Rich Media Best Practices

1. ***Look to rich media as a way to enhance your customers' experience.*** As online consumers are becoming more sophisticated, they are going to expect a richer user experience. Your competition may already be utilizing rich media to enhance their site and increase competitive advantage. Rich media technologies are both an online merchandising tool and a way to differentiate you as a trusted leader.

2. ***Think carefully to find candidates for rich media.*** Technologies such as AJAX, Flex, and Flash can make the user experience dynamic and engaging. However, these technologies must be used carefully and in the right places, so not to affect other critical functionality, such as SEO, website performance, and data analytics.

3. ***Rich media assets may need to be managed across your company***. Since digital assets can include commercials, demos, customer service presentations, etc., several departments may need to be involved. Digital asset management systems can be used.

4. ***Rich media can be used effectively when selling complex products.*** Product configuration applications can be used to guide the user through the customization process. These applications help the user select desired and valid options, while seeing their selections graphically represented. An example of this is selecting the color of a shirt and seeing it displayed in that color. Applications that help customers visualize their purchase will increase their confidence to buy. Configuration applications usually require some form of rich media technology to deliver this type of complex user experience.

5. ***Add rich media online to increase offline purchases.*** More users are researching products online before they purchase them in the store. Online brand messaging and comprehensive product details are becoming crucial in engaging customers and driving sales, online and offline. Rich media usages such as brand messaging, product commercials, high-res product images, video and audio will help influence the customer.

6. ***Build your assets to use dynamic parameters.*** Parameterized Flash movies are an effective way to dynamically change the content of Flash movies with configurable XML files and eliminate the need to rebuild the Flash asset. This technique will help reuse assets.

7. ***Try to get video product tours built for your key products***. Video product tours help a site promote key products and sell them effectively by showing how the product performs, looks, uses, etc. If you can, try to add relevance to the videos by having well-known or celebrity customers demonstrate them (e.g., a professional photographer demonstrating a camera). Be sure to test the placement of this media on your site.

8. ***Review the download speeds for your customers.*** Rich media means the content is larger so the delivery of the content to the users must be optimized for the internet. Storage and bandwidth management must be able to scale to your users as broadband usage increases.

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Rich Media Key Questions to Ask Providers

Company

1. How long have you been in this business?
2. How many customers have you sold? How many have left your company, and why?
3. What peripheral or supporting services do you offer?

Products/Services

1. Is your solution offered as perpetual licensed software or on-demand multi-tenant solution?

   If perpetual license:
   a. What are the hosting requirements?
   b. What should I expect regarding upgrades (both timing and pain)?
   c. Do you provide customization/implementation services?
   d. Can outside third parties provide customization/implementation?

   If SAAS/ASP:
   a. Do all tiers include maintenance and support?
   b. How often are new features introduced?
   c. What do I do if I need a feature you don't have or plan to have soon?
2. What optional services do you provide as part of your solution?
3. How long to implement a basic solution? A sophisticated one?
4. What ROI should I expect from implementing your solution?
5. What type of training do you provide to use your solution?
6. What skills does my organization (or hired third party) need to implement your solution?
7. What technical support services are available?
   a. Are there human beings I can reach during reasonable hours (chat or phone) or do I have to wait over 24 hours for an email response or callback?
   b. Is your support team located in the US? What is your SLA for support issues?
8. Do you have a support knowledge base, community forum, or applications that are shared by customers?
9. Which third party product technology ecommerce platform providers have you worked with in the past?

Features

1. What key features are included in your solution?
   a. What features are currently missing? What is on your roadmap?
   b. What features does management love? Shoppers love?
2. What is your product's competitive advantage over other packages? Why?
   a. Price? Features? Ease of use? Flexibility? Don't say "all of the above".
3. Please describe your capabilities in the following areas: Product zoom and rotating images, product configuration wizards, flash/flex, shopping assistants, other.
   a. What tools does your solution include to help me build and integrate these?
4. With which browsers and OS is your solution compatible?
5. What information do you need from my team for them to use your tool (image resolution, data, etc.)?
6. How does your platform integrate with ecommerce, CMS, analytics and back-office systems?
   a. Please list the applications for which you have standard integrations already built.
   b. Please list the applications where you have built custom integrations.
7. Do you have a management console? Is it web-based, application-based, other?
   a. Does it include tools to manage and modify images, catalogs, etc.?
   b. Does it include reporting and a dashboard?
      i. Please describe your reporting capabilities and how your solution can report against usage of rich media elements vs. online ordering metrics.
      ii. Please provide a list of standard reports.
   c. What else can I do with it?

Pricing

1. What is the license fee (if perpetual license)?
2. What are the pricing schedules and what features do they include (if SAAS/ASP)?
3. How do you charge for annual support? What about maintenance?
4. Are there any additional fees (e.g., implementation, transaction costs, revenue sharing)?

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