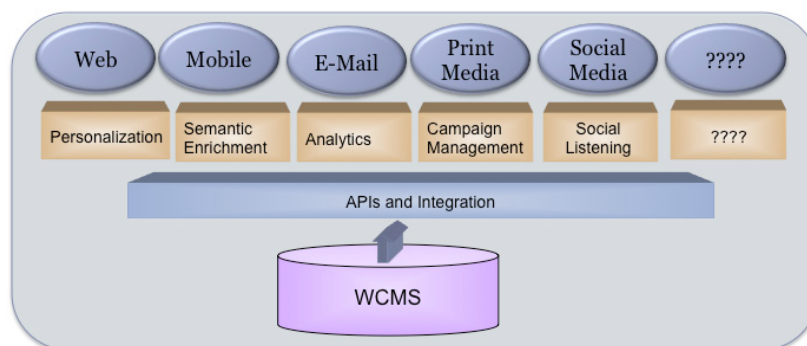
APIs and SDKs: APIs (application programming interfaces) are designed to make it easy to integrate additional application functionality and content with an application. Software development toolkits are provided to enable buyers to add and extend functionality to an application. While many WCMS vendors provide SDKs and APIs, it is important to kick the tires to ensure that they are engineered as part of the total solution—not just bolted on after the fact to meet checklist requirements.

Vendor Know How: One often-overlooked factor in selecting vendors is their knowledge of the buyer's business. Vendors that invest the time and energy to get to know a buyer's business are simply going to deliver more effective solutions that help businesses achieve their goals.

Partner Ecosystem: It isn't just about the technology. Selecting a vendor that has a well-integrated partner ecosystem ensures that evolving needs can be met, if not by the WCMS vendor, then by a partner. Partners can also supply deep knowledge and expertise that the WCMS vendor might not have.

The diagram below depicts a conceptual view of a modular WCMS with some of the functionality described in this paper. Note the modules and channels to the right, which depict the future addition of channels of delivery and functionality that are yet to be determined. That is modularity that enables WCMS owners to "snap in and out" functionality as it is needed or not. Also note the modular and tiered architecture that is key to a future-proofed solution.

Figure 3: Conceptual Modular View of a WCMS



Source: Outsell, Inc. 2011



Content Mobility and Agility

While mobile support has been discussed earlier, it is such an important prerequisite to attaining content immediacy that we amplify it further here. In the age of global, always-on everything, mobile devices are critical, not just for delivery and viewing of content, but also on the back-end in creating and acquiring fresh, locally relevant content. Witness how many news stations use tweets and videos shot by mobile phones in their broadcasts because of the immediacy of that content—they can get news captured by mobile devices on the air much more quickly. Also witness the often-visceral impact of that content and how it can catch your attention. That is how mobile content capture and creation figures in creating compelling content.

While many WCMS are designed to deliver content to mobile devices, fewer are able to offer the seamless ability to author and manage content across the range of computing devices and applications. In part, that is because the effort of revamping user interfaces and workflows to accommodate the real estate and functionality of mobile platforms is significant. In kicking the tires on mobile support for content creation and management, it is important to look at the user interfaces and workflows to ensure that they are specifically engineered for mobile devices, and are not poorly repurposed applications designed for bigger computing devices.

Conclusion

While corporate and commerce websites used to be the primary places that prospects and customers went to read content and gather information about products and services, the rise of mobile devices and social networking has greatly lessened their value and impact on the buying process. Instead, as customers move about their physical and online worlds, that content needs to be where they are, delivered in a seamless and contextualized fashion through a variety of channels, *and* timely and consistent as well.

Social-Local-Mobile computing unleash potent forces that have already altered user expectations and are driving big changes in the way marketers use content. While much change has already occurred, the reality is that we are still in the early stages of evolution of those forces. There will be mistakes made and lessons learned in the process of developing effective content marketing strategies.

Given the extent of change and uncertainty, it is crucial that marketers select and deploy WCMS solutions that are able to support today's already complex needs, but also accommodate new trends and technologies as they emerge. A key consideration is finding a WCMS that can help manage the cost and complexity of managing and delivering content and advertising across an ever-growing number of channels and devices.

One final note—a recent survey of marketers by Digital Brand Expressions found that only 41% said they had a strategic plan in place to guide social media activities, and only 29% of those surveyed had any formal ROI metrics. Social channels are important and potentially powerful, but the chance of succeeding in those channels with neither a plan nor a means to measure success is slim. The right WCMS will greatly enhance effectiveness in exploiting social-local-mobile channels, but only if marketers have done the work to create a strategy and a plan.



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