

FAST FORWARD:

Designing For Constant Change

Introduction:

Designing For Constant Change

The commercial Internet is barely a decade old, but already it has undergone dramatic changes that have transformed the role of users from that of passive readers to engaged, interactive participants who largely control what they see and how they want to see it.

Gone are the early days of slow-loading, static pages and simple links. The new, improved Web 2.0 is enhanced with streaming video, user-generated content, rich internet applications (AJAX), RSS feeds and widgets that have made it profoundly more useful and more fun. The Internet is becoming more personal, more customizable, and in the process it is transforming the way we live and conduct business online in new and surprising ways.

For proof, look no further than Nielsen Media Research's recent decision to abandon "page views" as the predominant yardstick of site success. Long considered the most accurate way to measure a site's popularity, the page view came under attack as new technologies (AJAX, Flash, Flex) put an emphasis on fluid, engaging experiences that were far removed from the point-and-click world we previously inhabited. "Time spent" is the new metric for user engagement—think minutes spent watching video, chatting via instant messenger and checking out friend's profiles on MySpace and Facebook—and it has shaken up the Internet's pecking order as Apple (iTunes) and Disney (media) now crack the top 10, and AOL leaps up in importance.

Social media have created a similar disruption across the Internet landscape. The rise of social networking sites like MySpace and YouTube, with their mushrooming user bases, has been well documented. Now Facebook, with its open application platform, has opened up a world of new possibilities. How profound is this change? You need only to look at the mountains of new ad inventory that social media create to understand the impact on advertisers and publishers. Traditional publishers are struggling to attract premium ad dollars, as marketers increasingly look to tap into the power of social media. Today's Web is as much about finding information as it is about sharing it. Publishers and marketers ignore this phenomenon at their own peril.

In this ever-shifting digital landscape "best practices" carry a short expiration date and yesterday's design orthodoxy is nothing more than today's sacred cow, waiting to be put out to pasture.

How then do we make sense of it all? How do we adjust to designing for constant change?

Understanding the Connected Consumer

First, we start with the consumer. In our first annual **Avenue A | Razorfish Digital Consumer Behavior Study**, we examine the desires, frustrations and digital consumption habits of today's *connected consumer*. How do these consumers discover things? How quickly do they adapt to emerging technologies and User Interface (UI) conventions (tag clouds, social media, etc.) What drives their desire to purchase (or not) online? How has video changed the digital landscape in recent years?

The answer, our researchers found, is that we've reached a collective digital tipping point as a majority of consumers are tapping into a variety of emerging technologies and social media to increasingly personalize their digital experiences. From recommendation engines, to blogs, to customized start pages, today's *connected consumer* navigates a landscape that is much more niche and personalized than we ever expected.

Designing the Digital Future

Next, we asked our design teams to give us their perspective on what it takes to create breakthrough experiences for the rapidly shifting digital future. From Germany to Japan, from San Francisco to New York, our teams—straight from the frontlines have sketched out their vision for the next wave of digital design and innovation. Think of essays that comprise *Fast Forward: Designing For Constant Change* as conversation starters. If the last few years have been about social media, user-generated content and rich-internet-applications, what's on the horizon?

Personalization is the major meme driving *Superdistribution and the Digital Ecosystem* in which Marcelo Marer explores how multi-platform widgets, RSS feeds and other viral network effects are putting consumers in control of content and experiences like never before; and Laura Porto Stockwell grapples with the role of personal identity in an increasingly public digital world in *Got ID?: Digital Identity 2.0*.

Casting the net further forward, *The Mobile Millennium* finds Joachim Bader and Stefan Mohr looking at what's next for mobile application design—especially in light of the iPhone—and how location-based services, Quick Response (QR) codes and micro-personalization are finally ready to take off. Bethany Fenton predicts that the notion of *Social Shopping* will power the next wave of eCommerce; Rachel Lovinger looks at the technology that is shaping up to power Web 3.0 in

"best practices" carry a short expiration date and yesterday's design orthodoxy is nothing more than today's sacred cow, waiting to be put out to pasture

The Semantic Web We Weave; and Marisa Gallagher looks at the trends in the rapidly evolving digital video space in *Video Killed the Internet Star*.

Other stops along the way include explorations of 3D interfaces, the role of data in the digital design process, the evolution of personae, and why your corporate Web site needs to go on a diet.

Finally, Joe Crump wrestles with the impact that all of this personalization and emerging media has on the future of brands in *Digital Brand Darwinism*, where he argues that a whole new digital DNA is shaping our interaction with brands online. He presents an invaluable primer.

Fast Forward

For those who have either worked in or followed this industry closely over the past 10 years, you know to expect the unexpected. For today's marketers, designers and technologists, constant change is the only reality that you know—and will likely ever know. To succeed in this brave new world, learning to live with and adapt to constant change is a necessity, not a luxury. Our hope is that *Fast Forward: Designing for Constant Change* helps guide you along the way.

Garrick Schmitt
Vice President, User Experience
Avenue A | Razorfish

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Topline

Avenue A | Razorfish Digital Consumer Behavior Study:

With personalization and niche content consumption on the rise, a major impact to digital and traditional media is underway.

By Benjamin Lerch, Malia Supe, Raphael Lopez, and Garrick Schmitt

The majority of today's consumers are actively personalizing their digital experiences and sampling niche content and video with increasing frequency. That was perhaps the key finding in our first annual **Avenue A | Razorfish Digital Consumer Behavior Study**.

Much has been said and written about how the Web 2.0 era has fundamentally changed the way consumers interact online. But to what degree is today's digital consumer really changing her online behavior?

A quick look at ComScore or Nielsen tells one story: millions of people are logging on to Facebook, Flickr, YouTube and MySpace and the numbers are growing. We wanted to know if it was simply the technorati leading the way (and leading the hype), or has something more significant occurred?

Connected Consumers

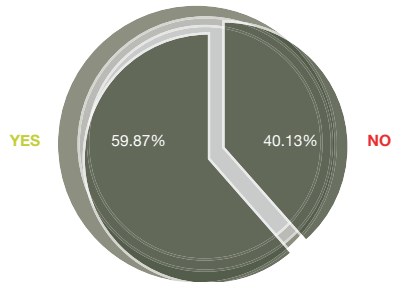
In July 2007, Avenue A | Razorfish surveyed 475 U.S. consumers across all demographics and geographies to understand their desires, frustrations and digital consumption habits. Our design research team was most concerned with digital behavior rather than demographics. We wanted to know:

- How the broad populace of *connected consumers* discover things?
- How quickly do consumers adopt to emerging technologies and user interface conventions (tag clouds, social media, etc.)?
- What drives consumers' desire to purchase (or not) online?
- How has video changed the digital landscape in recent years?
- Are mobile services being widely used (or not)?

Personalization Hits the Mainstream

The answer, we've found, is that the majority of consumers are increasingly personalizing their digital experiences and sampling a wide range of digital niche content. From recommendation engines, to blogs, to customized start pages, today's *connected consumer* navigates a personal landscape that is much more niche than we ever expected.

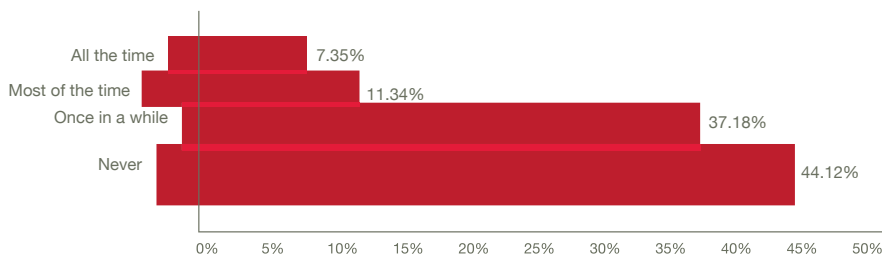
Have you customized your homepage with specific content feeds, scheduled updates or other features?



Our survey found that personalization has hit the mainstream. As illustrated in the graph above, the majority of consumers surveyed (60%) personalize their home/start pages. This far exceeds the smaller number of consumers that we previously believed to be such active participants.

Further, 56% use RSS (really simple syndication), a technology that enables users to subscribe to content feeds and read them via specialized readers or on their customized start pages. RSS enables consumers to keep up-to-date on news, sports or other information. Clearly this trend bodes well for the dominant portals and search engines such as Google (35%), Yahoo! (24%), AOL (10%) and MSN (9%) which account for the vast majority of consumers' start pages.

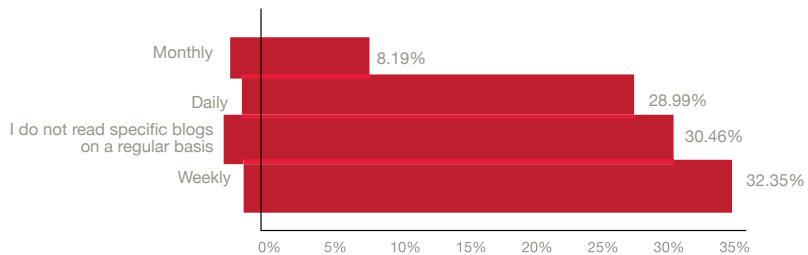
Please rate the frequency in which you do the following: Subscribe to RSS feeds



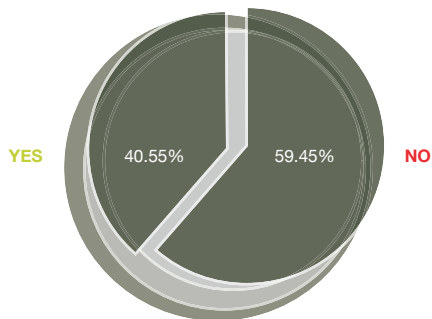
Media & Entertainment Habits Shift

The desire to personalize and sample niche content greatly impacts consumer's digital behavior across all industries and verticals. The effect on traditional media and entertainment consumption habits is stunning. According to our survey, nearly 70% of consumers read blogs on a routine basis, and 41% have their own blog or post frequently to blogs. In fact, 46% of consumers who responded to the survey read four or more blogs on a regular basis. All of that blog activity is significantly cutting into the reach of traditional media outlets (newspapers, TV, magazines, etc.).

How often do you read specific blogs?



Do you write your own blog or post to other blogs?



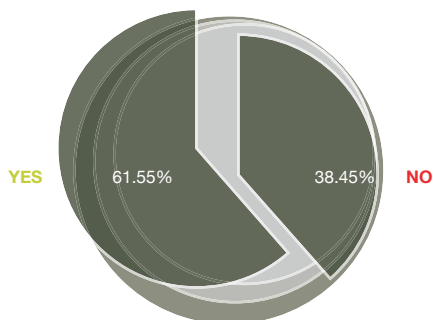
The trend toward niche content is similar for music and video consumption as well. 67% of consumers watch videos on YouTube or similar sites on a regular basis and 42% purchase music online. If anything, online video is not only becoming more pervasive but also affecting offline consumption in interesting ways. For example, 85% of consumers have watched a movie preview online before going to see the film at a theater. 58% of consumers have used a service to download (iTunes) or order (Netflix/Blockbuster) films online, and 71% have watched a TV show online.

Most tellingly, 91% of consumers rely on the Web to get current news or information, vastly eclipsing more traditional outlets such as television. No wonder why broadcasters and newspaper publishers are struggling to adapt in today's digital realm.

Retailers Face New Challenges

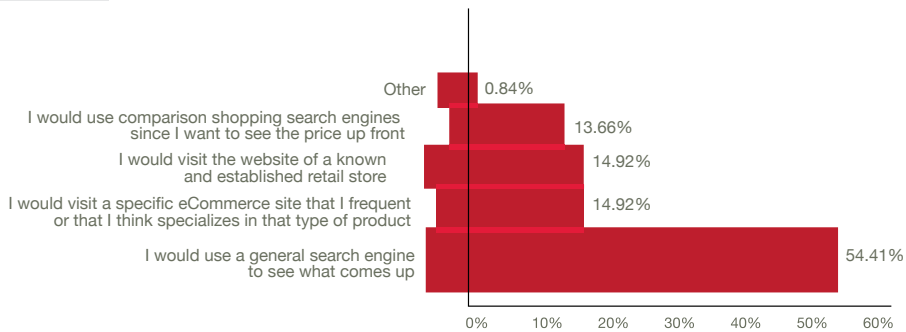
Personalization has had a similar effect on digital and multi-channel retailers, as well. Consumers react positively to recommendation engines and personalized services with their pocketbooks: 62% have made a purchase based on personalized recommendations (e.g. Amazon.com) and 72% find such services helpful.

Have you ever purchased an item as a result of a personalized recommendation e.g. Amazon making a recommendation based on a past purchase?



However, our research indicates that the biggest shift for retailers is yet to come, as their relationship with consumers appears to be increasingly disintermediated. 54% of today's connected consumers start their shopping experience at a general search engine, such as Google, versus 30% who either visit the Web site of an established retail store (e.g. Crate & Barrel) or a specific eCommerce site such as Amazon.com.

Where would you most likely begin your Web search for this product?



More surprisingly, 38% of consumers say that price is the most important criteria in deciding where to purchase online although 38% of consumers also indicate that a Web site that is known or respected helps sway them. Only 17% of consumers seek out a multi-channel retailer, such as Best Buy, that has a prominent brick and mortar outpost.

Welcome to the Participation Era

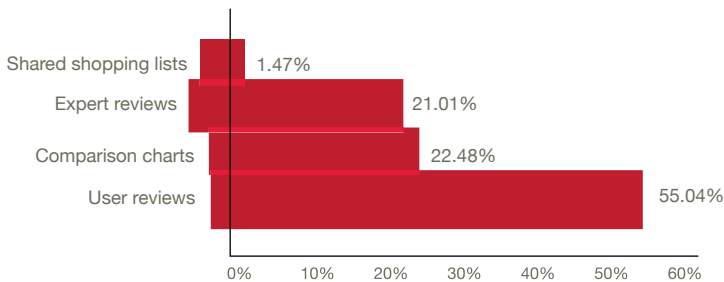
The level at which today's consumers interact socially online can't be overstated and is not confined to MySpace and Facebook. The desire to interact with others regularly is a fundamental shift that will affect all digital properties in the coming years.

More than 50% of respondents stated that social networking sites help them stay in touch with people. The second most common motivation

for social networking was meeting new people. While neither of these statistics are too surprising, the desire to participate online—whether as individuals or as part of a larger community—is clearly strong:

- 49% have uploaded a video in the past 3 months.
- 41% write or post to blogs
- 53% share bookmarks with others through services like de.lici.ious

When you want to research a product on the Web which of the following do you rely on most for information?



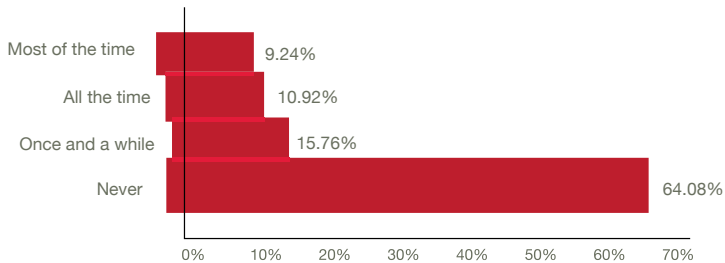
The influence of peers flavors interactions across the Web. Most consumers prefer, or at least desire, the option to navigate sites through "wisdom of the crowd" features: 82% have read and/or browsed by "most popular" or "most-emailed" features. 35% have used tag clouds. Most significantly, 55% of users indicate that user generated reviews and ratings are the biggest factor in helping them make purchasing decisions.

Mobile Usage Still Nascent

While the adoption of Web 2.0 features has clearly entered the mainstream, the usage of mobile data services certainly has not. Our survey, released on the heels of Apple's iPhone launch, finds the U.S. mobile data services market still nascent.

Photography-related activities are the bright spot for mobile services. 53% of consumers have taken and/or shared photos via mobile phones.

Do you use your mobile phone to check weather, news or sports headlines?



The outlook is not so bright, today, for other mobile multimedia usage. Only 32% have listened to music via their handset and 24% have watched videos. And 37% have used mobile web services to check weather, news or sports headlines.

What To Do Now

Given the sweeping changes in online consumer behavior, we recommend that marketers and publishers take the following steps to create exceptional experiences for today's consumers:

1. Make Content Portable – Ride the personalization wave by making your content portable. RSS offers a great means for users to subscribe to your content and get frequent updates. Widgets enable consumers to have deeper and richer experiences with a Web site's features and functions anywhere.

2. Enable Consumer Ratings and Reviews – Ensure that consumers can contribute and access peer reviews. Retailers should enable consumers to rate and review products. Publishers should allow

60% personalize their home/start pages
56% use RSS
70% of consumers read blogs on a routine basis
41% have their own blog or post frequently to blogs
62% have made a purchase based on personalized recommendations

"commenting" whenever possible.

3. Invest in Online Video – Online video is the next great growth wave in the industry. Make sure all video assets become digitized and integrated with existing content and services. Look for near-term advances in video advertising to help monetize the effort.

4. Think Beyond the Web site – Your Web site plays a much less central role in today's consumer Web experience. Think about how search, advertising, social media sites and the blogosphere are related to your digital marketing efforts and invest appropriately.

5. Take Small Steps with Mobile – Mobile data usage is still nascent. Take a measured approach to investing and keep an eye on Apple's iPhone for near-term breakthroughs.

For the full Avenue A | Razorfish Digital Consumer Behavior Study please go to <http://design.avenuea-razorfish.com> to download the PDF.

Avenue A | Razorfish Study Methodology: In July of 2007 we surveyed 475 consumers in the United States. Respondents were screened based on broadband access, entertainment, social media and ecommerce habits. The selected consumers were then asked a series of "situational" questions about their Internet behavior.

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Trend

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Social Shopping:

Consumers are taking control of their shopping experiences. Retailers need to adapt, now.

By Bethany Fenton

With the recent emergence of several user-generated eCommerce product aggregators, consumers are fully recognizing their ability to affect online retailers' assortments and sales. Sites like Stylehive.com, Kaboodle.com and ThisNext.com are taking the lead in a whole new commerce-driven social media movement that we call "Social Shopping."



Stylehive.com is one of the leaders in social shopping. Savvy retailers like the Gap have set-up custom storefronts on the service.

Blending the best of social networking and online shopping, social shopping sites are creating environments that allow consumers to create lists of products from retailers, comment and rate them, take polls that help them make purchase decisions and, most importantly, share the products and their opinions with other consumers—in the end, affecting online retailers' sales in both positive and unexpected ways. The success of these sites is based in several key truths: shopping is often a social event, people like to get opinions on items they're considering, and they get ideas from a variety of retailers and, now, an entire world of consumers.

What Does It Mean?

Primarily targeted at the Digital Class—18-24-year olds (2007 *Digital Outlook Report*, Avenue A | Razorfish), social shopping sites provide a new way to navigate an expansive, multi-retailer assortment. Tag clouds, unbelievably rich and accurate views of the traditional "items like this" cross-sell, and the user's ability to create an assortment of products that are uniquely "them," support the overall user desire for self-expression and sharing in a broader context.

While we don't expect retailers to become aggregators, there are important steps retailers can take:

1. Embrace these sites. Their audiences are your new merchandising team.
2. Watch your assortment. Consumer feedback on your products and overall selection is readily available.
3. Learn from them. These sites are part of an emerging trend in digital interactions.

**This audience is your new
merchandising team**

What Can You Do Now?

Social shopping sites represent a number of key behaviors that can be re-interpreted for any retailer's site. Here are six things that you can start doing today:

1. Provide more meaningful cross-sells

Consumers are often skeptical of products that are presented as cross-sells and up-sells from a retailer-specific point of view. They question their intent and origination. Leverage tag clouds and relationships established by consumers as a way to add validity to your cross-sells.

2. Offer tools that support consumers' need to consider items

Our retailing research has resulted in a common finding over and over—"The shopping cart is where I put items I've already decided to buy." What do consumers do with the items they're still considering? Currently, e-commerce sites support viewing a single item at a time. Provide a place for customers to store items they're considering just as they do in-store as they carry items with them while shopping.

3. Allow consumers to play

Seamless approaches to finding and viewing items are key. Allowing customers to mix, match and compare in a wholly interactive manner will quickly become the norm. Some examples include: Like.com's feature that allows customers to key in on a single feature of an item and view more like it; Etsy.com's feature that allows customers to view the assortment based on color family; or Endless.com's visual approach to faceted navigation. New interaction models are yet to be realized.

4. Support multi-dimensional product comparison

Product comparison tools, while valuable, are primarily one dimensional—focusing on the hard-line facts of the products e.g., technical specifications. Add new dimensions to product comparison tools by leveraging consumer reviews and aspects of the product that are more emotional and functional rather than specification-based.

5. Leverage content from select social shopping sites

Explore methods for incorporating user-generated lists and comments into your retail site in an effort to support existing customer reviews. As these social shopping sites move toward monetizing their environments, retailers may have the ability to develop relationships that allow them to grow existing content bases.

6. Create a stand-alone checkout process

Checkout processes are traditionally laden with features—some offering expedited processes, for example, one-click and stored information. Consider leveraging expedited, lightweight checkout processes that allow consumers to complete their purchases from aggregator sites, like Shopzilla, with low-involvement interactions.

Does Your Corporate Web site Make You Look Fat?:

Why corporate marketers need to put their Web site on a diet.

By Jason Levin, Elliott Trice, and Mary-Lynne Williams

Large corporate Web sites have become increasingly bloated in recent years. In trying to provide a full picture of everything the company does they have been weighed down by an overstuffed diet of confusing content, navigation and functionality. It's time to trim the fat.

Think thin.

Global corporations offer a huge number of products and services, each with their own set of packages and add-ons. But most of the information corporate Web sites give about these products is boilerplate and, as such, doesn't pull its own hefty weight. If users have to drill down through three or four levels of sub-navigation just to learn that you have a given product, you've already lost them.

The thin corporate site puts messaging first and last, with your set of offerings briefly noted in the middle. A well-architected site will give users enough of an overview of what your company offers with a minimal amount of skimming. The focus should not be on what you offer but why those offerings are better.

Ford uses a simple navigation model that puts more focus on their brand values than on the full lineup of vehicles. And the featured vehicles are offset by the global messaging. This thin site puts the emphasis on innovation, history and good works, letting the individual brand sites carry automobile and dealership info.

The screenshot shows the Ford Motor Company website homepage. At the top left, the text "Ford Motor Company" is partially visible. To its right is the tagline "Welcome to the home of Ford Motor Company and our family of brands" and a search bar with a "Search" button. Below this is a blue navigation bar with the following menu items: "Services", "Heritage", "Innovation", "Good Works", and "Company". The main content area features a large blue banner with the headline "Pedal to Our Medals" and a central image of a blue Ford Mustang. To the left of the Mustang are three award medals, with text identifying "2007 Mercury Milan" and "2007 Mazda MX-5 Miata". To the right of the Mustang is a red diamond-shaped graphic. Below the banner are two vertical panels: "Better World" with the subtext "High Standards for High Achievement" and "VALUES FOR A STRONG BUSINESS", and "Driving Thrills" with the subtext "Vehicle Quality Soars" and "RACING, AUTO SHOWS, PERFORMANCE VEHICLES". At the bottom, a "Products" section displays logos for Lincoln, Mercury, Ford, Volvo, Jaguar, and Land Rover, along with a "To Global Sites" link and a globe icon.

General Electric's positioning is all around innovation so their section on jet engines, for example, ties together an animated history, beautiful info-graphics and video to tell the story. Nobody is going to order a million-dollar jet engine over the Web, so the site is more about promoting the company and its position by highlighting key product lines and proving their value within the overall family of GE.



INNOVATION | GE.COM



The Life Cycle of a GE Engine

A GE engine travels around the world—and through the expertise and elbow grease of many GE employees, earns its place as an aircraft's valued power source.

<p>phase 1 Design</p> <p>Design of an engine is based on the aircraft manufacturer's specifications for both the aircraft and the engine that will power it.</p> <p>Design often involves the adaptation of technology proven on earlier engines. For example, the composite material of the GE90* fan blade—the result of almost 20 years of GE research and development—is used in not only the GE90™ fan blade, but also its fan case.</p>	<p>phase 2 Development</p> <p>Development focuses on the actual hardware of an engine and testing is a large part of this phase.</p> <p>From cold-weather testing in Canada, endurance testing in China and flight testing in California, GE tests throughout the world—at simulated altitudes up to 80,000 feet and wind velocities of nearly 100 miles per hour.</p>
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00:01
Jeanne Rosario, vice president and general manager of Engineering, on the service and repair of GE engines.

phases 1 & 2 > phases 3 & 4 >

Show off your good side.

The essence of your corporate site ought to be its value as a messaging platform (it's controlled by e-Marketing for good reason). The average site visitor is only spending a few minutes (if you're lucky) before moving on elsewhere. In that short time, you need to show them what's best about the company. A 500-page site isn't going to accomplish that, no matter how well your navigation has been structured.

Smile, then invite them over.

You'll fail in the long run if visitors just browse through a few pages of the site and leave. Do you want your users to sign up for something, buy online, create an account, or contact a salesperson? Whether hard or soft, calls to action are essential to converting casual browsers to active clients. By trimming down the rest of the site, these calls to act become much more prominent.

IBM has a call to a pre-selected contact form that routes your request to the right department, as well as upcoming events where they can find potential customers.

industries >

Media and entertainment

THE FIGHT AHEAD ON MEDIA'S MEAN STREETS

Traditional and new media are clashing.
The old rules on content and distribution: gone.
Traditional alliances: unreliable. Long-established partnerships: threatened. Everything's changing.

→ Prepare for an epic conflict



Why IBM for media and entertainment

With clients across the industry and end-to-end solutions, we bring unique expertise to your company. We are helping shape industry standards and offer over 100 Business Partner applications to help you compete.

Contact us

→ Questions? Contact an IBM media and entertainment specialist

What we offer

Industry segments

Advertising
Broadcast and cable
Film and entertainment
Games and interactive entertainment
Printing and publishing

Solution areas

· Production and distribution transformation
· Technology and content

Technology

Servers and storage

· Software

Events, webcasts & podcasts

→ NAB 2007 conference literature and news

→ Service orientation for media: providing flexibility and efficiency in your digital media business.

→ Access more events

State Farm Insurance goes light on the product overviews—but has all the right calls to action to convert browsers to customers. The details on insurance can be overwhelming, so State Farm has opted to give a confident overview of its offerings so users know enough to take the best next step towards becoming customers.

The screenshot shows the State Farm website interface for Condominium Unit Owners Insurance. At the top left is the State Farm logo with the tagline "Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there.®". Navigation tabs include "Insurance", "Mutual Funds", and "State Farm Bank®". A breadcrumb trail reads "Home > Insurance > Condominium Unit Owners Insurance". A left sidebar lists various insurance categories such as "Auto", "Homeowners", "Condo Owners", "Renters", "Life & Annuities", "Health", "Disability", "Long-Term Care", "Business", "Boat", and "Other Insurance". The main content area features a large image of a modern apartment building and the heading "Condominium Unit Owners Insurance". Below the image, the text states: "Whatever your needs are, State Farm has you covered. Buying insurance is different for a condominium unit owner than for owners of conventional homes or renters. That is why a special unit owners policy has been developed. A State Farm® Condo Unit Owner policy is for the customer who owns and occupies (at least part of the year) a dwelling unit in a structure owned and insured by a:" followed by a bulleted list of organization types: "Condominium Association", "Townhome Association", "Cooperative", "Homeowner Association", "Planned Community", and "Similar types of organization". A link "Learn more about what's not covered." is provided. Below this, the text says "Protect your corner of the world." and "Ready to get started?" with two prominent buttons: "Find an Agent" and "Get a Rate Quote". On the right side, there are sections for "Service Center" with links like "Get a rate quote", "Find an agent", "Manage my policy", "Make a payment", and "Report a claim"; "Make an inquiry" with "Get a Rate Quote" and "Condominium insurance made simple"; and "Related Links" with "Loss Prevention" and "Be Safe at Home".

Tone the easy parts.

Employment, press room, and investor information site sections have all been standardized. The users of these sections are self-selecting and task-oriented towards a specific goal. But so many companies still get them wrong. The basics of these sections are about providing a simple interface to a data repository—the list of jobs, press releases, press images, or quarterly reports. But corporate sites should be able to go beyond that to wrap messaging around the raw data. Why should somebody work here? Why should the press cover one of our thought leaders and not our competitors? Why should analysts rate the stock an "outperform?" With such focused users, corporate sites can create powerful experiences that help reinforce brand.

New outfits for different [user] occasions.

Your customers' needs are varied. You need to be able to quickly launch new campaign sites that target a narrow set of users for specific offerings. Those campaigns need to be accessible from your corporate site, and always tie back to the messaging platform you set up. This is a crucial role of corporate sites that so many miss. Just as print ads, billboards and TV spots can't run the same message for too long, neither can corporate site messaging. If the site structure is planned from the start with this in mind, then it will be able to accommodate new campaigns and promotions within the structure itself. If not, you end up with a messy proliferation of micro-sites that don't tie back into the whole and a corporate site that is misaligned with all other marketing efforts. The messaging needs to be woven into the experience but modular enough to shift as your messaging and brand shifts.

The thin corporate site puts messaging first and last

Proctor & Gamble customize its product line landing pages to the right audience groups, and then send users off to the specific brand sites they seek. The overall layouts and features between sections remain similar, but style, tone, and voice shift slightly for the audience.

P&G Everyday Solutions

Pet Nutrition & Care



▶ Have Dog, Will Travel

Planning a vacation? With a little advance planning, you can take your dog along, too. Get tips for a successful trip.

▶ Introducing Eukanuba® Weight Loss Formula

Help your dog lose weight and maintain health with our new Weight Loss Formula. It tastes great and provides 100% complete and balanced nutrition.



▶ You Can Feed Iams® With Confidence

We are committed to putting your pet's health and well-being ahead of all other concerns. Learn about the Iams Promise and a special offer at IamsPromise.com.

▶ Are you looking for advice about pet adoption and more? See all articles.

P&G brandSAVER™

Where Can You Find P&G brandSAVER?

Find out if your local newspaper carries the P&G brandSAVER coupon booklet — it has even more offers and promotions.

Search by ZIP: ▶ Go

▶ SAVE
MORE THAN
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P&G BRANDS



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- ▶ New Products
- ▶ Offers & Promotions



Microsoft not only offers different sub-sites with varying architectures to accommodate its messaging, it also provides thumbnails of each of them to the user from their main products page. Server customers are very different from Xbox users, so each of those sections has been tailored to that user group. But both stay true to brand and messaging and retain enough global elements to help users see the same company behind both.



Windows



Office Online



Servers



Microsoft Dynamics



Microsoft Developer Network (MSDN)



MSN



Games & Xbox



Home Software



Windows Mobile

Accessorize.

Today's digital universe goes far beyond the Web site. Users will come to your corporate site for their first and second visits to learn more about the company. But additional information about what's new can be delivered through a plethora of other digital media. You can provide your users with tools like RSS feeds, email alerts and widgets to track corporate information and product releases.

By creating an overall experience that quickly and cleanly differentiates the corporation and its brand expression, and then driving smaller slices of users to the right place in the cosmos of your Web offerings, you can maximize the effectiveness of how you market online.

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Video Killed the Internet Star:

Byte-sized entertainment is changing the entertainment landscape. Here's how to adapt.

By Marisa Gallagher

Almost 4 billion minutes of human time are devoted to watching videos on YouTube per month, according to recent MediaMetrix reports. While that's 18 billion minutes short of the time spent on Yahoo! Mail, and 3 billion short of the time whiled away on Yahoo! Messenger, it's a whopping 1.5 billion more minutes than people spent searching Google.

If email was the first "killer app," and search the second, video is fast becoming the third - and that's with only a 40% overall broadband penetration rate in the US.

As with any emerging Internet phenomena, there is a rapidly emerging video landscape to comprehend and, for sure, a good degree of hype. Here's how to start making sense of it all:

THE EXPERIENCE

Online Video Is Not TV Online

Web video didn't take off in 2005 just because a bunch of people finally got around to posting their videos online. And it didn't happen just because more people had a broadband connection, either (though that's always helpful).

What changed in 2005 was the emergence of an ecosystem that provides context for online videos. With YouTube, MySpace, and their ilk, videos became not just a random file type you'd click a link to, and "open up" if you felt like it but part of a contextual page designed to allow users to store and interact with them, and connect them to other ideas, people, and even other videos. Videos became part of the digital world, instead of simply files accessed through it.

SEARCH + FIND

In the early days of the Web, getting your videos up online seemed easy enough. You put up a link to a file and there you were. However, that simple tactic failed to create the necessary infrastructure to support the widespread searching and finding of videos. This is changing. Video producers and posters are realizing that they need to do a little extra work to get their videos searchable—and therefore, findable. What's required?

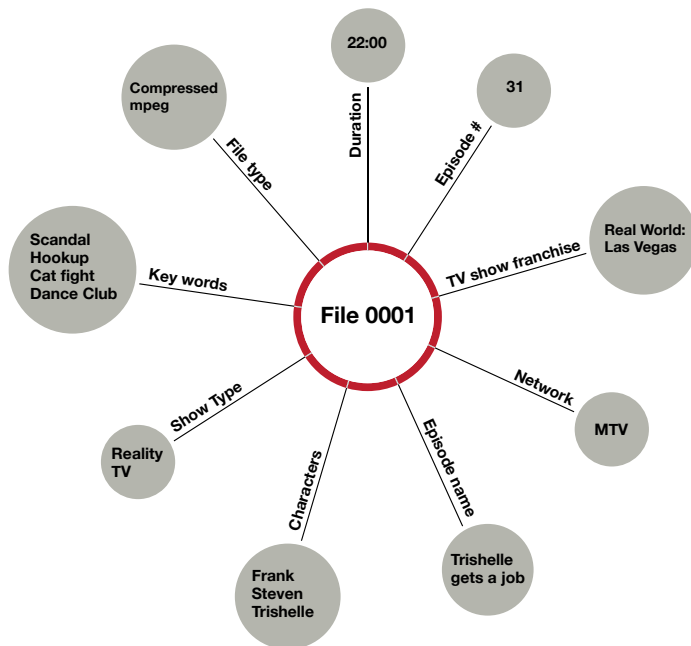
(Digital) Asset Management Systems

The term content management system is fairly well known in Web development circles these days, and this newer term—Digital Asset Management System (known as an AMS or DAM)—should be soon, too. An AMS/DAM, in many ways, is just a suped-up CMS, but one that's also designed to house video, image, and multimedia files (and track their size, resolution versions and edited permutations).

Metadata

Video files need a lot of metadata to help identify them in your system and out on the Web. They come with some embedded tags describing their technical nature—things like duration, file size, file type, and default file name, but you'll need to add (either manually or through some sort of script) other info to them—tags to identify them in human-readable and human-searchable form—such as name, category, intended audience, and even copyright and distribution limits. Some of these tags will be unique to you and your content—as well as the audience for it. For example, if your content and audience features a number of well-known actors, you may want your video files to be categorized or findable by those actors names. To do that, you'll need to tag the individual files with specific actor tags.

If all of this seems like a lot to find, remember that very little of this info is particularly unique or new. It's usually contained in scripts, production schedules, or even title credits—so, you may be able to leverage those offline documents or processes when you're loading the videos into your DAM or Web site database.



Getting the User Involved

Beyond the basic metadata and the DAM, the most interesting way to make your videos easier to find is to connect them to the behaviors and actions of your audience. One way to do this is to let your audience "tag" them with their own meanings and favorite words. This kind of folksonomy-type tagging is what drives many social networking and Web 2.0-pioneer sites, like Flickr and Digg. User tagging is a low-level investment that produces tremendous rewards. It helps you better understand what your audience thinks of the content you produce and gives your audience an outlet to be heard.

Players and the Players That Make Them

One of the most confusing aspects of web video is video players. Though there are many players to choose from, they all tend to fall into one of three general categories, described in the chart below.

	Example	Pros	Cons
Stand-Alone File Type Players	QuickTime, Windows Media, or Real Networks video player	Production ease <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quick link publishing - little coding required - small to no capital investment expenditure - files viewable offline 	Disruption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need for external plug-in - lack of context to videos - lack of next-step actions after viewing
Embedded Flash + Silverlight Flash Players	YouTube, MySpace, MTV.com, Heavy.com, MLB.com	Contextual engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - video placed next to relevant content - encourages action and continual snacking—potential for long session times - high ease of use for site visitors 	Design + Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - need to create an "experience" around videos - need for coding + player purchasing/creation - some capital investment, with little chance for direct sales
Enhanced Players	Move Networks Grid Networks Joost BitGravity (ABC.com) Brightcove (Fox Interactive)	Performance + control <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high-end, standards-based players - higher-quality video output (up to hi-def/downloadable) - support for distribution (via vendor networks) - sales opportunity 	Cost and Commitment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - requires significant capital investment or vendor contract - necessitates formalized production process/timelines

Stand-alone File Type Players

QuickTime, WindowsMedia, and RealNetworks players that launch in a separate—sometimes skinned—window to stream your videos have been around for years but haven't evolved much. They are super easy to get up since they require almost no production work. But this stand-alone, link-out-and-pop-up-a-disembodied-window experience represents a real loss of an opportunity.

Embedded Flash + Silverlight Players

The new popular choice in the player space is one you're already familiar with if you've used YouTube, played a video on MySpace, or explored most current sites with web video. The Flash player is the rectangular viewing screen typically embedded in all these pages. It often has very simple "Play" and "Stop" controls and the default screen often has a giant right-pointed arrow in the middle of it. Flash players feel quick and light, can be skinned to match many backgrounds, and can be accommodated in many different site layouts and structures. Since they are easy to integrate, they are used for snacking-style, playlist, and short-clip video-viewing behaviors. They are a great improvement on stand-alone players but they are not built for all situations.

Enhanced Players + Networks

While video snacking can generate hours of entertainment as well as significant ad revenues, it's not the experience you want to create for all of your videos. Many users are increasingly looking to the Web to find full episodes of their favorite shows if not full motion picture films. That's where enhanced video players offered by vendors like Brightcove and Move Networks come in. Using a player like this allows for the streaming of higher resolution—up to full HD quality—video footage in a specialized, movie, theater-like experience, though one that has contextual email/next clip hooks and greater user control of the stream.

THE BUSINESS

Videos are a great way to attract visitors but they can be expensive to produce. After all the talk of experience and design, it's time for the bottom line: how to make money with online video. Here are some possibilities.

ADVERTISING

Pre-Roll & Post-Roll

To many people, particularly those with a TV background, pre-roll and post-roll advertising feels like the perfect way to produce a return on online video—and for that reason has become the most obvious go-to advertising plan with web video. Unfortunately, there is a serious flaw. These videos are commercials, sometimes slightly shorter than broadcast TV commercials, but still just commercials. And TV revenues are eroding because users have already declared their distaste for commercials. Have we learned nothing about relevance at this point? Repeating a problematic advertising tactic in a whole new medium seems curious, at best, and purposefully alienating at worst. This has been reinforced in the market, with YouTube coming out against pre-roll and post-roll video in their late summer advertising announcements.

Display Ads

Another advertising option is to use ad banners (either Interactive Advertising Bureau-standard or custom) on the pages or even integrated in the players housing video content. The problem is that display ads don't directly capitalize on the motion appeal of video—they're just the same old web advertising tactic of years past, layered on a new technology. Pushing more banners may be an exercise in diminishing returns.

Overlays, Tickers, and Bugs

Another popular emerging option is the use of ad units that display in part of the video frame, though neither completely obscure nor delay the playing of the video you want to see. These ad units often take the form of overlays (covering the bottom fourth-to-third of the screen, as implemented on YouTube,) running tickers (as promoted through Video Egg,) or generic types of "bugs" (some of which could be used for product placement ecommerce solutions down the line.) They have the benefit of not completely impeding video watching and offering a long-term solution for contextual placement, though they can be somewhat invasive and annoying, especially for first-time users.

Sponsorships

The most profitable short-term advertising option is to focus on sponsorships. If you're a major site with significant traffic or niche appeal and/or you have a particularly talented sales team, you may be able to sell home page, category, or audience-oriented areas for large sums. We have some clients able to negotiate six-figure returns on major sponsorship placements. Users also tend to give this type of advertising tactic higher marks. These advertisements are usually done with more care—with an eye towards relevant placement and contextually interesting visual integration. CNET does this regularly with its Gamespot background takeover placements, while Heavy.com uses the logo-block-header as a subtle and inventive ad sponsorship point.



If email was the first "killer app," and search the second, video is fast becoming the third.

DISTRIBUTION

Here's a variation on one of the most common questions we hear from clients: should I hold my videos hostage, but safe and secure, on my own site, or, should I let them roam free throughout the greater Web, making new friends and picking up bad habits along the way? The answer is not simple. To a large extent, it depends on your audiences and your brand concerns, as well as the impact on your technology or advertising budgets.

Audience

For most companies—even the most popular film and TV studios—though, audiences aren't die-hard loyalists, knocking down homepage doors day and night. Instead, most audiences are found all around the Internet—and would love to stumble across your video where they are — rather than having to go to you to find it. If they do stumble upon you—or better yet, get a link from a friend to you, they're more likely to actually view your video or become your fan. So, if you're audience isn't already at your site, consider the idea that you might have to go to them, at least to help them come to you.

Brand

The scariest thing about Internet distribution for many media folks, particularly marketers, is the fear of defamation and brand damage. The thinking goes: every person who's ever held a grudge against your company or just wants to cause you trouble is waiting for the day you release your content into the world so they can use it to bring your brand down. Soon, your well-crafted narratives, icons, and brand positioning will be reduced to *Daily Show* fodder, and your bottom line will hit an irrecoverable free fall.

Not likely. The reality is that the perception of your brand that gets voiced on the Web is the perception of your brand that already exists out in the world and is already influencing people's buying decisions. Your brand is only as fragile online as it is offline. Distributing your assets across the Internet may open you up to louder voices, but they're usually not new voices. And how you deal with them in this new conversational universe is still up to you—they don't have stop you in your tracks. The upside is potentially very sweet. Broadening your reach through distribution may open you up to whole new audiences, market segments, and—in the end—paying customers. If you've got a strong product, why not take the chance?

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Superdistribution & The Digital Ecosystem:

How widgets, AJAX and RSS are putting consumers in control of content.

By Marcelo Marer

In 1987 Ryoichi Mori, head of the Japan Electronics Industry Development Association, came to a realization: it is much more difficult and costly to monitor copying than to track the actual use of digital assets/goods. Presciently centered on the idea that ease-of-replication needs to be looked at as a business opportunity—and not only as a copyright headache—Mori thought that the owners of electronic goods needed to "actively encourage free distribution of information-age good via any distribution mechanism imaginable*." He called this framework superdistribution and it is basically an approach to distributing software in which software is made available freely and without copy protection but is still protected from modifications and modes of usage not authorized by its vendor.

*Cox, Brad- *Superdistribution*- in *Wired* 2.09, September 1994.

Users act as relay stations that narrowcast within their own networks of friends/family and beyond

In the last five years, the number of distribution mechanisms has grown exponentially online and offline as personal computer, cell phone and game console platforms have become more diversified and mature. We have also seen the coming of age of tools that support users' ability to generate and distribute content, such as blogs, wikis, RSS and widgets. Such tools have increased user's expectations towards control of content (broadly defined as text, images, audio and video) and experiences.

Functionality and content superdistribution online has also progressively blurred the distinction between online authors/creators/publishers and readers/consumers/users. We have moved from a one-to-many distribution model to a many-to-many superdistribution framework—from a Web site-dependent model to a multi-site, multi-platform and multi-channel model of functionality deployment, content delivery, and communication. **Today users act as relay stations that narrowcast within their own networks of friends/family and beyond.** The cumulative effect of all these individual narrowcasts is viral broadcast and superdistribution.

In this environment we have to grapple with a wide array of new design challenges. For example, how do we create multiplatform user experience frameworks that are navigable and scalable from the user's standpoint and, at the same time, sustainable from a business perspective? Which functionality should we support beyond the serving of portable content chunks via embedded RSS? In which platforms should the selected functionality be available? How can we support the convergence occurring (or not) in users minds as they move from device to device, from Web page to desktop widget?

Widgets: Widgets are playing a big role in how users access content today and will become more relevant for deeper experiences as more interesting functionality starts to become available on the desktop. Users can download OS-specific desktop widgets that are from either Apple (apple.com/downloads/dashboard/) or Microsoft Vista (gallery.live.com), as well as OS-agnostic widgets from Google (desktop.google.com), Yahoo! (widgets.yahoo.com) and other sites. There are widgets that can search for content, widgets that allow users to view and edit complete Wikipedia articles in any language, play Sudoku, or get news headlines in real-time—all without leaving the desktop.

Content: Whether you are redesigning a corporate site, a content-rich destination site or building a desktop widget, the fact that users will access content in a distributed manner needs to inform the user experience strategy. For example, publishers and marketers will need to define standards for good lead paragraphs that are meaningful once users scan them on desktop, Web page-based or mobile widgets. Success metrics will also have to be re-thought in this new superdistributed digital ecosystem that is all about content, functionality, and portability across platforms. Simply tallying page views will no longer cut it.

Rich Internet Applications (RIA): If you want to provide richer functionality, you may also want to consider which development tools support hybrid superdistribution online. Ajax has enabled the display of multiple states in a single page and has supported the development of rich internet applications that increase content distribution and functionality power at the page level. Next generation RIA development tools such as Adobe's AIR and Microsoft's Silverlight have upped the ante and enhanced standards. In addition, AJAX-based applications serve to support video, richer graphics and media, as well as further enhance the potential for richer interactivity beyond the Web through widgets that can be accessed both online and offline, and soon via mobile phones.

Apple, iPhone and Portability: Although mobile adoption of widgets has been slow, we believe that a massive uptick is on the way as smartphones proliferate. The Apple iPhone's Safari and Zenzui development kits provide the ability to radically simplify Web applications. The iPhone does a great job of bridging the gap between personal computer and mobile-based experiences and has set a new standard for which we'll have to design as we move across platforms. And Apple, not surprisingly, has made the greatest strides in enabling superdistribution. The company has started to use iTunes as the conduit that allows users to track, manage and consume content across devices and platforms. The next challenge is to facilitate the convergence across platforms and devices, as users can watch two thirds of a movie on a laptop in-flight, then complete the viewing experience on their HDTVs at home.

This is all new ground for us—never has content distribution been as simple and pervasive. Never have we had such an array of devices and platforms, so close to being interconnected. We are just at the beginning of understanding what is possible in a world where everyone is both consumer and distributor.

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These richer experiences promote engagement which, the theory goes, resonates in new customers and an improved bottom line.

Designing for Dimensionality:

From Second Life to Joost, a look at where multi-dimensional design is headed.

By Sven Küster, NEUE DIGITALE Executive Creative Director

In the brave new world of social media marketing, success is measured by level of engagement, not simply counted in 30-second increments multiplied by frequency. The passive, stereotypical couch potato is being replaced by users who want to take an active role and participate in the media they consume.

These desires have given rise to the development of imaginative online venues and applications designed to create "experiences" that promote engagement and relationship-building through the use of 3D design and motion video.

Virtual Worlds

The most ballyhooed examples of multi-dimensional Web site designs are virtual worlds, such as Second Life, that are shaped by the inhabitants themselves. The special thing about these digital worlds is that a two-dimensional communications model has been extended by a spatial component that allows users to communicate and interact with one another using text and voice, as well as facial expression and gestures. A 3D world experience creates an intense, previously unattainable "being there" feeling and the lines between virtual worlds and the real world. These richer experiences promote engagement which, the theory goes, resonates in new customers and an improved bottom line.

Interactive TV

Another indication of consumers' desires to get involved and interact is the popularity of Joost TV, which delivers interactive TV, real-time communication, entertainment on-demand. People from all over the world can watch TV together via the interactive IPTV broadcaster, currently in beta phase. On-demand, and, above all, everywhere, Joost enables a level of online user interaction that has not been possible before. The latest wrinkle in interactive TV is the much talked about Flash 3D engine Papervision which, for the first time, allows 3D worlds to be produced in Flash.

Thanks to rapid technical advances, almost any online application can be produced using 3D interfaces and motion design. The range of possibilities is continually growing as broadband connection and fast processors are now commonplace.

User Controls

One important thing that marketers and developers must always remember is that the user wants to be in control. It is the user who decides what to spend time with and there is always an alternative just one click away. If you don't entice the user with a compelling idea and optimal usability, you will lose the battle for her attention. From push to pull, the only thing that counts is the idea that holds attention—and, of course, its implementation.

An important issue to consider regarding 3D implementation is the method of input. While most users still use a standard PC mouse, kids with their game consoles are a step ahead. Their controllers are already dominating navigation in the three-dimensional space. If you've ever played half-an-hour of tennis on Nintendo's Wii you'll know that the resulting arm ache is not virtual—it's very real and that's an important part of what makes it compelling.

Putting Theory Into Practice: Adidas and Audi

At Avenue A | Razorfish's NEUE DIGITALE office, we've been working with interactive film since 2003. Our award-winning "online specials" for Adidas Originals were created to inspire the user to be enthusiastic about the new collection. To achieve this, we used full screen Flash videos to create a fresh and to date, unseen, look that cast a spell over the user. For our Audi client, we went a step further with this concept for a re-launch of one of their sports cars by adding ways in which users can intelligently interact. Together with new 3D rendering technologies, we were able to use completely new ways to design an interaction that blurs the boundaries between TV and the Internet.

What's Next?

In the two-dimensional world, IP-based on-demand TV with feedback capabilities will replace classic linear TV. In the world of 3D we may soon be visiting holographically-projected Web sites that we can navigate with our hands, without any additional input devices, like Tom Cruise in the film *Minority Report*.

The most important challenge for the future of Internet design will be analyzing and swiftly interpreting the virtual movements of the user, not only in the ramp up to an online project, but continually throughout the project lifespan. Where are they coming from? And where do they want to go? What do they click, and what not? The users themselves provide the answers. Continuously. Free of charge. The only thing we need to do is listen to them. If we can do that well, we'll be able to develop interfaces in the future that are convincing—both in terms of visual aesthetics as well as functionality.

Interface design will still need to deliver an intense user experience. Communication between man and machine needs to be simple, intuitive, and ideally, as entertaining as possible. Remember, though, that 3D and motion design should never be used purely as ends in themselves. The original idea must be strong and compelling.



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The Mobile Millennium:

From QR codes to GPS, a look at the next generation of services designed for mobile media devices—and why the PC paradigm no longer applies.

By Joachim Bader and Stefan Mohr, Pocketframes of NEUE DIGITALE

Long heralded as the next wave of technology innovation, mobile services and mobile marketing platforms are finally poised to break out in almost every region of the world. In the U.S., Apple's iPhone may finally provide the tipping point as developers and media and entertainment companies rush to create an array of engaging Web applications for consumers on the go.

Like all other forms of social media, mobile marketing rapidly becomes more personalized.

This will be a far cry from the short message service (SMS), also known as "texting" services that have dominated mobile marketing to date. Now, mobile portals will become critical. Ditto for mobile display advertising; as well as the ultimate panacea of combining outdoor billboards/interactive installations and city lights with mobile devices and services.

But, be assured, this is just the beginning.

We are entering the mobile millennium where just about everybody will use the mobile phone in a completely different way than it is currently used. Like all other forms of social media, mobile phones are rapidly becoming more personalized and attention-grabbing.

First, the mobile phone will be the essential life tool; not simply a communication device, but a device that combines your diary, your planner, and your entertainment and information platforms. And, of course, last but not least—a status gadget that tells the world how cool you are.

Secondly, the paradigm of "talk to me" will change. We have been seeing a major shift from "speaking" to "watching" in mobile phones. Historically, this type of interaction is unheard of for any technical device. And have you heard that the Sony Walkman is becoming a WalkieTalkie?

In the past, we have seen that success is not driven by technology alone but by matching technology with user needs. For example, allowing users the non-intrusive possibility to send messages to one another without needing to talk (SMS) or personalize a device with your own individualized sound note (ringtones).

dia, mobile phones are zed and attention-grabbing

Here's our shortcut to the mobile millennium—all based around user needs:

1. Exchanging Information

The old SMS is still the most successful messaging tool out there. Although multimedia messaging service (MMS) has not yet lived up to expectations, we strongly believe in technology that enables users to share and communicate—not only via text, but videos, images, locations, audio, music, file sharing and applications.

Exchanging information on-the-go where and when you want is key. Here are our predictions:

- The rise of community and social networks into the mobile sphere
- New mobile triggered "life blogs" and "social network for the street" (i.e. <http://www.aka-aki.com>)
- Messaging applications that combine the options of uploading photos, and of streaming of videos- it is a bit like "SMS gone wild" (Eric Schmidt, Google)

2. Accessibility

Accessing information or technology via mobile devices is often an awkward experience—fumbling with small keypads, typing SMS to get information, etc. This is a major nuisance obviously, but one that is rapidly being resolved. The next generation of mobile technologies will provide more and more convenient ways to access information via mobile phones.



- 2D codes are the most convenient way to access any information on mobile phones. There are several different codes, the so called QR code being the most popular one. How does it work? The user must just focus the mobile phone's camera onto the code and is then directed to the information behind the code— which could be a mobile Website, the automatic initiation of an SMS or a download of coupons. It is a bit like James Bond—focus, wait for green signal, go for it. (See Avenue A | Razorfish's Smartpox <http://www.smartpox.com>)
- Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) and Near Field Communication (NFC)—Beware of abbreviations, but these two, you may want to remember. To put it simply: both technologies allow you to connect your mobile phone with another tech device in order to transfer secure data between the phones. This could be the new way to swap data and pay via mobile phones—as the Japanese are already doing.

3. Location-Based Services

For the past half a decade, we've heard it year after year, Location-Based Services (LBS) are coming. We really want to believe in it because the use case is so awe-inspiring: imagine being able to get only the data on your phone that is relevant for your geographical position. LBS has been delayed mainly because consumers also want convenience and content.

The tipping point for LBS (no really, this time it is true) is a global positioning system (GPS): embedded in the phone is a GPS chip that automatically locates position—simply and securely.

Content is finally here, with yellow page directories, shopping portals,

cinema listings, mapping and route planners and city guides all moving to mobile. Also, social networks (like Dodgeball) and security services for children are possible LBS features. Virtual tagging (leaving virtual tags, à la Google maps, related to streets, bars, shops, etc on a map) accessed from mobile phones will be the next huge step.

4. Usability of Services

As he has done so often in the past, Steve Jobs has, more or less, moved the usability on mobile phones to the next level. The iPhone is certainly not the last word, but after years of lists of links, small fonts and awkward usage, we see technology that will help to make mobile phones more easy to use and, ultimately enjoyable.

For those without an iPhone, Macromedia's Flash-lite is new software to make content, portals and surfaces more lively and easier to use. Also, there will be new usability concepts with motion sensing technology, such as that used in Nintendo's Wii, where one can navigate with the movement of the phone, or more succinctly, a flick of the wrist.

5. Customization / Personalization

The mobile phone is often heralded as the most personal device ever created. However, personalization was restricted to just ringtones and screensavers (and your address book, of course).

Now, with mobile widgets, users can configure their mobile phone with content snippets they choose from a Web page. Search can be customized to the owner's habits, needs, and location (see above). The next wave of this is all about applications to customize the phone. We will also see enhanced mobile content and entertainment features like backgrounds that change with room temperature or time—from snowfall at night to sun at midday.

However, customization and personalization goes even deeper for marketers: it extends to advertising on the phone and combines mobile banner messages with the usage patterns of users and their environment.

So, what does this all mean? Ubiquity. In the near future, the lines between usage and geography (home, office, city, country, etc.) will begin to blur. And the way that we think about interacting with others—including what we define as being "present" will change as well. Simply put, with an always-on data connection our "presence" becomes an abstract feature and, with that, the rise of total ubiquity.

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Tactic

Going Post-Personae:

Why this design tool needs to evolve for a Web 2.0 world—a guide

by Vincent Santo

Personae are dead! Well, not quite, but to maintain their potency as a design tool, we need to broaden our perspective of how they function—we need to move personas beyond archetypes of users interacting with Web sites, and consider the role of personas within the context of a larger experience.

The new, new personas are derived from a consumer assessment cocktail composed of both quantitative and qualitative data

For those of you unfamiliar with personas, they are representations of people who share similar needs, goals, attitudes, and behaviors in the context of using a Web site or product. Traditional personas are derived predominantly from qualitative ethnographic research and are used as a litmus test for designing relevant user experiences.

Currently, the predominant model for developing personas and the way they are leveraged falls short of reflecting the increasingly complex relationship an individual has with a brand. It is simply too one-dimensional and static.

It Wasn't Always So: Personas Save the Day

In the Web's infancy as a commerce and marketing channel, speculation and self-referential thinking often drove the creation of a Web site's user experience and the results were poor—causing endless consumer frustration and feature-itis overload. Additionally, the divide between the offline world and the online world was so vast that the use of traditional market segmentation models (based largely on quantitative data analysis and focused on demographics) proved to be inappropriate for devising experiential strategies and truly useful Web site interfaces.

Thanks to the work of author Alan Cooper, the emergence of personas in the 90's, with their focus on customer goals, behaviors and tasks gleaned from qualitative research, provided a much needed tool to guide the Web site design process. Suddenly, designers had a tool to help model and predict consumer behavior.

That Was Then, This Is Now

It's been nearly a decade since Cooper introduced personas into the world of software design and development, and the digital universe has expanded exponentially. The most surprising thing that we've seen is that the gap between the offline world and online world has shrunk. This phenomenon can be contributed to a number of things:

First, offline consumer segments have been co-opted into online segments by taking into consideration more psychographic information and associating them with using a Web site.

Second, companies have more channels and formats with which to communicate/market to consumers (e.g. email, mobile, video, etc.).

Third, the distinction between interacting with a company's offline brand vs. its online brand is eroding in many instances—consider the experience of shopping for clothing or electronic goods—making consumers' movements and experiences between them much more fluid.

Lastly, technologies enable us to more effectively identify, measure and track customers' online attitudes and behaviors across a brand's specific channels/formats as well as capture non-brand-related activities (i.e. visiting the competitor's Web site).

The Way Forward

The emerging breed of personas takes into consideration a broader spectrum of inputs and provides a more comprehensive perspective of peoples' values, needs, and behaviors all set within a larger world.

Specifically the new personas are derived from a consumer assessment cocktail composed of both quantitative and qualitative data. A combination of research gathering techniques (e.g. online surveys, Web site analytics, interviews, ethnographic observation and ad serving cookies) provides a greater breadth and fidelity of insights about what people say they do, what they actually do, how they do it and why they do it.

The process begins with gathering self reported quantitative insights using online segments as a baseline and leverages those insights to subsequently conduct qualitative research. The two sets of results are rationalized and mapped together to expose any areas of overlap as well as give context to the quantitative self-reporting. Voila! Personas 2.0.

Real Life Example

In an effort to truly understand the story of how people shop for cars "in the real world," Avenue A | Razorfish employed the approach and techniques described above on behalf of the Ford Motor Company.

What came out of the effort was a rich set of data that comprehensively described the key phases of the car shopping experience and deep insights into offline and online (car shopping) research behaviors, decision making influences and factors, approaches to negotiation and the overall dealer experience.

Furthermore, these insights were packaged into personas that reflect their uniqueness in the context of the shopping experience phases and describe areas of opportunity for providing a satisfying online experience.

Long Live Personas

In an increasingly complex consumer ecosystem, the next generation of personas will be relied on to serve a broader range of needs spanning the offline and online worlds from brand messaging to digital experiences, down to targeted content, features and functionality.

And while the technique is still being honed, the goal is to continue to reference and evolve personas beyond the design phase by associating Web site visitors with a persona and tracking their behavior over time and across the digital universe.

Our Brave New Beta Future:

An Argument for a Data-Driven Approach to UI Design

By Garrick Schmitt and Marisa Gallagher

What's the best way to send a room full of designers running toward the exits? Simply mention that "data" or "analytics" should be integral to the creative process and watch what happens. Until recently that is.

As of late, the notion of a data-driven approach to design was considered heresy in many parts of the design world. Style was the lingua franca of these groups (and still is, in many ways). But that is slowly starting to change in the digital realm as more and more designers are starting to embrace the power of data and are delivering increasingly impressive and effective experiences as a result.

The Art & Science of Design

Much has been said and written about how designers are faced with a new set of interaction paradigms in a Web 2.0 world (emerging navigation, mashups, tag clouds, multi-channel systems, AJAX UIs, etc.). But what about data? How are we as designers and marketers preparing to mine the data-rich platforms that underpin the experiences we create? How does data transform the art of design into a science?

Brave New Betas

We can start with the ubiquity of the *beta* release for starters. Web 2.0 has ushered in many different types of innovation, but none, as significant as the *beta* release. This one little word signifies a whole new approach to design; one that advocates pushing a product into the hands of users as quickly as possible to learn as much as possible. It acknowledges that digital applications are living things that evolve over time and, for them to flourish, they need constant user interaction and feedback.

Google and Yahoo! have led the way here. Many of today's top digital products and services started out in a *beta* release. Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>), Netvibes (<http://www.netvibes>), Google's Gmail (<http://gmail.google.com>) and Maps (<http://maps.google.com>) are among the top ten, according to the Museum of Modern Betas (<http://momb.socio-kybernetics.net>) a site that quasi-scientifically tracks the ongoing popularity of Web 2.0 betas.

As we have learned at Avenue A | Razorfish, the best consumer feedback is not gathered in a lab, it's gathered from users' real-time interaction with the application or Web site. Want to listen to your consumer? Simply sift through the data for clues and then react.

Eye-Popping Results

Beta ultimately represents a data-driven approach to design and forces us, as designers, to become both artist and analyst. It also changes the role of consumers in the design process. We can thank the likes of Google, Yahoo! and a host of Web 2.0 players for this. No longer do consumers expect to sit back passively receiving the latest digital product with baited breath. Now we are trained to believe that digital products are ongoing "works-in-progress" whose success depends on our interactions with a site or system and the feedback we explicitly supply (comments) and tacitly (clickstreams) provide.

Most digitally focused companies now actively maintain sites inviting users to test *beta* and *alpha* releases. Google did this famously with their "labs" (<http://labs.google.com>) and the other giants have quickly followed: Adobe previews its creations at labs.adobe.com, Microsoft gives users a taste of new Web-based services through Windows Live Betas (<http://get.live.com/betas/home>) and AOL maintains AOL Beta Central (<http://beta.aol.com>).

The results for consumers are superior user experiences and, for corporations, digital properties that provide eye-popping performance around key indicators like conversion rates, average order size, time spent on site and over all user engagement. It is not uncommon for these companies to see conversion rates soar by 20% or more over a given time frame. Ditto for revenue where multi-million-dollar increases are increasingly frequent.

The New Science of Digital Design

To successfully design and develop digital products in this new landscape requires a new approach. Here are three key ways to use data to alter your products and organizations.

1. Mine Existing Data For Behavioral Insight: Think of your existing digital property as a living lab where hundreds of thousands or millions of users have left their fingerprints. The first step in any good process is to explore existing data repositories to discover what works and what doesn't.

- **Site-Side Analytics** – Mine clickstreams to understand where users go and where they don't. Look for clusters of activity and orphans. Determine if site issues are design or product-driven.
- **Search Logs** – A virtual treasure trove of user intent, analyze these reports to find out what users are looking for and what they can't find.
- **Support/Call Center** – Call center or support logs yield clues to user frustrations and talking to support reps give insights into true user needs.
- **Financial Reports** – Ensure that financial reports are integrated with Web performance. There should be strong correlations.
- **3rd Party Reports** – ComScore, Nielsen, Alexa and Compete data often surface surprising insights about your properties performance – and your competitors.
- **Google Trend Data** – Provides an interesting, graphical way to explore the zeitgeist and where interest lies.
- **Ad-tracking Technologies** – Atlas, DoubleClick and others provide customers innovative ways to track consumer behavior above and beyond your property.

2. Utilize Advanced Analytics: Digital properties are all about "flows" or the paths that consumers take through a site or application on their way to completing a task. Site-side analytic tools like SiteCatalyst, Hitbox and WebSideStory are great for serving up general reports on success ratios but yield few clues as to why users exit a flow. That's because users exit on a page, not going from page-to-page. To ensure that you are designing for maximum conversion, Avenue A | Razorfish employs a proprietary tool called Advanced Optimization that allows us to track user behavior at the page level. Now we can see exactly where users click on a page, the amount of time spent filling out form fields, how far users scroll, how much time they spend watching a video, interacting with a flash module and more. All of which allows us to understand why a user opts out of an experience and how to design a better solution.



3. Design for Ongoing Optimization: After launching a digital property, it's key to understand what performs well and what doesn't. Usability testing only gets you so far—it's much better to monitor performance in real-time. And, better yet, test page options with real users. As such, we are huge advocates of multi-variant testing. Think of this as A/B testing on steroids, where every element of the page—from text to graphics to layout—can be tested in various combinations. All of this is done dynamically and yields typically powerful and often surprising results (at least to the design teams and marketers).

In the end, a data-driven approach to UI design will force the industry to redefine the notion of "participatory design," leaping out of the lab and into the world. It's an idea whose time has come—and it can only be done digitally.

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Got ID?:

The way we live our lives online has evolved, so has the way we manage our identities. Welcome to Identity 2.0.

By Laura Porto Stockwell

Knock, knock. Who's there?

In the online world, the answer to that question gets tricky. With an over-abundance of user names and passwords, we often have trouble remembering who we are as we journey from Web site to Web site—never mind creating an identity on which to build our reputation, credibility and relationships with others.

"Now you have to be a different identity every place you go," says co-producer and facilitator of the Internet Identity Workshop, Kaliya Hamlin. "How can we be whole, integrated people?" It's a very valid question in today's ever-expanding Internet.

Whether we focus on contributing or consuming content, or developing relationships, our identity allows us to define who we are and how we are known within a community. For those of us who contribute content, research has shown that social capital is a key motivator, and being able to build a reputation and personal credibility is vital to that experience. For those consuming content and information, trust is a key component when making decisions about the credibility of information. Either way you cut it, identity is vital to reputation, trust and an overall good site experience.

eBay is a great example of a site built on trust through user identity and reputation. Its system enables both sellers and buyers to build a reputation within the community; therefore, offering smarter decision-making options. If a seller has a poor rating, then a buyer may choose to purchase an item from someone else. This reputation system helped eBay build trust within the community; thus, develop a lively, robust and active marketplace.

The problem is, when we have to continually recreate ourselves online, building a reputation or knowing who to trust is a challenge. A user may have a strong reputation on eBay, but, when he joins another site, he starts from scratch. Let's look at a hypothetical example:

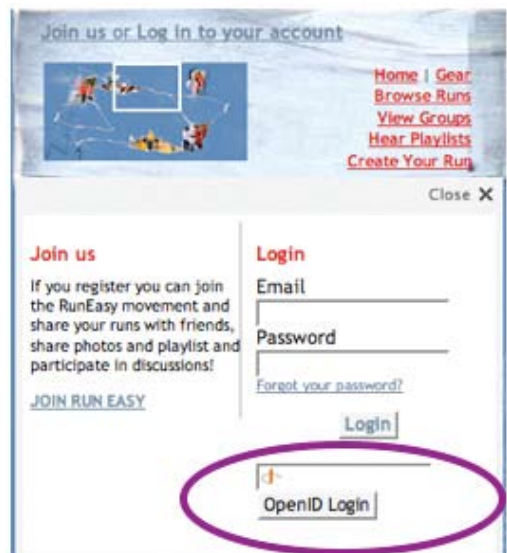
Joe is an active member of Facebook, where he has 273 friends, and has never had a negative interaction with anyone on the site. He also sells restored mountain bikes on eBay and has a great reputation there. He's been a member of e-Pinions for years as well and posts reviews about once every other month. Today, he decides to join a new online community—but he has to start developing his identity and building his reputation from scratch. The only chance another user might recognize him is if he uses his same username, but, even then, they will have to find each other.

What is it worth for him to join another site—your site—when he has to start again?

The Quest for One Identity

Online identity has always been a concern, but over the past few years, as communities proliferate online, this concern has compounded. A number of solutions are currently gaining ground. Let's take a look at a few of them:

- **OpenID** has been gaining traction recently. It is used by a number of sites, including Facebook, Digg, Wikipedia, Yahoo!, and AOL. Reebok also recently implemented OpenID in its GoRunEasy.com community site. OpenID is an open-source application that provides users with a uniform resource identifier (URI) in the same way that Web sites have a URL. It allows for "authentication" so that it is secure, and it also allows users to choose which elements of their identity to share.
- **ClaimID** is a sister to OpenID. It allows users to create a profile with all of the sites on which they have identities. It also allows them to claim those pages as their own.
- **iNames** are similar to OpenID's URI. iNames may be a better choice for regular, less technical people according to Hamlin. To date, more than 10,000 people use iNames. The system works by providing users with a number that is unique and persistent to that user. iNames and OpenIDs work together so you can type your iName into an OpenID log-in.





- **Windows CardSpace** allows users to securely provide a digital identity to a site via a piece of client software that uses a set of "cards," with identity data for the user to choose from.
- **Amazon's Real Name Attribution** allows users to claim their real name using a credit card in the spirit of credibility and reputation building.
- **hCards** are popular among the more tech-savvy crowd. They are considered a "microformat" and use a one-to-one representation of vCards. Users must program an hCard, and they are accessible by anyone, which means they are not for everyone.

What To Do?

There are many reasons for enabling an identity in your online community that works across multiple properties.

- First, it lowers barriers to participation by enabling users to sign in using an existing username and password. This means a potentially faster ramp-up for your community.
- Second, it allows users to leverage their reputation without having to rebuild it on your site. This not only makes your community more appealing to users who have spent a great deal of time building their reputation, it also allows you to more easily build a reputable community.
- Finally, it allows you to provide a better user experience overall. When registration barriers are removed and users feel like they can take their identity with them to your community, the experience is more welcoming and satisfying.

Identity is vital to reputation, trust and an overall good site experience.

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The Semantic Web We Weave:

A look at the technology that may usher in a whole new wave of consumer –and computer– experiences.

By Rachel Lovinger

Why does Netflix keep sending me movie recommendations that are clearly more appropriate for my ex-boyfriend? *Full Metal Jacket* is just not my cup of tea. Why doesn't Netflix know I dumped Simon last month?

In the not too distant future, the semantic Web will enable Web sites to do just that. For years, we designers have labored to do one thing really, really well—give users what they want. This is no small feat, given the complex, evolving and fickle needs of savvy Web users. But now, the emerging technologies behind the Semantic Web make it possible for Web applications to leverage information (sometimes personal) more intelligently, ultimately making consumers' digital experiences more valuable and relevant.

Translate That Into Computereese

The underlying strategy of the Semantic Web is to create data and Web sites that are "machine-readable." Why do we care if machines can read data? After all, we're designing Web sites for people, right? If machines could comprehend the meaning of the content of a Web site, they could manipulate data in more meaningful ways, resulting more quickly and more frequently in precisely the information that the user wants.

For example, you can use Google Maps to find the nearest Starbucks. You can even use it to try to find that fabulous French restaurant whose name you forgot (if you know the general neighborhood). But what if you're looking for something even more ambiguous? Say you suddenly remember that it's your nephew's birthday tomorrow, and you want to search for nearby stores that are open late and sell gifts suitable for a teenage boy who self-identifies as a geek.

And how about that breakup? On the Internet, personal information can last forever, but the details of people's lives change. If my social networks and favorite sites were infused with semantic capabilities, I could change my relationship status to single on Facebook and it would alert all my other linked services. Netflix, knowing that Simon was the one who gave 5 stars to *Saving Private Ryan* and *Full Metal Jacket*, would stop making strong recommendations for other war movies.

So, how do machines know what data means?

The Building Blocks

There are three technological innovations that make the Semantic Web possible, plus one key factor that makes it feasible.

IDs

Machines need a unique, consistent way to identify a thing or concept. For example, if I mention "Bill Clinton," how does a machine know that this is the same person as President William Jefferson Clinton? If I mention "President Bush," how does it know if I mean George W. or George H. W.? People can usually tell by context, but a machine needs a unique identifier to be able to make those connections and distinctions.

New Web Standards

Web1.0 and 2.0 were built on standards like HTML, XML, and CSS. Some new standards have been developed specifically for expressing metadata and metadata relationships. Standards such as RDF, OWL, SKOS and Dublin Core are used to define the structure, usage, meaning, rights and authority of metadata, in a machine-readable way.

Ontology

This is the part that scares people most. All this really means is defining the shared classifications, attributes, relationships, and logic that will allow machines to integrate distinct data sets and extrapolate new, unexpected information from stated information. Think of it as a hyper-glossary.

Commercial Tools

The first three things listed here make the Semantic Web hypothetically possible, but to make it a reality we need commercially available software and systems that will allow people and companies to easily create, manipulate, interpret and use semantic data. Without these tools, the obstacles to adoption would be prohibitive for most organizations.

Is the Semantic Web Right for You?

Do you want to leverage the vast stores of excellent content and data that your company has to offer? Want to provide rich, relevant search results? How about personalization, customization or integration with popular scheduling, shopping, social or location-based services?

These are the kinds of features savvy Web users are already starting to expect. Soon they'll be demanding them. You can probably fake some of these features for a while without Semantic Web technologies. This usually involves manual processes that are expensive and time consuming and quickly become unmanageable as your collection of content grows. Plus, what happens when the next new widget

comes along and you absolutely have to add it to your pages to keep your audience satisfied? It will probably require a new development cycle, a whole bunch of manual coding and another change in work process to get that widget meaningfully integrated into your site. If your data were semantic-ready, you could have that widget up and running in the time it takes you to read this article.

A few years ago, the common view was that you wouldn't be able to benefit from the Semantic Web without investing huge amounts of time and money. Now the prevailing attitude has shifted towards "a little semantics goes a long way." Semantic solutions can be adopted incrementally, with the ability to grow as needed. For example, solutions that allow businesses to overlay semantic information on legacy data sets—without having to migrate them—reduce the barriers to entry. Data mining, based on natural language processing, makes it easier to discover rich data relationships that may already be lying dormant in your company's content.

As with any emerging technology, there are costs and risks associated. Within a very short period of time, though, the opportunity cost is going to be even higher. When some information services allow me to quickly and easily extricate Simon's influence from my online presence and some don't, I'm going to go with the ones that know I'd rather watch *Moulin Rouge* than *Black Hawk Down*.

Why do we care if machines can read data? After all, we're designing Web sites for people, right?

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Digital Darwinism:

Great digital brands have their own unique DNA. As all brands become increasingly digital, we need a new way to measure effectiveness. An Avenue A | Razorfish primer.

By Joseph Crump

An experiment you can do right this minute: Click on over to Amazon.com and do a book search for the word "brand." You will be presented with almost 240,000 books on the topic. There are books on the history of branding, the economics of branding, the sociology of brands, branding in retail, in environmental design, in politics. You'll even get "how to" books about branding and cattle, but I suspect that involves red-hot pokers. Since everyone and their mother have apparently been meditating for decades on the topic of brands, you would think that the subject would be all sorted out by now.

You would be wrong. In fact, it's quite the opposite. I humbly suggest that brands and branding and brand strategy and brand identity are in a bigger and more confusing mess than ever before. Just to put a fine point on it: The world of branding is a complete goat rodeo at the moment. And to be honest, I think it's your fault.

And by "you" I mean you who use the Internet for an increasing amount of time each day. (And spends way less time watching network TV.) You who, this year, will probably buy more clothes or books or music online than in a "real" store. You who can't remember the last time you had a face-to-face conversation with a bank teller or a customer service employee. You who is YouTubing and blogging and Flickr'ing and SMS'ing and Tivo'ing and Shaving Everywhere and maybe even having a Second Life. And especially you who's posting all those damn Mentos Fountain videos. Would you cut it out already?

Yes, you are a pain in the increasingly sagging butt of brands, and you are personally wrecking the whole grand and graceful evolutionary procession of branding from "Drink Coca Cola" to "Welcome to the Coke Side of Life." You, Citizen of Web 2.0, are to brands what the hungry saber-toothed tiger was to our proto-human ancestors back on the African veldt: A sharp-toothed force of nature who is forcing a massive and unprecedented and extremely inconvenient mutation. And unless we want our brands to end up as meat, it's time for us—as brand professionals—to remove our opposable thumbs from...somewhere unpleasant...and use some new tools.

What follows, then, is a kind of Darwinian Cookbook for branders—an owner's manual for intelligent brands in the era of the New! Improved! User-Controlled Internet.

Brands Are Dead! Long Live Brands!

So what's the big deal about brands, anyway? A lot of people think that brands don't matter today. They think that the power of "brand" in shaping consumer opinion or perception or buying decisions is on the retreat. A lot of people voted for George Bush, too. And those people are considerably less opinionated at parties these days.

As it turns out, the power of brands is not diminishing, it's increasing.

While small brands and new brands—think MySpace—can come out of nowhere to capture market share and spark the fringe imagination, you underestimate the power of a blockbuster brand at your peril. Top-selling name brands still rule, and brand preferences are fickle creatures. This year, in fact, consumers were less willing to switch brands than last year.

In an increasingly complicated and atomized world—where brands are multiplying like bunnies and appealing to impossibly narrow niches—the curatorial power of brands is more important than ever.

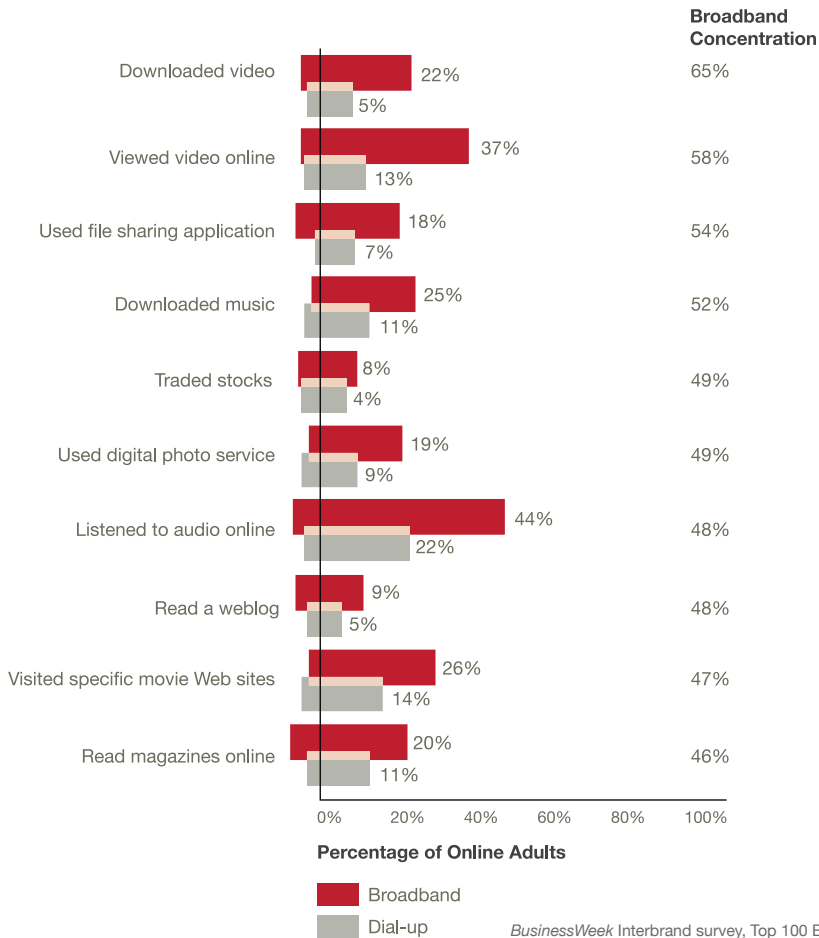
And On the Sixth Day There Was Broadband

Just how did we arrive at this peculiar evolutionary state of affairs: Where brands remain central to our lives in ways we cannot quite pin down, yet we are more instrumental than ever before in influencing those brands? Perhaps a short history lesson will clear things up.

Once upon a time there was dial up.... Remember, say, 1999? Just pause for a moment, close your eyes, and recall what it that was like to watch a Web site load onto your computer screen chunk...by...chunk...by...this better be worth it....chunk. Now shake it off. Can you imagine trying to fool around with Subservient Chicken on a 14K modem? Or watch Lonely Girl ramble on about, well, anything, on anything slower than DSL? Inconceivable.

Broadband, and the unprecedented tidal wave of innovation that followed it, changed everything—most especially, human behavior online. A thumbnail sketch:

Top 10 Online Activities with the Highest Concentration of Broadband Users.



Broadband fueled filesharing, downloading of music and movies, video and audio streaming, and Internet telephony. A super-fast connection is the main engine driving the Web from a place where people complete tasks, to a place where they seek entertainment, form communities, express themselves (and complete tasks). And if history is any guide, this progression will pick up speed.

Net net: Broadband has put Moore's Law (which refers to the doubling of data every 18 months) on steroids, and the online population has followed suit up the very steep incline of the hockey stick. The Internet user of 1999 was roughly the equivalent of a chimpanzee, and you are, well, *TIME's* Person of the Year.

Hop in the Wayback Machine for just one more minute. Dial it back to the year 2000. You've been given the task of planning and executing a big family vacation somewhere exotic. What would you do, circa 2000? Hmm. Call a friend (on a land line, probably) to get a referral for a travel agent? Spend some time buying guidebooks at a couple of bookstores? Pick up a bunch of magazines? And that would take how many hours or days? And what was your confidence level that your trip was well planned and fairly priced? And what would have been your recourse if the trip was a horrendous mess? Or a smashing success? Now—bang—back to today. Walk yourself through the same scenario.

As it turns out, the tools and attitudes that make travel planning efficient—or maybe even fun—in 2007 are the weapons that we also use to assess and destroy ignorant, monolithic, slow-moving brands. The Broadband Web is the most ruthlessly Darwinian medium in history—a channel that demands brands to innovate or die at the hands of more nimble competitors, or be pecked to death by ducks in the blogosphere. Within the user-centered world of Web 2.0, it's survival of the fittest.

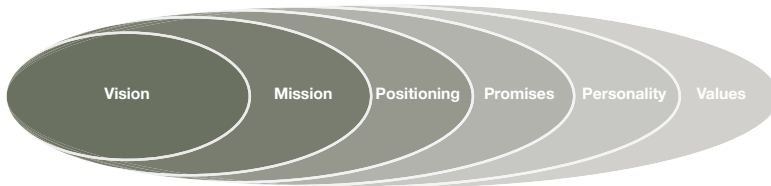
And to put brands on even more dangerous ice, the Web is also the thinnest of the thin-slicing media—where consumers are only a "back" button away from the exit. In fact, Dr. Gitte Lindgaard, a researcher from Carleton University in Ontario, did an extensive study of how rapidly Web users formed impressions of home pages*. She and her team found that impressions about brand credibility, usability, visual appeal, and—ultimately—buying intentions are determined in fifty milliseconds.

Fifty milliseconds is not a long time. It is about one frame of a video or half as long as the blink of a human eye. But that is all that it takes for a visitor to a Web site to decide how appealing the site is. The study shows that people not only make up their minds about the quality of a Web site in an eye-blink, but they subsequently stick to these first impressions.

*Study: "Attention Web Designers: You Have 50 milliseconds to make a good first impression!", Behavior & Information Technology, Vol. 25, No. 2, March-April 2006, 115-126

As depressing as it seems to those of us who spend months building Web sites, people make an immediate, intuitive decision whether they like a digital experience or not, without reading one word of content. And from this first snippet of experience on, the entire interaction with that site is colored by that first impression.

**The Answer Is "Mission Statement."
Now What Is the Question?**



Most brands have a strategic structure that looks pretty much like this. And I will bet you a chocolate shake that if you mess around with brands for a living, you have a document—or five—somewhere on your hard drive that contains a variation on this theme. And that is fine.

Once upon a time, say, five years ago, this structure was sufficient for guiding companies, and maybe even great for building brands around floor wax or dessert toppings. But it doesn't quite cover the subject in a world where one of the biggest TV spots of the year was shot for Doritos by a 21-year old amateur who did his dolly shot using rollerblades and made the whole commercial for \$12.79. Not including the price of the bag of Doritos.

Like it or not, users—that would be you, again—are in control of brands to an extent never before imaginable. And you like it. And my bet is that you are never going back to the farm. So how can brands join you, rather than beat you over the head with Wanna-Be Big Ideas and TV spots that you never see because you Tivo'd them into oblivion?

we have identified seven
core characteristics of
brands that "get it" online

Those Genes Make You Look Hot

As an agency, Avenue A | Razorfish has spent a great deal of time thinking about what makes great online experiences. It's the water we swim in every day. We've had the good fortune to work with some of the best brands in the world—and we've done our time trying to push rocks up hills, too. As a result, we have identified seven core characteristics of brands that "get it" online. Think of these as Digital Genes, sort of like knobs on the brand dashboard that you can dial up or dial down depending on the customer group, the industry, or the competitive environment.

Fresh – Does it inspire a feeling or emotion?

Is the brand's digital home new, current, beautiful, smart, fearless, impactful?

Adaptive – Does it respond to your involvement?

Is the brand's behavior mutable, intuitive, quick, interactive, Web-native, data-savvy?

Relevant – Is it useful or appealing to you specifically?

Is the site or campaign tailored, meaningful, useful, targeted?

Transformative – Does it raise your expectations of the brand, or the Web? Is the digital experience disruptive, innovative, surprising, memorable, pioneering?

Social – Is it worth borrowing, sharing or contributing to?

Is the brand designed to be modular, portable, engaging, communal, shareable, buzz-worthy, newsy, democratic?

Immersive – Do you lose track of time?

Is the experience seamless, involving, entertaining, usable, convenient, multi-sensory?

Authentic – Does it seem genuine?

Does the brand feel transparent, coherent, consistent, humane?

We think that every modern brand, when it makes the leap onto the Post-Broadband Web, should possess each of these attributes in some measure. And we think that truly great brands must exhibit these characteristics in abundance.

You can use these Brand Genes as a kind of litmus test. Whether you're helping your clients sell more shampoo or sneakers or credit cards, what would your team's work score? If your scores are high, chances are you've hatched a truly digital brand experience. If your scores are low, I would bet there's room to push the experience to a more interesting place.

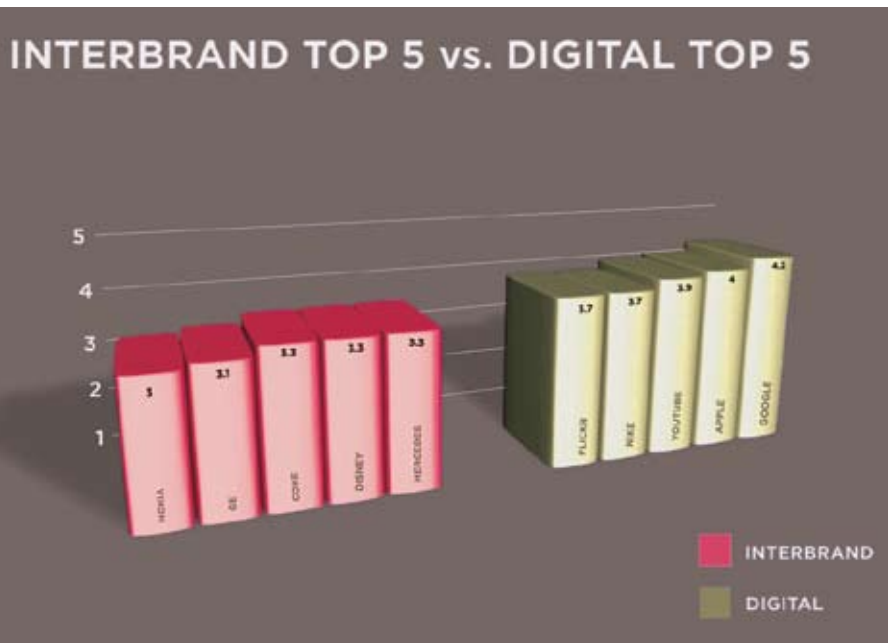
As a road test, we decided to harness the wisdom of crowds: We asked almost 800 Avenue A | Razorfish staff, from multiple disciplines, to rank 20 "household name" brands using the Digital Genes Scorecard. Here's what we learned:



Digital Gene Scorecard

Interbrand's Top 10 brands compared with Avenue A | Razorfish's Digital Top 10 brands by their cumulative Digital Gene Score.

Interbrand Top 10 brands compared with Digital Top 10 brands compared by each attribute.



CREDITS:

The following extremely big-yet-nimble brains contributed to this article: Ana Andjelic, Andy Pimentel, Brook Lundy, Dimitri Ehrlich, Dave Van Hook, and Alex Snell.

HERE WE ARE NOW, ENTERTAIN US:

An empowered, technology-addled culture will watch ads only on their terms.

By Tim Sproul and Jim Gibson

The cynical spirit behind Kurt Cobain's lyrics from the biggest pop song of the nineties foretold an attitude among America's youth culture that is being played out in the world of digital advertising. Audiences are saying "okay, we'll show up to your party, but if it's not entertaining, we'll leave."

And where will they go? They'll go where they can find content that is both entertaining and relevant to their lives. Why? Because they can—because technology has empowered them to watch what they want, whenever they want.

Consequently, advertising has more pressure than ever to be relevant to its audience and, above all, entertaining. At Avenue A | Razorfish, we understand those dynamics and, through a tight relationship with a smart client, we're connecting to this audience in entirely new and interesting ways.

Prime Time Is Now All The Time

The ever-elusive (but oh-so-influential) 18-24-year old demographic is increasingly mobile and digests its media in smaller bites.

They're not sitting down at 8 o'clock and flicking on The Cosby Show (if you did that, you're almost irrelevant in this conversation—you're too old—you're probably still watching prime time four nights a week). Cultural trends, including how we consume media, are set by our cultural influencers and early adopters. And those people, generally, are younger professionals with active lifestyles and plenty of disposable income.

They're fickle, too, with technology empowering (again, that word) them to select what they want and easily avoid ads altogether. You'll note the popularity of TiVo for its ability to block out commercials.



Generations of flaccid, transparent creative, driven by desperate, literal marketers to increase ROI have finally caught up with us. Viewers are fed up with advertising and they're expressing this online by refusing to click on ads and by viewing and sharing only what they deem interesting. And more often than not, they are watching...how do we say this?...that which is cool (and relevant to them). They're watching what entertains them.

Funny, Relevant, Truthful. I'll Drink To That.

This summer, in an effort to boost sales with our 21-27-year old target, Avenue A | Razorfish launched a campaign aimed at getting our audience where he and she lives—surfing the Web at work in the afternoon. We bought space on sites where they go during downtime—Comedy Central, Heavy, and Yahoo! sports.

Our creative approach empathizes with the working class by showing funny moments of work pain, then urges those people to "Call it a day," by catching the 4:53 Coors Light train to happy hour. We give them clickable maps, so they can locate bars near the office. We give them a happy hour countdown to 4:53 (admit it, we all watch the clock around 3 P.M.). And we give them tools to e-vite their friends. But, above all, we're giving them a laugh and an invitation for a cold beer when they need it most—during that often tedious, if not eternal stretch of time between lunch and quitting time.



A live ticker in a banner ad counts down the painful, remaining minutes to happy hour—4:53.



A geo-targeted map shows where our viewer can go after work for a Coors Light.

The results? Quite simply, we've made Coors Light part of the conversation. We're seeing our audience post our ads on YouTube as they celebrate the spots. "This is the funniest ad I've ever seen from Coors Light." The next phase is to stimulate the conversation by encouraging our audience to connect with each other, via social networking.

Your Audience Is Also Your Ad Agency

Yes, YouTube is a revolution—in the way it empowers viewers not only to watch exactly what they want, but also to self-publish. Consequently, our next evolution is to create ads that encourage viewers to do the work with us, to create ads with us.

So, our challenge is to create branded entertainment, not ads. And instead of weighty, pricey media buys aimed at distracting our viewer into a position of interest or clicks (we all know that click through rates are dropping and smart marketers know that clicks aren't the way to measure the influence of a brand), we allow the viewer to pass the ad along, so that, in essence, our audience is our media department.

If we create a video that's compelling enough, a 25-year old will send it to a friend across town. And then, if that person finds it interesting, they will pass it along to another. Before you know it, you've got a million views. Go further. Give them tools to re-edit the spots. Let them play with your brand a little and they'll care a little more about you.

Beyond being a viewer, your audience has become an ambassador for your brand. They've become an active participant. They're publishing your ads for you. An interesting thought when you consider the cost (the broad, wasteful reach) of a 30-second buy on Survivor or CSI.



Coors Light videos depict painful work moments, then urges viewers to reward themselves with happy hour refreshment. Here, a paper shredder mishap cues the notion to "Call it a day."

Swing Big

So, creatively, digital advertising must be entertaining to even be considered worth watching. This is both liberating and daunting. For a creative in 2008, the fences have been moved in, the ball is juiced and you're swinging a big piece of lumber. But you only get one trip to the plate. And if you miss, they will mock you, they will call you out to their friends.

Finally, the smartest work will be the spot that surprises and entertains and begs to be shared, but, also, is connected to a truth about the brand. Otherwise, they'll say, "yeah, that was cool, but I have no idea who did it." And therein lies the challenge—not just to entertain to garner the most eyeballs, but to do it in a way that endears brands to those captive eyeballs.

That's where Avenue A | Razorfish is headed creatively in 2008. And getting there should be an interesting, entertaining ride. If not, those smart, jaded folks will shrug their shoulders, leave the party and hang out with someone else.

Taking branded entertainment to where our audience lives, the spots auto-played between 2-5 o'clock on weekdays. This guy gets a rather rude awakening that would drive any erstwhile fishmonger to drink.



About Avenue A | Razorfish™

Avenue A | Razorfish is one of the largest interactive marketing and technology services agencies in the world. The company helps industry leaders such as Starwood Hotels, Kraft, Ford Motor Company and Carnival Cruise Lines use digital channels to acquire and service customers. Avenue A | Razorfish's full suite of digital offerings includes online advertising, Web site design and development, email and search engine marketing, emerging media strategies, and enterprise portal development. Its award-winning client teams have a great understanding of customer needs and provide solutions through distinct business disciplines, which include: analytics, strategy, technology, media, creative design and user experience. Avenue A | Razorfish has offices in markets across the United States, and global operations in Australia, China, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Visit www.avenuea-razorfish.com for more information.

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