AN EVALUATION OF THE WEB PRESENCE OF A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Using the Balanced Scorecard Approach in Ecommerce

Ayman Abuhamdieh, Julie E. Kendall and Kenneth E. Kendall

Indiana State University, Rutgers University, and Rutgers University

Abstract: How can a nonprofit organization determine the strategic importance of its Web presence and what is the best methodology for doing so? This study uses a combined qualitative and quantitative approach called the Balanced Scorecard (also referred to as BSC) (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). The Manhattan Theatre Club (MTC) is a not-for-profit organization operating in the performing arts industry and is used as a case study here.

Our study makes a contribution to the ecommerce literature in that it systematically extends and adapts the BSC methodology to the study of nonprofit organizations; applies the BSC approach in an original way to help with the formulation of ecommerce strategy; determines through the use of the BSC that establishing and maintaining a Web presence can hold potentially great strategic value for a nonprofit organization; and provides a case study of an actual nonprofit organization's Web presence.

Key words: ecommerce, ebusiness, nonprofit, Web site, Web presence, Balanced Scorecard

1. INTRODUCTION

How can an organization determine the strategic importance of its Web presence? Organizations in general and not-for-profit ones in particular have limited resources. They need to determine the best way to allocate limited resources to key projects as well as for information technology. Creating and supporting a viable and strong Web presence could cost from several thousands to several millions, depending on the size and capacity of the organizational Web operations.

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Organizational Web presence targets several groups of the organization's constituency, including customers, suppliers, and the general public. It provides different information to each of these groups. For example, customers may find technical and support sections for the products or services they have purchased, suppliers may have special access to the organization's extranet for the smooth operation of the mutual business relationship, and the general public may find general information about the organization and its activities.

While the strategic importance of creating an ecommerce Web site for profit making businesses is becoming clearer, nonprofit organizations are confronted with a different set of circumstances. This exploratory case study attempts to answer the question of what is the strategic importance of Web presence for not-for-profit organizations, and also what is the best methodology to determine this?

The strategic importance of organizational Web presence is addressed in many trade magazines, but the literature is void of systematic studies on the assessment of the strategic importance of organizational Web presence, and the best approach to determine this.

This paper examines these questions in detail through a combined qualitative and quantitative approach called the Balanced Scorecard (also referred to as BSC) (Kaplan and Norton, 1992 and 1996). The Manhattan Theatre Club (or MTC) is a not-for-profit organization operating in the performing arts industry and is used as a case study to answer the research questions posed here. In addition to using the Balanced Scorecard to answer our research questions, managerial, technical and aesthetic assessment of the existing MTC Web site was completed; as were in-depth interviews with administrative and artistic staff from MTC.

2. THE CONCEPT OF WEB PRESENCE

Only a handful of researchers have considered the concept of Web presence, by which we mean establishment of an accessible Web site on the Internet. Their studies to date have by and large been considering ecommerce Web presence for profit making businesses. Only a subset of these studies are empirical in nature. Rather, much of the existing literature comes to us through trade journals and other types of publications suitable for Web designers and other practitioners, rather than researchers who are trying to gain an overall view of Web presence.

The concept of Web presence deserves some attention. In this paper we use the terms Web site and Web presence interchangeably, with the caveat that Web presence can be a humble personal home page created with

Microsoft Front page templates, or it can be a complex, unified, aesthetic, and diverse corporate ecommerce site that includes thousands of pages, links, multimedia content, and interactivity (Dern, 1995).

There are currently few published empirical studies that have examined the relationship between the organization's Web presence and its strategy and overall goals, nor does there seem to be any published research efforts to study the effects of the organization's Web presence on its operations and activities. Limited studies have been conducted on the evaluation of the Web site of the organization. One proposal for studying the strategic importance of Web sites can be found in Abuhamdieh, Kendall and Kendall (2000).

Early trade articles Lyons, (1995), suggest that even though the Web can lower some organizational costs of doing business, the benefits are not necessarily easily apparent, nor are they quantifiable. Despite the lower costs of being present on the Web, the benefits to organizations are not clear-cut, and they are difficult to quantify. Even though the difficulty of quantifying the organization's Web presence is roundly acknowledged, as is the difficulty of completing an objective overall evaluation of Web presence effectiveness, a number of articles presented evaluations of the startup costs of an organization's Web site. Wingfield (1996) estimated that the cost of building a Web site, as reported by the companies responding to a survey, as between \$840,000 to \$1.5 million dollars. Other estimates of building a corporate Web site ranges from \$250,000 to \$1 million dollars (Beck, 1998). In any event, these are only estimates, and the actual numbers depend on many variables, such as the complexity and size of the site, the type of interactivity included in it, and a host of other variables.

In contrast, to begin a business with only a Web site certainly need not cost that much, where the cost of the software, the registration name of the site, the space on the host server of a hosting company might be the only startup costs. In fact this can be very inexpensive, even falling below the \$1,000 dollar mark. Indeed, this minimal barrier to entry is one of the attractions of starting a business on the Web and having a presence on it (Johnson, 1995).

One method for organizations to learn about the World Wide Web (WWW) community is through their employees. The employees educate themselves about the Web, how to navigate and operate on it, then they introduce it to the organization they are working in. After that the organization might send employees on training sessions to remedy the deficiencies they have in their Web skills (Krakowka, 1997).

Other organizational developers are more concerned with the benefits the organization would accrue as a result of being on the Web, such as having a two-way communication between the organization and its customers (Friedman, 1995), having a better image and better customer relations,

because the organization will be seen as coping with the trend of being on the Web along with the other organizations, and customers can communicate with the organization through its Web site (Lyons, 1995).

There are several advantages organizations realize by being on the Web (Dolgenos, 1996) mentions that being on the Web is relatively inexpensive, and there is a huge potential for local and international readership, along with the ability to integrate the multimedia attributes of audio and video into the Web site.

Disadvantages include limitations of the bandwidth capabilities of the users who are downloading the information or the graphics from the site. If users possess a slow connection, or if there is a high volume of users, users will be frustrated waiting for information to download. If the Web site of the organization is not widely registered with a variety of search engines, then it might be difficult to find it. In order to gain repeat visits after getting them there initially, it is important to make the site as up to date, informative, entertaining and as easy to use as possible. This requires the constant updating and careful maintenance by the Webmaster or the team responsible for the site.

Several practitioner-oriented journals provide advice and guidelines for the development and maintenance of Web sites. These include the need to make frequent updates to the Web site since it reflects the image of the organization (Greiner, 1998); putting a Web team in charge of the site, rather than a solitary Webmaster; learning from other sites by examining their strengths and weaknesses, and providing value to users who visit the site (Marken, 1997; Wilson, 1997). Using meaningful and colorful icons; providing maps for the site, improving ease of navigation; and developing rich content are additional guidelines for the design and maintenance of the Web site (Frenza and Hoffman, 1997).

There are also many experience-based suggestions for ways to use the Web presence of the organization. These include: as a means of feedback from the customers; consumer education; persuasion of customers; public relations to represent the organization's perspective; customer service and support (Marken, 1997); and marketing (Ditto and Pille, 1998; Bush et al., 1998). Although experience suggests that organizations are using their Web sites for these purposes, little research has been published on the effectiveness of this medium, nor is there much research in print that examines this medium as a marketing strategy (Bush et al. 1998).

The exact determination of the Web in terms of the functions that it can perform will determine its uses for the organization. The suggested functions mentioned above, and actual uses by the organizations are important touch stones that help inform this decision.

The Web is a channel through which an organization can tell the outside environment about what it is doing, why it is doing it, and what it can do to help satisfy the needs of its constituency. It is a way for the outside world to view the organization, and it is a way for the organization to look back the outside world.

This is a major change and often times an improvement over earlier methods of gathering and disseminating information. Organizations used to depend on traditional advertising methods in the media of TV, radio, and print ads. They used to depend on market research efforts that were either accomplished in-house or outsourced to other organizations. The Web has changed that forever. Now the organization can tell its customers and the outside world in general what it does directly, without any proxies, if it so chooses. At the same time, it can ask everyone who visits its Web site to give feedback on a variety of topics that are germane.

Hoffman, Novak, and Chatterjee (1995) presented a classification that categorized commercial Web sites into six distinct types: Online Storefronts, Internet Presence, Content, Mall, Incentive site, and Search Agent.

Kendall and Kendall (1999a and 1999b) demonstrated how both sides of the equation, end-users and organizations, are currently using the Web. They presented an original classification for Web pull and push technologies. Pull technologies are the different techniques used by Web users to get information from the Web. It stretches from surfing the Web, to having an ever-evolving Web agent that learns about users' needs and does the Web exploration and search independently. Push technologies are the different methods that deliver information to the Web users. They range from Webcasting to an advanced evolutionary filtering agent. They name these systems Information Delivery Systems or IDS.

This study is important in providing a basis for examining the relationship of the organization to its customers through its Web site. Customers will be using the different Web pull technologies to search for the information they need about the organization's activities, and organizations will be using Web push technologies to deliver information that they believe the consumers will need. Hence, knowing these classifications will help customers and organizations to determine what level of interaction they are in and how can they both maximize their level of effectiveness when using the Web to reach each other. Organizations can have a better reach to their customers if they have a good Web strategy. Should this strategy be separate from the overall organizational strategy, or should it be an essential part of it? And how can the organization's strategy be translated into measurable indicators?

3. NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Not-for-profit organizations need IT to better their operations and sustain a continued 'competitive advantage,' but many do not have their own IT staff because of their limited budgets. Also not-for-profit organizations do not have market value because they do not have stocks that are traded in the market; thus the reliance on economic theory might not be the right approach for not-for-profit organizations. This study uses a different approach by examining the internal capabilities of the organization through the Balanced Scorecard, Web site analysis, interviews and observation, and then tailoring a strategic use of information technology on the Web in the form of strategic organizational Web presence.

It is important to determine the intraorganizational factors necessary for deployment and use of IT in an organization. When these factors are determined, they could be manipulated and influenced to ascertain the desired effects of applying IT in the organization. Boynton, Zmud, and Jacobs (1994) examined the relationships between four constructs and their effect on IT use within the context of a large and complex organization: IT management climate, managerial IT knowledge, IT-management process effectiveness, and IT use. They report that managerial IT knowledge explained the most variance in high levels of IT use, and IT management climate affected both managerial IT knowledge and IT-management-process effectiveness. This implies that to achieve a successful implementation of IT within an organization, its management should possess a certain level of IT knowledge, in addition to the presence of a climate of support for IT implementation.

4. METHODOLOGY

A not-for-profit organization operating in the performing arts sector is investigated. The phenomenon of organizations, especially not-for-profits, of establishing Web sites is a new one, since the age of the Web itself is relatively new, and ecommerce is usually dated from the late 1990s. There are no theories or models that have described the strategic importance of having a Web presence. In addition, each organization has its strategic planning horizon, strategic planning process, and content. All of these factors indicate the use of a case study approach to successfully explore these questions. Benbasat, Goldstein, and Mead (1987) assert that the case study approach to scientific inquiry is most suitable for those problems where theory and research are at their beginning or early stages. They provide three reasons why case study research is a viable information system research strategy.

1. The researcher can examine an information system in its natural setting that would pave the ground for generating hypotheses about the phenomenon.
2. The case study approach is the most suitable methodology for answering “how” and “why” questions that are pursuing the understanding of the nature and complexity of a phenomenon, and
3. If few previous studies have been carried out to investigate that area then the case study approach could be used as an exploratory endeavor.

Yin (1984) describes the situation under which the case study has a distinct advantage over other research approaches, and that is when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 1984, p. 20, emphasis added).

The methods used to analyze the strategic importance of MTC’s Web presence could be grouped into two distinct dimensions: human and technical. The human dimension refers to MTC’s management, staff, and patrons; the technical refers to MTC’s Web presence, and the environmental refers to the organizational atmosphere where staff interacts.

Measuring the human dimension required the use of interviews, and structured observation (Kendall & Kendall, 1981). The interviews that were conducted with MTC management and staff opened up the way to understanding the relationship between management and staff and MTC’s Web presence. The personal interviews enabled the researchers to experience first hand the level and nature of the staff’s motivation level and individual-organization alignment. Also it provided the opportunity to understand some of the dimensions proposed by the Balanced Scorecard that measured MTC Web presence strategy implementation.

The second dimension measured by the methods used in this study is the technical dimension, which examined the technological aspect of the organization’s Web presence. We accomplished this by applying the techniques of the Balanced Scorecard approach described below.

4.1 The Balanced Scorecard approach

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) suggests going beyond the organization’s financial indicators as the only strategy measurement benchmark. Other dimensions that should be taken into consideration are the customers’ relationship with the business, the internal business process, and the learning and growth of the organization. Although this approach is addressing for-profit organizations, not-for-profit organizations could apply this approach after a reconsideration of the emphasis that should be put on the different dimensions used. Indeed, we believe that the BSC can help illuminate nonprofit

organizations, even though their objectives are not financial but rather service, community-oriented, and social ones. In addition, we believe that the BSC approach can be usefully extended to studying the strategic aspects of ecommerce. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship of the four dimensions to the Balanced Scorecard approach.

Figure 9. The elements of the Balanced Scorecard approach

5. THE MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

Manhattan Theatre Club, an off-Broadway, New York City theatre company, is a dynamic artistic organization that nurtures, produces and presents premier U.S. and international plays and musicals. It has grown since 1970 from a small, off-Broadway theatre into one of the most acclaimed theatrical organizations in the U.S. It is one of the foremost artistic institutions dedicated to producing innovative plays and musicals written by established and emerging U.S. and international playwrights. The administrative offices are

on west 43rd street, and there are two theatres (Stage I and Stage II) located at City Center on W. 55th Street.

Many of the New York, U.S., and world premiers created under MTC's auspices travel across the continent and around the world. MTC is committed to presenting theatre to the widest possible audience. It has won the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Achievement, Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Excellence and a Theatre World Award for Outstanding Achievement. The shows that it has sent to Broadway have also garnered coveted Tony (Antoinette Perry) awards. Recently, MTC purchased an historic Broadway theatre, the Biltmore, which it is restoring, in order to establish a Broadway presence as well as an off-Broadway one.

MTC's mission is to nurture and develop new talent in playwriting, musical composition, writing, directing, acting and design. It reaches out to young audiences with innovative programs in education and maintains a commitment to cultivate the next generation of theatre professionals through internship and professional training programs. This mission is critical for the development of new talents who are searching for an outlet and path to present their work. Hence, this mission is also critical for the continuation and development of theatre operations and shows oriented toward freedom of expression and innovative communication with a broad community. MTC constantly seeks innovative ways to bring theatre to a wider audience through extending the life of its productions in-house, transferring its productions to larger theatres and sometimes to Broadway, and co-producing plays with fellow institutions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE BALANCED SCORECARD ANALYSIS

The Balanced Score card facilitated our understanding of how a non-profit organization can achieve their strategic vision via establishing, maintaining, and updating a Web presence. In particular, there are specific changes that we are recommending to the Manhattan Theatre Club that will improve their Web site's appearance to their subscribers and patrons; changes that demonstrate use of the Web site to help meet financial objectives; improvements to business processes through added Web features that satisfy subscribers and patrons, and establishment of B2B channels; and we are recommending ways to use the Web site in order to help Manhattan Theatre Club artistic and administrative employees improve and change as they work to achieve their mission.

The following is a list of Web presence improvement items that we have generated based on our analysis using the BSC. In order for the Balanced

Scorecard approach to work effectively, these items should be captured and highlighted for management. These are the actions that will help the most in facilitating MTC's achievement of their mission. As these are the most pressing Web needs, MTC should turn their attention to these soon.

For continual improvement of the customer dimension, MTC needs to answer this question, "To achieve our vision, how should the MTC Web site appear to our subscribers and patrons?" MTC should take the following actions:

- Improve the MTC Web site structure so that it more closely matches the MTC mission
- Keep the content fresh, up to date, and directed towards MTC's subscribers and patrons
- Provide textual information about future productions and reviews of current productions
- Include current graphics and video clips
- Improve presentation by updating the entry screen
- Include more educational items and human interest stories
- Provide more links to relevant Web sites

In order to help meet the financial objectives and constraints it works under, MTC needs to answer this question, "To succeed financially, how should the MTC Web site contribute?" MTC should:

- Increase the subscriber base
- Ensure subscriber retention and involvement
- Increase the patron base
- Increase participation in the annual Gala and other special events through the Web site
- Encourage contributions for the new Broadway theatre through the Web site

In order to improve their internal business processes through their Web presence, MTC needs to answer this question, "To satisfy our subscribers and patrons, what business processes could we improve by our Web presence?" MTC should address the following points:

- Continue to redesign the website to represent our mission more clearly
- Use the Web site to continually improve MTC's image
- Ensure that the Web site is up to date at all times
- Provide ways to attract subscribers and patrons back to visit the Web site often
- Use the Web site to recruit volunteers
- Introduce moderated chat rooms for subscribers and patrons to talk with directors, actors, and playwrights

Growth and learning can be continued successfully if MTC answers this question, "To achieve our vision, how can we use the Web site to help MTC change and improve?" MTC would benefit by addressing the following points:

- Improve MTC's employee awareness of ecommerce
- Use the Web site for others objectives such as recruiting volunteers and interns
- Provide B2B opportunities with other theatres, actors, directors, and playwrights
- Use the site to communicate with designers and technicians
- Use the website for subscriber feedback
- Develop information assets about current or potential subscribers and patrons

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this study we have examined the strategic importance of Web presence for a nonprofit performing arts group called the Manhattan Theatre Club. While some ecommerce research is being conducted on the strategic importance of Web presence to profit-making organizations, there is little in the way of systematic study to demonstrate what the strategic value of such a Web site is for a nonprofit organization.

Nonprofit organizations traditionally face budget constraints and harbor value assumptions that often lead them to assign a low priority status to the use of information technology or the hiring of IT staff for Web-associated endeavors. In this study we attempted to address the lack of research on these issues by using a methodology that is both qualitative and quantitative called the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) to systematically assess the organization's Web presence on the dimensions of customer perspective, financial objectives, internal business process perspective; and organizational learning and growth. Our study makes a contribution in that it:

1. systemically extends and adapts the BSC methodology to the study of a nonprofit organization, although the Balanced Scorecard has been typically used to examine for-profit organizations;
2. applies the Balanced Scorecard approach in an original way to help with the formulation of ecommerce strategy, which is the first such application;
3. determines through the use of the BSC that establishing and maintaining a Web presence can hold potentially great strategic value for a nonprofit

organization and in so doing can help them integrate ecommerce applications into their work and also achieve their mission;

4. provides a case study of an actual nonprofit organization's Web presence, revealing that ecommerce must become an integral part of the nonprofit domain as well as becoming an important part of the for-profit corporate world.

The evidence gathered through the different methods used in this study point to the essential and strategic role MTC's Web presence plays. While that Web presence has not yet taken on its full role as a gateway for MTC's productions, presentations and patrons, it is going strongly in that direction.

MTC has achieved many milestones through its Web presence. Web traffic analysis reveals that its Web site users are on a rising usage trend. They can now buy subscriptions and renew them online; they can check the schedules of the performances and get information on how to get involved in MTC activities, and they can read about MTC, its history, its present and future plans.

MTC subscribers would be able to have a totally different experience if the Web site would be changed to incorporate the objectives discovered in the Balanced Scorecard Approach. Upgrading the Web site would allow more patron and subscriber interaction including access to informative articles about the plays, directors, and actors. They will have a better overall theatrical experience if they visit the Web site before they attend the plays, because they will anticipate these plays more and understand them more deeply. Additionally, many theatergoers choose to view specific plays or productions because of the directors or actors who will appear on stage.

Strategically, MTC's Web presence warrants greater attention in the strategic planning process and the Web site should be considered a strategic resource. It is one of the efficient and effective ways that MTC can reach out to its constituents without interruption. Many of MTC's printed documents could be put online, such as its quarterly Off stage magazine. This could save money that might be better used in other productive activities and projects. MTC's Web presence could be used in two ways at the same time as a revenue generator, and as an expense reducer, both needed and sought after.

MTC's Web site can be a source of pride and identity for its subscribers and patrons. They will compare it favorably to other Manhattan theatre companies' Web sites, such as those of the Roundabout Theatre, Playwright's Horizons, and Lincoln Center. If MTC's Web site is superior in the information it provides; the quality of online service; and the overall online experience it helps the image of MTC vis-à-vis the other theatre organizations and ultimately improves their strategic positioning.

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