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Strategic web sites rely on the right mix of team players

Insider view:

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When the World Wide Web was discovered as a viable communications vehicle, it frequently fell under the aegis of technologists. As IS- and IT-authored sites saw more traffic, authors began seeking ease of use, authoring and access.

These goals brought a few insightful technologists to turn to their marketing peers (or vice-versa) for counsel. Marketers, who had long been charged with the task of making things easy for people to “buy,” saw incredible potential in the web and, in general, embraced its opportunities.

In many cases, the transition from a technologist-authored site to a marketer-authored site was positioned as “generational,” or “next generation.”

A problem developed, however, when marketers and technologists sought to lay claim to the web.

And so began the secret cold war of contemporary web site development—the battle of ownership between technologists and marketers.

At some organizations, technologists and marketers find harmonious ways to effect good web strategies. For the most part, however, the group that presents the strongest interest is allowed to “own” the web strategy.

Too much content

Ownership can create problems when effective writers, product managers, product developers and even technologists and marketers are relegated to the dehumanizing titles of “content developers” or “geeks.” And the people who receive the content are dubbed “users.” In this process, many of the important specialties and talents are overlooked while the “owner” raises his or her role to a matter of mission-critical importance.

The solution to such challenges has eluded many organizations. But one thing is clear: to compete in the emerging electronic landscape, ownership must transcend territorialism and assume a facilitative role.

To own a web site today must mean advancing the needs of the overall organization and helping identify those needs beyond one’s piece of the pie. From universities to multinationals, organizations are discovering that integrated, multidisciplinary web teams are the key.

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Emmanuel College knew the web would play an important role in its most recent communications initiatives. A small women’s college in Boston’s Fenway area, Emmanuel faced increased competition.

It was becoming more challenging to present the college in ways that spoke to the a diverse set of students, prospective students, adult learners and alumnae.

As a solution, the publications department organized a web editorial team with representation from all departments.

The result is a web site that cuts across the many complexities of a college and speaks in a consistent voice.

The web site is one of a number of new initiatives that have significantly helped the college increase its undergraduate and graduate inquiries, applicants and enrollment.

Today, the web editorial team steers the site and continues to counsel the development of the institution’s Internet and Intranet sites. The team is now broadening the site’s scope and crafting change that speaks to even wider audiences, while managing the process and accounting the changes in their constituencies.

Boston-based management consulting firm Vertex Partners Inc. competes with some of the country’s most established management consulting firms.

When initiating its web effort, the company gathered representation from its many departments to form a team.

After some research and brainstorming, the team decided that a key strength of the web lay in its recruiting potential. Many MBA students are on-line, using the web for research and job searching.

While recruiting was the initial focus, the balance of the team has brought critical insight to the development of the web strategy. Today, there is important communications and marketing information for all Vertex constituents.

The web has become a key strategy for recruiting activities and a strong communication tool for general company information. The future of the web initiatives for Vertex Partners holds great potential because they are steering their web communications with a healthy team focus.

Untapped opportunities

There is still a lot of untapped opportunity for the web to fit comfortably within business practices, communications strategies and technology infrastructures that may have web initiatives in place.

The degree of success for any web venture will be greatly determined by the right mix of team players and the leadership of a committed facilitator.

To construct a site that is strategic and extensible, the task of mastering the web must be left in the hands and collective thoughts of a well-constricted team.

A webmaster (if that role really exists anymore) must act much like a producer/director, bringing together the right minds and talent to craft the vision and strategy of an organization within the exciting realm of the web and new media technologies.

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