

Peak Performance: Best Practices in Global Web Site Management

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Introduction

I am XXX and today we will look at what it takes to manage a global Web site.

Did you know that in some countries, when a person's name is written in red, it denotes death? In fact, in other countries, the use of black denotes death. In still other countries, the color white is a sign of mourning.

Or, did you know that screen buttons which can easily hold English words are likely too small when these same English words are translated into German? That's because German words are frequently longer than their English equivalents.

Or, did you know the rounded OK sign made with the thumb and index fingers by Americans has decidedly negative sexual connotations – the equal of flipping someone the finger – in other cultures?

The point is, global Web site management is filled with surprises, and is much more complex than simply translating copy from one language to another. By watching this program today, you will learn of the important issues involved with global Web site management, and the practices that will help you avoid the difficulties, embarrassments and costs of making mistakes.

The topics we'll cover include why it is important to make your Web site global, the management issues involved with globalizing a site, personnel issues such as training and teamwork, and some of the techniques involved with making a site global.

Overview

In a sense, all Web sites are global. After all, virtually anyone on the Web in any country can access any Web site unless the Web site owner limits access. But just because your Web site is available globally doesn't make your site truly global.

Of course, one variable that helps make a site global is that its available in more than one language. Surprisingly, many sites of large, multinational companies, don't even meet this minimum requirement for globalization. An article published in *Link-Up*, in September 2001, reported that the brokerage firm Merrill Lynch found that only 10 percent of companies that trade worldwide have plans of setting up multilingual Web sites. Forrester Research says that only 37 percent of Fortune 100 company's have multilingual sites. Jupiter Communications reports that two-thirds of leading U.S. Web sites ignore the needs of non-U.S. or non-English-speaking visitors.

Why worry about having your site in languages other than English? After all, hasn't English become the universal language of business? The British publication *ComputerWeekly* reports that about 70 percent of the world economy comes from non-English speaking countries; ignore non-

English speaking countries and you ignore much of the world's economy. Not only that, but you may turn off those who do visit your site. Forrester Research reports that users stay twice as long and are three times as likely to buy when content is presented in their native language. A recent Web survey by Georgia Institute of Technology found that 71 percent of Europeans said they believed more people would use the Web if the content were provided in their own language and tailored to their culture.

And if you stick solely to English, more and more commerce done on the Web will pass you by. Of the 403 million people currently online, 192 million or 48 percent have English as their first language. By 2003, however, while the number of English speakers online is expected to increase to 230 million, it is estimated there will be 270 million speakers of Asian languages and 290 million speakers of other European languages online, dropping the share of English speakers to just under 30 percent. An academic research paper by Steven John Simon of Florida International University reports that the United States' share of e-revenues will drop from its current 66 percent to 39 percent by 2003, **which means much of e-commerce will pass you by in the future if you stick only to English.**

As important as translation is for having a global site, it's been estimated that it is perhaps only 10 to 15 percent of what's involved when making a Web site truly global. There are cultural, technical, marketing and management issues involved, as well.

As an example, there's the issue of branding. Kristine Kelley, director for Internet marketing at the accounting and consulting firm, Andersen, formerly known as Arthur Anderson, reports that her company completely relaunched its Web site in early 2000, in part, because it lacked consistency. She says, We began a new branding effort when we relaunched the site. Previously, **it the site** was a collection of different offices, practices and service lines. It was a series of minisites, and it lacked consistency in terms of branding, navigation and design. There needed to be consistency brought across the firm so it could appear as a global firm operating as one company in many places and identifiable as such. In effect, the firm felt the site could not be truly global until it had consistency throughout.

There are technical issues as well. A major consideration is if the site be organized centrally at essentially one location, or distributed among many locations. There are more subtle but still important technical issues. If your site is to include middle eastern languages, such as Arabic or Hebrew, or such Asian languages as Chinese or Japanese, can you technically handle languages that are read right to left, or even vertically, and have two-byte characters, unlike the one-byte characters of European languages which are read left to right?

The bottom line for IT executives is, if they don't implement the best practices needed to make their site global, they will miss out on much of the growth in the world's e-commerce, opportunities to move into new markets and attract new customers will be lost, and it is likely they will fall further and further behind their competitors who understand and appreciate the importance of having an effective global Web presence.

Management Phases

If there is an essential phase in managing a global Web site, it's in the planning. Before you ever move into cyberspace, you should be planning. And planning some more. The place to start your planning is by deciding what you want the site to accomplish, notes Craig Aramaki, a vice president at DSW Partners, the Salt Lake City branch of Euro RSCG, which is a multinational advertising agency based on Paris, France. Is the site there just to provide information on your products or services, much like an online brochure, asks Aramaki, or is it to be more sophisticated, by helping you establish and maintain customer relationships? The latter requires two-way communication. Such a site will likely want users to provide information about themselves, including their names and e-mail addresses. You might want to design the site with the ability to customize it to the individual user, where the user sees content aimed at his or her interests.

Douglas Brashear, a principal at the international consulting firm and systems integrator, American Management Systems, based in Fairfax, Virginia, told us that a Web site should be 80 percent theoretically designed before any development begins. That's because it is so much easier to create and correct and go through one iteration after another when you're just talking about paper mockups or a quick html mockup or Powerpoint presentation which everyone can discuss and refine. Once you start developing, your costs rise dramatically, as programming is not a cheap nor quick endeavor. As a simple example, the German language generally takes up more space than English, which means if you design a form to be used in the U.S., and later realize you need the same form for German users, if you haven't accommodated the form for German at the beginning, you probably will have to totally recreate the form. If planned properly, you'll have a flexible system, likely based on the use of templates, that can more easily accommodate creating a multi-language forms.

Just as sophisticated e-commerce companies have gone beyond just posting product information on their sites, they realize that establishing a **A** Web presence can mean more than just trying to save money and increase revenue, important as these may be. A Web presence **It** can enhance a company's customer service, provide a competitive advantage, strengthen brand equity and speed up a company's ability to respond to market changes. Some potential benefits are hard to predict. For example, a Web site can help a company with its employee recruitment. About half of those visiting Andersen's site are job seekers. Such potential benefits and goals need to be incorporated into your planning process.

Here are some best practice planning steps:

- . Define the site's purpose. It is to be used strictly for communication or do you want two-way communication? Who is the intended audience? What content is needed for this audience?
- . Site design. Here cultural issues come into play. Recognize that **what** some cultures take offense to seeing a picture of a person's face, while others take offense to seeing pictures of certain animals. What you think is obvious may not be to others. A shopping cart is now widely recognized in the U.S.; in other countries, the shopping cart logo is largely meaningless because those cultures don't use shopping carts. The site needs sensitivity to it's various audiences.
- . Create a management structure that allow you to accomplish your stated goals. We'll discuss the management structure in some detail shortly when we cover techniques for managing a site, but recognize here that **how** the site is managed must be well thought out right from the beginning, or it is unlikely you'll be able to achieve what you want. One of the interesting things

about global site management is that there seems to be no universal placement of the site organization within a company's organizational structure. Typically, it is in IT or marketing; Andersen's site is within its marketing department. While there is no right and wrong here, the site's place in the management structure can have an affect. Aramaki notes, Marketing is more focused on branding, messaging issues and having a consistent look and feel. If the site is run by IT, there's more concern with infrastructure and back-end. In a sense, IT looks back to front, while marketing looks front to back.

. You need to plan for implementation. This includes the hardware and software to be used, such back-end issues as functions, features and data processing, the content to be placed on the site and how it will be created, and the marketing to be done that will drive users to your site.

. A budget must be created that will take account not just the costs of developing the site, but updating it, maintaining it and perhaps expanding it into new countries and markets over time.

Personnel Issues

One of the key management issues facing any company establishing a global Web site is whether the site be centralized or distributed. Centralized means the site basically resides in one location and most if not all changes and updates to it must come through this central site. Distributed means that the company's global Web presence is a sum of individual parts, usually largely independent sites that reside in various localities, which may be regionally, such as Europe and Asia, or if large enough, in individual countries, as having independent sites in the United Kingdom, Poland and South Korea.

One factor to consider is the depth of your organization's skill sets and where they are located. If hosted locally, then the skills must be available locally. Skills needed are technical, such as knowledge of html, xml and programming generally, networking capability, database and content management, and hardware and software maintenance. But also needed are more soft skills, such as editing, writing, graphic design and marketing. As a general rule of thumb, expect to see the need for technical skills decline in relative importance over time as the site becomes established. And expect to see the needs for soft skills to increase as more and more content is placed on the site and as more people – typically non-technical folks – become involved with the site and make contributions to it.

For a site to be effective, particularly in terms of branding, it needs consistency – a consistent look and feel. Establishing this across international boundaries is not easy. This is both a training and management issue. Ann Arellano, director of operations at Anderson, reports her firm doesn't just train people how to author templates and what templates to use, but it goes through the what is the vision of the site, its brand strategy and why it's important to hold to the brand strategy. One lesson Andersen has learned, she says, is that communication has got to be both ways. It can't be top down. The local offices have to **must** have a say. Shoving edicts down the throats of locals is no way to have them support consistency first development **developed** at the central office. What's needed is lots of communications, and not just via e-mail and phone, but also face to face. More than one observer has commented on the importance of bringing those involved in the project face to face, even when it means having them travel considerable distances for a meeting or two.

It also helps to get local buy-in when travel budgets for meetings come from the headquarter's budget, not the local's. They are more likely to participate and want to participate if the central office pays.

Techniques

Be sure to have a comprehensive style guide before going live with your site. This is especially necessary with a global site having many geographies. You will have people from various countries contributing to the site, and if you don't control them, you will have sites that end up looking very different from one another. The style guide covers such basics as the size of the logo and where to place it, the writing style, use of graphics, use of color and so on. You want everyone to be reading from the same page, and that's what a style guide helps to achieve.

Have regularly scheduled meetings to help maintain consistency. Aramaki, who was heavily involved with the development of Intel's global site, says Intel has quarterly meetings for the major participants in its site and brings them from various countries to its California headquarters. Recognize that it's generally easier to have consistency if the site has one central location rather than being distributed.

As the site develops, expect the need for functionality to increase as more people participate in publishing content and more collaboration to be needed between content creators and Web site developers.

Plan well. Technically, creating templates is more expensive up-front than creating static pages. But in the long term, templates can save money because they allow for much greater flexibility. Templates are like a pitcher into which you can pour various content as needed. Static pages are like an aluminum can – once you use it, it can't be changed and used again.

Include in your planning means for getting feedback of those with a stake in your site. This includes the development team, of course. But don't ignore the needs and desires of your target audience. In addition, find out what upper-level corporate management expects – you need their buy-in.

Be aware of creeping costs. Good planning will help you contain costs. If you think the site will grow over time, you can save money in the long run by building in flexibility at the beginning. The costs of a site vary dramatically, depending on how many pages you have, how many countries and languages are involved, the graphics, the frequency of updates, and such. Development costs in the six-to-seven figure range are likely commonplace. Aramaki gives this rule of thumb: the incremental cost of adding a site is probably 25 to 30 percent of the cost of the original site. If only translation is involved, the cost can be less. Let's say your cost for developing your U.S. site was \$100,000. The cost of adding a site for France or Germany will probably be an additional \$25,000 to \$30,000.

Be aware of hidden dangers. Time to develop is often a surprise. It's like home remodeling – the time the project takes can be a multiple of the time expected. That's why you need to build **Build** extra time into your planning. Aramaki says he's seen where a company will give its central site

a fair amount of time for development and deployment, but when it comes to the outlying sites, they are expected to do their development in short order. Be realistic will all members of your team.

Be sure to have people on your team who know the cultures and legal issues in those localities where you will have sites. If you have a site in Britain, it's probably okay to have it just in English. But if you have a site in France, you'll want it available in French. And if you have a site in Canada, it better be available in both English and French. It helps to have native speakers involved, as they can detect subtleties that non-native speakers, even if fluent in the foreign language, may not detect.

Even if you centralize the site, you'll still need localization. Your site is likely to work best when its language, color and design are suited to the locality. Legal issues are an important concern. For example, the U.S. has looser laws governing privacy than does Europe. U.S. companies are required to offer an "opt out" policy for online data collection and sharing, which means that consumers must specifically request that their data be treated confidentially. In the European Union, an "opt in" scenario is required, in which data collection and sharing is prohibited unless a consumer specifically gives permission. Another legal consideration is that European privacy regulations prohibit the transfer of personal data collected online to countries outside Europe. To deal with this, companies will set up a data center in an EU country, which allows for the data collected at that center to be transferred within the EU.

To handle differences between the U.S. and European, a so-called Safe Harbor agreement between the U.S. Commerce Department and the EC took effect in the summer of 2001. It consists of a number of principles, including the requirement that organizations must notify individuals about the purposes for which they collect and use information about them and organizations must give individuals the opportunity to choose (opt out) whether their personal information will be disclosed to a third party. *Information Week* magazine reports that at this time, most companies are holding off signing on to the Safe Harbor rules until it's clear what the risks of not joining are. There are legal issues to consider in various parts of the world, such as collecting value-added or VAT taxes, privacy concerns and issues related to the type of information you can collect on your visitors. Shipping to a foreign country requires knowing the rules.

Unfortunately for global e-commerce, payment methods standards are hard to come by. As a result, payments for online transactions are still often done offline using the traditional methods, such as letters of credit. *InternetWeek* reports that, "more than 90 percent of e-marketplaces still require companies to seal deals offline." Credit cards are a means of international payments, but these are not as commonplace elsewhere in the world as in the U.S., making them a less than ideal payment vehicle.

There are companies offering online payment solutions for global e-commerce transactions. New York City-based E4X Inc. offers a solution where the seller can post prices in U.S. dollars, then ask their customers what currency they wish to use for payment. According to *Information Week*, if the answer is anything but dollars, E4X takes over the transaction and translates the prices into any of 22 currencies, collects the payment and pays the site in dollars, just as though it were any

other transaction. Customers never realize they're dealing with a third party.

Be prepared to handle issues a domestic site doesn't need to consider. For example, communications, such as sales inquiries, customer complaints and technical issues, will be coming to you in various languages the more global your site. You need to be prepared to handle such queries. Shipping and tariff issues can create logistical hurdles.

The major vendors in this market include BroadVision, Vignette, Idiom, Interwoven, Day, Epicentric, PlumTree, Sequoia, Verity, Oracle, Lotus and others. Be prepared to customize the software you buy no matter how off-the-shelf the vendor claims its product to be.

Vendors in this market include those with integrated offerings, such as Broadvision and Indiom, those with content management capabilities, which include Vignette, Interwoven and Day, and those with portal software, such as Epicentric, PlumTree, Verity and Citrix which recently purchased Sequoia. Vendors like Oracle and Lotus have platforms on which to build Web sites.

Case Study: Andersen

[Michelle and Dave: I don't quote anyone for this case study, but obviously if you want to interview one of the people I spoke with at Andersen, this portion of the program would lend itself to an on-camera interview)

Andersen has a truly global Web site. It is in a dozen or more languages and spans 84 countries. It runs on the Lotus Notes/Domino platform that has been customized to Andersen's needs.

The site is much more than just an electronic brochure -- it has research papers, white papers, information about the firm's various practice groups, executive summaries of studies you can purchase and even information about the firm's alumni, who are considered good sales prospects for Andersen. About half the visitors come to the site seeking job information.

The company won't disclose costs, but at the firm's Chicago headquarters, it has 25 to 30 full-time people working on the site -- about one third are editors, one third project managers and one third technical people -- and worldwide, the total comes to about 100.

The company relaunched its site in January 2000. It had been largely a series of individual sites lacking consistency. To bring order from this chaos, the new site was based entirely at corporate headquarters in Chicago and resided on three servers. But one surprise was that limited bandwidth in some outlying geographies caused problems with such things as the speed needed to open a template or save a document. For this reason, the company is in the process of creating three satellite centers, which will essentially mirror Chicago, but will enhance performance. These will be located in France, Britain and Singapore.

The company has regional editorial centers in London and Singapore, and approvals and quality assurance all go through either of these two cities or Chicago. Countries are allowed to author in their own language. Some sites are quite extensive, while others don't have much more than basic information than a welcome page and contact information. The differences are dependent on how large is the firm's practice in a particular geographic market.

Management of the site comes from the firm's marketing arm, and there's a staff of technologists and developers who are assigned solely to the site. Communications are often filtered down, with Chicago notifying the London and Singapore regional centers and they, in turn, notifying the local sites. There's a detailed style guide and guidelines are also available online for all authors. These help assure consistency. Also assuring consistency is the centralized nature of the site's organization. For example, when the logo was changed to reflect the name change from Arthur Andersen to Anderson, the logo was updated on the master template and pushed through by the technologists as a specified time. This way, everyone got the updated logo at the same time.

Action Plan

1. Be clear about what you want the site to accomplish and who your target audiences are.
2. Do extensive planning ahead of time. This minimizes expensive development efforts that have to later be redone or changed.
3. Be sure your team has all the skill sets needed to implement the plan.
4. Plan for the future. Global e-commerce is destined to become a bigger piece of virtually every large company's sales pie. Be ready to change and expand your site as your market changes and grows.
5. Be aware of cultural differences. Global sites should reflect the world, which is not entirely American and doesn't speak only English.

Best practices for managing a global Web site require you accommodate to local needs and desires. That you are sensitive to local legal and cultural requirements. That your site, no matter in which country one looks at it, consistently reflects your corporate image. A poorly managed site can harm your company's reputation. But a well managed one can significantly enhance your business by allowing you to take advantage of markets and opportunities that would otherwise not be available to you.