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Use Integrated Rich Media to Engage and Retain Website Visitors – Part II From Concept to Application

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The rapid penetration of broadband Internet connections has changed the way Web users want to receive information. Large numbers of consumers now *expect* to see rich media. In the May 2006 issue, I provided a conceptual overview of the considerations for the integration of rich media with your Web marketing strategy to engage, educate, and retain site visitors. This article defines the challenges associated with the process of implementing rich media applications given an organization's existing Web marketing strategies.

To achieve positive outcomes, consideration must be given to the following:

- The inside team
- The existing Web design and architecture
- Determination of the right media given the organization's goals
- Internal and external media resources
- Ways to leverage the investment

Integrated rich media

Everyone has a slightly different definition of rich media. For the sake of this discussion, integrated rich media is defined as any media element that moves your Web site beyond "static" text and pictures. Examples include:

- **Audio:** Applications may be as simple as adding music to segments of your Web site or including spoken messages or explanations.
- **Video:** Broadcast-quality video programming may include integrated graphics for patient education or scientific explanations.
- **Motion:** Web site motion when used discreetly is an engaging tool to draw visitors' attention to a specific portion of the screen.
- **Interactivity:** Elements that require site visitors to interact with your Web site include participating in an assessment, filling out forms, or downloading instructions.

The team

The “team” required to develop and implement these media applications will vary depending on the nature of the content. However, there are three entities that must be part of each team: marketing, production, and information technology.

Marketing’s job is to develop an implementation strategy and craft the initiative’s brand messaging. In addition, input from physicians, nurses, and allied health professionals will be needed if the content requires clinical messaging or patient care modeling. The production team specializes in the capture, organization, and delivery of the multimedia elements. Your organization’s IT department must integrate the elements with an existing structure and provide technology for delivery and measurement.

A critical element of success for implementing integrated rich media is to involve all members of the team at the inception stage. Too often, projects stall or fail for lack of complete understanding and buy-in of the goals or the failure to recognize and resolve technology issues.

You can compare rich media development and distribution to construction of a house. The architectural portion is marketing –concept, look, messaging, materials. The structural design is realized through clinical input and unique intellectual capital. Craftsmen are then contracted to assemble the vision. Lastly, the infrastructure, or IT people provide the internal environment. Throughout the process, marketing serves as a communications conduit.

Babies and bath water

Assuming you have an existing Web offering and strategy, you must seamlessly integrate new content with the current structure. Back to the house analogy, this is somewhat like adding a home theater to the house. You’ll have to consider how implementing rich media elements will affect your existing Web elements. You need to ask the following questions:

- Does the existing site design and information architecture still reflect the organization’s positioning?
- If site capabilities, design, and content are still timely, what elements may be utilized in the rich media initiative?
- What are the existing technology capabilities and limitations?

Because the healthcare market is moving more toward a consumer-directed model, many organizations are considering significant Web site revisions. If that is the case in your organization, it is important that you communicate your rich media plans to your Web developers. Retention of Web visitors is clearly linked to the user experience, and you need to know that your rich media elements will work within existing or proposed Web designs.

Existing design elements also need to be considered from a branding perspective. If your existing logo, color schemes, and navigational tools have been effective branding tools, you need to incorporate them in the design of new media elements.

Lights, camera, action? Maybe

Integrated video is a very powerful marketing tool for two reasons. From a marketing perspective, video lets you tell a story. Secondly, video turns the computer into a television station with one huge advantage. The programming is available when and how often the viewer wants it.

Before you decide to create video materials for Web site distribution, you need to ask: "What is the story I want to tell?" If the answer to the question includes creating emotional delivery, showcasing people not normally seen, concisely delivering conceptual and complicated information, or explaining disease and treatment processes, then video should be your first choice. Functional examples include patient testimonials, high-level marketing messaging from thought leaders, and explanation of medical procedures or surgical techniques.

When a user clicks on your video link, the program comes up in a player window. Often that window bears the logo of the player engine, Real or Windows Media. It is no longer technically challenging to design your own player window. If you choose to build your own player window, you can frame it in your organization's color scheme and place your logo in the upper left corner to extend your branding opportunities.

Or maybe audio

Audio is emerging as a valuable marketing tool for messaging that may be emotional, such as patient testimonials, or for content that remains constant but needs repetition, such as patient instructions. Podcasting is one distribution possibility.

For the uninitiated, podcasting is a term that has grown out of the use of Apple's iPod product. Originally designed as a portable jukebox, the iPod has become a *portable* repository for video, music, and downloadable files on a variety of subjects. So that its patients could have rich media-based educational materials, the Arizona Heart Institute and Hospital recently created an entire library of podcasts. The titles include "Endovascular Interventions" and "Coronary Artery Bypass" and are downloadable from the organization's Web site.

Interactive engagement is one of the most effective uses of rich media. Risk assessments, games, RSS feeds, and the completion of scheduling forms are some possible interactive applications. An argument for shared budgeting for rich media, presented in my May article, is the fact that a hospital could reap operating efficiencies and create new patient care models with interactive rich media.

Now, where to buy?

Few hospitals have the internal capabilities for producing professional broadcast-quality rich media. In addition, your organization's server capabilities may not be able to handle streaming media. Most likely, you will need outside resources to create interactive rich media and provide integrated hosting. Following are some criteria for choosing those resources:

- Choose a company that offers a strategic perspective specific to healthcare.
- Select a company that demonstrates creative leadership that can be adapted to your healthcare audiences.
- Seek vertically integrated companies that handle media production in conjunction with Web development, distribution, and e-learning. Otherwise, you will be juggling multiple and sometimes disparate suppliers.
- Be certain the company can and will work closely with your IT department (and vice versa).

The following table provides some broad guidelines for the cost of interactive rich media elements. Keep in mind that length and detail will be the determining factors in cost estimates.

Audio	\$1K to \$5K
Video	\$5K to \$50K
Animation	\$10K and up (based on level of detail required)
Webcast & On-Demand Programs	\$25K + (based on detail & audience)
Web Design	\$20K +
Flash™ Design	\$5K to \$30K (based on level of detail required)
Structural Redesign (new page structure, navigational tools)	\$30K + (based on data & functional requirements)

More bang for your buck

The production of interactive rich media should be an investment that is leveraged in as many delivery points as possible. As an example, one hospital recently engaged a company to produce media for its Gamma Knife. The organization's target audiences are referring doctors and patients. The educational programming is being designed for distribution to physicians, consumers, and hospital staff. The graphics, voice-over, and length will be repurposed for each audience, but the core content will be the same. Graphic elements that are being created for Web site content will be used for community relations, trade show presentations, and newsletter design. Screen shots and other graphic elements will also be integrated with the hospital's traditional marketing campaigns.

The process of managing the integration of rich media elements with your Web initiative is not an easy one. You must motivate and manage multiple internal and external resources through a series of tasks to a common goal. If you begin with a clear strategy, empower and challenge the disparate parts of your team, and serve as the hands-on coordinator, the results will be valuable and will provide unique market value for your organization.

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