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The Future of Web Content

In 2011, Forbes Magazine predicted by 2013 40% of large companies will have context-aware computing projects that will engage site visitors and deliver better business results (Savitz, 2011). One of the reasons for this is the growth of mobile web browsing. Customers who access the web from a mobile device usually are doing it for different reasons than surfing the web at home or at work. The mobile customer doesn't want to click through multiple, slow loading, difficult to read pages to find a single piece of information such as a restaurant location or movie times. Therefore, landing pages need to display relevant organized information that will reduce frustrating visits by people on the go that want immediate results. This paper will explore how data producers will present future content for different audiences, in addition to the affect this technology has its audience including advertising.

The World Wide Web, like radio and television, continues to grow and change and have profound influence on our lives. The Internet has changed the way we live our lives. How we bank, shop, work and most of all how we communicate. The qualities of the web are so very different than its predecessors, radio and television, in that it is immediate, flexible, permanent, has unending capacity, and most of all is interactive.

The moment an event happens it immediately appears on the web, where there is unlimited capacity that can handle a wide variety of multimedia formats. Before the web, media content was stored by means of paper, audiotape, videotape, etc. that would deteriorate over time. The existence of the web now enables content to be stored and archived automatically and permanently with an “available on demand” interface. Most importantly, the technology of the web offers interactivity between producers and consumers. The web allows linking to other material on other sites as a way in which consumers can interact with what they are reading. Data producers can track consumer’s choices, and consumers have more choices than ever before. Globally!

In the creation of the web as a new medium, many of its structures and data presentation were drawn from practices developed from traditional media (Stovall, 2012). Accuracy in information, clarity, efficiency, and precision were taken from journalistic practices. New techniques have also surfaced over time such as, the inverted pyramid approach, where the most important information is presented first. Links are another new technique the web offers, and is one of the most important characteristics of the web because it leads a reader to more information on a topic.

Most viewers only spend at the most about three minutes reading a story, so lists (bulleted and numbered lines) are techniques that have become popular. YouTube and visual presentations tell a story without having to read it, and like changing the channel on TV the viewer can pick and choose the subject.

Additional forms of content and writing today on the web include: micro-content (words, phrases, and sentences that lead visitors to a website), headlines, summaries, subheads, cut-lines, introductions, and labels (Stovall, 2012.)

The web today is a vast medium of untapped potential for presenting information, news and entertainment. Recently new methods have been introduced to the Web such as web and backpack journalism, lateral reporting and web packages (Stovall, 2012.)

According to a Forbes report on technology trends of the future, the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Network ranked "informatics for adding value to information" at the top of their list (Cotsakos, 2012).

The Internet is evolving at an unprecedented pace, in part because of a new way of writing for the web called HTML5, and every major software company is backing it (Warman, 2012). Warman, a Consumer Technology Editor, interviewed new media professionals about how HTML5 allows content on the Web to be more creative.

Kristina Halvorson, Founder of Brain Traffic, a content strategist, said about HTML5, *"With the advent of HTML5 and responsive design, as well as the worldwide mobile regime (finally here!), content has taken center stage: how will we prepare our content for cross-platform delivery without having to recreate it every time? The answer, of course, is to structure our content so we can create it once, and then publish it everywhere. To do that, we need to find brand new ways to collaborate across disciplines; and that's what I'll be looking for in 2012"* (Warman, 2012).

This new opportunity that HTML5 is delivering to the Web brings with it pressures and demands to have skills tied to these new characteristics. The audience expects immediate access to real-time events, which has expanded and accelerated web journalism. Words not images remain the web journalist's most important tool. One difference from a traditional journalist is the necessity for flexibility to work with different means of gathering and processing news (Stovall, 2012). They must also

understand what drives the Web's machinery – software. Journalists writing for the web also needs to know where information is located and stored, whom to call, and where to go. An ability to think creatively and have flexibility to the ever changing landscape of the web involves learning to be efficient, write with simplicity, and knowing when to write formally or informally or appropriate tone for the information presented (Stovall, 2012).

Another change the web created is a reality known as *backpack journalism*. Traditional journalists of previous generations did not need to be photographers, shoot video, or know photo and copyediting (Stovall, 2012). Today, a backpack journalist is a one-stop producer of information and news for a medium that moves at warp speed. The web audience today demands speed, visual logic, simple organization, depth and news (. People visit certain websites to know certain things for a particular purpose, to further investigate news, to help them solve a problem, or to buy something etc. Because of this media organizations today expect their employee to have a wide range of skill sets.

The World Wide Web is no different from any other mass medium: It uses words and images to convey information (Stovall, 2012.) Words are its chief tool. Websites convey information, ideas and meaning. The web has a voracious appetite for words and information, and many producers of web sites do not understand this dynamic. Once a website is up it should not be left alone and expect its audience to remain engaged. Many people discover that information can quickly become stale. New information must constantly be uploaded.

What's ahead for the Web? Personalization and customization, according to Forbes consumers want to see news and content they only want to see (Koziowski, 2012).

More and more content is being driven toward personalization by offering RSS feeds, My Yahoo, MyNYTimes, etc., where people are given access to content they want to read. Websites are now more than ever using links to take consumers to the information they are looking for (Koziowki, 2012). CEO of Gravity, Amid Kapur said, *“My partners and I — saw this huge opportunity for where the Web was going to go beyond social. That’s a big reason that we started Gravity. We think everything’s moving toward our experiences becoming a lot more personal. What began as their web, became our web, and soon to be your web.”*

Kapur goes on to say, *“Mastering any one individual’s interests could allow companies to provide better service, as their website would already know each reader’s ‘interest graph.’* Kapur’s company Gravity looks and keeps user information not for public viewing to create interest graphs. Kapur claims Gravity is more than a recommendation engine by offering customization for every single user, giving a specific, unique experience on a website (Koziowki, 2012).

The Wall Street Journal is already using Gravity, and more are likely to follow. What is Kapur’s ultimate goal? To have every website a user visits adapt to the user, and understand and personalize the experience. Imagine a future Internet that will cater to your likes and interests (Koziowki, 2012).

The future of the web is mobile according to many tech observers. Manuel Castells, the leading scholar of cyberspace, has coined a term describing our current mental state in relation to the Internet: “informed bewilderment” (Naughton, 2012). Meaning that the phenomenon is of not understanding the content as it is presented.

In an Ofcom Annual Communications Market Report in London, England

findings state that two fifths of UK adults are now smart phone users up from 27% in 2011 to 39% in 2012. Ofcom.org is an independent regulator and competition authority for the UK communications industry (Naughton, 2012). This reported increase indicates that smart phone users say their phone is more important for accessing the Internet than any other device. In the same market report consumers of smart phones indicate they use their phone 57% of the time for online shopping, 30% for social networking, 23% tweeting, and 22% film/YouTube/TV (Naughton, 2012). In addition, the report uncovered a staggering revelation that advertising on the Internet is now greater than any other category of advertising (Naughton, 2012).

Cloud computing providers for mobile users is increasing on the Internet and will only grow stronger. According to a Code Research Study, an estimated 98% of U.S. mobile web traffic in 2015 will come from smart phone consumers, and the number of wireless Internet users in that time is expected to increase from 84 million to nearly 160 million (CTIA, 2012).

North American wireless data traffic will double almost every year from 2009 to 2014, increasing nearly 50 times during that time (CTIA, 2012). Smart phone users are expected to more than double from 90 million in 2010 to more than 211 million in 2015 (Informa Telecoms & Media). Due to this projected unprecedented Internet growth on mobile devices, web developers created a responsive template for websites that adjust according to the device the Internet page is viewed on.

It would not be fair to talk about the future of the web without discussing how these changes in technology affect the next generation. Technology experts made a few predictions from a survey conducted by Pew Research and Elon University (Barseghian,

2012). Of the total 1,021 responses, 55% agreed that by 2020 *“the brains of multitasking teens and young adults are “wired” differently from the generation before them. They do not retain information; they spend most of their energy sharing short social messages, being entertained, and being distracted away from deep engagement with people and knowledge. They lack deep-thinking capabilities, lack face-to-face social skills, depend in unhealthy ways on the Internet and mobile devices to function”* (Barseghian, 2012). In conclusion, it is believed that the changes in behavior and cognition among the young will have generally negative outcomes.

This point of view is based on the context of statistics that indicate Internet and media use completely permeates young people’s lives. The Pew Internet Project’s findings include: “95% of teens ages 12-17 are online, 76% use networking sites, and 77% have cell phones (Barseghian, 2012). From an educators view, Adjunct Professor of Sociology and Education at Columbia University, Hugh F. Cline writes, *“If we simply continue to use technologies to enhance the current structure and functioning of education, our young people will use the technologies to entertain themselves and engage in online socializing and shopping. We will have missed enormous opportunities to produce independent life-long learners”* (Barseghian, 2012).

Are we producing a generation of thumb aching, self-entertaining, hyper-connected young adults? Opinions surfaced from the survey that educators should work on shaping students use of and attitude towards technology for a more positive outcome. Others believe education reform is necessary because of antiquated educational approaches. Whatever the outcome the truth will be told – the Internet is here to stay and is evolving into a machine hungry for information about you and me. *“Who is*

monitoring this and is it safe?" - is another subject and paper to be written.

The answer to where the web is going is mobile, which includes customization and personalization. The answer to the affects of this technology on us, especially the younger generation is astounding. There is a “digital divide” that is growing between this generation and the next. Finally, advertising has taken over the web from appearing on social media sites to email sites - it appears to be everywhere thanks to monitoring software advertising is now personalized according to the user’s browsing history.

The “Information Age” is moving rapidly toward what could be a “Digital Social Revolution.” From the beginning of time people and their thirst to communicate has not changed, but has morphed into a personal experience of seeking self motivated interests and entertainment at the expense of a holistic approach of knowing and understanding the world. Early cavemen left pictures of religious and cultural practices. Down through the ages all forms of communication educated the world inhabitants on history, religion, cultures etc. The circle began small and increased only to become small again where we are visiting a small circle of people who share our interests and ideals.

The web has widened our view of the world, but in our own way we have proven (by the shear numbers of us on Facebook) that we want our own networks based on our interests. Is this a good thing (or not) for the future of humankind? Only time will tell.

I pledge I have acted honorably. Debra Bryant

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