

How Convertible Is Your Content?

Preparing Your Content for the Multiplatform Future

They say content is king. While that remains a royal truism, this monarch's loyal subjects are clamoring for a new castle to be built—one where the walls aren't paper-thin and fading fast.

Ask Mark Gross, president and CEO of Data Conversion Laboratory, Inc. (DCL), a Fresh Meadows, N.Y.-based content conversion and publishing services business, and he'll tell you that, while paper won't disappear entirely over the next few years, most content published will be electronic—including legacy content. And therein lies the promise—as well as the challenge—for publishers: How to successfully convert past print and existing material to the digital realm.

"Five years from now, if you're not producing electronic books, you probably won't be in the business," Gross says. "What we think of traditionally as print will disappear, for the most part."

Indeed, publishing survival, insists Joe Gollner, director, Gnostyx Research—an Ottawa, Canada-headquartered independent consultancy that helps organizations adopt and leverage open content standards—requires delivering a "bewilderingly broad range" of publication products while leveraging the requisite technology as an integral part of the content management and publishing life cycle.

"Content conversion is fundamentally about abstracting the materials that have typically been used to produce a specific publication and establishing a reusable store of content assets from which many publications can be optimally produced," says Gollner. "It means converting single-channel publications into multi-channel content resources."

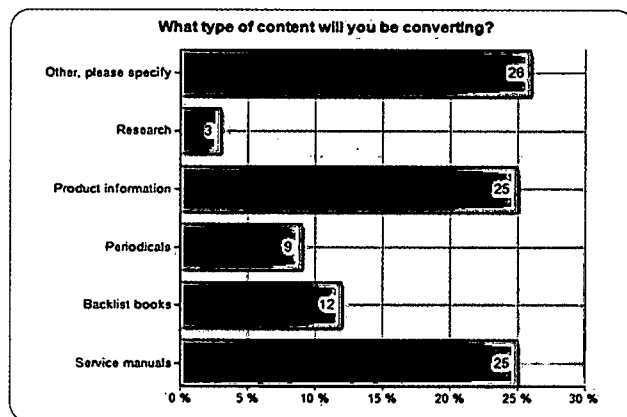
Service manuals and product information are among the most popular types of content that companies plan to digitally convert.
(Source: Data Conversion Laboratory, Inc.)

Whether it's in the form of an ebook or a mobile app, converted content can offer enhanced value to consumers, says Scott Abel, chief content strategist for The

'You have to put the content you've converted into content shopping malls. ...'

Content Wrangler, a content strategy firm located in San Francisco. "Today, you have to deliver the right information to the right people at the right time, using the right format and language on a device of their choosing," says Abel. "You become the go-to source of information. Content can be personalized ... which makes learning and shopping and researching and understanding and connecting with other people more useful."

Why make content conversion a priority? Consider the results of a new survey by DCL involving more than 266 professionals from a variety of industries. The



news & product briefs

survey findings revealed the following: 44% of respondents said their content comprises more than 50% of their company's value; 88% have converted at least some content in the past; 43% are planning a content conversion in 2012, while another 30% are planning for it within the next two years. The survey also found that 77% of "content" is not what we think of as traditional publishing—the majority are actually service manuals, product information, and other types of documentation.

Gross says there are typically four steps involved in content conversion: extracting the raw text and other information (via electronic extraction, OCR scanning, and other methods); organizing the content and coding/tagging it for modern technology; enhancing the content with extras such as video, graphics, tables, and charts; and providing links to the outside world.

In the traditional model, ebooks and apps are simply posted on a company's website and available for download. While this route doesn't involve paying commissions to middlemen content distributors, it can prove to be a poor strategy, noted Abel.

"They didn't put Macy's in the middle of nowhere—they put it in the middle of malls. You have to put the content you've converted into content shopping malls, just like the retailers," says Abel.

That means offering your converted content on iTunes and Amazon for use on tablets, mobile devices, and other gadgets. The two major ebook formats are .epub and .mobi, used predominantly by Apple devices and Kindles, respectively.

"The fact is that today's ebook platforms do not demand particularly intelligent content resources in order to work properly," says Gollner. "Despite this, most publishers seem to be struggling with delivering ebooks of acceptable quality."

Case in point: Gollner recently purchased a business publication to read on his Samsung Galaxy tablet using his Kindle app.

"There were numerous formatting foibles. The handling of the drop caps in the printed book became line breaks

Google Unveils Knowledge Graph

Google has once again reworked its approach to search in an effort to better find what users are searching for by introducing Knowledge Graph. Many words or phrases have multiple meanings which search engines aren't always capable of recognizing. For instance, on its blog, Google uses "taj mahal" as an example: "You might think of one of the world's most beautiful monuments, or a Grammy Award-winning musician, or possibly even a casino in Atlantic City, N.J. Or, depending on when you last ate, the nearest Indian restaurant." Knowledge Graph will ask which of the multiple options you are searching for on the side of the screen. When users click which one they are referring to, the search is further refined.

Google says it is a quicker way to get the information that users are looking for. This new feature is up and running on the U.S. English version of Google. And according to Google, Knowledge Graph contains more than 500 million objects, as well as more than 3.5 billion facts about and relationships among these different objects. And it's tuned based on what people search for and what we find on the web.

(www.google.com)

Groupon Revenues and Stock Price Soar

For the first quarter of 2012, revenue for online coupon vendor Groupon, Inc. soared 89% to \$559.3 million, compared to \$295.5 million posted in the prior year's quarter, according to Daily Deal Media. This news sent shares of Groupon up 18.5%, or \$1.84 per share, to \$11.74 in after-hours trading.

The second quarter looks to be a big jump from the previous year as well, with Groupon forecasting an increase of 40–50%, with revenue of \$550 to \$590 million.

(www.groupon.com)

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in the ebook,” he says. “More damagingly, the images included were not legible in the ebook, and no amount of effort on my part was going to unlock what information was hidden in the small text in those images.”

Gollner’s example points to a fundamental mistake that too many publishers make when attempting to convert content, Gross says. “They end up thinking, ‘Just get it converted fast—we’ll clean it up later,’” adds Gross. “But if you don’t do it right in the first place, cleaning it up can be a very expensive process.”

Another common misstep is choosing the wrong material to convert—including content that isn’t in demand or which is cost-prohibitive to adapt. For these and other reasons, Gollner says it’s crucial to evaluate business considerations that will govern future publication returns and establish the editorial suitability of the content itself. The solution to the former is to create a priority list.

“At the top of this list will be publications that have years of prospective sales before them, and typically these are associated with regular updates and editions. The highest ranked of these will be those for which the evolving ebook market offers new opportunities,” says Gollner.

Among your A-list of priority publications, “there is a need to make the content quite a bit more intelligent than the source materials that lay behind the original printed artifact,” Gollner continued. “This intelligence will enable better search and navigation behavior and

will accommodate the inclusion of rich media and interactive components.”

Additionally, it’s important to enlist the right conversion professionals and tools to ensure better results, say the experts. Today, the conversion tool of choice is XML. “XML is flexible enough where (publishers) don’t have to go through this process multiple times (for different formats/platforms),” Gross says. “For example, if you have a large table, today you can’t really (reproduce) that on an iPad or Kindle, because the special characters and scientific symbols may not translate properly. But if you use XML first, you can keep all that information.”

The production and positioning of high-quality ebooks in particular, says Gollner, depends on the precise use of XML-based formatting standards—namely XHTML and HTML5—as the rendition format being generated from XML source content. Many mobile apps that seek ever-advancing functionality benefit from being able to access and leverage the source content directly as XML (and perhaps XML that has been implemented using the Darwin Information Typing Architecture).

Lastly, Abel recommends hiring an expert content strategist who can perform a thorough content analysis. “[This person can] determine what types of content you have, who needs it, and why they need it,” says Abel. “Most mistakes are made by converting content that nobody reads, and internal people often don’t know what customers want.”

(Facebook Portal for On-Demand Video? from page 9)

among and revenue from consumers. So, it isn’t necessarily a question of one or the other; it’s more a matter of building a set of diverse and profitable channels in order to grow revenue.

“But that’s not different strategically than it would be for any other business that generates revenue through both direct and indirect channels.”

That part about revenue is key. Facebook’s IPO has been in the news a lot lately, and while Steffen says it wouldn’t be appropriate for him to comment on it, he did say “a lot of the expert opinion I’ve heard and read about Facebook’s IPO seems to argue that Facebook will need to generate revenue through means other than advertising in order to justify its valuation.”

Steffen says that if what he’s heard is true, “then e-commerce is an area where Facebook probably needs

to lead. Digital content sales is one segment of the e-commerce market, and obviously one that we believe is increasingly important.”

At the end of the day, while Facebook may be—in a word—huge, it’s still a business, and “any business needs to find new ways to grow,” Steffen says.

“The digital content market is growing massively,” he adds. “If you’re a big online channel with a massive audience, like Facebook is, then you probably want to find a way to capitalize on the growing, global revenue opportunities in the digital content business. If everyone is competing for consumer transactions, then the way to win is to find the most effective ways to capture and monetize as many profitable transactions as you can.”

Perhaps beefing up Facebook’s on-demand video experience is one of those ways.

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