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One Web Image

Creating a uniform look and feel – one company, one Web image.

It wasn't that long ago. Remember when you first brought up your company's Web site? It had a nice picture of corporate headquarters and your logo on the home page. Then you realized you should put product brochures up there. And it started to get a little more serious. Now you had a central team that worked with the product groups to put up all the pages. And the site looked good. Pages all looked the same. It was easy to navigate. Then, everything changed.

Suddenly everyone wanted their product on the site. Your central team couldn't keep up with new products. Then everyone started to use these easy authoring tools – HotMetal to ColdFusion – with every temperature in between. In the race to get a broad presence, you decided to decentralize the Web site. "Let the lines of business put up their own pages. They are closer to the products and they can manage their own launches." And you thought that was good.

Importance of a consistent user experience

And it was, for a while. But as time has gone by, you're starting to notice that three of the product groups have their own e-commerce facilities. Every part of the site has a different look and feel. And you're hearing complaints from customers that it's hard to find things. Just to be sure, you run some usability tests, confirming that your visitors are confused.

IBM "Call-Me" functionality provides a real-world represen-tative to support a customer's virtual experience.

The art of consistency:
One company, one Web image.

IBM faced just this problem a few years ago. Each product group did their own thing across a multi-million-page site. It was expensive and inconsistent and it wasn't working. To move to the next level as an e-business required a consistent user experience across the site.

Customer's viewpoint – What would you do?

First, it was important to look at the situation from the customer's viewpoint. Customers were coming to the Web site, but they also interacted with IBM through other channels. Research showed that customers who used the Web also contacted IBM frequently by phone. So, cross-promotion looked like a natural. Display the phone number on the Web site and play the Web address during the on-hold phone message. Could more be done? Last year, the Call-Me button was introduced, so that Web visitors needing help can get a call from IBM within five minutes.

Integrating the Web and phone channels make a more unified customer experience.

But how would you unify the Web experience itself? Every product group had its own Web site and each looked like a separate company. It wasn't realistic to go back to a centralized model, but clearly some kind of central control was needed. In 1997, IBM established a central organization to manage the top-level pages of the site and established a governance model to set and enforce company-wide standards.

Single look and feel

IBM established a single look-and-feel across the site in 1999. Trying to get each product group to rework the pages and promote them all the same day was a bit like herding cats, but the results were dramatic. Over the years, user research has continued to inform changes to our site-wide navigation template and standards, which IBM updates twice a year.

Today, IBM is focusing on initiatives that improve visitor experiences through improved content. A major area needing standardization was the landing experience,

the first page a visitor sees when coming to the site from a banner ad or other promotion. Studies
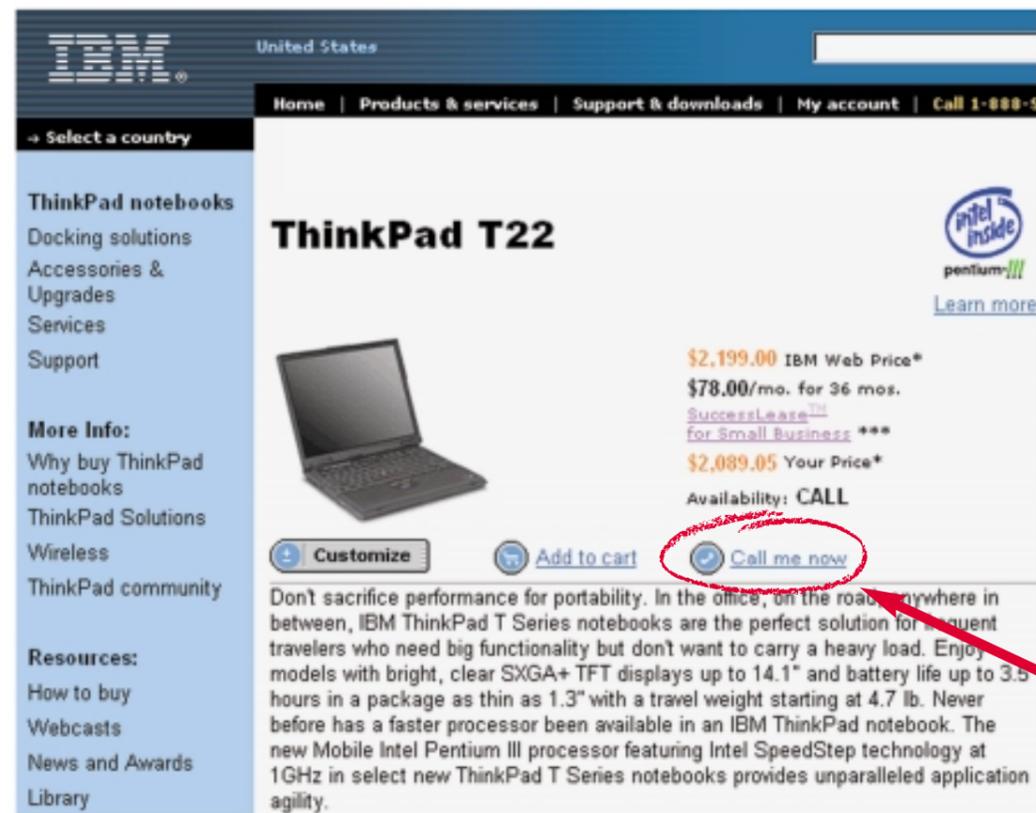
CRM is NOT primarily about technology.

Buying and integrating a best-of-breed CRM system will not necessarily lead to best-of-breed CRM practices and programs. Successful CRM involves strategy, tactics, processes, and skills, and is powered by technology. It is necessary to have the business clarity and focus, not just the technology, to support your CRM objectives and facilitate reaching the business goals of your company.

You should start by identifying your most valuable customers. CRM requires priority and focus. The biggest gains usually come from learning more about your best customers' behavior, expectations, attitudes and interests. It is only through a deeper level of understanding that companies are able to create and sustain real value for their best customers.

were convincing us of the need to make that first page look visually similar to the ad that drove the visitor to the site, whether a click from a banner, a television spot, or a print ad, to provide continuity and reassurance to continue. At IBM, we expect the adoption of these standards to markedly improve the conversion rate of visitors who click through banners to come to the site. (See next page.)

Importance of quality content

Another company-wide push is improving content quality. IBM's WebMiner service is used on ibm.com to identify pages with broken links, missing titles and descriptions, and other problems. Monthly scorecards show improvement for each product group and detailed reports allow individual problem pages to be targeted and fixed. Improving broken links reduces abandonment, while repairs to titles and descriptions improve search results.

These efforts are a natural continuation for ibm.com, as a governance model continues to evolve to allow a large, decentralized site to deliver a consistent, quality experience called "OneIBM." To do so, we are guided by four directives which are simple to say, hard to execute, but are key to customer satisfaction:

- Think like your customer.
- Set standards to improve customer experience.
- Monitor compliance.
- Continuously improve. &

This must be the place. Whether driven to the Web by print, TV or banner, IBM customers are greeted by highly-related landing pages that keep the engagement going. As shown by this print ad for servers (above) and the related Web page (below).