Content Digitization Strategy 101

Develop strategies that lead to effective transformation of your frontlist and better monetization of your backlist.

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John Corkery
Vice President, Client Development
and Market Research
DETI Group

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Half of all Americans now own some sort of smartphone or tablet device according to a recent Pew Research initiative. This is roughly similar to the number of Americans who own laptop computers, but the transition has occurred in over very few years, and these numbers are expected to double in coming years. This trend is largely what is driving most activity in the content business today. The ability to present meaningful content where and when it is requested and at a price that is acceptable is the challenge. Whether this means an increase in business, or just spreading around existing business is anyone's guess. But, it is becoming increasingly clear that content that is not digitized is not as valuable as content that is.

OVERVIEW

Digitization has become a necessity for content driven businesses. Many publishers have developed digitization strategies mainly as a reaction to market trends. Some have adopted a "wait and see" mindset betting that technology will improve and that prices will come down. This may have been a good strategy in the early adoption era. However, it is likely that technology has "hardened-off" at this point, and that the pricing for both technology and offshore services are about as low as they are going to get, and may even start trending in the upward direction.

This white paper is entitled "Content Digitization Strategies 101" and provides a basic view of methods to manage digitization and best practices for approaching the techniques and technology that supports content now and into the future.

AN APPROACH TO THE DIGITIZATION QUESTION

Ownership of tablets and e-reading devices has grown from 18% in late 2011 to 33% in late 2012.

Digitization is not just another trend happening in the content industry.

The term "content industry" represents what is happening to the publishing and media markets in general; the neat lines that used to exist between the two industries are becoming blurry. This is true of all content and information verticals; there is a great mashup occurring, which is of true benefit to some and is crushing others. How you approach the digitization question will play a large part in how you fare in this mashup, and the certain mashups to come.

Digitizing your content is one of the necessary costs of admission to be able to play in this marketplace. The following concepts must be part of any content management and publishing plan:

- How you develop content that has a high digital readiness factor
- Strategies for reclaiming content that does not have a high digital readiness factor
- Planning to upgrade legacy content that is not digital into digital readiness
- How you manage, store, and distribute your digital ready content
- How do you maintain a focus on business value as a guide to all these activities

DIGITAL READINESS - KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT

In order to know what you want, it always pays (as Stephen Covey has always said) to begin with the end in mind. When it comes to digitization nothing could be more important. The goal is to have content that has high value and is ready to be easily transformed, in as few steps as possible, into a readily consumable product. This isn't always as simple as it sounds, or as some conversion vendors would like you to believe. Planning is key at this stage, or you'll end up with a "one-off" that doesn't have enduring business value, and will require re-conversion at a later time for additional use. Sometimes the "one-off" strategy is appropriate, especially if you think that is all you will need the content for; however, it is always best to think things through and get quotes both ways if you have any doubts.

Digital readiness factor means your content is within a couple steps of being in the final output format.

Let's say your intended audience is a doctor who only cares about reading PDFs on his laptop; then your digitization effort is pretty simple. But, how about when that same doctor, who now carries a tablet as his main work tool has decided he prefers eBooks to PDFs? It is not a major problem to convert to ePub format. But what about when that doctor brings your content to the attention of a major insurance provider who wants to buy a feed of specific XML from you, and they are offering quite a generous price to do so? Well, if you had a crystal ball that might have been an easy call. Few publishers ever know what potential uses content will be called to, and where future license opportunities may lead. This is the first part of developing a digital readiness strategy.

A **digital readiness factor** is the concept of being within a couple steps of an automated or semi-automated output to the final product. This could include an output or product that you didn't know about, and that your CEO has just decided she can't live without. This is the basic strategy for the frontlist, but also speaks of the baseline goal for your general digitization strategy.

This doesn't mean that you adopt the "uber-XML" standard and convert everything into that format. But it does mean that you should take a realistic approach to developing content model specifications of your content as a beginning step. By defining content model specs you have a starting point for discussion with any vendor you engage, whether they are a conversion vendor or a content management software developer. It also provides you with a valuable benchmark to refer to should anything change. This is a positive step that will not leave you a technology orphan, but will make you a hero when your CEO decides (unexpectedly) to launch in a new product direction.

SOME STEPS TO DEVELOPING CONTENT WITH A HIGH DIGITAL-READINESS FACTOR

1. **Talk to your marketing people!** I can't tell you how many times we have discovered that the two ends of the house don't talk to each other about important topics like this. Discuss what your marketing people may wish to do with the content. It will help both of you when it comes budget time if you have a

unified approach. Having a more unified approach spreads the risk around and there is no shortage of that these days.

2. **Know thy market.** It is imperative to know your market, to know your competition, and to know the trends, which are coming faster and more furious now. You should approach the market from both ends and exchange information with your aforementioned marketing team. You will learn things your marketing team can't by talking to your counterparts at other content houses.

3. **Make a list.** List all the things that are being done by your competition, then go outside your realm and look for parallel content markets that are doing things a little differently. Think about potential new future content product directions with your marketing people. This exercise is to inform what your content model should look like and what might be profitable directions you hadn't thought of previously. Be ready to include finance, technology and operations in the discussions, too. It never hurts to have input and it will add credibility to your ideas when you share with others.

"Unstructured content is costly, complex, and does not generate a competitive advantage."

4. **Adopt a content model.** A content model is a consistent structure applied to unstructured content, which makes the content machine readable and therefore able to be transformed into a variety of digital formats. Why model content? Well as Anne Mulcahy, former CEO of Xerox once pointed out: *"Unstructured content is stupid and old-fashioned. It's costly, complex and does not generate a competitive advantage."* The competitive advantage is the ability to automate transformation of content to forms that can be used by new products or otherwise.

5. **Apply structure to your content.** Whether you apply it at the beginning of your content development process, in the middle or at the end you want structured documents that define your content in a consistent manner. Good conversion, technology, and consulting partners can help you achieve this effectively, efficiently, and on time.

6. **Manage your content.** Now that you have structured documents you will want to be able to safely store them, search them, edit, and annotate (metadata) them. This rich content is efficient to work with and is a source of profitability that your new marketing friends and that CEO of yours is going to love.

PLANNING FOR LEGACY CONTENT UPGRADES INTO DIGITAL READINESS

Planning to bring the backlist into the digital realm is not always deemed to be profitable and may not be desirable. For some content it just doesn't make sense. Some backlist content will never go further than an ePub (in which case that "one-off" strategy we spoke of earlier does make sense). As with the frontlist strategy, the first step should be to confer with the cross-functional team to determine what the value of the titles might be to the business.

1. **Test, test, test.** This is rather simple, but it is often overlooked. You should have a good business model for ROI on any products you are looking to bring back in a new digital form. Ask your marketing team to help you perform market tests and analysis for a particular product, series, or author. Don't be afraid to see what's hot in your competitors' list.

2. **Measure up front.** Metrics are important in digitization as elsewhere, and so are getting the right metrics to measure. Sample test half a dozen titles if you are unsure. Don't forget to include your conversion vendor in on your plan. They might offer you A/B type pricing: A = if you do all the titles in your list, B = is your test fails and you don't end up doing the list.

3. **Plan.** Planning helps everyone, and it should save you money with your vendors. Here is a short list of things to consider:

   a. Prepare an overview document of the content set, including size, state (i.e., what shape is the input content in? Is it digital or will it need to be scanned, can it be destroyed or are they one-of-a-kind, etc.). Set expected due dates and other factors (i.e., web prep, scripting, development, etc.) including a list of deliverable formats, quality expectation levels (99.995%?), and delivery method (FTP, CMS, etc.).

   b. Include a set of sample content that is an *accurate* representation of the difficulty. Request they provide an accurate estimate on this sample and provide the measurement (pages, kilo-characters, etc.).

   c. Prepare a good content specification document for the conversion people and set up a meeting to review.

   d. Create a project charter document that identifies all contacts with complete contact information, sets expectations and provides a clear change order process. Assign PM and QA people on your team. Have an escalation plan in the event of difficulties – your vendor should provide the same on their side.

   e. Have a project manager set up weekly status calls. This need only be a 30-minute call.

4. **Audit.** Plan to maintain consistent feedback loop with the vendor, but if anything should start to drop don't be afraid to request a process audit and, if necessary, a review of the project. If this is done early and right, it will help the vendor identify potential problems with personnel or process and this can help both of you avoid many headaches. Sorting out a troubled conversion job can take as much as twice the work and time as the original job.

5. **Metrics.** You should measure everything on the project especially soft costs associated with management overhead (i.e., how much additional time do your people have to invest in working with lowest cost vendor you could find, how much time are your QA people spending on errors, etc.). These things are rarely included in the ROI measurement, and should be. Are there processes that are taking your people too long that could potentially be automated through scripting or a transformation process running in a good content management system? Measurement can help to discover if you have any practices that are being underdone or overdone by your team (slackers and sticklers) and may indicate that automation or semi-automation could be helpful. A good conversion vendor will help with or handle much of the pain associated with soft-costs by delivering a better product which will cut down on quality

review, project management, team down-time and time to market, which is the ultimate measure of soft-cost adding up to hard-cost.

6. **Good Project Management.** It is very important. A good project manager will keep the project moving with minimal effort and will be timely in identifying risks and oversights (i.e., bottlenecks and the solution to fix them, etc.).

NEXT STEPS - MANAGE, STORE AND DISTRIBUTE YOUR DIGITAL READY CONTENT

The term content management system (CMS) is one of the most confused terms in the content business today. Wikipedia defines the term in the following way: *A content management system is a computer program that allows publishing, editing and modifying content as well as maintenance from a central interface. Such systems of content management provide procedures to manage workflow in a collaborative environment. These procedures can be manual steps or an automated cascade.* Today there are a hundreds of CMS solutions for every conceivable use.

A CMS of some kind should be on your list if you don't have one available currently. It should be more than simply a WebCMS – or a tool adapted specifically for web content. Even if you have a CMS, it may not be adequate to meet your needs. Consider an audit of your current capabilities and other potential opportunities, uses and other business requirements. From there create a plan of action for making your newly digitized content manageable and capable, with your CMS bringing great new value to your company.

A few things are certain operating a content-centered business today; budgets are shrinking, and so are turn times, which leaves a slim margin for error. At the same time expectations for richer quality products are on the rise. Running your business without a plan or a way to measure results is becoming very risky. Perhaps more important, is the fact that content that is well modeled and structured is much closer to those great revenue opportunities that your CEO is hungry for. Be ready for them when they come!

About Data Conversion Laboratory

DCL (www.dclab.com) is a leader in organizing, converting, and moving content to modern formats for wide access and new revenue streams. With expertise across many industries, DCL's proprietary technology matched with US-based project management teams solve clients' complex conversion challenges securely, accurately and on-time. Serving businesses, government, nonprofits and individuals by future-proofing their content, DCL started in 1981 and has been named as one of the Top 100 Companies in the Digital Content Industry: The 2012-2013 EContent 100, for the 2nd year running.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Data Conversion Laboratory
Linda Morone
SVP of Sales & Marketing
(718) 307-5728
LMorone@dclab.com
www.dclab.com

About DETI Group

DETI Group is a leading publishing industry consulting group. They provide digital publishing guidance using a systematic multidisciplinary approach. Helping publishers to reinvigorate their businesses by increasing transparency, and evaluating digital readiness factors to chart the optimal course. DETI Group integrates process improvements across functions and disciplines for maximum effect. Executives benefit from a consistent set of meaningful metrics. Content teams develop efficient and adaptable means to form products without being mired in proprietary or inflexible solutions. DETI Group's iterative approach ensures minimal disruption to current business processes, and success at every stage.

CONTACT INFORMATION

DETI Group
John Corkery
VP of Client Development & Market Research
(508) 851-0684
john.corkery@deti-group.com
www.deti-group.com

About RSuite CMS

RSuite CMS is a content management system used to create, store, manage, and deliver content. RSuite CMS serves some of the world's leading publishing organizations, including Oxford University Press, British Standards Institution, Elsevier Health Science, Wolters Kluwer, American Society for Training and Development, Nature Publishing Group, LexisNexis Pacific, SAGE Publications, Macmillan Higher Education, and many more. Learn how RSuite CMS can help your organization overcome today's publishing challenges.

CONTACT INFORMATION

RSuite CMS
Marianne Calilhanna
Director of Marketing
mcalilhanna@rsicms.com
www.rsicms.com