Making it Personal

Personalizing Sales Support and Customer Communication in B2B Marketing Operations.

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It's human nature. People are more interested in something that is personally relevant to them – that interests or benefits them or is local to where they live and work. Most of us will at least take a look at the email or letter that incorporates our name into the offer: "Jane, you've been selected for a free trial membership!" We also tend to take note of promotions offered by local establishments that we recognize: "Enjoy two meals for the price of one on Wednesdays at the Corner Pub."

Personalization and localization work. Personalization has been successful for greeting card companies, which let users customize e-cards with their own words and designs. Localization has made FourSquare, a social networking site where users share where they are with friends based on their GPS location, popular with a growing user base. Groupon, a deal-of-the-day website, caught the localization wave by offering deals and discounts geared to each member's geographic location.

But for B2B marketers who go to market via networks of field-based sales reps, distributors, agents, resellers, brokers, and OEMs, the challenge is to help their salespeople achieve this same kind of personalization and localization in marketing and sales materials. The challenge of "making it personal" increases as marketers need to support far-flung audiences and diverse customers.

A recent report on Marketing Asset Management by Gleanster (www.gleanster.com), an industry analyst firm that benchmarks best practices in technology-enabled business initiatives, states the issue well: "As companies expand regionally and globally, marketing organizations face the challenge of delivering the right marketing messages to specific local markets while maintaining their corporate brand and identity." The report goes on to say, "Fortunately, a new breed of digital asset technology, designed specifically for marketers, has emerged to address localized marketing challenges."

These new breed solutions include some low-cost, flexible, easy-to-set-up systems that give users the power to create marketing assets that are tuned for maximum effectiveness. These solutions are available as software-as-a-service (SaaS), and enable creation of promotional offers, sell sheets, ads, newsletters, brochures and other assets that are more relevant and compelling to specific audiences and that speak to them directly.

This new technology gives marketers control over the design and core content of marketing assets. With it, they can combine their central creative design with field insight and accountability by involving users in tailoring items specifically for their customers. At the same time, marketers can ensure that all such collateral remains brand-compliant.

One technology solution that enables personalization and customization converts marketing's selected collateral assets into digital templates. Marketers can create pre-approved content components (images or text) for users to mix-and-match as appropriate on the templates. Users can tailor the templates by inserting either marketing-approved content and/or local and market-specific information, including contact information, logos, special pricing, images and sales messages. The completed piece of collateral can be emailed, or printed and mailed.

In addition to the convenience and time savings of this solution, it also eliminates the need for marketers to pay graphic designers to make these kinds of changes. Also eliminated are routine requests by dealers and distributors for marketing materials because users can assemble the materials themselves from pre-approved online text and visual components, customizing them with their own local information.

What kinds of modifications to marketing assets are possible with these solutions? Some examples include:

- A dealer can automatically insert their logo, contact information and web site at the bottom of a sell sheet.

- A sales rep can feature specific products for a deal sheet in her own region – to capitalize on customer interest.

- A regional marketer quickly can build an ad from a template by selecting an image and headline, and adding a facility address.

- A dealer can add his own sales message and promotional pricing to a data sheet.

- A sales executive can tailor an electronic newsletter for customers by selecting content, products, and events that are most relevant and compelling.

These new technology solutions meet the expanding needs of marketers to manage, share and distribute marketing assets across field operations, sales teams and partners on a global basis. Ensuring consistency, accuracy and reuse of hundreds or thousands of assets in such distributed marketing and selling operations is a key benefit to marketers – along with the ability to "make it personal" with their sales channels and customers.

Scott Richardson is President and co-Founder of Longwood Software, Inc. (Maynard, Massachusetts), a leading provider of marketing asset management solutions. Scott has over 20 years experience in marketing and has worked with hundreds of companies in the area of marketing asset management. Longwood's RevBase® system is a comprehensive marketing asset management system that was first introduced as a software application in 1997 and as a hosted service in 2000. Leading marketing organizations rely on RevBase to manage, secure, share and track their full range of marketing assets. For additional information, visit www.revbase.com.