The Content Continuum

Smart formats, intelligent data, exceptional vendors, oh my!
by Teri Tan

On Planet Content Services, your asset is sliced, diced, spliced, structured, dechunked, formatted and channeled through a variety of platforms. In between, it also gets animated, fattened (or trimmed) and slicked up for optimum results. That's Content Transformation 101: (Over-)Simplified, skipping the veritable alphabet soup teeming with mostly three- letter acronyms (XML, PDF, DTD, CSS, OCR, TeX- get the drift?)

Understandably, it's hard to retrofit a print- centric model into one primed for multichannel publishing and capable of absorbing the slew of new technologies bombarding the industry. But you don't have to go the whole nine yards into XML universe right from the get- go and break out in hives. Logically, not every publication needs to be deep- coded to the nth layer. (Okay, now take a deep breath and relax.)

The most important thing is this: you can depend on your vendor to hold your hand, wipe your brow and add value to your content. And once you decide to jump into the outsourcing wave, you are in fact in excellent company (literally).

Planman's threefold growth in publishing projects over the last 12 months is no accident. "Basically, toward end of 2005, we identified a potential segment and we aimed for it. We expanded our graphics and illustration capabilities and gave our designers and artists intensive training in publishing requirements. What happened next was a surprise: our new capabilities started pulling in full- color elhi projects in bigger volumes. A case in point: in January 2006, we were doing about 800 to 1,000 pages per month for one client; today, we're delivering an average of 5,000 pages. Another elhi client has also increased its volume to about 5,000 pages during the same period," says v- p of sales Amit Vohra. "The expansion has resulted in more editorial and other developmental services being offered to make up an A- Z range of project management support." Thus said, Planman gets projects involving illustration and creative services aplenty. "We recently completed one 252- page full- color book in which 184 of the 268 pieces of artwork had to be created from scratch," says director Sourav Chatterjee, who has 50 illustrators and designers among his 800 staff. "Another project involving copyediting and typesetting of 229 full- color pages required approximately 200 illustrations."

On the editorial side, Planman is taking on writing of technical reports and conference proceedings. "The latter are time- critical projects allowing little to no margin for error or delay. Upon receipt of the project, our team makes a detailed analysis of the client's requirements and prepares the style sheet," says Vohra. "Next, we check the formatting, generate the abstracts, keywords, references and headers, and produce the author index and table of contents. The files then go through a final quality audit before being uploaded."

Over at its newspaper publishing section, its imaging team handles image archiving and data processing from microfiche, while another 500 personnel convert legacy data to XML. So far, over 400,000 pages of newspaper content have been converted, and these projects come from mostly European publishers. But Planman does not stop at just conversion. "Take the case of the Manchester United soccer team photobook: it was not in our client's original plan, which was just to archive the newspaper pages. But the potential for such a book became apparent as the project progressed, and we brought it to our client's attention," says Chatterjee. "Helping clients create new revenue streams from their content is one value- added service that Planman offers. As the enabler in the content transformation process, we are in a great position to help identify the opportunities as they arise."