

Avnet: Channel Connection and the Enterprise Portal

Leading supplier of electronic components, embedded systems and enterprise computing products reduces costs, improves productivity, increases top line revenue and grows market share through development and adoption of web content management and portal applications

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Avnet describes the development and deployment of Channel Connection, an integrated set of web-based applications that serves sales, marketing, Avnet customers and suppliers and the markets they serve. The significant success of this project contributed to a subsequent enterprise-wide initiative to amplify and replicate the productivity and revenue gains throughout this global \$9B corporation. The Avnet recipe for success includes specific technology strategies, project management guidelines, organizational recommendations and a tailored approach to ROI measurement and justification.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
CONTENT TECHNOLOGY WORKS (CTW).....	3
OVERVIEW OF SUCCESS STORY	3
GOALS AND NON-GOALS	3
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	3
IN THEIR OWN WORDS	4
AVNET'S PERSPECTIVE	4
<i>What were the symptoms in your organization that brought this need to your attention?</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>How did you identify what specific content technologies were appropriate?</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Which vendors were selected; what were the overriding considerations?</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>How did you justify the funding and other necessary resources?</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>What were the challenges and approaches used to get the most of your suppliers?</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>What specific changes in your organization resulted from this deployment?</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>How did you capture the value of this deployment?</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>What future plans are in place to further develop or exploit the results of this initiative?</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>What were the most valuable lessons learned?</i>	<i>6</i>
AVNET, INC. BACKGROUND	7
PROJECT DESCRIPTION	8
PROBLEM DEFINITION	8
METRICS FOR MEASURING EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM AND CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS	8
<i>Cost savings</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Productivity</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Intangibles</i>	<i>8</i>
PROJECT REVIEW	9
SCOPE	9
COMMERCIAL COMPONENTS	9
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS	9
WEB-BASED APPLICATIONS	10
NOTEWORTHY FUNCTIONALITY	11
RESULTS	12
CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR	12
<i>Avnet IT Staff</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Avnet Authors</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Avnet Sales and Marketing</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Value Added Resellers (Customers)</i>	<i>13</i>
ROI RESULTS	13
<i>Efficiencies</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Increased revenue and market share</i>	<i>14</i>
LESSONS LEARNED	14
IN THEIR OWN WORDS	15
A SUPPLIER'S VIEW: VIGNETTE SHARES ITS PERSPECTIVE	15
CONCLUSIONS: THE GILBANE REPORT'S PERSPECTIVE	15
PARTNER PAGE.....	17

Introduction

Content Technology Works (CTW)

The CTW is an industry initiative that is administered by The Gilbane Report to develop and communicate content technology best practices and success stories. The premise is that when given enough proven recipes for success, enterprise consumers will be able to adapt and replicate that success for themselves – increasing productivity and confidence.

Success stories are written by The Gilbane Report and are told in the voice of the enterprise adopter (in this case, Avnet) with final editorial control resting entirely in the hands of the adopter.

The result is that:

- Success stories are as opinionated and as jargon free as the adopter prefers
- Analysis is included from The Gilbane Report and invited contributors
- In addition to technology recipes, strategies for securing funding, measuring actual value, driving adoption and other business and social issues are of interest
- Vendors do not control content

Typically, this kind of valuable information is only available for purchase. CTW content is different because CTW partners subsidize the program to ensure that this information is free. Partners want to push as many best practices to as many organizations as possible with the expected result being an overall acceleration of content technology adoption. For more information on the CTW program, visit www.gilbane.com/technology_works.html.

Overview of success story

Avnet has translated the promise of web content management and the enterprise portal into a transformational initiative that has resulted in significant cost savings, increased top line revenue and market share growth. Further, numerous soft benefits have been accrued including improved customer service, more efficient sales and order processing, optimized demand generation and broad productivity gains across IT, marketing and manufacturing. This impressive recipe for success is based upon a purposeful, but unhurried, approach that combines careful technology selection, project management and roll-out processes with an equally deliberate approach to team building, cross-functional communication and education.

Goals and non-goals

This success story outlines essential elements of a successful enterprise deployment of content technology. This is an individual enterprise's story told in their voice. While their approach may not be universal, their success is indisputable.

There is no attempt to generalize Avnet's recipe for success into a universal formula.

Acknowledgments

The Gilbane Report would like acknowledge the generous contribution of time and intellectual property from Avnet, Inc. Specifically, they have allocated the time of talented and heavily committed staff in support of this effort to improve the understanding and adoption of enterprise content technology.

In Their Own Words

Avnet's Perspective

When selecting a fine restaurant, nothing is more valuable than a review. The best ingredients cannot guarantee a great night out; recipes, price, service, convenience, etc. are all critical elements. CTW success stories are organized around a *recipe* for success rather than the *ingredients*. This interview section takes the analogy one step further and provides a review of the entire experience; from soup to nuts. Here, the select Avnet staff introduces their experience with an eye towards enticing others to follow.

What were the symptoms in your organization that brought this need to your attention?

How did you know you were hungry?

“We had a slower than preferred response times using a manual input process to request changes to our web site. The effort to maintain the web sites was an increasing burden on the IT organization. Often, product and marketing program information would need incremental updates while previously requested updates were still under development. We would then begin the entire change process over again having accomplished nothing.” – Mathew Clausen, Marketing Project Leader, Divisional Communications, Avnet, Inc.

“Our web site had grown to several thousands of pages and our web site management team was constantly playing catch-up to the nearly 400 change requests we were getting per month. We were slow to innovate or to make substantial improvements to our web presence. Further, we would get numerous high priority requests from different groups within Avnet and no rational way to arbitrate or prioritize.” – David Allen, Director, Web Development, Avnet, Inc.

How did you identify what specific content technologies were appropriate?

How did you decide on what you wanted to eat?

“We knew we needed web content management and web site management. The scale and breadth of our organization meant that we needed to put a premium on scalability, manageable cost, financial stability and most importantly, we needed to establish a trusted partnership with the vendor.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

Which vendors were selected; what were the overriding considerations?

Where did you dine and why?

“We selected Vignette They met all of our selection criteria and really established great relationships with our team. Subsequently, we have supplemented this platform with Google Search and Lotus SameTime for instant messaging.” – David Allen, Director, Web Development

How did you justify the funding and other necessary resources?

How did you pay for the meal?

“We based the entire project on productivity improvements and cost savings. We were able to reduce IT support of existing web sites by 95%, time to create a new web site by 70% and the turnaround for content changes from days to minutes. While incremental revenue and increased market share were ultimately very significant components of the overall value of this project, we did not have enough information prior to the project to include those projections in the initial proposal.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

What were the challenges and approaches used to get the most of your suppliers?

How was your service experience?

“Our approach from the very beginning was to build up enough expertise so that we could support our own efforts and be mostly independent of outside consulting and integration services. We told our suppliers to teach us to fish, not catch the fish.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

“Our first engagement with Vignette was a single website and we had our personnel doing much of the actual coding alongside Vignette services. We watched, asked questions and used this exposure and initial project to learn what worked for us and what did not. We then invited Vignette services back to work as coaches in the subsequent projects and they have proved to be excellent partners.” David Allen, Director, Web Development

What specific changes in your organization resulted from this deployment?

How could you tell when you had had enough to eat?

“We were able to deploy a completely self managing web publishing lifecycle with no dependence on IT staff. We identified one ‘power user’ per department who had the inclination and willingness to act as a local publishing coach. This was not an IT professional, simply a computer literate author. Over time, each department came to rely less and less on their coach and emerged as a group of independent collaborating authors. – Mathew Clausen, Marketing Project Leader

“From an IT perspective, we were able to divide our organization into three groups; maintenance of legacy web sites, conversion of legacy into our new Vignette-based application suite and application development focused on new development in support of sales, marketing, and customer service. We are no longer playing catch-up, we are moving forward and actively participating in Avnet’s growth and success.” David Allen, Director, Web Development

How did you capture the value of this deployment?

How would you measure and rate the nutritional value of this meal?

“We have grown from 2 to more than 135 sites with limited increase in IT staff. We had seen traffic to the Channel Connection site grow by five times in two years. Our most recent conversion has seen nearly a 15% increase in traffic every month for the past 8 months. Where web sites were supported 100% by IT staff, they are now support 95% by content authors.” – David Allen, Director, Web Development

“While reducing our overall IT expenditures, we are building and deploying applications that are measurably increasing sales and expanding our market share.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

“I see authors’ ownership over the content they create and manage on the website. We are able to preview, innovate and prototype independently without having to compete for IT resources. The overall quality of our content and our ability to adapt to change has dramatically improved.” – Mathew Clausen, Marketing Project Leader

What future plans are in place to further develop or exploit the results of this initiative?

When and how often do you plan to go back?

“The Channel Connection project has been successful enough to justify a corporate initiative to convert our key corporate web sites across the globe to this platform. We will be further

consolidating infrastructure, sharing and reusing content even more broadly and increasing the efficiency of our sales and marketing programs.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

What were the most valuable lessons learned?

What advice would you give your friends?

“A web strategy needs to balance specific applications supporting business operations with good content to attract users, new and repeat alike. In addition to delegating content contribution to authors, security functions need to be delegated to external communities. Delegating content authoring and security are essential to scaling web usage without having to scale IT staff.” – Dave Stuttard, Vice President Applications

“A well integrated and motivated team is the single most important ingredient to our recipe for success. We actively promote from within and invest in developing subject matter experts able to coach and consult with multiple teams. While it is true that we have not had to expand our team to support significantly expanded web operations, we have had to continue to ensure that we had the best team.” — David Allen, Director, Web Development

“We had to work at changing the underlying culture of our authors to accept ownership of both the content itself and its context on the web. It is a very good idea to have a dedicated power user to initially own the content posting process in each user group to account for slow adopters. Required author training should not exceed one hour.” – Mathew Clausen, Marketing Project Leader

Avnet, Inc. Background

With sales exceeding \$9B in 2003, Avnet, Inc. is one of the world's largest B2B distributors of semiconductors, interconnect, passive and electromechanical components, enterprise network and computer equipment, and embedded subsystems from leading manufacturers. Serving customers in 68 countries, Avnet markets, inventories, and adds value to these products and provides supply chain management and engineering services.

Avnet strives to enable its customers' and suppliers' success by saving them money or helping them grow faster, both of which increase their profits. And, from the electronic components that feed the supply chain, to the subsystem building blocks that reduce time to market, to the value-added mid-range computing products space, Avnet is a market leader at the center of the technology industry, serving not only traditional customers and suppliers, but original equipment manufacturers, contract manufacturers and others, as well.

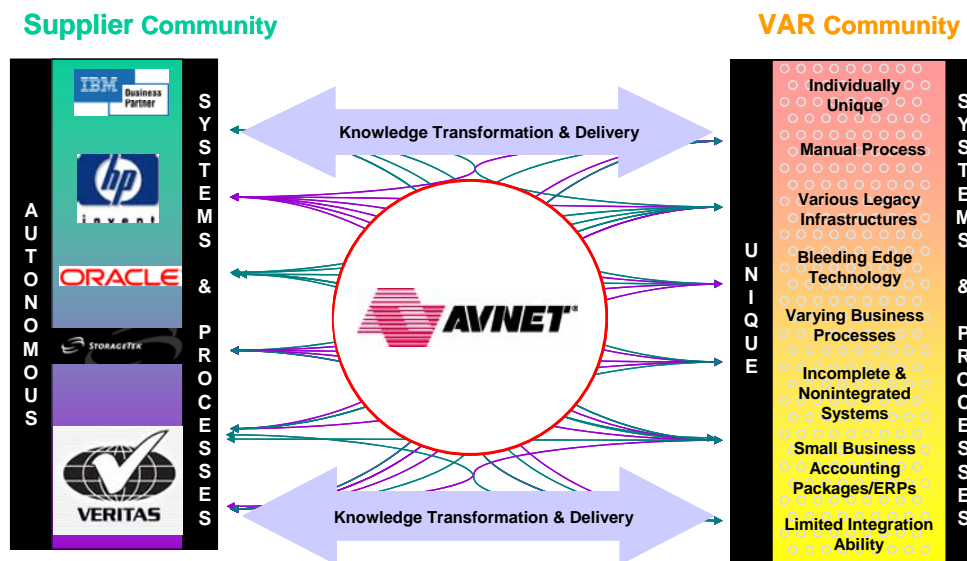


Figure 1. Avnet “intermediates” the supply chain¹

Avnet has built its business by placing itself at the center of complex, mission critical operations where suppliers and customers have become dependent upon Avnet’s operational excellence and domain expertise.

In the best of all worlds, technology inspired projects will deliver savings, productivity, new revenue, and encourage improved competitive business practices. These benefits are not derived strictly through technological capabilities, but from the more natural and dynamic individual and organizational behaviors that well designed applications foster.

In Avnet’s case, the stakes are even higher as Avnet’s customers are themselves selling technology, products and services. Avnet must work to extend the advantages content technology offers beyond their firewall and to independent partners and VARs.

¹ Graphic provided courtesy of Avnet, Inc.

Project Description

Problem definition

Portals were hand crafted and mainly HTML/ASP-based. Further, the evolution of the web sites had spawned multiple security models, inconsistent human interfaces and was completely dependent on the technical support staff for all content changes. Staff bandwidth was consumed with maintaining and updating content. At a critical time when corporations were having to do more with fewer resources, the website team was unable to introduce any substantial upgrades.

Metrics for measuring extent of the problem and criteria for success

The objective was to hold the current IT and content authoring staffs constant while significantly upgrading the content and capabilities of Avnet's web-based applications.

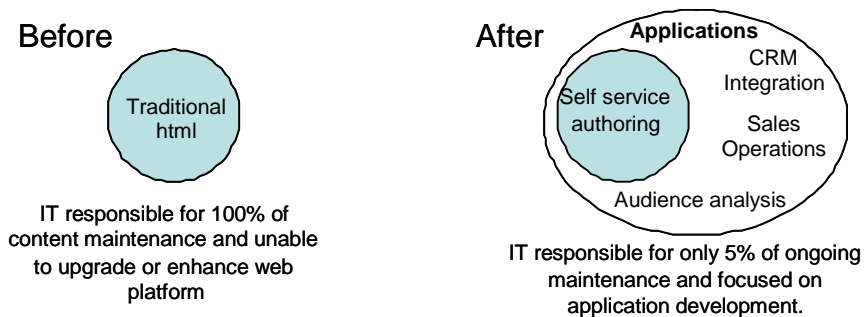


Figure 2: Success is defined as the balancing of quality content with advanced web-based applications without having to increase supporting staff.

Metrics fell into three categories.

Cost savings

Cap staffing levels while increasing development contribution.

Productivity

- Shorten time required to update content by 90%.
- Shorten time to deploy new websites by 70%.
- Increase number of website under management by twenty times.

Intangibles

Improve

- Support and service to Avnet Value Added Resellers
- Sales operations from lead generation to portfolio management
- Reusability across both content and applications.

Project Review

Scope

The scope of this initiative was to empower content authors (primarily in marketing functions) to be self reliant and, in turn, free up IT staff to develop a broad set of integrated value-added web-based applications. These applications would expand support for Avnet stakeholders and update a variety of core business functions.

Commercial Components

The cornerstone for all of the development and the benefits that we Avnet have derived is the web content and portal management platform, Vignette. The Vignette proposal was selected against four other viable alternatives. However, Vignette was selected based upon the following criteria:

- The Vignette has the widest relevant feature set
- Vignette demonstrated a high degree of financial and organizational stability
- Vignette had a broad customer base that Avnet was able to reference
- Vignette personnel, including executive management, professional services and product development, showed willingness and an ability to partner with Avnet and develop a shared commitment to Avnet's success.

Subsequently, Avnet supplemented their platform with Google Search Appliance to provide additional means to find relevant content and Lotus SameTime for instant messaging. Criteria for these selections included:

- security features robust enough to support Avnet and its partners' security requirements
- openness and extensibility to support integration with existing enterprise components

Implementation process

Avnet recognized that its requirements for enhanced web site management spanned multiple divisions and implementations. Avnet adopted a "teach us to fish" rather than "fish for us" strategy. Most initial Vignette implementations are completed primarily by either Vignette Professional Services (VPS) personnel or a Vignette partner, not the "end" customer as was the case with the Avnet implementation. This approach allows for the sites to be migrated into the Vignette technology quicker through the leveraging of known technological resources. However, the Avnet approach was to focus the efforts of the Vignette professional services personnel on transference of knowledge, not on actual writing of code.

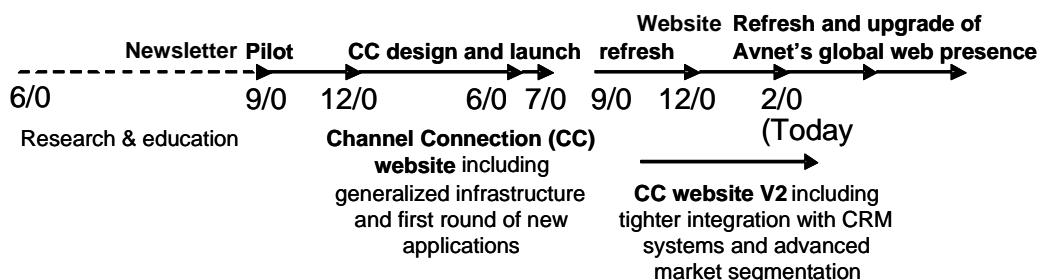


Figure 3. Implementation timeline

The Avnet IT team decided to take 90 days to study Vignette technology closely and to learn as many practical lessons from the project as possible. Giving the team the time to learn the technology without pressure to produce a production environment proved to be an essential part of Avnet's recipe for success.

This approach afforded them a unique opportunity to have a bird's eye view into a detailed and relevant project on its own infrastructure and its own web content management and portal technology. The team then applied their lessons learned by first replacing one finite piece of their business from end-to-end. That project was the publication of a VAR (customer) newsletter that is used as a communication vehicle, a demand generator and a brand builder. With this project completed, Avnet set out to replace their partner web site with Channel Connection; the self-supporting portal platform that integrates fresh content with essential web-based sales and marketing applications.

The team built their website with an eye towards repurposing content and code across divisions. The result was that they were able to almost immediately take on the task of upgrading Avnet's other web sites. Figure 4 provides a general timeline of these development milestones.

Web-based applications

One of the most significant differences between Avnet's earlier web sites and the Vignette enabled portals was the debut of full function sales and marketing applications. The first release of the Channel Connection portal included:

- **Lead management:** this application is tightly integrated with demand generation activities and sales management systems. VARs are rewarded for keeping this system up to date with improved lead generation and sales tracking capabilities.
- **Order detail and Order tracking:** These applications provide up to the minute information on the status and progress of equipment orders. The complexity of these orders has historically generated lots of phone traffic that slows production and delivery. These applications improve customer service and improve the productivity of order processing overall.
- **On-line credit statement:** A VARs credit line is an essential ingredient to their ability to scale and optimize their business. Providing online access simplifies decision making, improves customer support and reduces the cost of support.
- **Executive sales history:** Avnet has a unique vantage point into the sales activity of its VARs and making it available on demand has contributed to the increase in executive presence on the Avnet web site since the launch of Channel Connection.
- **Executive revenue analysis:** Selling options such as financing, software and incremental maintenance increases deal size and improves margins. Avnet leverages its unique vantage point to generate current revenue analysis for their VARs as well as comparisons to target ratios and their peers in other territories. This latter metric is hugely valuable and was never available to executives before.
- **Instant messaging:** IM serves as an alternative to phone calls that are required to get rapid approvals, order changes and other just in time adjustments to order processing. This service further reduces telephone interruptions, shortens delivery cycles and improves customer satisfaction.

Noteworthy functionality

There are numerous components that combine to put content authoring and maintenance entirely in the hands of authors. These included specific user interfaces to generate newsletters, events, product information, promotions and many more. One of the more challenging and often overlooked aspects to solving this problem is security administration. This was particularly true in Avnet's case as many of their users are VAR employees. Keeping track of employee status and authorizations is a difficult task made virtually unmanageable when third party employees are also included. The security component simplifies access and roles and permits each department to define their own users' access rights through a "trust but verify" model. External users can specify all fashion of security settings and these requests are forwarded to internal Avnet sales for verification. This completely frees the IT support staff while keeping a business eye on third party activities. Figure 5 is a sample screen shot from the security component of Avnet's Channel Connection portal.

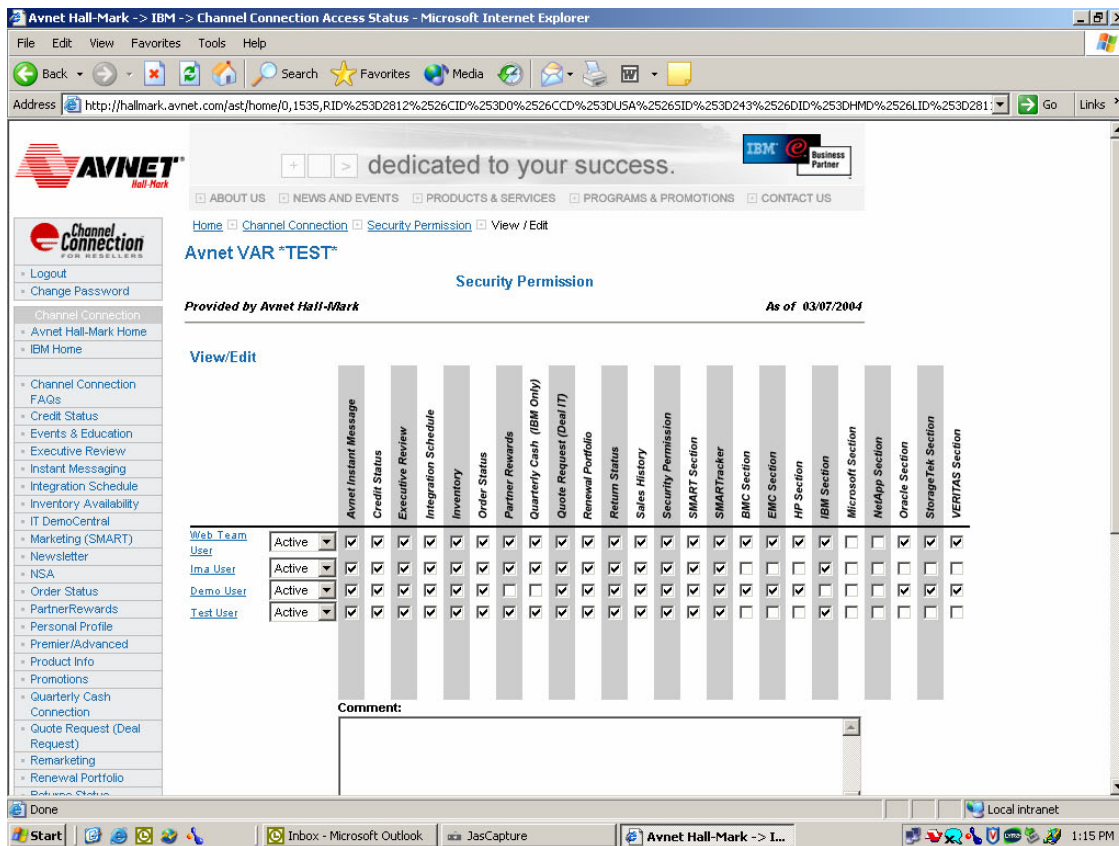


Figure 4. Channel Connection delegates security as well as content authoring to stakeholders and reduces dependence on IT staff.

Results

The Avnet web team is quick to point out that they still have a lot of work to do in converting existing legacy sites, more tightly integrating the applications they have built into the broader enterprise information architecture, developing still more applications and continuing to extend their platform to include a broader cross section of their suppliers, partners and customers, it is clear that they have met and exceeded a number of the most important milestones that were initially put before them. Avnet categorizes their results in the following categories:

- Productivity enhancements
- Efficiency gains
- Faster time to market
- Cost efficiencies
- Improved operational flexibility
- Advanced customer experience

The impact of their work to date can be measured in a number of meaningful ways.

Changes in behavior

The Gilbane Report has always emphasized the connection between the value of technology initiatives and the resulting changes in behavior at individual, organizational, market and societal levels. One must understand old behaviors that are abandoned and new behaviors that are adopted in order to get at the heart of any ROI measurement.

Avnet IT Staff

The web team has been transformed from a group of change request processors to a cutting edge web application development team. They have had the opportunity to grow professionally and to witness the impact of their work across this global enterprise. Their improved morale and expanded skill set is evidenced by an essentially unchanging IT staff; even as the number of sites and features under their care has expanded dramatically.

Avnet Authors

Authors and editors are now self-supporting and this has resulted in a number of different behaviors and attitudes.

- Content ownership: authors are responsible for their content from inception to deletion. As such, they have developed a greater sense of ownership resulting in higher quality and fresher content.
- Ability to prototype: the independence from IT staff has also provided the ability to test and iterate through different approaches in content and in style. The result is a more polished and organized web presence.
- Freshness reminders: The Vignette-based platform proactively delivers reminders to content owners prompting them to confirm the continued freshness of their content. This serves as an unobtrusive way to maintain accuracy and interest.
- Improved data for personalization: the feedback on the kinds of people and the manner in which they are interacting with content on the sites provides real time feedback on where interests lie and on what formats are most effective.

The mindset of the authors has been forever altered. They all feel greater responsibility for the whole web experience and have expectations of control over and responsiveness from their web environment that they will never give up.

Avnet Sales and Marketing

The availability of a closed loop set of web-based sales and marketing applications has had a significant impact on the Avnet's sales and marketing organizations and processes. The upgraded web portal provides direct visibility into and control over Avnet's entire closed loop sales and marketing process.

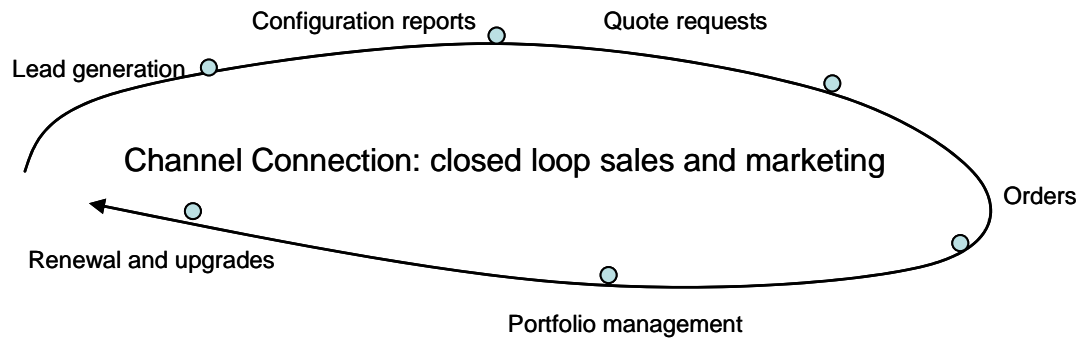


Figure 5. Web-based applications that help to accelerate and optimize Avnet sales and marketing.

One significant advantage of Channel Connection is that it provides a far deeper understanding of how customers and prospects are behaving. The ability to resolve web traffic with their CRM database has given the sales and marketing teams a unique perspective into their audience; often, in real time. This has resulted in far more effective marketing campaigns and customer service programs.

Another significant benefit has been as a sales tool. Avnet "customers" in this context are themselves resellers. Channel Connection capabilities, flexibility and ease of use has proven to be a very effective sales tool. In other words, Avnet sales teams have successfully leveraged the availability of Channel Connection as a recruiting tactic to recruit new VARs.

Value Added Resellers (Customers)

Avnet VARs have a unique environment where they can manage their sales pipeline, optimize order processing, streamline communication and measure themselves against their peers. These productivity tools are seen as cost reducers and process improvers. The result is that VARs become more independent, less reliant on costly and time consuming human support and more efficient selling organizations.

ROI results

Efficiencies

The generalized Avnet platform has proven to be scalable and transportable. At this time, Avnet has measured an 80-90% reduction in web site redesign costs and a 95% reduction in field requests.

The cost of producing the newsletter via the Vignette-based application yielded an \$80,000 per year savings.

For authors, the previous workflow consisted of the following steps:

- Develop an idea for content or design

- Put down on a form and submit a request
- Wait for developer to contact. This was complicated because developers were forced to arbitrarily prioritize requests from a large number of departments. True business prioritization could not be feasibly managed and as straightforward first in first out queue was considered to be most equitable.
- Discuss with developer
- Evaluate proofs/prototypes
- Make further adjustments
- Retest
- Schedule post to production site.

This entire process, which often could take weeks, is now all completed in minutes.

Increased revenue and market share

While specific numbers are Avnet confidential, the availability of Channel Connection to VARs has been perceived as such a strong differentiator that it is credited to contributing to Avnet's increase in market share and dramatically increased rate of VAR recruitment in the past fiscal year.

Lessons learned

Avnet made a deliberate decision to develop in house expertise on the commercial products that they selected. While this was not necessary to complete tactical projects, they recognized that in order to fully leverage the strategic value across the enterprise, they needed to be fluent in both their business operations and the technologies that they had selected.

Overloaded staff (both technical and authoring), had to have the motivation to learn new technology and applications. For the technologists, it was important to give them time to explore and become fluent in the new products before asking them to deliver quality production applications. For authors, each group identified a power user whose job it was to support and hand hold (when necessary) to get users over the initial hurdle of incorporating a new, and ultimately far more rewarding, way of working.

It was critically important to strike a balance between engaging content and useful applications. The only way to cost-effectively fund application development was to ensure that content authors were as close to 100% self-supporting as possible.

In their own words

A supplier's view: Vignette shares its perspective

Avnet has realized tremendous value from its use of Vignette software. This is testament to both Avnet's understanding of the power of information and the Web to deliver business efficiencies and its success in leveraging the capabilities of Vignette software within its organization.

Avnet had a classic content management problem. It had large amounts of information critical to the success of its business. It had a variety of constituencies that needed this information. And, its current process required that IT staff accept content from the business owners and then manually package it into Web pages.

Avnet knew the Web could play an important role in allowing the company to efficiently expand its business. The Web would allow Avnet to communicate and interact with its key constituencies including suppliers, reseller partners, and employees in order to drive sales and increase productivity. However, Avnet also realized that it could not cost-effectively deliver these Web initiatives without changing its processes and enhancing its software foundation.

By implementing Vignette Content Management, Avnet realized measurable business efficiencies. It connected its business users, the content owners, to the Web delivery process, reducing costs by eliminating IT from the content delivery process and increasing the speed of delivery. With Vignette, 95% of Web content is managed directly by the content owners and the time to update content has decreased by 90%. Avnet expanded the number of Web sites from 1 to 135, providing properties optimized for each constituency and purpose, without enlarging its IT organization. Vignette's unique ability to deliver multiple initiatives from a single platform allowed Avnet to reduce the time to deploy new Web sites by 80%, allowing it to adapt to changing business needs quickly and efficiently.

Avnet is a great example of the important role Vignette software plays in enabling customers to meet their business objectives. We're pleased that Avnet has achieved such clear business efficiencies, increasing revenues while reducing costs, from its partnership with Vignette. Avnet's success is just one example from among the more than 1600 organizations worldwide using Vignette software solutions.

Conclusions: The Gilbane Report's Perspective

This Avnet success story is packed with positive lessons. By virtually any measure, this initiative has been extremely effective. While some of the information has understandably been deemed as confidential and only summarized in this white paper, this author has been able to verify that through this project, Avnet has been able to:

- Attribute incremental revenue
- Increase market share
- Measure material cost reduction
- Improve productivity of existing staff while increasing morale.

Some of the key ingredients to their recipe for success are:

- Ownership and responsibility for the ultimate success of the project. The Avnet team did not rely upon software suppliers or integrators to connect their products to their business. They invested in deeply understanding the components they selected and

ensuring that they were able to get the most from both the products and the vendors they chose to work with.

- Careful analysis and prioritization of features and their respective value to the business. Their top-down design that was focused on addressing specific areas where the introduction of new technology and processes would provide quick wins for the business and justify the initial investments.
- Inclusion of extra features, like secure instant messaging and executive benchmarks that added unexpected dimension that accelerated the adoption of the Channel Connection.
- A deliberate plan for professional development of the IT staff to align individual and group success with corporate objectives.
- A clear understanding of adoption that includes end-user assimilation of new behaviors and the abandonment of old behaviors to deliver the ROI predicted by the introduction of new technology into their ongoing business operations.
- A well-defined and supported roll-out plan that enables predictable and continuing value from their initial successes.

While all of this may seem too good to be true, it is in this analysts' view one of the most successful deployments of content management and portal software that I have seen. Avnet has properly integrated this technology into their ongoing business operations to improve efficiency, service to their customers and, in all likelihood, the valuation of their corporation.

Partner Page

When we first conceived of an initiative that would develop and distribute success stories that placed *recipe* over *ingredients* and favored no supplier, technology or computing standard, we also recognized that our most significant hurdle would be to recruit vendors to subsidize such an independent and open process.

Since the CTW program was first conceived in late 2003, we have sought out suppliers who were passionate about and committed to content technology as a game changing force in the markets that they served and secure in the value of the products and services that they offered. The following vendors have literally put their money where their mouths are. They know that public, open and unfettered access to successful enterprise deployments, regardless of the technology mix, only benefit the commercial aspirations of organizations that offer material, dependable and predictable value.

Please join The Gilbane Report in thanking these diverse and often competing organizations for their generous support and sponsorship of the development, promotion and distribution of CTW material. They are an elite group. They are: [Software AG](#) (TECdax:SOW), [Sun Microsystems](#) (NASDAQ:SUNW), [Artesia Technologies](#), [Atomz](#), [Context Media](#), [Convera](#) (NASDAQ:CNVR), [INSCI](#) (OTCBB:INSS), [Trados](#), [Vasont Systems](#), [Venetica](#) and [Vignette](#) (NASDAQ:VIGN).

