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personalization

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definition -

On a Web site, personalization is the process of tailoring pages to individual users' characteristics or preferences. Commonly used to enhance customer service or e-commerce sales, personalization is sometimes referred to as *one-to-one marketing,* because the enterprise's Web page is tailored to specifically target each individual consumer. Personalization is a means of meeting the customer's needs more

effectively and efficiently, making interactions faster and easier and, consequently, increasing customer satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat visits. There are a number of personalization software products available, including those from Broadvision, ResponseLogic, and Autonomy.

Personalization in some ways harkens back to an earlier day, by making consumer relationships more closely tailored to the individual. If you've ever bought a book from Amazon, for example, the next time you visit they will - like a friendly and helpful sales clerk - greet you by name and tell you about products in stock that they think you might like (such as more books by the same author, or books purchased by other people who also bought the book that you purchased). Many portal sites, such as Yahoo allow site visitors to customize the page with selected news categories, local weather reports, and other features.

In addition to use of the cookie, the technologies behind personalization include:

- *Ccollaborative filtering*, in which a filter is applied to information from different sites to select relevant data that may apply to the specific e-commerce experience of a customer or specific group of customers
- *User profiling*, using data collected from a number of different sites, which can result in the creation a personalized Web page before the user has been formally
- Data analysis tools used to predict likely future interactions

Because personalization depends on the gathering and use of personal user information, privacy issues are a major concern. The Personalization Consortium is an international advocacy group organized to promote and guide the development of responsible one-to-one marketing practices. Founding members include Pricewaterhouse Coopers, American Airlines, and DoubleClick. The consortium has established *ethical information and privacy management objectives*; these include, for example, the suggestion that enterprises should inform users about the information being gathered, and the purposes for which it is sought. According to a March 2000 Consortium survey of over 4,500 Web users, 73% of respondents find it helpful to have Web sites retain their personal information, while only 15% refuse to supply personal information online. 63% of respondents disliked having to reenter information that they had already supplied.

*last updated*16 Mar 2001

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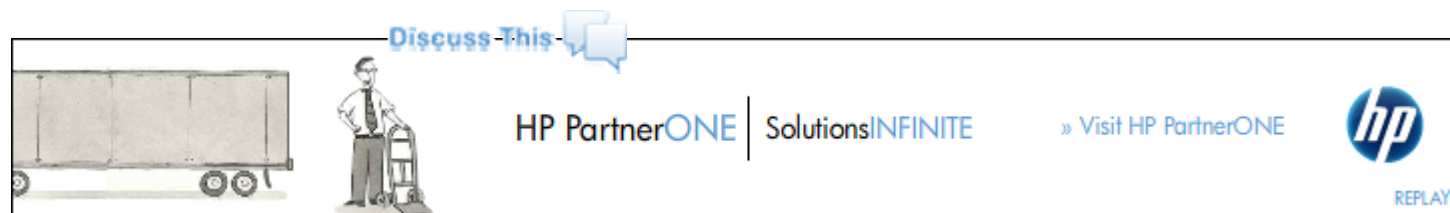
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American Airlines Soars To New Sites

With help of BroadVision, Quantum Leap, new Web site gets off the ground

By Kristen Kenedy
11:28 AM EDT Fri. Apr. 07, 2000
From the April 07, 2000 issue of VARBusiness

At InternetWorld this week, American Airlines executives enthusiastically demonstrated their company Web site as a model of going beyond a simple redesign to deliver real customer value.

Teaming up with BroadVision (:BVSN) and Quantum Leap Communications last year, American Airlines replaced its existing look, based around different company departments, with a personalized site that serves up custom flight discounts tailored to each customers' buying habits. The team also built a user interface for the complex Sabre reservations system to offer an easy-to-use travel planning and ticketing service. The result: a Web site that now draws 6.9 million unique visits per month and attracts the cream of American's crop: the most frequent users of its rewards program.

The efforts by one of the country's leading airlines demonstrates the process necessary to reengineer a complex Web site but also to integrate and maintain a highly personalized system.

The first American Airlines Web Site went up in the spring 1995. At that time, the site was simply what Scott Hyden, American Airlines managing director of interactive marketing, called "brochureware." The site explained the company but didn't offer any interactive services, he says. The site had grown up organically, he adds, organizing its pages by the different departments in the company.

"The functionality and user experience were quite limited," he says. "There were more than 3,000 HTML pages on the site. We knew we needed to improve in a lot of areas."

American Airlines already maintains a database of 38 million people for its American Advantage (AAdvantage) frequent flyer program, "which gave us a wealth of information about what the customers were looking for," Hyden notes. Officials also knew that customers liked the company's e-mail program, which automatically sent out information about discounted fares.

"American Airlines was one of our few [clients] who had a very intuitive and detailed understanding of who their customer was," says Richard Giuliani, chief creative officer of Quantum Leap Communications, which was responsible for American's new site design. "You have to understand who your customer is and what their needs and wants are as you move the site."

Rather than focus the site around departments at American in an informational structure, the team wanted the new design to be an extension of the kinds of things customers would naturally want to do on an American Airlines Web site. They settled on some basic needs: managing the AAdvantage account, booking reservations and finding special fares. But to present this information most effectively, they decided that one-to-one marketing was in order.

This decision brought the project to a new level, requiring painstaking marketing research, back-end integration and design work. "Personalization is definitely not easy," says Ron Matusof, regional vice president of BroadVision, which handled American's integration efforts. "It requires a strong team and a coordinated effort among the team."

The first order of business was to decide what kind of information would be personalized and how it would be organized. In American's case, the group chose personalizing by airport and purchasing habits. Under this plan, the system remembers the registered users' preferred airport and automatically enters it in the reservations system. It also organizes fare discounts by location, presenting only those discounts applicable to the customer's chosen departure location. But the system had one flaw. Some customers live by out-of-the-way airports, resulting in little or no relevant discounts being displayed.

"The content management is difficult when you take on personalization," says Hyden. "If you target content to the wrong customer, you might as well do broadbased marketing."

The group solved the problem by setting up the customization to display discounts in surrounding areas. Additionally, Quantum Leap needed to set up a system that let developers design discount page templates, which were ultimately controlled by the business development department at American, a detail sometimes overlooked in the process, said Giuliani.

Now that American has its personalization, its job is far from over. The company must continue to keep a close watch on the personalization "rules," the development team says. "Think of a rule as a hypothesis," says Giuliani. "You look at the data and say, 'Is that rule correct? Can I improve my rules?'" It's something that's constantly evolving as information and customer needs evolve, he adds.

Personalization can go too far, as well. Hayden is now looking to relax some of the personalization features in the reservations system to appeal to a broader group of users. The site currently requires users to give a user ID and password when using the reservations system. In the future, Hayden wants to allow guests to check flight times and buy tickets.

"We have [many] customers who come to the site each day that don't want to log in or use personalization," he says.

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American Airlines redesigns its Web site

FORT WORTH, Texas -- First launched in 1995, the American Airlines Web site has undergone a complete redesign with new features and user-friendly navigation. The new AA.com uses the booking engine from Orbitz, the online travel sales site founded and financed by five large airline companies in response to the success of online travel sites such as Travelocity and Expedia.

image

The new Web site retains information on AA's wireless notification services, although it can be found only after a three-click drill-down. Wireless services offered on the new site include flight status notification, real-time wireless flight information, and flight tables.

American Airlines was one of those Orbitz founders, along with Continental, Delta, Northwest and United. While it was still just an idea with the code name T2, Orbitz was the target of law suit threats, Congressional hearings, and complaints by non-participating airlines, travel agencies, and consumer organizations.

The fuss about Orbitz and its airline owners has subsided somewhat, and there has been growing praise and industry admiration for the the speed and thoroughness of the online Orbitz booking engine. And, that's the reason now given by American Airlines for choosing Orbitz.

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"Our customers told us that along with the ability to find great fares and manage their AAdvantage accounts online, they wanted to be able to book their travel in a few seamless steps," said Scott Hyden, managing director of interactive marketing for American. "Orbitz booking engine provides American Airlines with a reliable, more robust online booking channel and enables AA.com to offer users a simpler, more intuitive booking process."

In addition to selling the booking engine, Orbitz is a full-service online travel agency offering consumers a wide selection of low airfares, as well as deals on lodging, car rentals, cruises, vacation packages and other travel. The Orbitz flight search engine searches 450 airlines -- up to 2 billion flight and fare options -- offering the most unbiased and comprehensive list of airfares and schedules.

"The rapid growth in online travel purchasing presents a unique opportunity for Orbitz to provide its technology to help airline sites such as AA.com better handle and service the increasing volume of customers," said Ellen Lee, vice president of New Ventures at Orbitz. "By allowing consumers to search options faster and book travel easier, Orbitz booking engine contributes to a better online user experience that will ultimately help suppliers increase customer loyalty."

Discounted fares

American Airlines said the new AA.com features great fares that are easier to find on the site. The Net SAAver Alert feature allows the user to select up to 30 city pairs to be notified of regarding fare specials, and the Net SAAver Search allows the user to search all discounted fares posted on AA.com by origin and destination. In addition to offering greater personalization, the new site includes a search functionality and improved navigation with new "fly-out" menus.

The redesigned American Airlines Web site also uses e-business infrastructure services by Totality Corp. "The redesign of AA.com was a large-scale project involving a number of new applications and the integration of many

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technologies," said Scott Hyden, managing director of interactive marketing for American.

The new AA.com also features Art Technology Group's (ATG's) Online CRM offering. The new design has expanded AA.com's personalization options, as well as enhanced the site's publishing and marketing capabilities.

Loyal customers

"We are extremely pleased with the flexibility of ATG's Relationship Management platform," said Scott Hyden, managing director of interactive marketing for American. "As the world's largest airline, we have a large number of loyal customers who make AA.com one of the busiest sites on the Web. We needed a solution that could support our plan to continually upgrade the site over time."

Built on a Java platform, the new AA.com's open architecture allows for a simpler, more intuitive booking process and greater versatility, which will enable future implementations of new features and enhancements to AA.com. "This launch represents a major milestone for both American Airlines and ATG by delivering a sustainable, extensible, personalized site that offers a customer-focused way to buy an American Airlines ticket," said Paul Shorthose, president and chief executive officer of ATG.

Some highlights of the new AA.com site architecture are:

▪ Platform: The new site is built on a Java platform and adheres to Open Standards, allowing for greater flexibility, more scalability and reusability.

▪ User Categories: AA.com customers are classified into three categories: guest, recognized user and logged-in user (AAdvantage member). Guests and AAdvantage members who are not logged in can use most of the features on AA.com (including Reservations) but they do not have access to their profile on the "My Account" page.

▪ Navigation: The eight major components of the new AA.com are My Account, Reservations, Travel Information, Net SAAver & Special Offers, AAdvantage, Business Programs, Customer Service and About AA. Each section contains 'fly-out' menus, putting information just one click away.

▪ Enhanced login: AAdvantage members no longer have to memorize a PIN. Upon enrollment on the new site, members create their own 6-12 digit alphanumeric password and select a Challenge Question to help them remember it. For future log-ins, members use their AAdvantage number and customized password to access their personal profile on the 'My Account' page.

▪ Personalized Messaging: The new AA.com continues to integrate travel preferences, AAdvantage information and customer-provided information into a single customer profile database. This database provides a common view of the customer across all airline touchpoints and eliminates synchronization issues.

▪ My Account: My Account page is a highly personalized version of the AA.com home page. My Account contains content relevant to the specific user, including online fare specials based on preferred airports or cities, mileage balance, AAdvantage elite status, credit card information and listing of the current reservations and flight status notifications booked on AA.com.

▪ Reservations: By streamlining reservations, American was able to offer an easier booking process for customers. Users can book air travel, car and hotel reservations, redeem AAdvantage miles, purchase an electronic upgrade and subscribe for flight status notification all in one convenient place.

▪ Search Function: The new Search functionality allows the user to search the entire site, including searching for fare specials.

▪ Security: No longer using frames, the new AA.com continues to focus heavily on security and adheres to strict privacy guidelines. AAdvantage number and password are required for accessing the 'My Account' page, but if an

AAdvantage member does not remember their password, they can answer the Challenge Question, and the password will be e-mailed to them immediately.

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American Airlines Gets All up in Your Business

Posted January 16, 2009 by Nicki Krawczyk

As they themselves will readily admit, American Airlines is getting personal. But not in the "What's your sign, baby?" kind of way; more in the "Hey, you live in Boston? Fella, have I got some Boston deals fuh you!" And, despite how I make it sound, that turns out to be pretty darn helpful.

Good old American has begun personalizing their emails to, among other things, offer subscribers more relevant deals, highlighting great prices on flights from the subscriber's hometown or cities near that hometown. This should help to significantly cut down on post-click disappointment ("$4 flights???" Click. "Oh, $4 if you're flying from Estonia"). And, to do my full service to you, I should mention that they're also running something called the Travel Brain Sweepstakes, featuring a grand prize of 250,000 AAdvantage Miles, a trip for two to a deluxe resort, and $5,000 cash. Why "Travel Brain," you ask? No idea. None at all. It kind of sounds like a game, don't you think? Or perhaps a threat to implant a microchip into your frontal lobe to track your airline preferences.

I digress.

I think it's important to applaud American Airlines for making their emails more personal (read: useful) for us. I think it's also important to take a step further and supply/inundate them with other personalization opportunities, because many, oh many, exist.

For example, I live in perpetual fear of being caught somewhere with nothing to read, so I prepare for any flight by packing at least three books and three magazines, just on the not-so-off chance that a two-hour flight will turn into 12 hours on the tarmac. The downside is that I suffer from having to *carry* these books and magazines along with my laptop and other travel

necessities. Could an airline, instead, offer to tuck a book and magazine of my choice into the seat pocket of my seat before I board for the price of the book (discount Amazon price) and a $1 fee? Sure. Would I pay it? Probably. Do any airlines do this? Nope.

My other fear is that I'll be trapped somewhere with nothing to eat. I may have lived through a famine in a past life because the very idea of being stuck somewhere, hungry, with no access to food makes me want to scream and cry and shake and moan. Out of consideration for my fellow passengers, I aim not to let this occur by packing a whooooooole bunch of protein bars, snack crackers, nut mixes, etc. Instead, perhaps an airline could offer the option to choose and purchase a snack ahead of time and have it delivered to me during the flight. Again, I'd pay a 50-cent fee. Who am I kidding—for food? I'd give up my firstborn.

And for those airplanes that have a built-in TV screen in the seat in front of you? How about letting you choose from any number of movies? They could set up a deal with Netflix to pull something from your queue or even a proprietary deal with film studios to see movies during regular release. Would I pay for that? You mean, would I pay to avoid having to choose between that latest slapstick box-office bomb and teenie-bopper romance flick? Yes. Yes, please. Yes. Yes.

This is just the beginning. I can see a whole realm of personalization options just waiting to be explored. Heck, if Starbucks can call me by name for a $4 latte, an airline can call me by name for a $400 seat. You want to get personal with me, American Airlines? OK! Start with personalizing my emails, progress with personalizing my experience.

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That's actually a FABULOUS idea about Netflix. They have that whole library of "on demand" movies you can watch. For those airlines that offer wifi...I wonder if you could log onto your Netflix account, up high in the sky, and enjoy a flick!? Something to consider!

I like the book idea too - I do most of my reading when I'm traveling. However I think this would turn into just another reason for delays. I guess we'll just have to be satisfied with those airports where you can trade your books in for now :-)

Posted on January 26, 2009 at 12:04 PM by Abby

Virgin Atlantic already had the seatback personal entertainment system (i.e. movie library, lots of albums by individual bands, and games) when I flew with them in economy six years ago.

Posted on January 26, 2009 at 11:26 PM by Maximo

*"seatback personal..." was redundant. feel free to ignore it.

Posted on January 26, 2009 at 11:28 PM by Maximo

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"Welcome Back, Steve," said the friendly…computer??!

Published
by
Steve Pollock
on June 19, 2007
in call center automation, caller experience and case study
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Personalization Arrives in the Voice Channel

It's amazing how quickly you get used to personalized customer service. Most merchants and companies I do business with have a personalized web experience. On Amazon, Netflix, eBay I'm greeted by name. My recommendations are highly tailored and my account information is readily accessible.

I've been waiting for this for years on the phone, and it's finally happened.

I was just greeted by name when I called American Airlines. It's about time!

American has just deployed a really amazing new system that has some really cool features. My favorite is one of the simplest — I can opt-in so my cell phone is recognized, so I'm immediately identified and authenticated.

"Thanks for calling American Airlines. Welcome back, Steve." It's very cool. Better yet, I get proactive service — when I've got a flight coming up, I automatically get flight status. When I land, I'm offered help with lost baggage. If I need to be rebooked, it is handled automatically. The most common options are menu-free — they're proactively offered.

The phone has taken a huge step forward.

Are you an American frequent flyer? Try it! You can get information on the American Airlines website.

TuVox built this system using multiple personalization techniques. A series of dynamic features are used to create a highly personalized experience. Some of the personalization features include greeting by name and context-specific menus — so that I'm only offered appropriate choices at any point.

The other key element of a next-generation personalized experience is what we refer to as 'anticipating intent'. The American application looks at your current status to see if you're flying; if you're between legs of a trip; if you've just landed; if you've got an upcoming return flight, etc. On top of your status is event-based information — are planes late, have you been re-booked. The combination of these may result in a high probability reason for a phone call.

Anticipating intent allows American to offer service without having to present a menu selection. This is very forward-thinking and breaks significant new ground for a phone system.

This is the phone system of the future, here today.

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2 Response to ""Welcome Back, Steve," said the friendly…computer??!"

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1. ▮ 1 Laura Bramschreiber

June 21, 2007 at 12:56 pm

To "Remember Me" is to Love Me

I love this system!!! I signed up for the American Airlines Remember Me feature yesterday and the process was really easy. I called AA at 1-800-433-7300 and simply said "Remember Me". The system knew what I wanted and took me through the enrollment process.

All I needed was my AAdvantage number and my zip code. (Note: be sure your AAdvantage profile has your current cell phone number or it won't work. I had to go to AA.com to update mine.)

In my opinion, this system is more than a customer service tactic, it's a customer service philosophy. When I call a lot of other companies, they tell me to go to their website (which is very annoying).

American uses what it knows about me to provide proactive service. The American slogan "We know why you fly" is more than lip service and the Know Me system is a testament to that.

American Airlines Remember Me program

1. 1 Where The Brand Breaks Down at TuVox Speech Central
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