

Win in the flat world

Microsites that Click: Reaching the Target, Ramping up Online Response

– Duane Lyons

Abstract

Microsites – campaign-specific ‘websites within websites’ – provide a critical tool for online marketers seeking a focused approach to reach their target customers and generate healthy response and sales. Implementing microsites, however, involves challenges of strategy, approach and technology. This paper discusses the issues that need to be addressed and the Infosys approach to building a successful microsites solution.



Overview

Without a sound online marketing strategy in the connected world, the best organizations can flounder. Companies leveraging online marketing face a host of challenges that include providing consumers the precise information they seek, analyzing the needs of their customers and responding to them in near real time.

When online shoppers click on a paid search term, they expect to land on Web pages that contain the relevant information and contact details for further action. Instead, reaching irrelevant general product pages or corporate home pages can be discouraging. This directly impacts the response rate resulting in reduced sales.

To address this, marketing organizations need to build campaign specific websites with relevant information linked to the main product site with a clear 'call to action'. This has led to the birth of the microsite.

For online marketers, microsites present an important tool for advertising their products to the targeted consumers. A microsite is a separate page of a website used to promote or describe a product or service that is featured in the parent site. The microsite's URL is different from that of its parent site. Consumers are directed to these microsites either through the emails that they receive from marketers, by a search result, by clicking on banner ads, or typing in a URL displayed in an offline advertising campaign.

This enables interested consumers to quickly scan the microsite for the required information instead of wasting time on the parent site. Thus, microsites facilitate effective online advertising and help improve campaign response rates.

For example, a computer manufacturer can create a microsite to promote a new product, a testimony from a product user, or one that engages prospective buyers in an interactive product demonstration.

An art gallery website could put up a microsite with vignettes from a forthcoming exhibition and inform frequent visitors through an email with the microsite's URL.

Microsites have a short, campaign-specific life-cycle and can be removed from Web servers once the promotion is over.

According to a recent E-Commerce Times report, the use of promotional microsites will grow most strongly among the largest advertisers in the coming year. "While only 30 percent of companies whose annual revenues exceed US\$500 million used promotional microsites in the past year, 45 percent of such companies plan to use them in the coming year," the report says.

Challenges

Although the concept is gaining popularity among advertisers, few organizations are equipped with the requisite strategy, tools and technology to develop, host and leverage microsites for online campaigns.

Considering that microsites are the destination for respondents who click on banner ads, third-party e-mails, organic search results, and paid search results, the content for the microsite must be campaign specific.

Further, the content must provide customers more than just price and availability. It should enable them to quickly find the product or solution they need, compare products, and make informed purchase decisions.

Considering that better content management can directly impact online sales, the job becomes even more challenging. To address this challenge, marketers need a customized solution that addresses the following requirements:

- **Web content management** – This component enables the web content team to keep pace with changing product details and ensure consistent, error-free content, helping customers find what they are looking for.
- **Pre-built, customizable templates with reusable components** – Marketers managing multiple campaigns need to effect frequent changes to microsites (to market additional products or to highlight upgrades for existing products). This means that time to market is critical for microsites.
- **Approval workflow** – Besides web designers, other roles are involved in building microsites. Beyond creating and publishing web pages to a live website, it involves reviewing the pages from marketing and legal standpoints.
- **Publishing capability** – Following the green signal from marketing and legal, the pages need to be ready for publishing.
- **Integration with marketing automation tools** – Campaign-specific pages need to be designed in parallel to the building of the campaign within a campaign management tool.
- **Microsite visitor analysis** – Analytics to measure campaign and microsite effectiveness

Infosys Solution

The Infosys Microsite Architecture Frameworks (IMAF) helps build campaign-specific microsites that enable marketers to reach their target audiences with significantly higher response rates.

IMAF incorporates all components critical to a successful microsite solution based upon the Microsoft SharePoint Server 2007 platform

Infosys' approach to building this customized solution includes:

- Assessment phase – 2-3 week requirement discovery initiative
- Implementation – 6 to 14 week customization phase to build an IMAF that meets the client's specific needs.

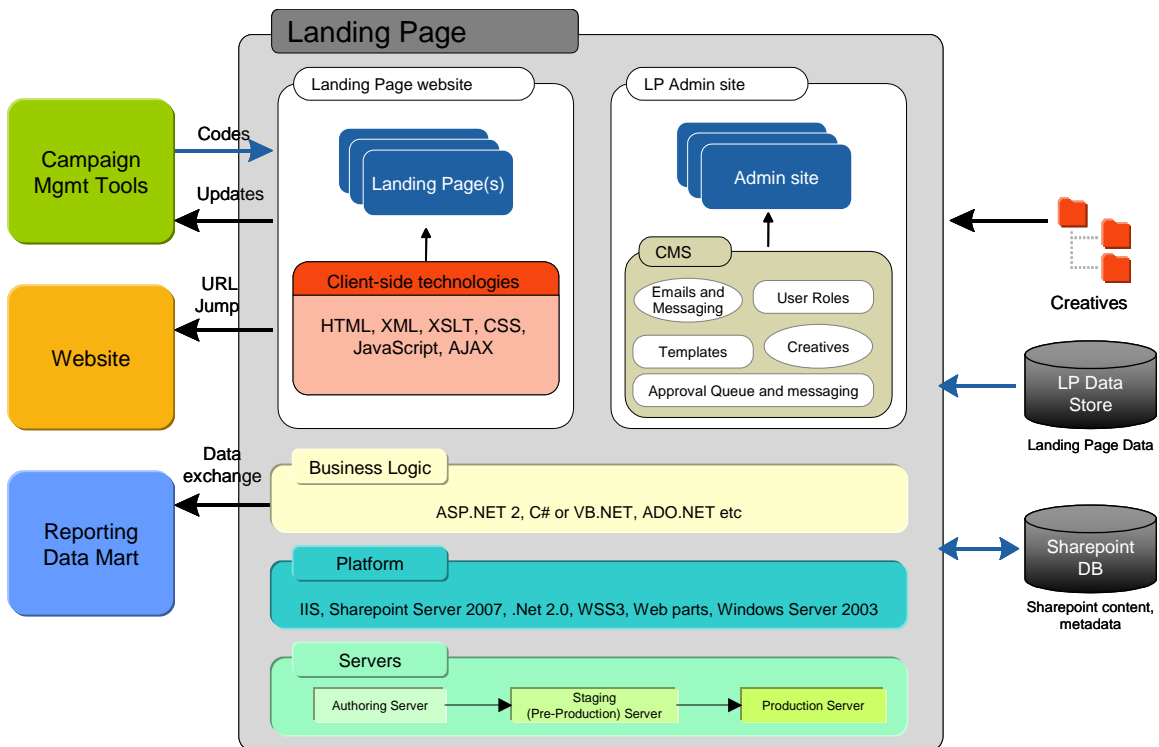


Figure 1: Infosys Microsite Architecture Frameworks (IMAF)

IMAF's six key components are architected as follows:

Web Content Management - Sharepoint Server 2007 has a content management tool as an in-built component that stores graphics, frequently used text, etc., for quick retrieval. Such built-in components enable marketers to rapidly deploy customized microsites in response to market needs.

Pre-built, customizable templates with reusable components - Availability of pre-built, customizable templates with reusable components makes it easy for marketers to quickly build customized, campaign-specific sites. Infosys works closely with clients to understand their needs and define templates, including a library of reusable components.

Approval workflow – Infosys Web designers build the microsite pages that are then reviewed from the marketing and legal standpoint. IMAF maintains this workflow from designing to production with email-based alerts for all roles involved.

Publishing capability – Once the completed pages are approved from the marketing and legal standpoint, they are ready for production. IMAF supports this by utilizing Sharepoint Server 2007 functionality to promote the pages from development all the way to the production environment.

Integration with marketing automation tools – IMAF tracks anonymous visitors by tracking various factors such as number of visitors for a page, number of visitors performing some specific action on that page, names and addresses of the individuals, etc. In case of known respondents, IMAF supports the concept of embedding the individual's unique ID within the URL redirect that sent them to the microsite. As a result, IMAF can track all actions by an individual on a microsite.

Microsite visitor analysis - Respondents who visit campaign-specific pages can fall in two categories - known and unknown respondents:

- Unknown individuals are usually those who visit microsites by clicking on banner ads while browsing, through third party emails, by clicking on paid search results, or clicking on organic search results.
- The known quantity comprises individuals who respond to emails sent by the marketing organization.

A client recently requested a template with a “call to action” component. The “call to action” component includes buttons for the following functionality:

- *“Click here to view a product video...”*
- *“Click here to register for this special promotion...”*
- *“Click here to order this product”*
- *“Click here to view a white paper on...”*

Another client requested a component that allows respondents to input name and contact information (to be stored in the underlying database). These components can be easily incorporated into the templates using ‘drag & drop’ functionality, allowing marketers to quickly build pages.

Benefits

In addition to dramatically improving response rates, microsites deliver additional benefits such as:

- Reduced IT costs to support campaign-specific Web development
- Higher placement on organic search results for specific keywords. Too often, marketers jump right into paid search without exploring search engine optimization as it relates to organic search results.
- Shorter cycle times for campaign creation, enabling execution of more campaigns
- Increased ability to collect additional useful information about customers. For example, allowing (or requiring) existing customers to answer a survey before letting them access a white paper
- Ability to prevent cluttering of the corporate website with additional pages that are not consistent with overall branding strategy

Conclusion

With the help of Infosys's IMAF, marketing organizations have significantly improved response rates achieving the goal of generating sales. Further, it has enabled clients to build cost-effective and campaign-specific websites that capture customer data and provide insights into the mind of the consumer.

About the author

Duane Lyons is a Senior Engagement Leader with Infosys Consulting and has 15 years' experience in customer operations and Business Intelligence. His expertise is in Database Marketing and Business Intelligence strategies. In addition, Duane is a frequent speaker at numerous national and regional marketing conferences. He can be reached at Duane_Lyons@Infosys.com

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