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Inkriti

Web 2.0

Solutions for Customer-Centric E-business

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Web 2.0 for Customer Centric E-business

A White Paper

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is the phenomenon of our times - and several major trends have come together that make it a very important influence on how e-businesses interact with their customers and sell to them.

- ✓ 70% of US households had broadband connectivity by end of 2006
- ✓ More than 40% of online purchases happen because customers use search engines
- ✓ Cutting edge companies like Google, Yahoo, Nike and others are launching rich interactive websites that use AJAX, Video and other new interactive technologies that are attracting customers away from their competitors.
- ✓ User generated content, in the form of user reviews, blogs and tags, is beginning to have tremendous impact on product perception and product purchases, and finally
- ✓ Professional Open-source solutions, such as Google Enterprise Solutions, Content Management Systems and Dashboards, have begun to provide low-cost and reliable alternatives.

These main Web 2.0 trends, when leveraged well, offer great opportunities to e-businesses in four main ways:

- ✓ Attract more Prospects
- ✓ Increase Conversion Rates
- ✓ Increase Retention Rates and
- ✓ Save More on IT Costs

And the underlying Web 2.0 technologies - especially Open-source and Google Enterprise Solutions - enable e-businesses do these while reducing their IT costs.

Video and Rich Media

With broadband penetration at 70% of US households, video is rapidly becoming popular. This is further fuelled by the success of companies like Youtube, Brightcove and PermissionTV.

Video offers a host of very exciting possibilities for e-businesses.

- Instead of using static images for the product presentation, use video to promote “lifestyle selling”
- Link e-commerce functionality directly into the video, such that customers can directly add-to-cart or buy, even as they watch the video
- Monetize your current video assets by inserting advertisements and promotions into the video
- Use video to create “how-to-use” User Guides and Educational video for products and services that need hand-holding during installation or troubleshooting.

To make intelligent use of video and to integrate this effectively into your merchandising, promotions and purchasing, companies should consider a robust video publishing platform that includes functionality such as:

- Linking video to catalog and e-commerce system
- Creating a video channel
- Scheduling the time of publishing onto the website and
- Dynamic insertion of ads into the video

Using video extensively on the website can also result in a significant increase in bandwidth usage - so companies should carefully consider a professional Content Delivery Network that can manage their content delivery.

AJAX

Technologies like AJAX -- and other Rich Internet Application (RIA) technologies like Adobe Flex -- can make a website experience very dynamic and interactive. Perhaps the best known example of this technology is Google Maps. Being able to scroll various areas in the map by just dragging your mouse and not having to refresh the webpage facilitates a smooth and elegant user experience.

There are many areas on the website that e-businesses can leverage AJAX to enable a rich user experience. For example:

- **Product Navigation:** At websites like Netflix, hovering the mouse over the product image automatically brings up the product details in a popup, instead of the user having to click on the image, wait for the webpage refresh and then seeing the product details.
- **Cart & Checkout:** Companies like Anthropologie, TJMaxx and Urban Outfitters are using AJAX techniques to condense the entire cart and checkout experience into a seamless “single-page”.
- **Site Search:** Firms such as Answers.com and Google use AJAX for the Search box. As the user starts typing his search string, the system starts coming back with various recommendations on the search string that the user might actually be searching for.

There are several software vendors that provide robust AJAX platforms - Nexaweb, Jackbe, Backbase etc. A competing technology, that is suited for more data and business-logic intensive interactive online applications, is Flash and Flex based. Several vendors like Adobe and Laszlo Systems offer products on this platform.

Next Generation Site Search

Online retailers know that the cardinal rule of online shopping is that if the customer can't find it, they can't buy it. Today's online shopper isn't satisfied with simply browsing through your product catalog - they don't have the time. Most of them simply use the search box, and expect intelligent and useful results. After having experimented with simplistic in-house solutions, most firms find them unsatisfactory. At the same time, Contextual search vendors like Endeca, Easyask and FAST, operate at price tags in the half a million (\$500,000) range, and remain out-of-reach for many e-businesses.

Now, there are two very reliable and cost-effective solutions available in the marketplace:

- **Google Search Appliance:** The Google Search Appliance is an integrated hardware and software product designed to give businesses the productivity-enhancing power of Google search. This appliance can be easily customized to work effectively as a Site-search tool. Furthermore, at price points as low as \$2,000, it is an extremely cost-effective solution as well.
- **Open-source Lucene:** Lucene is an open-source project launched by the prestigious Apache foundation, and has become the world's premier open-source search and indexing engine. Similar to the Google search appliance, it can be easily customized to work effectively as a Site-search system.

Web 2.0 Content Management

One of the essential characteristics of the Web 2.0 world is the irresistible rise of User Generated Content and User Communities. The Web 2.0 User Interaction can take any of the following forms:

- ✓ Product Reviews
- ✓ RSS
- ✓ Blogs
- ✓ Forums
- ✓ Polls
- ✓ Comments

Even as this content explodes in quantity and quality, online retailers are constantly looking at ways to leverage this phenomenon.

Marketers look at the possibilities of Guerilla Marketing, Blog Marketing etc. as ways of generating buzz around the products. But it is fair to say that these experiments are in their early stages.

The pressing need at this stage is to give tools to the online marketing teams that can help them be extremely nimble in trying out various things. For example, they might want to:

- ✓ Quickly launch a poll around a promotion
- ✓ Launch a user forum for 3 weeks to generate buzz and then bring the forum down
- ✓ Enable Product Reviews instantly around a product, solicit feedback, take these reviews through an internal workflow, review them and then post them on the website

Meeting such needs of online marketers necessitates a content management system that is extraordinarily agile in managing concepts like Comments, Blogs, Polls and Forums etc.

Fortunately, there are a series of open-source Content Management Systems like Drupal and Joomla that have come up, precisely to meet these needs.

Google Enterprise Solutions

Google continues to be an increasingly dominant force in the world of online retail. With a 60% market share in the search engine marketplace, that continues to grow, it commands a lot of attention from e-businesses. At the same time, Google has constantly rolled out a series of very valuable solutions that cater to the needs of e-businesses, most of which are offered free-of-charge.

In particular, there are three solutions that all e-businesses should consider

- **Google Analytics (for Website Measurement):** Companies can use this free solution from Google to measure the traffic on their website and observe various purchasing patterns.
- **Google Website Optimizer (for Multivariate Testing):** Firms that are Adwords customers can get to use this tool for free. It helps marketers conduct A/B and Multivariate testing to understand how effective their web pages are, in converting customers.
- **Google Search Appliance (for Site Search):** The Google Search Appliance is an integrated hardware and software product designed to give businesses the productivity-enhancing power of Google search. This appliance can be easily customized to work effectively as a Site-search tool.

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