Best Practice

Tracking customers at Teletext

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Abstract

Teletext has a commitment to understanding its users, and using this understanding to further its business efforts. In the new media sphere, increasingly sophisticated systems have been implemented in order to understand customers fully and how they use their products and services. Example cases are used to illustrate how this has been harnessed to enhance online marketing, product development and client relationships. As tracking has developed within the organisation a number of key lessons have been learnt, which are shared here.

Background

Teletext has its origins in a free television text service behind a number of terrestrial television channels in the UK. Teletext was awarded an ITC licence in 1993 to broadcast a commercial information service behind ITV and Channel 4, and is the largest commercial TV text service in the world (Figure 1). Since then, Teletext has been providing information behind these channels. Every day Teletext gives essential information about what is happening around the world and in your area, and entertains viewers with a broad range of content, as well as allowing people to book

Figure 1: An image of analogue Teletext

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New media movements

their holidays. Currently the Teletext weekly viewership on ITV1 and Channel 4 is just under 20 million — more people than work full time in the UK! The most recent addition to the Teletext analogue stable is the text service behind Channel 5.

Traditionally, Teletext has generated revenue by selling advertising space on these pages. Most of the advertising carried is for holidays, with sections of the service devoted to it. It provides a well-established medium for people in the UK to look for and book their holidays, and has an association with bargain, last-minute holidays. Other types of advertising are carried on the service, which often complements the editorial in much the same way as in a newspaper.

From its starting point on analogue terrestrial, Teletext has grown its business on to new platforms. As new media have become available, Teletext has been an early mover and trailblazer in these. Platforms that Teletext now has a presence on (Figure 2) are:

- Web: www.teletext.co.uk and www.teletextholidays.co.uk
- digital TV platforms: Sky, NTL, Telewest and digital terrestrial
- mobile phones: SMS information services and WAP.

These platforms have generally maintained similar advertising-driven business models, and although this has resulted in failure for many companies trying to make money from new media, Teletext's established client base and sustainable business model have meant continued success. In fact, during June 2002 it was found that almost 20 per cent of the UK population had used one of Teletext's services to browse for their last two holidays, with 12 per cent going on to book.¹

Figure 2: Examples of digital Teletext services

Support for business model

Evolution of tracking

Tracking, in one form or another, has always been a fundamental requirement to support the Teletext business model. As revenue has traditionally been generated through the sale of advertising space, in order to sell this space audience figures are necessary.

The analogue Teletext audience is tracked using a quarterly sample of users of Teletext on ITV1, Channel 4 and now Channel 5. A quarterly face-to-face survey is used where respondents are shown pages from the service and asked whether they have seen them, and if so when they last saw them. Although basic by new media standards, this method of tracking has been used on the analogue platform successfully to enable the sale of advertising on a page-by-page basis. The sample is derived from the Target Group Index (TGI), which is fused with the page traffic data to provide access to a wealth of profiling information on these users, which can then help to sell to advertisers.

Actual vs reported behaviour

With the advent of new media platforms came the promise of new sophisticated methods of understanding the audiences. Suddenly, after years of relying on audience memory and accuracy, the industry had a way of recording actual behaviour. In the early stages of Teletext being on the Web, in-house log file analysis was relied on quite heavily. This provided some useful data that had previously been unavailable; however, requirements soon far exceeded the capabilities of the system. There was a desire for actual audience data based around unique visitors rather than basic volume data based around page impressions, so an external solution provider was sought which could meet this requirement.

Although an external solution was implemented, this again suffered from the same problem of user expectation eventually exceeding capabilities. It was felt that a more sophisticated, flexible tracking tool was required, which would allow back-dated queries and bespoke reporting. This was when the current Web analytics supplier, Intellitracker, was brought on board.

Tracking today

Teletext currently has a number of requirements for its tracking solution:

Clear requirements

- real-time, accurate traffic levels from site to page level, with ability to audit via ABCe
- sophisticated reporting on paths through the site
- reporting on how users get to the site, and the differential effects of their origins on their behaviour on the site
- flexibility continually to update and refine the reporting process as the sites develop
- ability to satisfy the requirements of a wide range of users within the organisation, from technical through to sales
- scalable across platforms
- reporting on details of user searches on databases
- negligible effect on implementation time and speed of use.

Intellitracker fulfils these requirements. Their Web analytics product

uses a cookie-based system to track site activity. The key metrics, which adhere to ABCe definitions, are:

- unique visitors/users: a user is identified by the combination of an IP address and a cookie
- page impressions: a file or a combination of files sent to a user as a result of that user's request being received by the server
- visits: a series of one or more page impressions, served to one user, which ends when there is a gap of 30 minutes or more between successive page impressions for that user.

Implementation is relatively straightforward. Code is inserted into the source of each page that requires tracking, by placing the tracking code within the source code for the website template which is used to generate each page. In order to track incoming and outgoing links, code is also inserted into the links to ensure that the click is counted.

Evolving solution

The solution was implemented for Teletext and Teletext Holidays on the Web and cable, and has developed considerably since then. This has been mainly due to the flexibility and consultative nature of the relationship with the provider. Internal expectations of the system continue to increase, but the solution provider has worked with Teletext to meet these requirements, which has resulted in a continually evolving product. Increasing amounts of control are being given to Teletext; for example users can now create their own custom reports. This speeds up the process of having new reports implemented as well as offering transparency as to what is being measured.

Results

Intellitracker has been in place at Teletext for almost one year now and, although under continuous development, has been very successful so far. The solution has met objectives in providing basic audience statistics which help in setting targets, benchmarking against competitors and selling services. However, the capabilities and uses of the system have gone well beyond that. The rest of this paper illustrates how tracking can be used for commercial success. As Teletext Holidays is the most commercial of the Teletext services, this is where most of the examples are drawn from.

Enhanced online marketing

Post-click analysis

Teletext and Teletext Holidays both have well-established online marketing presences. These vary from banners and buttons to content placement on partner websites — for example, live feeds of holiday offers and search facilities. Previously, absolute traffic levels would be relied upon to measure the success of pieces of marketing activity. However, a value can now be placed on that traffic based on their activity on the site.

To do this, tracking code is placed in links on referring sites. When a user clicks on one of those links, they are taken to the relevant Teletext site and tagged as coming from that particular source. Distinct codes can be generated, so that as well as knowing which site a user has been referred

from, one knows the particular link that referred them, be it a button or a piece of content. However, origin tracking does not stop there: sites that do not have specific arrangements in place can be defined as sources, and one can identify places where one is not advertising but should be.

Calculating ROI

An important facet of this tracking system is that a user's source can be tied together with that user's behaviour on the site. So user behaviour can be used to get a more accurate reflection of actual return on investment (ROI) from marketing activity. For example, some sites deliver large amounts of traffic, but these viewers are of limited value because they leave immediately, or only view non-commercial content. Other sites may provide smaller levels of traffic, but if these users visit a large number of critical pages they are very commercially valuable. So a figure can be generated to determine the value of traffic from a particular origin.

For example, on the Teletext Holidays website the most valuable customers are those who look at holiday offers, as this is where response is generated for advertisers. These offer pages can be defined within the origin reports, so that one can see which origins drive most traffic to those pages, as well as identifying the creatives and linking mechanisms that are most effective. This has helped the online marketing team to increase their ROI by enabling them to optimise their marketing deals. The furthest that this has stretched so far is into new payment models, where one particular site agreed to payment per 'new valuable user', ie a user who had not been to the site before who went through to an offer page. So Teletext has been able to maximise return from its advertising spend.

Enhanced product development

Informing product development

A complete record of behaviour on the site helps Teletext to optimise the products and services that are being offered. It helps understanding of usability of the site, as it is easy to see where user drop-off occurs. This means that it is relatively easy to identify where problems exist, especially if something on the site has changed, and it can help to identify a solution. It can also monitor critical operations, such as searches, to show success rates and reasons for failure so that these can be rectified and enhanced.

An example of how this can be used occurred recently. Changes were recently made to the flights section of the Teletext Holidays website. The changes meant that the paths to the offer pages were changed slightly. The relevant report was amended to reflect these changes, and this was then monitored closely to see any changes in site behaviour. From this, it was quickly evident that the site changes had resulted in a fall in the proportions of users getting to the offer pages in the flights section. Tracking meant that the problem was spotted quickly and a solution could be formulated and implemented within a couple of days.

Assisting strategy planning

As well as providing tactical product development guidance through troubleshooting, tracking data can also help guide strategy. For example, Teletext Holidays is generally seen, by consumers and clients, as a provider of a market-place for last-minute holidays. However, through tracking analysis in January and February 2002, it was discovered that in

fact users were searching for holidays a few months in advance. This helped guide strategy by confirming that the Teletext Holidays brand could be stretched beyond a last-minute holiday shop into forward bookings. This in turn informed the site's positioning and the inventory that is provided on the site.

Although very useful in product development, tracking data are a supplement to rather than a substitute for traditional market and usability research. Although tracking data are recording actual behaviour, so can be supposed to be more accurate, offline research is still needed to understand why particular features are working or not, and to enable things to be tested before they go live.

Enhanced client relationships

As the majority of commercial effort is geared towards driving response for advertisers on Teletext and Teletext Holidays, outgoing traffic to these clients also needs to be tracked. On Teletext Holidays tracking code is placed into all links off the site, which not only makes it possible to track how users are interacting with advertisers as a whole, but also how users are interacting with each advertiser. Providing clients with accurate information on the number of people seeing their offers and the amount of traffic they are receiving from Teletext helps advertisers to calculate their ROI from the site. This open sharing of information helps enhance the relationship between Teletext and its clients. Future plans are to allow clients direct access to a subsection of the tracking information.

However, tracking data do not give a full picture of response. Although the tracking solution can measure the numbers of people who click on links to advertisers' websites and click on links to e-mail advertisers, this underestimates the actual response rates in at least two ways. Firstly, the primary interaction method for booking holidays is still the telephone, and currently the tracking system cannot take telephone response into account. Secondly, it does not account for people who do not click on the links, but visit advertisers' websites or e-mail them anyway.

To overcome these problems, an online survey was commissioned with Taylor Nelson Sofres Interactive to complement the tracking data and give a fuller picture of response rates. Users were recruited to take part in the survey via a pop-up window triggered by a visit to an offer page on the Teletext Holidays website. To avoid obstructing users' holiday booking processes, if they agreed to take part they were sent an e-mail containing a link to the survey that they could then fill in at their leisure. The survey asked users whether they had interacted with any advertisers as a result of their visit, and whether they had gone on to book any of the holidays that they had seen. This therefore gave interaction and conversion rates for users who reached offer pages.

The next step was to integrate this with tracking data. It is well documented that the more times a user has been to a website, the more likely they are to participate in an online survey. For weighting purposes, it was therefore necessary to ask survey respondents how many times they had visited the website. This was compared with tracking data for number of visits to the site, and it was found that first-time users were under-

Proving effectiveness

Combining with market research

Increasing user satisfaction

represented by a multiple of eight. This meant that the survey data had to be weighted to give an accurate portrayal of site visitors, as repeat users are more likely to book, so relying on their responses would skew the data. The data were then integrated into tracked data to give overall conversion rates for the website, producing a site usage model, which was only possible through the combination of tracking and market research data.

Along with accurate conversion rates, clients are being presented with other information that adds value to their offerings on Teletext Holidays. Tracking data are collected on the search parameters that people use on the site. This means that Teletext has real-time data on what holiday destinations people are searching for (see Figure 3) and, as mentioned earlier, what period of time ahead they are looking. This information is shared with clients, so instead of relying on general market data about the types of holidays people are looking for, they know what users are actually searching for on Teletext Holidays. As clients know what offers are likely to do well on the site, they put relevant offers on to the database, which means that they are likely to sell more holidays. This has the added benefit of Teletext Holidays being more successful as users are more likely to find what they are searching for.

Lessons learnt

In the year that the Intellitracker Web analytics solution has been in place at Teletext, it has proved to be an invaluable tool in enhancing online marketing, product development and client relationships, as well as having a variety of other uses. However, some lessons have been learnt along the way.

Internal acceptance

The tracking solution only started truly to deliver once it had become accepted throughout the majority of the organisation. Having an easy-to-use, easy-access system for all is imperative to this. Once all have access, the right data are available to everyone and very little time needs to be spent in communicating data. Also, as people within the organisation

Figure 3: The seasonal variation in destinations searched for on the Teletext Holidays website

Working in a partnership

perform different functions and have different needs, it ensures that they all shape the development of the tracking system so that it develops appropriately.

A particularly important group of people who need to be kept well informed about a tracking solution and how it works are the technical people who develop the sites that are being tracked. They needed a real understanding of how the system worked before they could ensure that the sites were developed in an appropriate way. In addition to this, the importance of the system and the use of the data within the organisation need to be communicated. This eases acceptance of any constraints that are being placed on the development of the site so that they are accepted as well as understood. Also, the tracking system needs to take account of all site changes to continue to provide accurate reporting, so this relationship needs to involve a two-way information exchange.

Of course, giving a large number of people access to such a powerful tool also creates problems, the main one being that data can easily be misinterpreted. This means that it is important to ensure adequate training for all users to minimise this risk. It has also proved useful to have one person within the organisation who is the expert in use of the system and in its developments. This gives one point of contact within the organisation to anyone who may be experiencing difficulties or needs assistance.

Stretching the boundaries

The most important lesson that has been learnt is the need to retain a flexible development plan. While it is important to have very clear objectives at the beginning, which should stretch the boundaries of what is currently possible, it is also important to realise that these are constantly going to change — to continue driving the solution forward, one needs to keep stretching the boundaries. Your requirements, and those of others within your organisation, will change and become more demanding as you come up against the limitations of the system. It is important that your tracking solution partner understands this and accepts that it will happen.

So, as has been demonstrated here, with the right approach tracking can be incredibly powerful in driving an understanding of what users are doing and how this can be used to improve online marketing, products and client relationships. The next development in tracking systems at Teletext will involve using these data to improve customer relationships.

Until now, Teletext's CRM potential has been limited. Acting as a mediator between consumers and clients has meant that Teletext has no ownership of the customer, so it has been difficult to perform any sort of relationship building. The future intention is to strengthen this relationship as a mediator between customer and advertiser, by tying together user profiling information with the large amounts of data that Teletext can gather around that person's usage of its websites and cable services. Then the tracking system will truly deliver by pushing the business forwards in a new direction.

Reference

1. BMRB (2002) TGI Postscript survey, June.