

IT vs. Marketing

Increasingly the responsibility of a company's website is falling to the marketing department, with issues of branding, content, promotions and news all sitting within their control. However, much of the time this is complicated by the fact that the IT department actually 'owns' the website and without them the information would not appear there at all.

Introduction

The gap between the people who generate the information and those who deliver it to the website can cause significant problems. For the majority of businesses, changes on a website can only be carried out by people with the necessary technical skills, Java, HTML, and so on, yet this presents two difficulties:

- It increases the workload of technical staff by giving them day-to-day maintenance tasks to complete
- It stops those people within an organization who generate the content from becoming more actively involved in the way it appears online

The first of these problems can cost time and money, as expensive resources become routinely distracted by what should be non-technical duties, such as taking copy and converting it to HTML to then be uploaded onto a web page. The second problem can lead to a website becoming out of date, with stale content left without regular updates. Unless changes are made to the way information on web pages is managed, the investment in your company website could turn out to have been a waste of time, as out of date information on a web page can easily turn potential customers away.

For all types of user

A report from JupiterResearch (a leading IT research firm) confirms the above. In their interviews with hundreds of web editors over the past year, a picture has emerged of multiple stakeholders with conflicting objectives, pulling companies' websites in different directions.

At many companies, marketing, customer service and IT staff all play a role in web decision-making. While marketing is concerned with brand building and growth, customer service focuses on satisfaction and call deflection. IT is generally motivated by cost reduction and technical objectives like infrastructure simplification. While attempting to use their websites to serve the interests of the numerous constituents who control the purse strings, many web businesses fail to maximize the value of the site to the business overall.

"Web site governance is a tangled, often highly political affair" commented Senior Vice President David Schatsky, author of the study and head of research at JupiterResearch. **"As a result, even very sophisticated companies are challenged to extract the most value from their online presence".**

Common problems

- **Wasted resources** – a single change to the website can involve up to six people to write, proof, sign-off, schedule, code and quality check before publishing and each change to the site, when taken as a separate task, takes a lot of time to implement. E.g.: to change a header from 'September Promotions' to 'October Promotions' can take hours with sign-offs, scheduling into IT's workload, coding changes and finally quality checks;
- **Ownership** - IT owns more than they should - driving marketing staff by telling them what they will get - Trying to impose the function on the business, rather than enabling the business to drive the demand for technology
- **Focus** - Marketing doesn't always know what they want - they are not IT buyers and generally don't have the understanding of what is available to them.
- **Speed** - IT sometimes doesn't move fast enough for marketing and delivery of online solutions - As each single change is timely, it is often the case that changes build up and amendments to the website are scheduled to the IT department for perhaps once a week. This prevents a dynamic site and hinders daily/hourly updates and promotional activities. It can also hinder consistent messaging and branding.

Publication bottlenecks



Website organization – the set up

In an age where websites are already a key marketing tool, and in the advent of increasing digital communications, the corporate website is set to become the hub of a business's communications strategy. In order to get it right you need to be in control of the maintenance of that information. It would be foolish to argue there's no obvious overlap between IT and marketing people when it comes to the company website, but by looking at the core responsibilities of these two groups we can maybe begin to avoid the problems this overlap can create.

Division of labour

A division of labour to ensure the best from everyone could look something like this:

- **Marketing** would take control of everything that is visible to the customer. This would include design – what the website looks like, the placement of logos, text areas, graphics and so on; content – what is on the site, graphics, up to date information, latest news, promotions, images; structure – the site map, the navigation path; branding – where and how branding is used on the site, which is different from the content on the site.
- The **IT department** would take control of the infrastructure that the website runs on. This encompasses the technical infrastructure – what the system runs on, its scalability and reliability; integration – building connections with other systems and troubleshooting, thus having time freed up to be available when problems do arise.

Different needs

To be able to take charge of the website, marketing people need a non-technical management tool, combined with the ability and freedom to control the areas of the website that require marketing and communications messaging i.e. everything that is visible to the customer. They also need to control the content, to avoid falling foul of a publication bottleneck, so tools to give immediate responses to keep up with the demanding pace of marketing changes are a necessity.

Conversely, the IT department needs the management tool to be robust, reliable, secure and scalable. After all, they would hardly see the benefit in having routine copy-editing tasks taken away, if they found the number of help-desk calls increased dramatically in the wake of a new management tool being installed.

How to organize ownership of your site

In order to determine how best to manage your website, you first need to look at your assets:

- What types of web information do you have? – documents, downloads, news releases, maps, product brochures and so on;
- How is it currently managed? – separate teams responsible for publishing information to specific areas;
- Who is responsible for different elements? – messaging, branding, PR;
- How do you make changes? – what is the process you currently go through; how long is sign-off for each item; how would you like to amend/maintain the site;
- And finally, in an ideal world what would be the most efficient and most accurate way to add or make changes to a piece of content?

You then need to sit down and build a roadmap outlining the different types of information on your website, who within the company should have access to each type of page, who should make the changes to copy, who should approve and sign-off this work and who should publish it to the site. From there it is just a matter of finding the software to allow you to do this as seamlessly as possible.

Software can ease the process

Managing a web presence is a business problem and as such, needs a business solution. Control over the way your website is managed needs to be placed in the hands of the people who own site visibility, not left solely with the IT department.

Content Management is a solution for serious websites which are driven by the business, yet still loved by IT, and can deliver an environment where all aspects of the business can achieve their own web objectives. IT requires a solution that integrates with existing corporate systems and adheres to their overall IT strategy while communications professionals are accustomed to tools that relate to their needs in everyday working and are familiar, understandable, and accessible.

Tools to manage your website should be highly visual and targeted at the specific task at hand. These tools will need to be graphical, immediate, powerful and flexible just like the Microsoft Office applications we are already used to. But this new generation of applications will need to be multi-user for collaboration and team efforts. Being no more difficult to use than, for example Microsoft PowerPoint, they should be capable of being deployed to tens or hundreds of users working simultaneously on one web application. They should be more task and audience focused – pushing technological boundaries and lifting restrictions imposed by the previous generation of tools.

What to look for in these tools

- Choose a system that gives access controls to the people that need it. e.g.: marketing assistants can edit and write copy but need approval from the marketing director before items are published onto the web
- Choose a system that is intuitive and easy to use for those without technical skills: for example, a Windows interface and visual workflow – therefore everyone can use it.
- Choose a system that allows offline working and workgroup collaboration. Some have inbuilt Instant Messenger functionality which allows communication between disparate teams, you can even drag links and files into the conversation to discuss and review
- Choose tools that are easy to understand – content shown exactly as it appears. All design and coding hidden to those who don't need to understand or edit it
- Control of content only by those who need to use it
- Choose a content-driven website management system that allows for expansion and the duplication of pages of information between your public facing website and your internal intranet

Summary

In short, there is no need for a divide between the IT and marketing departments. There should be no competition over the company's website, just a clear understanding of the business needs involved. Choosing the right software to suit those business needs can save an untold amount of time and money, and enable you to get real value out of your online assets.

Top tips to manage your website

1. Utilize your assets – let people do the things that they do best

Let writers write content, designers design, the PR people write and publish press releases, the finance department prepare and issue financial results, and the webmasters manage process, setting up access rights and maintaining the core structure of the site.

2. Spend time understanding what and who makes up the content of your site

Work out everything that may appear on the site. Then work out who generates this content, who edits and approves it, and who uploads it to the website – from design, to promotions, to company information – everything! Then set about new processes empowering the content author to deliver the content to the website themselves.

3. Simplify the publication cycle

Simplify the publication cycle with diagrams, web-based management, workflow and version control.

4. Use dynamic technology to enhance marketing control

Once you've sorted out the process and the people behind the information on the website, make sure that the technology used can publish the information simply and immediately.

5. Be business driven – not technology driven

Relieve dependency on IT resources.

Reflect business process through publishing workflow and lifecycle management.