



Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Media and entertainment

Customer Profile

MediaNews Group, based in Denver, Colorado, owns dozens of local newspapers and other media outlets across 11 states, with more than 7,000 employees.

Business Situation

To maintain its leadership position in a dramatically changing industry, MediaNews Group wanted a way to better support its sales and marketing professionals at the local properties.

Solution

Working with Microsoft Services, MediaNews Group built an enterprise communications portal, based on Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, that provides easy access to messaging and presentation materials.

Benefits

- Rebranding as a leader in innovation
- More effective use of sales professionals' time
- Up to 30 percent savings on sales materials

With Innovative Portal, Media Enterprise Expects Higher Revenues and Lower Costs

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Bernie Fischer, Vice President, Marketing & Communications, MediaNews Group

MediaNews Group, a longtime leader in the newspaper business, wanted to demonstrate its commitment to innovation by strengthening its support for its sales and marketing professionals in local properties. To do that, the company developed and deployed an enterprise communications portal based on Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007. Through the portal, which supports a centralized Active Directory-based infrastructure as well as SharePoint team collaboration sites and My Sites, sales and marketing staff can access a wealth of marketing collateral and rapidly customize it for a given market or customer. By taking advantage of these efficiencies, account representatives in local properties can focus up to 40 percent more of their time on customers. Moreover, local offices can use the portal for planning events and purchasing supplies, for an estimated savings of up to 30 percent.



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Situation

Founded in 1983 and headquartered in Denver, Colorado, MediaNews Group is one of the largest newspaper companies in the United States. Its 54 daily and Sunday publications in 11 states have a circulation of 2.4 million and 2.7 million, respectively. The privately owned company also owns a television station in Alaska, radio stations in Texas, and additional print properties.

Similar to any other business operating in an industry that is being transformed by the Web, MediaNews Group faces a challenge in persuading advertisers that local newspapers continue to be an excellent medium for reaching prospective customers. For MediaNews Group, a central component of that challenge is supporting the company’s sales and marketing staff at the local level so that they can better reach those advertisers.

“The local newspapers, including their print, online, and mobile versions, are the foundation of our business,” explains Bernie Fischer, Vice President of Marketing & Communications at MediaNews Group. “We work hard to deliver consistent messaging to our sales and marketing staff in those markets, and to do it in a way that helps them emphasize to businesses the advantages of advertising in their local newspaper, whether they prefer print, online, or both.”

Until recently, however, Fischer and other executives at MediaNews Group found it difficult to ensure that sales and marketing staff members in local markets had the messaging they needed to communicate effectively with customers and prospective customers. “We had a great deal of valuable sales and marketing information, but there was not enough sharing of the information between corporate and the various properties,” Fischer says. “Moreover, with

our longtime focus on newspapers, we needed to help the local sales and marketing professionals speak boldly across multimedia platforms, to cross-sell and up-sell more effectively.”

Solution

To optimize the company’s ability to deliver effective messaging and collateral to the local markets, Fischer’s team decided to develop and deploy an enterprisewide communications portal. As they envisioned it, the portal would give sales and marketing professionals throughout MediaNews Group messaging and marketing materials that would be not only clear and consistent, but also easily localized for a given market and customized for a given business. For the foundation of this portal, the team selected Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, a technology that Fischer had used in the past.

Minimizing Custom Code

For the team developing the enterprisewide communications portal, which MediaNews Group named iShare, a key objective was to make the solution especially easy for users to access information and materials. To do that, developers worked with consultants from Microsoft Services to create a metadata-based content storage and retrieval tool that includes a search-based questionnaire, which each user fills out when visiting the portal. The portal draws on the information gleaned from the questionnaire to provide documents specific to that user’s marketing and sales needs.

As Fischer is happy to report, building the metadata-based search tool was the only part of development that required custom coding. “To simplify future enhancements, including support and new requests, we wanted to minimize our use of custom code, and with SharePoint Server 2007, we did just that,” she says. “The

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Amy Howerton, Sales & Marketing
Communications Manager,
MediaNews Group

standard SharePoint user interface fit our needs quite well, with very little custom development.”

To help ensure that users would receive consistent and relevant results when searching for needed materials, developers used Office SharePoint Server 2007 site templates and a common taxonomy. They also built in support for SharePoint team collaboration sites, as well as individual SharePoint My Sites, for employees to use as virtual workspaces.

To streamline administration, developers used the Active Directory service in the Windows Server 2003 operating system to establish a centralized infrastructure. Fischer calls this “a major enhancement” of the prior infrastructure at MediaNews Group, in which every property had its own Active Directory–based infrastructure and forest.

Ensuring Successful Adoption

To encourage user adoption of the portal, Fischer and her team personally visited with groups of sales and marketing professionals at many of the MediaNews Group properties. To simplify the localization of a property’s site on the portal and the posting of local content, Fischer’s team provided those professionals with templates, Web parts, and instructions for using them. The team also showed employees that they could easily access sales presentations and other related material while in a customer’s office, for example, because the iShare portal resides outside the corporate firewall.

According to Fischer, the time and energy that her group invested in introducing iShare really paid off. “People are excited about the iShare portal,” she explains. “Every time we turn around, someone is

asking whether a similar solution can be developed for their department.”

Fischer estimates that once iShare is fully deployed, about 500 MediaNews Group employees will use it regularly, and another 1,800 will access the sales and marketing area occasionally.

Benefits

With iShare, MediaNews Group is establishing its reputation with advertisers as a forward-thinking media enterprise and boosting its competitive advantage. The company is helping support staff to work more efficiently and sales teams to spend more time in the field, thereby enabling them to boost revenues. The company also is helping its local properties to save as much as 30 percent in associated expenses when producing localized marketing materials, planning for events, and purchasing office supplies.

Driving Innovation

With iShare, MediaNews Group is promoting itself to advertisers as more than a newspaper business. It is repositioning itself as a multimedia company that is driving innovation.

“As long as our newspapers have had their own Web sites, we have been a multimedia company, but until now that may not have been effectively communicated to advertisers,” says Amy Howerton, Sales & Marketing Communications Manager at MediaNews Group. “With iShare, we have a perfect vehicle for showing account representatives and their customers in local markets that we are indeed a multimedia company. This is essential if we want to stay ahead in the industry.”

Boosting Sales

According to Fischer, iShare is an ideal tool for helping MediaNews Group to

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improve its organizational effectiveness, primarily by helping administrative staff better support the account representatives.

“To take just one example, administrative assistants can easily access all the targeted marketing materials that account representatives need for sales calls with prospective customers,” Fischer says. “This frees up the time that account representatives used to spend gathering the materials themselves.”

Fischer estimates that as a result of this new ease of access, account representatives will be able to spend up to 40 percent more time in the presence of customers—and that can translate directly into greater revenue. “Spending more time with customers is the secret to higher sales,” she points out.

Cutting Office Expenses

For local MediaNews Group properties, iShare can help not only to increase sales, but also to reduce costs. “The marketing group at a property can easily access and localize whatever sales materials and content they need and create camera-ready copy without having to involve an outside agency,” Fischer says. “This will save the properties cumulatively up to hundreds of thousands of dollars yearly and help them produce localized collateral days or even weeks faster than they could before.”

Additional cost efficiencies will come through the use of iShare as a central purchasing point for all MediaNews Group properties. “Through an agreement with a major nationwide retailer, and by providing a plug-and-play template model of materials and services, we are enabling local properties to purchase materials for events as well as office supplies and services directly through the portal,” Fischer says. “The properties can save up to 30 percent on these purchases. And because

at a corporate level we will have better visibility of purchasing activity, we will be able to manage expenses more effectively.”

Expanding Opportunities

As Howerton reports, because iShare has been so well received by the sales and marketing teams at MediaNews Group, other parts of the company are starting to develop their own portals based on Office SharePoint Server 2007. In addition, she and her colleagues are starting to work with the enterprise IT staff to expand the iShare platform to support a redeployment of the external MediaNews Group Web site. “We anticipate a site that will be far more functional and interactive than what we have had in the past,” she says.

According to Fischer, interest in iShare extends beyond the enterprise, to other media groups that are asking just how MediaNews Group did it. “They understand that something like iShare can change how media companies support their local properties and how they present themselves to advertisers,” she says. “They understand that what we’ve been able to do with iShare is truly transformative.”

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