



Web Experience Excellence:

Driving Profitability...From Customer Acquisition to Advocacy

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

Don't Get Tongue-Tied by Multilingual Social Media

*By Craig Brown, Senior Manager, Online Communities & Social Media Strategy
and Jeff Gluck, Senior Manager, Marketing Communications
MTS Allstream*

Complying with the French language requirements of the Canadian province of Quebec isn't new for MTS Allstream. We've had a mandate to provide fully bilingual Web sites — both the external facing site as well as our company's intranet — since the mid 1990s. By now, we have an established workflow for ensuring our English and French sites are identical.

In recent months, however, as we've taken on the initiative to bring social media components to our sites, we've run into a new set of questions regarding translation and implementation. As we've launched internal and external social media initiatives — including internal Employee Exchange Forums, Executive Blogs and Wikis, and external Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts — we've had to decide when to translate, when not to translate and the criteria for making those decisions.

With all of these tools, there is a point where you have to draw the line. The problem we've grappled with is that this question of translation is not a hard rule, but a very fluid one. The best approach, we have found, is to address each component individually.

Employee Exchange Forums

In January 2009, MTS Allstream held a series of Executive Roadshows. During a special interactive session, a panel of the company's top executives posed five questions to employees who had been invited to offer their suggestions. We had such a great exchange of ideas we wanted to continue that conversation outside of those sessions. We created the Employee Exchange Forums covering five discussion topics, corresponding to each of the questions from the roadshow.

We didn't want to create two entirely separate forums based on language; this would only segregate the staff. Ultimately, we decided to translate the forum topics into French, to create bilingual topic areas and let employees post in the language of their choice. We decided we were not going to translate employees' French comments into English and vice-versa.

The forums have been an overwhelming success with several hundred posts to date. Real ideas are being generated. Additionally, the forums have helped open up information sharing between our two organizations, MTS and Allstream, because even after the merger in 2004, we still had silos in departments across the company and people didn't quite know what others were doing. Interestingly, while the bilingual topic areas are present, we've found that everyone, even in Quebec, is posting in English.

It's one thing to create a forum for idea generation, and another to actually put those ideas into action. This has created a new challenge: How do we report back on progress? To solve this, we're in the process of developing another intranet site that will actually show the ideas in action. It will be a discussion forum, where employees can talk about ideas, and allow peers to rank them as well. Additionally, we'll have a blog space on the site where the director or vice-president accountable for an initiative can report back via blog posts on execution status.

Executive Blogs and Internal Wikis

We've launched a few other new initiatives on our intranet, including executive blogs by our Vice President of Technology Development, Mike Strople, who has turned out to be quite an active blogger, as well as the President of Enterprise Solutions, Dean Prevost.

These two executive blogs are a perfect example of why it's important to take the question of translation on a case-by-case basis. Although the formats of these two blogs are essentially the same, Mike's posts are in English only, but Dean's posts *are* translated. The deciding factor for us was defining who was going to be reading the entries. Mike's blog is much more focused on the topic of network technology, with his team the primary target audience, but Dean is addressing the entire company. On that level, we decided it was important to translate his blog posts, which now appear with the English version directly above the French version of the same post. As with our forums, employees are welcome to post comments in either English or French, but we won't be translating them.

Also on our intranet, primarily for our technology group, we have set up a group of internal wikis where information can be shared. So far, the wikis are only in English, but as the entries evolve, and certain sections of them become



Web Experience Excellence:

Driving Profitability...From Customer Acquisition to Advocacy

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company

actual policy guidelines, or the content becomes fairly static, we'll take the "best of" and translate the posts to French so they are available for everyone.

External Social Media Components

To manage our external social media components, we set up a social media working group — a cross-functional committee representing all three sides of MTS Allstream — corporate, enterprise and consumer. This team established legal terms and conditions of use, a language policy and the appropriate security measures. Additionally, we've set up Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts, all in English. Another big question regarding social media: Do you create just a single profile/username that represents the company, or proliferate several different personas? At what point does it make sense to have multiple faces? We decided to keep it simple and stick with a single account for each channel, rather than immediately jumping in and populating the channels with multiple personas.

Because our different customer segments interact using different social media tools, we handed over control of these channels to different business groups. Consumer clients, for example, may be more likely to engage with MTS Allstream via Facebook, than our enterprise customers. So, after the committee set up the initial ground rules, we turned the social media accounts over to the marketing departments of each division to decide how they wanted to engage with their particular group of customers.

Down the line, we may develop other social media accounts. A French-language Twitter account, for example, is a really interesting option. We want to connect with French-speaking customers in Quebec via Twitter, but to translate every Tweet into French would be both time consuming and a potential turn-off for our followers on Twitter, who would receive an extra, redundant post every time we Tweet.

Also under development is an externally-facing "Executive Blog" component that will likely be incorporated into our monthly online publication targeting enterprise customers.

Conclusion

How to utilize social media is a top-of-mind question for virtually every marketing department. The first step to determining the best course of action is to identify what you are trying to achieve.

On a macro level, we are engaging with social media to maximize awareness of our brand, and of our products, and ensure we're being perceived in a positive way.

But we have very specific, tangible objectives as well. We'd like to see social media bring us closer to our customers and eventually inject customer perspectives very early in the product development lifecycle. Can you imagine the value of being able to address a group of enterprise customers with questions such as: "What are the five biggest challenges business faces today ... and what should your communications services provider be doing to help you overcome them?"

We'd have our value proposition defined well in advance of a product release and a pool of advocates eager to become new customers.

The added challenge of serving customers in multiple languages need not diminish your social media end goals. By carefully considering who the audience is and what they need to get out of the forums, blogs, wikis and other tools, you can plan accordingly for translation where needed.

About MTS Allstream

MTS Allstream is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Manitoba Telecom Services Inc. As one of Canada's leading national communication solutions companies, MTS Allstream provides innovative communications for the way Canadians want to live and work today. The Company has more than 100 years of experience, with 6,000 employees across Canada dedicated to a mission of delivering true value as seen through the eyes of our customers. In 2008, MTS Allstream had nearly two million total customer connections spanning business customers across Canada and residential consumers throughout the province of Manitoba. The Company's extensive national broadband and fibre optic network spans almost 30,000 kilometers. Manitoba Telecom Services Inc.'s common shares are listed on The Toronto Stock Exchange (trading symbol: MBT). Customers, stakeholders and investors who want learn more about MTS Allstream services, markets, community commitments and record of creating shareholder value are encouraged to visit: www.mtsallstream.com.