

Repositories Runneth Over

New content management systems help e-retailers get the most out of video, reviews, images and more

By Mary Wagner

Flooring manufacturer Shaw Industries Group Inc. has a network of thousands of dealers. And it has a content management system loaded with product specifications, descriptions and video. The dilemma Shaw faced was how to help those dealers put that content to work on their own web sites.

The answer is the Shaw Web Studio, deployed in April, which allows dealers to log in to create their own consumer-facing web site from a pool of templates Shaw provides. Each dealer can then pull from the system, built on the iAPPS Content Manager from software vendor Bridgeline Digital, to populate its site with content about the Shaw products it sells. The system also serves product images on-demand from the Adobe Scene 7 digital asset management system where they are stored.

The content the Shaw Web Studio pushes to the dealer sites arrives with product information tagged so search engine crawlers can find it. Built into each template are navigation and URL naming conventions that further optimize pages for natural search.

“This has enabled us to deliver product data in real time directly to the dealer web sites, to be exposed to the consumer,” says Misty Hodge, web services manager at Shaw. And thanks in part to the rich, optimized content, some dealers are finding their new sites appearing on the first page of local search results, says Brian Bolton, vice president of marketing at Bridgeline.

What’s more, e-mail capabilities built into Bridgeline’s product could one day allow Shaw dealers to select content to push out to their customers in targeted e-mail campaigns. It’s all part of freeing the vast content Shaw possesses internally so that it can make dealer web sites come alive and help dealers sell more Shaw flooring products.

Many online retailers face the same situation as Shaw. They have a wealth of content about their products—360-degree product images, videos, product descriptions and customer reviews, just to name a few. They come from many sources, consumers and suppliers as well as

investment plans for 2010, 37% of online retailers surveyed by Forrester Research Inc. cited content management, putting it second only to e-commerce platforms at 49%.

“Managing content was kind of broken before, a little messy, but you could cope,” says Forrester analyst Brian Walker. “Now we are hearing from a lot of our clients that they need to get on top of this. Businesses are feeling pressure around managing content and the need to drive more localized, targeted, sophisticated content.”

The price tag

Retailers making the decision to invest in content management

will have to allocate significant dollars. The cost varies by the amount of content, the features a retailer requires, the number of users, the links required to other systems and other factors. But Bridgeline’s Bolton says retailers could expect to pay \$100,000 to \$200,000 for a larger deployment similar to Shaw’s, with increasing discounts as more users participate.

There are additional training and implementation fees in the range of \$130 to \$150 per hour, Bolton says.

Smaller e-commerce sites with less content to manage could get started for \$75,000 to \$100,000, he says, while larger retailers with more content and more extensive integration requirements might pay in the range of \$300,000 to \$500,000.

As retailers go shopping, they’ll find vendors are responding with enhanced content management technology. For example, since



a retailer’s own staff. The trick is to make sure the most current and relevant content appears on search ad landing pages, in marketing e-mails, on a retailer’s Facebook page and product detail pages, in comparison shopping sites and more.

Since so much of this is new—the types of content as well as the ways it can be used—it’s no wonder so many retailers plan to update their content management systems. Asked to prioritize their technology

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expanding its services four years ago to support e-commerce on its retailer clients' sites, rather than just providing manufacturers' product specs for physical store space planning as it used to, product data vendor Gladstone Technologies has greatly expanded the number of product attributes it gathers from manufacturers and feeds to retailers. "We now have over 100 attributes we can collect on a product," says chief marketing officer Stephen Cole. "It's everything from nutrition to ingredients, to whether it's organic or kosher or the package is recyclable."

Some content management technology builds in important functions that are tied to content distribution. Bridgeline's iAPPS content manager and other systems like it, for example, automatically update Sitemap.xml files, which alert search engines when an e-retailer creates new pages on its site or changes pages or navigation paths. That helps to boost the SEO-friendliness of the content they push out on the web and distribute for the use of partners.

Personalized content

Content management systems also can categorize the content they store by the type of user likely to need it, which can help retailers push out the right description or video to a site visitor.

Language learning products manufacturer and retailer Rosetta Stone has that kind of capability in the Day Software CQ5 web content management system it deployed in May. A key reason for introducing the system was to automate the personalization of site presentation by type of customer.

Each customer has her own reason for buying products that teach foreign languages, says Matt Cascio,

director of architecture and strategy at Rosetta Stone. They may be looking to upgrade their job skills, or interested in connecting with their heritage. "We want to know what type of shopper you are and be able to target you with content that speaks to that," Cascio says.

Rosetta Stone has segmented shoppers by placing distinct URLs in ads in print publications geared to different audiences; what's presented on the page accessed through one URL will be different from what's on a page reached with another URL.

But Cascio says that being able to segment site visitors by their behavior after they reach the site—by what they view and in what order, for example—and then personalize content presentation on the site accordingly rather than depending on the referral source, would streamline its marketing efforts. And as it gains familiarity with the new content management system launched this spring, he expects to be able to do just that, using segmentation capabilities built into CQ5's web content manager.

New market

For computer hardware maker DataQDirect Inc., it was a change in business model that required it to bring in a new content management system. Until recently, the company marketed itself to wholesalers with a web site that allowed customers to reserve a product, with the deal later completed offline through a call center. But a decision earlier this year to sell directly online to system integrators required major changes to its site and created new

demands for content.

The company turned to its content management specialist Bridgeline for help in presenting content in a more dynamic way, and automating as much of that process as possible on the new customer-facing site. For example, because of the complexity of the hardware it sells online, buyers need detailed technical specifications about each product. So Bridgeline created a link between DataQDirect's content manager and Etilize, a supplier of

product data, using part numbers to match content in the DataQDirect system with the specs that Etilize stores. Now when DataQDirect adds a new product to its site the specs buyers need are easily accessible.

"There are 10,000 products on our site, and if we were to try to manage 10,000 products manually, there is no

way we could get it done in a week or a month," says DataQDirect purchasing manager Greg Conroy. He adds that the content management system also allows the retailer to easily alter price and product descriptions and to edit tags on content to optimize it for natural search.

"Our customers last year were strictly re-sellers. I don't think we sold to one systems integrator," Conroy says. "We've gone from zero of that kind of customer to 150 transactions with 150 different system integrators since May 15."

That's the payoff for presenting content effectively to online shoppers. ●

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