Gleansight Deep Dive
Harnessing the Power of Website Personalization to Drive B2B Marketing Improvement

How B2B Marketers Can Capitalize on an Emerging Technology That Gleanster Terms “Real-time Website Content Versioning”

Personalization sits at the very heart of marketing performance improvement in B2B companies as well as in B2C companies. The latter camp has made enormous strides in recent years in being able to present customers and prospects with relevant content, offers, recommendations and other types of messages via online channels, including the company website, in an automated and systematic fashion. They have done this through a variety of means — for example, by using cookies that tie user sessions to web content management systems. Underlying the technologies are analytic capabilities designed to impute an individual’s propensity to make a purchase decision based on such factors as their online browsing behavior and also, when possible, by incorporating personal profile data that might include their past purchase history and various geo-demographic and psychographic attributes.

It hasn’t been so easy for B2B companies. These marketers are at a disadvantage in that they operate in a fundamentally different world — one where the buying intentions, not to mention the identities of the influencers and decision-makers ultimately responsible for making the buying decisions, are generally unknown. It’s a world where the ability to dynamically serve up relevant content at the so-called “moment of truth” has traditionally presented a monumental challenge.

That challenge, however, is being dutifully addressed today by technology innovation that has produced a next-generation approach to website content personalization. The approach, which began to prove out its value last year and is likely to gain much broader adoption in 2012, makes it possible to identify the company affiliation of a website visitor the very moment they hit the company’s website, even before the visitor’s web browser has loaded a single metabyte of display content.
When combined with a business rules and web content management system, the IP address mapping-based technology can deliver real marketing magic. Imagine being able to, in the blink of an eye, present a new website visitor with content — not only text, but also graphic elements and even video and other rich media — that speaks to them in a highly relevant fashion based on their company’s firmographic profile and anticipated needs. Website copy could reference the name of their company and, using real-time database queries, activate “best next actions” according to a set of predefined parameters. Is the company a medium-sized business? That may influence how the product or service is positioned on the homepage and even which products or services to feature, in the first place. It may also dictate which client examples and informational resources to present. Does the company have a retail franchise structure? Are sales down from last year? Is it a seasonal business? Is it currently doing business with a competitor? Does it sell direct or through reseller channels? Where is the company likely to be in the consideration-and-buying process? Precision marketing nirvana is knowing as much as possible about the company printed on the business card of the current website visitor and then acting upon this knowledge in an automated and real-time fashion to engage that individual in a context-sensitive fashion. Too good to be true? It’s not the first time a new technology has promised to bring to fruition that long-heralded vision of one-to-one marketing personalization, although few have touted anything that resembles this capability in the context of B2B. Figure 1 illustrates some of the key milestones in the evolution of website content personalization.

The system of IP mapping goes far beyond merely making it possible to serve up regional or localized content based on the geographic location of a website visitor, as is now common practice. Instead, the technology seeks to enable what Gleanster calls Real-time Website Content Versioning (RWCV). And although still in its infancy, it has shown enormous promise in helping more than a few B2B companies improve website effectiveness in ways that drive significant increases in lead generation and new customer acquisition.

**Website Content Personalization**

It’s a foregone conclusion that personalized website content should — and generally does —

“Relevant website content means more website traffic, longer website sessions, and more frequent website visits.”

![Figure 1: The Evolution of Website Content Personalization](image-url)
lead to higher conversion rates and increased return on marketing investment (ROMI). It’s not surprising then that, according to survey data captured for the Q1 2012 Gleansight benchmark report Web Content Management, a majority of companies within the B2B realm are investing in technologies, capabilities, and resources to bring the concept of web content personalization to life. In fact, 71% of Top Performers, compared to 60% of Everyone Else, indicated that they are making improvement in web content relevance a priority focus area this year (see Figure 2). These companies recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach to prospect engagement via the website generally results in higher abandonment rates, fewer return visitors, and fewer overall conversions than an approach that offers content tailored to specific segments of website visitors.

Simply put, relevant website content means more website traffic, longer website sessions, and more frequent website visits. More to the point, Gleanster research points to a direct correlation between the amount of time that a prospect (which, in a B2B situation, is actually likely to involve multiple individuals – both influencers and decision-makers – from the same company) spends on the company website engaging with relevant content and the likelihood that the accumulation of interactions will ultimately culminate in a transaction and new client relationship.

In fact, according to Gleanster research, “content engagement time” is a performance metric that Top Performers are more apt to use than Everyone Else (67% compared to 54%). The reason, no doubt, is that the former have a deeper understanding of the direct correlation that exists between the amount of time that a prospect spends on the company’s website browsing and interacting with relevant content and eventual buying outcomes. Companies can deploy web analytics to track and measure engagement time and activity in the aggregate, with click tracking, heat maps and other reporting tools providing some level of insight into how website visitors are interacting with the content and where they are spending their time.

But these tools have limited value when all visitors are seeing the same content, regardless of company size, industry vertical and other defining characteristics that align with differentiated engagement tactics, and also regardless of where they rank as a target account from the perspective of the sales organization. In an ideal world, a company would receive a notification whenever a high value, high priority target account spent an average of $x$ number of minutes on the website.

“Today, the vast majority of visitors to a company’s website remain anonymous.”

Figure 2: B2B Companies Focus on Improving Web Content Relevance

71% of Top Performers (compared to 60% of Everyone Else) within the B2B realm indicate that “improving web content relevance” is a “high priority” focus area in 2012.
Deep Dive: Harnessing the Power of Website Personalization for B2B Marketing Improvement

perusing relevant content and engaging in calls-to-action of a specific kind (e.g., downloading a particular white paper or other content asset). They would know who these companies are by name. Moreover, they would be able to adaptively engage these website visitors in a real-time fashion to enrich the quality of their experience and help ensure that they’ve accomplished their objectives.

Current State of B2B Content Targeting

For many B2B marketers, email has served, and continues to serve, as the backbone of their prospect engagement strategy. The ability to personalize email content according to the firmographic attributes of the target recipient ranks as a key success factor by Top Performers. Everything from subject line and copy to the selection and positioning of the various graphic elements within the body of the email can and should be designed to resonate with the target audience based on who they are (title, role, function within the organization), the business of their company (industry sector, company size, customer base) and the likely nature of their current needs and buying intentions. The problem, of course, is that the interest level and buying intentions of any given contact name within a B2B email distribution list are seldom known and difficult to ascertain. This dearth of information can prove to be detrimental if companies choose to hawk their wares to prospects that aren’t currently in the market to buy.

The content permutations in an email marketing campaign, whether one focused on customer acquisition, customer retention, and/or customer cross-sell / up-sell, can be as numerous as a company deems necessary. Most large enterprises rely on the principles of experimental design, conducting extensive multivariate, or A/B, testing to help ensure that their marketing content is optimized by narrowly-defined segments of prospects and/or customers. Experimental design helps ensure that they are generating the best possible campaign performance given their budgetary, time, or other constraints and based on their marketing objectives.

Most B2B companies are unlikely to need hundreds of permutations, in contrast to their B2C brethren, but they certainly need their messaging to be sufficiently granular. That granularity comes not only from prospect profile information, which they may or may not have, but also from their online behavior. What are they clicking on? What are they downloading?

Of course, B2B marketers have a number of tools at their disposal that go beyond push email for delivering relevant content to target customers and prospects. These tools can have a positive impact on achieving the desired objectives around lead generation and conversion and are being increasingly embraced by B2B marketers who, by and large, are under more pressure than ever to maximize the value of their marketing investments and demonstrate ROMI. In many cases, their job security depends upon it.

An example is event-based marketing triggers, in which case a business rules engine is used to automatically send an email with embedded content or related landing page links in response to a website visitor who has “tripped a wire,” so to speak — by downloading a white paper from the company website, for example, or via a content syndication partner. Inviting new email subscriber opt-ins to a website preference center where they can indicate their needs and select from topics of interest as they relate to the company’s products or services can also trigger predefined responses.

Marketing triggers work well in theory. But again, in practice, only a small percentage (in most cases, less than 1%) of a company’s website visitors take the bait — that is, engage in a call-to-action that enables the company to capture their contact information, let alone gain actionable insights into their (and their company’s) buying intentions with respect to a particular product or service offering. Today, the vast majority of visitors to a company’s website remain anonymous, and enticing them to volunteer their contact information is likely to remain a monumental challenge for most B2B marketers.

“The interest level and buying intentions of any given contact name within a B2B distribution list are seldom known and difficult to ascertain.”
Knowing when prospects are in buying mode, or at least in the early consideration stage, may be indicated by their browsing behavior or response to a call-to-action — or, importantly, by the simple fact that they visited the website, in the first place. Company identification technologies can help compensate for the fact that only a small fraction of website visitors submit an email address. Information captured through website visitor analysis can inform email, direct mail and/or phone outreach.

Another recent technology innovation that pertains to content personalization is retargeting software. Also known as remessaging and remarketing, retargeting means presenting a targeted display ad via various ad networks to a prospect after they were either previously presented with an ad but failed to convert or they visited the company’s website but failed to convert. The technology works by allowing a website tag to write a cookie on the visitor’s browser that can be used to identify them in the future. When the visitor visits a website that supports retargeting, companies have the ability to display a follow-up ad to this same prospect across multiple websites. While the technology may help marketers increase brand awareness, the relevancy of the content is generally lacking. Moreover, the continuous recurrence of the same ad can feel like a pesky housefly following you around the room, buzzing incessantly in your ear.

**Content Mapping**

Next-generation tools promise to make Real-time Website Content Versioning a reality. Yet, even then, companies need to be able to determine what content is most likely to resonate with prospective buyers by narrowly defined segments and to then create and deliver the messages and offers in a compelling fashion. Addressing them by industry or even company name only goes so far, and, in fact, may have a negative impact if the content itself doesn’t also reflect an understanding

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**Figure 3: Website Content Mapping**

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Company name → Industry vertical → Firmographic attributes → Internal account information → Targeted website content
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- **Company name**
  - Pharmaceutical Supplier
  - Apparel Manufacturer
  - Electronic Components Distributor
  - Automotive Parts Supplier
  - Natural Gas Mining Company
of their identity. Figure 3 illustrates the basic steps in data querying between website visitor identification and web content delivery.

According to the benchmark report B2B Precision Marketing, 93% of Top Performers view the need to create narrowly-defined customer segmentation schemes as key to maximizing the value of an investment in a related initiative. Companies, like individual consumers, don’t exist as two-dimensional cardboard cutouts. Rather, companies are complex and unique entities that possess an enormous range of differing characteristics. When creating a segmentation scheme, consider the following firmographic attributes:

- Company size / revenues
- Industry / types of products & services sold
- Geographic location
- Markets served
- Competitor / market activities
- Business structure or process considerations
- Perceived wants and needs
- Perceived readiness-to-buy stage
- Projected customer value

By understanding customer context and serving up relevant content in response to that understanding, companies can deliver more relevant and productive prospect and customer experiences.

When it comes to Real-time Website Content Versioning, one question to ask is whether a high degree of personalization on company website could be off-putting. Early adopters don’t seem too concerned. “We are targeting B2B marketers who do online marketing and testing and targeting and understand that,” noted one marketer. “Way more than creepy, it’s just awesome. It would probably be very different in a B2C environment, where you may want to just clear your cookies.”

On the topic of cookies, proposed “Do Not Track” legislation may severely curtail the use of cookies for website content personalization. IP lookup technologies comply with “Do Not Track” standards of online privacy because there is no application or usage of cookies or pixel tracking, and that may ultimately be viewed as the icing on the cake.

Website Content Optimization

Multivariate experimental design processes, also known as A/B testing, are used to scientifically match different prospect segments with different marketing treatments, content variations, to optimize offer-matching. As discussed, the technique is standard in email marketing, where the target audience is well-defined in advance. The concept is equally applicable in the context of website content, given the ability to do real-time identification. In both cases, the objective is content optimization.

In mathematics, optimization refers to choosing the best element from some set of available alternatives. It’s about solving problems in which one seeks to minimize or maximize a function by systematically choosing the values of variables from within an allowed set. It means finding “best available” values of some objective function given a defined domain. In the past, it has been next to impossible to optimize website content, for the simple reason that doing so requires advanced knowledge of the identity and characteristics of the individual website visitor. Lacking this capability, companies have strived to optimize by routing content based on the visitor journey through the website, by allowing people to navigate their way to relevant content.

The goal and perhaps a key performance metric should be to reduce the amount of searching and navigation required to arrive at the “right” content, by being able to anticipate what that content is and then serving it up in a real-time manner. With the implementation of real-time website content versioning,
Deep Dive Talking Points

The following are a few key takeaways:

- The ability to dynamically serve up relevant content at the so-called “moment of truth” has traditionally presented a monumental challenge for B2B marketers.
- An emerging approach that uses IP mapping technology seeks to enable what Gleanster calls Real-time Website Content Versioning.
- Company identification technologies can help compensate for the fact that only a small fraction of website visitors submit an email address.
- Addressing website visitors by industry or even company name may have a negative impact if the content itself doesn’t also reflect an understanding of their identity.
- The goal should be to reduce the amount of searching and navigation required to arrive at the “right” content, by being able to anticipate what that content is and then serving it up in a real-time manner.

friction is reduced and the notion of “zero-click website” inches closer to reality.

Of course, B2B marketing success doesn’t happen solely by being able to identify website visitors by company and industry or even by buying intention and purchase authority — that is, whether they’re a decision-maker, an influencer or merely an employee entirely disconnected from the process. The art of creative development will continue to be as important as ever in terms of eliciting a positive response. The challenge is to marry the art with the science.

Case in Point: Adobe Systems

Software giant Adobe Systems began testing the waters of Real-time Website Content Versioning in early 2011, using industry vertical, account size, and even individual company name as the basis for personalized content targeting. According to the project managers at Adobe, deploying IP mapping to auto-fill banner ads and webpages with content that relates specifically to the identity of the individual browser or visitor has thus far produced some impressive results.

Like all marketers, Adobe has traditionally been limited to using generic and broadly applicable offers and headlines in the online channel. Combining Real-time Website Content Versioning technology with its own image rendering system, Adobe Scene 7, while also pulling information from a content optimization plug-in called Test and Target, Adobe is now able to serve up highly targeted messages and offers.

For example, a headline that may have read: “How sophisticated is your online marketing?” can now, depending on the industry profile of the website visitor, read: “How sophisticated is your online marketing for retailers?” or “How sophisticated is your online marketing for travel and hospitality?”

According to Jeff Fuhriman, senior manager, Interactive Conversion Optimization, targeted headlines consistently yield a significant conversion lift over the generic versions. “In most of the A/B tests, offers targeted specifically by industry generate a call-to-action lift of 5-15%,” he says. “We’re now optimizing the funnel metrics to get down more into the sales opportunities and sales-accepted leads and, ultimately, revenue. Any time we’re able to increase our conversion rate on those offers, we’ll typically see a lift further down the funnel.”

Clearly, there’s still work to be done. To date, for example, Adobe has been successful in matching traffic on less than a quarter of website visitors. That percentage is likely to increase over time as the IP mapping library continues to grow.

Adobe has experimented with account identification not only by industry but also by company name on external display media on sites like Clickz and eMarketer. In some instances, a call-to-action would promote a guide with the message that it had been specifically prepared for, say, Hewlett-Packard. “We’re going to continue run these programs because we know that they create more relevant content for users,” says Fuhriman. “We don’t have significant findings down towards the bottom of the funnel but it’s hard for us to come up with that sort of significance for anything because the bottom of the funnel is so much bigger than the top.”

Adobe has also experimented with using Real-time Website Content Versioning to integrate auto-fill into registration forms, by pre-populating the forms with existing database information. “We’ve been able to shorten the form by making the fields that are populated disappear, allowing us to go from 12 fields down to 8,” says Fuhriman. “We’ve done a version where it looks the same, with the 8 fields, but all the fields that have been populated so people can see what’s been populated. The version that hid the fields completely provided a 33% lift for us, which is very impressive.”

“Combining Real-time Website Content Versioning technology with its own image rendering system, Adobe is now able to serve up highly targeted messages and offers.”
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