

Principles of White Marketing

by Martin Balestie

I wish I could start by stating that *white marketing* was an invention. Perhaps it was but I would be quite happy to settle on something along the lines of a maturation and blending of old ideas.

I was able to find and meet other schools of thought, such as social engineering, missionary selling, brand development, direct marketing and the like. I guess over time we all partially resorted to all these various weapons to get things done, i.e. improve the bottom line. I think I'm able to pinpoint some little milestones that lead the way, *without* my knowing, to the arrival of *white marketing*.

Back in 1999, the *younger* brothers of my class of '89 [H.S.] computer students came around with some fuzzy business plan based of something that at that time was called the Internet. One of the first problems was that I really didn't know *anything* about "the Internet." Let me explain though that I was by that time, already a systems engineer and business manager at a small engineering partnership with modest [cooling towers] manufacturing facilities. I had also been for some five six years computer coordinator at two U.S. American Schools before graduation.

Their project (which was to fail over time) was to build and run an online pharmacy and my job, strategic planning, was to do research and condense findings, basically a full-time surfing position. I was surprised how little they used or kept *books* or printed matter at the premises. I was known as the major slave driver for the faithful laser – I still like to underline as well. Actually I don't spare any approach on my way to the "Ahh" experience.

In my lengthy, virtual ramblings now and then I would find some pebbles very much the likes one would find in a beach. Some of them gave cues as to site design, some of them were about marketing using this new media, some of them were about past business practice and possible outcomes. Some of course were about online pharmacies!

I remember printing hard copies of some of them – I wasn't sure whether I would later be able to ever find them again – and over time gathered a little treasure chest. I must apologize to worthy parties if my own dumbness or fate made me skip or miss deserving works. I will go over some of the items I *cherished then* and *cherish now*, that's the key phrase.

One of the very first sites I pulled out, about February 2000, was that of the so short-lived Tenagra (1993-2002). I say so short-lived because I perhaps favor the longer term presence conception. Small as we are, we ourselves have been in business since 1962 and some people attach value to this fact. In any case, at that time I was struck by the *conciseness* of their suitability for Internet product characterization – no longer available that I know and summarized elsewhere.. They would give a list of seven or eight ideal traits a product would have to profit from the new media. I found I was able to answer yes to probably all of them, at least as regards our engineering partnership

related products lines. I shared those beliefs then and I share those beliefs today to such an extent that we redesigned our business plan or perhaps more properly, visualized two business plans, one for the traditional/domestic product line, small cooling towers, and a far more comprehensive, “ambitious” if you want, for what we then called “beyond borders” jobs. So while the original fund raisers later changed their strategy to a limping health content website I was left, after about five six month of full-time surfing with a wealth of reading material. I decided to quit the online pharmacy project – to this day we get together – and went back to the traditional market. So while someone would say “are you nuts to go back?” I was “seeded” as it were with new ideas.

As I paddled my Internet canoe while still at the health start-up, I saw go by as it were a very plain, unflashy if you want, page, probably it was nothing more than a page by Jim Rhodes (www.deadlock.com) in which he stubbornly stated/touted a golden rule: “Graphics are great, but ... Content is King.” For some reason I found myself sharing the idea as well as some of the *simple*, broad guidelines: love your topic, recycle as much of your preInternet info, author your own copy on “pain of death,” always read submitted e-mails, and the like. He was clever enough to include a epitomizing statement: information promotes itself. Let me tell you at that time it was not exactly a “clear and distinct” truth. Time would tell. Even then, not everybody may agree.

There were other valuable writings at that time. Don’t ask me how I got (to this day I don’t know), *completely offline*, a [xerox] copy of Esther Dyson’s Release 1.0, Sept. 13 1999 newsletter. While I shared some of the stuff there were interesting words such as market makers, and market builders, brokers and implications and forecasts, enough to grant them a place in the chest. I just needed to browse through the first forty pages of “The Lexus and the Olive Tree” to scent that something’s a brewing, and to what extent! Dr. Hofacker, from FSU, was kind enough to send me an “Internet Marketing” (then 2nd.ed.) complimentary copy. Moral: *don’t look down* on non-Internet sources! For instance, the Internet may have been more successful in the BtoB segment probably because those people had been working together for years *before* and they would very willingly embrace anything that would help them function better. How many times have you tried to read light/dimmed fax print from associates?

Side note: Please be reminded that while the Internet broke many a barrier, collapsing markets at times and making some companies go broke, it has *not* dissolved the language barrier.

I guess at that time, say late nineties and early 2k’s, most of us were renting domains from NetSol. At about u\$ 35/year a piece, plus u\$ 12/year to secure webforwarding, plus hosting, most Internet inroads consisted of what I call *the classic approach* (to this day) of Internet websiting. One writes *a large or institutional megasite* with a patch/quiltwork of content and periodically issues newsletters urging folks to visit one’s site.

I must award big credit (at least in my taste) to the arrival of GoDaddy and far more palatable, to the common man, domain fees, less than say eight or nine dollars a year per domain, plus *free* forwarding. Perhaps this made *a turning point in Internet history*, repositioning what could have been viewed as a tool for the corporation (very much in an expensive preInternet fashion) and making available domains for the common

person, on a massive scale if you want. I would say this helped establish the *Internet more as a boon/resource to the little guy than to corporations*. Corporations had/have funds to place offices anywhere in the world so roughly speaking, the Internet's no big deal as regards beyond borders. Small guys (and gals!) can now be anywhere as long as the mosaic (labor) time is spent. Why GoDaddy's far lower fares made a difference, at least to me?

Side note: To some extent, successfully transferring out of NetSol/Verisign and Register and into GoDaddy wouldn't have been possible without the help of John C. Dvorak – ICANN wasn't as organized at that time. Because of corporate feet dragging, back then I probably spent more money on long-distance phone calls and fax submissions than in actual domain ownership. I was also afraid some domains would end up in limbo ad aeternum. I'm glad that at least, the showers of please-be-reminded e-mails were for free. Anyway that's over so let me proceed with the main course.

As I have mentioned, the classical notion had/has been to focus on a *large, centralized website*, stressing readerships and visitorships and essentially begging people to go back and revisit the site. Now because the *need to maintain some minimal identity* and say, navigation controls, one has to retain a somewhat fixed, routine format/look and feel. We have a situation where *new, exciting* information has been added but the cover is basically the *same*. Now my marketing question is: would you buy a monthly magazine that features the same cover again and again? Probably not, so, what can be done to diminish this apparently unsurmountable setback? So we thought, why don't we split/span content in a *string* of *independent little minisites*, each with his/her own life to live, a sort of supplement. That way we also wouldn't/ shouldn't "on pain of death" *subordinate content* to a company name or perhaps an all too broad denomination, e.g. edibles.com.

Another aspect of concern was the *technological platform* or perhaps more properly, *lack* of one. In any case, we deemed that relatively *static* content deserved static (vs dynamic) formats. Among the "technology" I had secured was a version 1.0 FrontPage, Office 2000 w/o FP and a version 4.0 Photoshop. I later for experimental reasons bought an academic copy of Flash 5.0 and was able to upgrade to FP 2000 for u\$s 10. I was unsure whether I had enough technology to carry out any sizable Internet enterprise. Most [IT and non-IT] people would snub you upon learning that I would give it a try with such a man in the street arsenal. Many people would say go java ,or CGI or ASP or any other buzz word – *anything* but plain simple html editors. So we settled to work with whatever meager "IT" tools we had available.

Thus the way was paved to boldly organize content *on it's own merit*. Kin domains were to head each chunk of info and point to each other, in good faith. Rather than use a large, difficult to maintain site content was/is to be deployed periodically, say every 60 to 90 days. The affordability enabled by GoDaddy allowed the development of said *strings* of *minisites, i.e. specialized, small, "shallow" websites* perhaps with say eight pages of content at most with the obvious potential to grow, over time, as large/elaborate as needed. Finding info in a classic website usually involves home page and a search. Finding info in a minisite is just typing a term plus enter, a far easier and convenient way to find info of interest. But then, how would these little dwarfs were to be baptized?

To draw from common preInternet serials/series practice, one can easily recall things like McGraw Hill Mathematics or Houghton Mifflin Algebra. One approach could have been to name sites carrying some identification or some other, binding trick. For some reason, the prevailing criteria was to pick domains *as mnemonic and simple possible*, very much what people in the street would actually use, say bikes.com if we were to write about bicycles or candies.com if we were to write about sweets. However, by doing so we would have to give up, at least initially, *paternity or brand reinforcement*. Again after some time, it was felt to go plain, brown paper bag and launch content based/headed under domains for the *actual words people would use for searching*. Search engines would say things like make sure you pick/include meaningful/relevant words to your chosen topic so we said why don't we *secure them as domains* in the first place? They're helpfully mnemonic (people have a good idea what they're going to find), to a certain extent *need not necessarily to rely on search engine placements* and, to our luck, many of them were *unbelievably available*. Back about 1999 I vaguely remember some health content to be launched in a like fashion but I'm not aware that it went much further – I may be wrong here. The approach was to deploy content by way of a similar domain string, i.e. cancer.com, alzheimer.com. Who but someone involved or honestly interested with the concern would surf the site? I'm just citing where or how the "string of minisites" approach was borrowed. That I know, the term minisite was not used back then and now they (the domains) seem to belong to different people. We set to work on what trade people later confirmed to be the *generics*, an ideal trait, very much like the *yellow page headings* and to our later awareness, true *dictionary entries in cyberspace*. So the vote was use generics as domains that would huddle together as a collection and reinforce each other, a sort of miniweb within the web. If *quality information* was/is to be steadily trickled out every sixty to ninety days we really would have made away with expecting returning and/or loyal readerships. *We simply don't expect it*, a sort of disposable, one-time cartridges. Marketingwise all we want is an opportunity to secure prospect's mind every now and then, a la Ries & Trout, even if they don't take the trouble to read or even visit the website. So expectations are kept low as regards the contribution of each individual fiber (miniwebsite) – to borrow some "slogan:" united we stand. While a single fiber is weak, a web will do, textile/Internet pun intended. Key to the marketing strategy is *what happens next, sustainability*, either a 60-90-days-from-now e-prober or a RFQ/RFI. Quotes should be as much automated as possible because of the higher RFQ figures and failure rate. Some, several or many quotes are taking the place of paid advertising so perhaps expectations should be low. It is not ugly to announce the launch of a *new* site, however small it may be. So save valuable content for the next specialty pitch. At least is far more appealing than inviting people to read a same cover new content magazine – consumers' age rules! We have seen quite a few companies missing the Internet boat. What companies really need is an [Internet] plan rather than a simple, one and first shot site. One sees folks concentrating on their core activities, say manufacturing, lab work, whatever and postponing or overlooking the virtual outreach/grab component. Instead of *marketing motors*, companies' websites are just another, half-finished/half-baked sort/batch of corporate brochures. No active pursue of inroads at marketing, no mileage or punch extracted from the new vehicle/media.

Please be aware that perhaps a corporation would have hardly given authorization to develop a like strategy, tied to preInternet notions of **brand development and brand managers**. **White marketing** came to be to show one can still do **market development** without engaging in **brand development**. A good working definition of white marketing is that of a marketing school/drive based 100% on content, *not budgets*. You basically **remove reference to brands and/or companies** and **settle/focus on providing accurate information, a sort of primer-level booklet series**. One does give thanks/credit to *people*.

We obviously registered the domain variants for white marketing and found that antecedent term thinkers (dot com) applied the word in a wedding wares sales context so we could be easy as regards independent discovery.

The baptism of **white marketing** (we didn't know we were doing it until perhaps a year ago) actually came about by taking the concept of **white paper** a little bit further. To our knowledge the term white paper is used to refer to papers written in good faith, very often stating company or technical positions, and basically arguing or pursuing the case based on its merits rather than budgets or advertising campaigns. So we said, why don't we base the whole marketing plan on merits, or individual white minisites if you want? I guess most best products sell themselves on their own grounds and need little or at least not extraordinary advertising/marketing budgets. This approach would be in agreement with both what search engines said they would favor and our own preferences, i.e. pass along as much possible very much in the same way things were passed on to us w/o rewards. Jim Rhodes had said: *"If you can build a site with free and useful information that people want to read you've already done 90% of the work required to make a successful site."*

I guess we cannot say we know **how search engines work** – even then each may have different nuances for listing/ranking. Still it's hard to believe engine folks see their mission on earth as content writing. Also, there seems to be no obvious/apparent reason, businesswise, why they would favor company A's website over company B's website. Also whether search engines will disfavor popular entries in *competing* search engines. Maybe MSN.com folks earn their monies from far more profitable activities and may not have so vested an interest in the engine's role. Some other companies may play around with sponsored placements and/or condition rankings to their own *private* mission statements. In any case, being ourselves a little bit of soil bacteria as it were, and going back to the generics and content-based approach we felt bold enough to interpret the situation like some gathering/assembly room. In comes the search engine and asks the people at large: "Who wants to market/sell a washing machine? Awful vendor & chair scramble and shouting for supremacy .." I do! . I do! . Me too!. So do I!" .. a hundred times or more. Search engine raps hammer and says "Now folks, before pushing wares we need to **explain people** about washing machines. Who wants to **volunteer** for this? " Roomful answers of "I don't have time for that! Come on. We just want to sell." Search engine then proceeds to [ap]point "you, the one at the back, only one to raise your hand, come right up front and explain what makes a good washing machine." The sequel is obvious. Also, what if college kids/instructors *also* start perusing them?

Now what about as interpreting how search engines *interview* sites? Having been heretical once, i.e. previous paragraph, ain't difficult to push the envelope a little bit further - there may be a bias in the reasoning so I include an apology to all parties involved. In comes search engine again, be it Google, Yahoo, Mamma, AltaVista, MSN, AskJeeves, whatever, and *maybe* something like this happens between those robots, i.e.

Search Engine: "What's your name, sir?"

Regular Site: "We're TotalMetalFabricators.com."

Search Engine: "What's you're line of business?"

Regular Site: "Oh we do first-rate widgets, mainly ... actually anything, custom-made, really, anything."

Search Engine: "OK so you go to Widgets."

Regular Site: "*Definitely*, but we *also* do first-rate gaskets and flanges and vessels ..."

Search Engine: "No, one's enough. We just want to rank *specialties* - can't do."

Search Engine: "What's your name, son?"

Son: "Widgets.com, Sir."

Search Engine: "What's your major, kid?"

Son: "Well, you know, I'm into widgets."

Search Engine: "That's where you'll be heading."

Ditto kinfoiks Gaskets.com, Flanges.com, Vessels.com and YouNameIt.com. Because the way the questioning proceeds other skills are forced to take a second seat to some mandatory principal, most if not all secondaries missing the coveted, incumbent categories. Will search engines list the very same website for all entries? Will you buy the same cover magazine? On the other hand, the strings of floaters need not to know or tell everything about everything. All that's needed is some honest, decent, primer level intro. One can *later* grow them all the way to monster encyclopedias, as needs arise. Not enough emphasis can be placed to ***make sure folks get the basics right first***. There's always time/links for *fineries and further reading*. Perhaps many real world jobs fail because of overlooking the basics, *not* the fineries.

The fact that we tend to ***avoid naming brands***, same as happens with most college textbooks say aside from advertising courses, is also a good thing. *Traditional rep times are over* and we have seen quite a few people loyally basing their campaigns and drives on borrowed HQ prestige only to find themselves ***disowned*** after a handful years. By pursuing the path of white marketing one can engage in ***market development*** without being forced to volunteer ***brand development*** for others. It's obvious that white marketing may not be applicable to everybody but a least it's ***an alternative*** for many people today. A competitor crushing question: say one's lucky to have such a strategy, how's the competition going to do it? Domain names are gone or in the hand of speculators folks, at least the most popular ones. Still, our only dot info domain ***steadily tops readership*** stats every month only to prove that content rather than even "smart" denominations prevails. Still if one's able to change surfers' mind to favor *or at least try once* "just type the word dot com and see what happens" we're moving away from search engines' moods and/or sponsored rankings. They can't control this! *Once people try it*

they will very likely try it again, from then on. We never counted on help from search engines and only started to gather stats these last two years, out of a possible six or seven. We don't believe it was worthwhile then – so little to show, so little to tell.

The Internet's currency is content. Only way to have a mosaic or some carpet is to set aside the time to do it. Money does not necessarily help. Either time is spent or work is contracted third-party, usually rated out of budget and discarded, or definitely missing the point, as almost invariably happens when hiring core trade IT outsiders. To a certain extent, we feel it shouldn't have been possible to seize or amass the majority of terms for a given discipline. But then, that's the Internet and there's still a long way to go, and not only marketingwise.

Partial List - Inch Pounders (ca. 25)

www.TreatabilityStudies.com - www.Respirograms.com - www.AerationFundamentals.com - www.ExtendedAeration.com -
www.TricklingFilters.com - www.Biotowers.com - www.AnaerobicFilters.com - www.UASBs.com - www.DewateringFundamentals.com -
www.FilterPressFundamentals.com - www.MembraneBioreactors.com - www.BioremediationFundamentals.com - www.Aerators.info -
www.ActivatedSludge.net - www.AeratedLagoons.net - www.AerationSystems.net - www.Diffusers.info - www.respirometers.net -
www.FabricFilters.net - www.BaghouseFilters.net - www.PackedScrubbers.com - www.RandomPacking.com - www.StructuredPacking.com -
www.VenturiScrubbers.net - www.ElectrostaticPrecipitators.info - www.IncinerationFundamentals.com - www.LandfillFundamentals.com -
www.CoolingTowerFundamentals.net - www.StructuredPackings.com - www.EvaporativeCondensers.com - www.AnaerobicReactors.com -
www.EGSBs.com - www.CoolingTowerFundamentals.com - www.Festbettreaktoren.com - www.Rieselbettreaktoren.com -
www.Tropfkoerper.com

Partial List – Sp/LatAm (ca. 30)

www.respirometros.com - www.aireadores.net - www.difusores.net - www.filtroprensa.com - www.biofiltros.net - www.AguaActivada.com -
www.CondensadoresEvaporativos.com - www.bioremediacion.info - www.Aeradores.Net - www.balestie.com - www.VirtualGuild.Net -
www.incineradores.com - www.pretratamiento.com - www.VirtualGuildBr.Net - www.LodosActivados.com - www.biodiscos.net -
www.biofiltros.com - www.TorresDeEnfriamiento.com - www.floculadores.com - www.rellenosanitario.com - www.digestores.net -
www.biofabrics.net - www.enfriadores.net - www.biofabrics.net - www.AireacionExtendida.com - www.biomembranas.com -
www.ablandadores.com - www.FiltrosFaseGas.com - www.Condensadores.Net