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Confronting the challenges of complexity

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2012 INTERACTIVE MARKETING GUIDE

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Marketers embrace digital content testing

Labs look at everything from user experience to registration forms to optimize content

BY KATE MADDOX

As b-to-b marketers expand their use of digital content on websites and in newsletters, ad campaigns and social media channels, they are setting up labs and implementing rigorous testing processes to optimize that content.

While testing content is nothing new—in fact, most marketers and agencies perform some sort of testing on creative content before publication—the formalization of such processes has become a priority at many b-to-b companies.

Last year, SAP created a digital test lab to standardize the testing of all content to be published on the company's Web pages—including usability, design and registration forms—as well as on its mobile-enabled site launched this month.

"As we looked at growth in the addressable market, particularly with mobile devices, we realized there was a significant need for very rational decisions around digital marketing—what's working,

what's not and how to optimize traffic once it arrives at SAP.com," said Crispin Sheridan, senior director-global search at SAP.

NEED FOR GOVERNANCE

"We knew some people were doing testing, but there was no business ownership of testing as a concept. There was no governance or process to ensure syndication [of content] so we were getting the best bang for the buck."

In July, the company introduced the SAP.com Test Lab under the direction of the global search team that Sheridan leads. "[Search] being the highest traffic-driver to

SAP.com, it made sense for us," Sheridan said.

The team is comprised of a full-time director and individuals from SAP's marketing and Web analytics teams. SAP uses a crowdsourcing model to solicit ideas about what to test, from the bottom up to the top down, Sheridan said.

"We take an idea [such as an offer] and look at all the things that lead up to a conversion—the process, Web pages, design, user experience, content, offer and actual registration process," he said. "Then we do a blend of A/B and multivariate testing, and image testing [such as putting an image next to the offer], to see where we get the most significant lift."

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Study: Financial services companies use of social media 'amateurish'

BY CHRISTOPHER HOSFORD

The financial services sector—in the wake of the mortgage meltdown, financial bailouts and the uproar over new fees—may be the U.S. industry most in need of social media to improve its reputation.

Yet the top 50 private banks and wealth management compa-

nies approach social media in an "amateurish" way, according to a study by investment portal Assetinum.com.

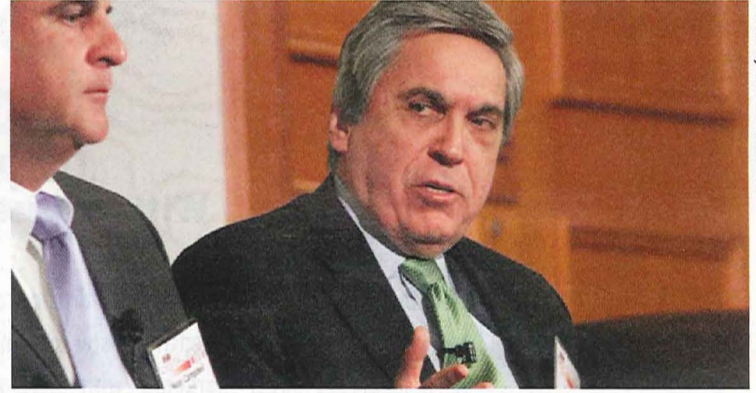
The study assessed financial services companies' involvement with Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube, as well as the integration of social media with the com-

panies' websites. Assetinum found that one in three companies was absent from Facebook and the others weren't much engaged. Only 26 institutions out of the 50 businesses responded to Twitter posts, and only 13 added tweets about wealth management subjects.

The numbers were equally poor in regard to YouTube, and only half of the institutions studied integrated social media into their websites sufficiently, according to the study.

This is a huge mistake, said Benjamin Manz, managing partner at Assetinum. "Digital media does not only

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Neal Campbell (l.), senior VP-CMO at CDW, listens as Siemens CMO Tom Haas responds to a question during 'BtoB's' Digital Edge Live conference.

Digital Edge Live: Surround customers with social, content

BY CHRISTOPHER HOSFORD AND KATE MADDOX

Social media and content marketing were two of the hottest topics at BtoB's Digital Edge Live conference last month in San Francisco. The clear recommendation from marketers, agency executives and analysts who spoke at the event: Immerse customers in these two complementary channels.

"Make social media engaging,

make it social and make it count," said Sharon Crost, global online marketing and social media manager at Hitachi Data Systems. She said Hitachi has created engaging contests and has senior executives speak to bloggers and influencers to create social content.

On the content front, panelists said a savvy combination of sales pitches and nurturing is essential.

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The new playbook

Strategy for digital environments
and events evolves for b-to-b marketers

BY CHARLOTTE WOOLARD

IBM INC. PRODUCED MORE than 200 interactive online events last year, carrying marketing messages, educational sessions and expert advice to global audiences via a digital channel it calls the IBM Global Virtual Events Center.

The digital event models on display in the perpetual environment reflect a new proficiency with an emerging medium. Hybrid events combine digital and face-to-face elements to increase reach. Some divisions of IBM use the platform to find speakers to add to event agendas. Year-round digital extensions of live events keep the conversation going, while virtual road shows home in on specific city markets. About 50 always-on permanent event spaces offer content organized around a business sector or other theme.

"It's no longer looked on as a replacement of face-to-face, but as a much more strategic position," said Larry Cook, manager-events and digital metrics at IBM. Cook joined the team that in 2010 introduced the IBM environment, which has welcomed more than 100,000 unique visitors since its inception.

The strategic thinking expands beyond IBM and into the digital marketing industry at large, said Eric Vidal, director of product marketing for the events services division of InterCall Inc., the platform provider that manages the IBM environment. "People are getting smarter about leveraging virtual technologies," he said. "They are integrating these technology processes into business practices now."

well as clients.

The same thinking that once recreated static magazine print pages as Web pages also led to the development of digital booth replicas, she said. But as people gain familiarity with the technology, those tropes can be shed in favor of easy navigation. "It's not so much about the virtual event anymore," she said. "Physically these environments are looking more and more like websites. It's about user behavior, maneuvering online."

That's not to say that virtual environments do not share strong ties with events. The medium has been key to not only extending the reach of face-to-face events, but also driving attendance, informing audience and keeping the conversation going after the trade show floor has closed.

pany representatives. "The email is no longer the vehicle to communicate," said Dianne Morin, director-marketing and communications in the investment services division. "The solution center is the repository of all information."

The medium is still moving into new areas, said Michael Doyle, executive director of the Virtual Edge Institute. Platform providers are building mobile capabilities and working to align back-end systems with their platforms. Marketers are asking for embedded sites that allow an audience to interact with an environment in a familiar place rather than visiting a third-party website.

Marketers are working to keep pace with the rapid development, but many companies still fail to analyze the data that has been one of the biggest selling points of the medium, Doyle said: "They're not measuring as much as they should. A lot of companies, especially in the events department, are understaffed. We get the data but we don't stretch. So what does that mean, how do we apply it to something?"

As marketers become more comfortable with the tool, however, they do see virtual environments delivering results, said Kenny Lauer, VP-digital experience at George P. Johnson. Marketers are learning to integrate the technology into the overall marketing mix. "We're going to see all of these communications come back to form an experience and outside of the events structure, which is where it is sitting now." The focus will be on collapsing distance, connecting people and creating deliberate behavior through campaigns that integrate physical and virtual event components, as well as other traditional campaign elements, he said. "That is a healthier way for organizations to start thinking about it," he said. "Virtual is over as a standalone thing."

Lauer recommended looking first at the behavior that you want to inspire, then pulling from the entire bag of marketing tools to develop those outcomes. "At the end of the day, it's about marketing," he said. "Don't get carried away." □

More companies are looking at virtual environments as channels for ongoing content, he said. "The challenge over the last two years: A lot of companies are moving toward this, but they've stumbled a bit. They didn't keep an active event."

Vidal recommended companies

Need to Know

5 ways to improve online
delivery of live events

- **Edit content.** Provide information in digestible chunks, cutting extraneous material and keeping the focus tight so you don't lose the audience—in the physical room or online.
- **Build an active experience.** Insert interactive features at regular intervals to help your audience avoid the passive-viewing lull associated with TV. Surveys and other elements provide immediate feedback and keep your audience engaged.
- **Speak to the online audience.** The presenter should acknowledge online viewers and encourage their participation in elements such as a live Q&A.
- **Recap events.** Provide succinct summaries of archived presentations so your audience can determine the value of the material and decide if they want to watch the long-form version.
- **Throw out the drapes.** Graphic elements that replicate the trade show experience do not enhance the content or relate to the social experience. Create a relevant interface that allows your audience to quickly locate information.

Source: Tony Lorenz, CEO, bXB Online, an event marketing provider that focuses on the online portion of hybrid events

that have built perpetual environments develop a calendar around specific business goals and continually add fresh content to draw the audience back to the event space. "You don't want all of that conversation and connection to die."

Virtual environments also have moved beyond the event model, becoming more like next-generation websites than replicas of the show floor, said Kate Spellman, president of UBM Studios. The unit of media giant United Business Media develops virtual environments for internal divisions as

But while events have served as the core inflection point, the impact is felt in marketing programs outside the event space. At financial services company Fiserv, for example, a perpetual environment developed with platform provider ON24 acts as a library of all the information that once had to be accessed through a link in an email blast. Newsletters have replaced multiple blasts, and clients know they can find the information in a searchable database in the environment where they can also access educational webinars and connect one-on-one with com-

Food services company expands with digital event

"We have a decentralized workforce. Pulling people together for annual meetings gets expensive. [In 2009,] our president said this is not going to be able to happen. But we were able to partner with ON24 and put together a program that had a live day. The presidents had a pre-recorded session and did a live question-and-answer session. Immediately after their Q&A, with more than 500 people on the chat, they were sold. And we saw that we had 96% attendance as compared to live [annual meetings], where we have about 49% attendance. Virtually, we have a broader reach. We decided to do a refresh in the winter. The virtual gave us two touch points as opposed to one. The live events still happen, but with a smaller group and more geographically appropriate.

—MICHELE SUPRUNOWICZ, senior director-talent management and development, Sodexo Inc. educational market

Cvent gets customer intelligence virtually

"We were hosting 200 enterprise users of [event management company Cvent's] software at our corporate meeting summit. We wanted to start a dialogue about how [event] managers choose their hotels. We wanted to open it up to our other clients and industry members because it is an industry-wide conversation; and we wanted the audience to be able to weigh in. We've done thought leadership webinars with a panel before, but this was our first time bringing things [into an interactive] virtual [environment]. We had 1,000 people attend virtually. Almost 100% were clicking [on poll responses] and interacting during the event, and everyone in the live audience had a polling device. We showed the results on the screen in the room. So much goes into content generation. It really makes sense to leverage all of that work for a wider audience, a virtual audience that wouldn't make it to that event.

—KATE SLONAKER, marketing manager, Cvent Inc.

Set strategy early to produce successful show

BtoB: What do marketers need to know to produce successful digital environments?

Michael Doyle: You need to have a solid strategic understanding of what you can do and how you can do it. Identify big objectives and goals. Then, across every aspect of these digital engagements, have a strategic business plan in place. The other thing you need to be successful is the tactical aspect. People have to know a certain amount about how an event is going to happen. Should you use Flash or HTML? How many users can the platform support? This is the tactical but not the operational side. They need enough education to be successful at building the plan and also be able to manage the execu-

tion of that plan and achieve what they've envisioned.

The strategy does depend on the business objective. Are you trying to deliver training, a marketing program or a product launch? At the very high level, what are you trying to achieve? Then build the program down from that. Have a strategy for the user interface. Do I have a single sign-on? How do we handle registration? Is it integrated with our overall CRM? How are people likely to be consuming it? What type of devices will they be using? A lot of (those decisions) flow from the very top-level business objective.

BtoB: Has use of the medium moved beyond the event marketing team?

Doyle: We are seeing a broadening use of digital media and event technology. It started very "eventcentric." Now it is training, employee onboarding, incentive programs. Human resources departments at small or very large organizations in particular are using this.

BtoB: We see a lot of interest in year-round environments. What do pervasive environments offer?

Doyle: When we talk about 365 (days-a-year events), we're not necessarily talking about building community. It's more about having a persistent environment where you can have ongoing customer contact. The attendee is familiar with the site and registers once. Event production is streamlined. □



MICHAEL
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