Next Generation Marcom Document Requirements: Multimedia, Interactive, and Cross Platform

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In early 2013, our firm decided that we wanted to offer a new type of marketing communications (marcom) document – beyond traditional documents such as websites, brochures, white papers, etc. To identify what sort of document we should offer, our staff talked with business customers, service providers, marketing consultants, and others. We conducted extensive online research and painstakingly evaluated various contractors’ services. Over the course of that six-month investigation, we determined that the next generation of marcom document should have three primary attributes to best meet the needs of our business clients:

- It should use multimedia (e.g., video, audio)
- It should be interactive and customizable
- It should operate across platforms (PCs, Macs, tablets, and smartphones)

Multimedia Marcom

First, let’s cover multimedia. Business and technical decision makers are becoming more sophisticated in their expectations for online marketing. They increasingly use video in the form of short home page summaries, recorded webinars, online product demonstrations, etc. Music and sound are also part of this online sensory experience. The perception is that use of multimedia in documents is more engaging than static documents.

So we decided that any next generation marketing document should incorporate video and audio. However, our test projects with existing clients revealed that some businesses do not have video clips that serve marcom purposes. This meant that the ability to develop new custom video was an important requirement for any new marcom document offering. Because video can be expensive, we researched how to develop affordable, custom videos. To do this, we identified outfits that could combine a script we wrote, a background image we chose, and one of a selection of professional spokespersons into engaging short videos at reasonable cost. One of these service providers became part of our team.

Interact with Readers and Customize to Their Needs

The second attribute is interactivity and customization. Our team felt intuitively that if a viewer could interact in some way with a document, that document would probably better hold their interest. But we also felt that simply using interaction for the sake of interaction might not provide the level of engagement with the document that we sought.

To maximize viewer interest, we designed interaction that customized the document – on the fly – to the particular viewer’s needs. Feedback from early test projects with clients showed that this could be
done by asking the viewer questions, and based on their answers, by tailoring the remainder of the document content to the viewer’s needs. We also found that flow charting these questions, answers, and content was useful for organizations in the planning stages of the document. We made this interaction, customization, and flowcharting a requirement for our next generation marcom document.

**Anywhere, Anytime Marcom**

The third attribute is operation across platforms (i.e., PCs, Macs, tablets, and smartphones). Our writers have read (and written) quite a bit about the consumerization of IT and bring-your-own-device (BYOD) initiatives, so we knew that business decision makers were increasingly using a variety of devices to access information.

We decided that any next generation marcom document would need to operate across all of these platforms. This posed a significant challenge initially, as we discovered that multimedia (rich media) PDF files, for example, are not consistently supported on tablets and smartphones. We also learned that various operating system and PDF reader combinations pose some ease-of-use challenges. While the rich media PDFs still presented some advantages (e.g., a standalone downloadable document), we sought an alternative. We determined that we would need to also tap into the next generation of web technology, HTML5, to develop reader-independent, cross platform, online versions of our next gen marcom documents. We found this to be a technically feasible approach for our envisioned document, as well as a promising way to address the emerging need for analytics. We also found that use of responsive design, in which the document is automatically resized to fit the dimensions of the device’s screen, was advantageous.

We think we’ve successfully achieved most of these requirements with the recent debut of our multimedia content packages for B2B marketing. These packages can be a powerful tool for business marketing. They artfully incorporate multimedia elements, enable viewer interactivity and document customization, and function effectively across platforms. We’re very interested in your opinion on these three attributes, whether you think we’ve provided something that achieves these goals for next generation marcom, and any other thoughts you may have on the subject. Please contact us with your ideas or reaction.

Steve Hoffman is President of Hoffman Marketing Communications, Inc., which provides state-of-the-art multimedia marketing content packages to leading technology companies around the world.

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