

Research Report

Harlequin

Engaging Readers with Cross Media Strategies

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Harlequin: Engaging Readers with Cross Media Strategies

Background

Harlequin Enterprises Limited is the global leader in series romance and one of the world's leading publishers of women's fiction. The Toronto-based company publishes over 115 titles a month in 25 languages in 94 international markets on six continents. These books are written by over 1,300 talented authors worldwide, offering women a broad range of reading from romance to psychological thrillers to relationship novels. With 131 million books sold in 2005, Harlequin is a very powerful brand for female readers. Brent Lewis has earned the reputation of being one of the publishing industry's leading innovators and is responsible for the LibreDigital relationship.

LibreDigital, a Division of NewsStand, Inc., provides an integrated, dynamic digital publishing solution available to book publishers worldwide. The LibreDigital Warehouse is a secure, Internet-optimized service that empowers publishers to monetize and protect all of their copyrighted content through a comprehensive fulfillment and delivery model (including print titles, digital versions, syndication, and new media), assuring the true vision of publishing now and in the future.

The LibreDigital Warehouse enables publishers to add digital book browsing to any website anywhere in the world, to automatically reflow titles into oversized print, to re-monetize their backlist without carrying inventory by using print-on-demand, to convert titles into a variety of digital formats using only one vendor, and to sell custom titles pulling content from several different books, leveraging the "long tail" potential of their content library.

The Challenge

Harlequin has a very aggressive and successful digital publishing program. To take their program to the next level and support a broader range of digital products, Brent Lewis sought digital publishing technology that would integrate seamlessly with their existing publishing platform. In specific, they were seeking a combination of XML conversion services, eBook and widget production, and robust browsing and search features.

Meeting the Challenge

The Harlequin team conducted a rigorous RFP process and interviewed all leading industry vendors. They selected LibreDigital because of their broad range of high quality services and the following advantages:

- Outstanding ease of implementation
- Accurate and cost effective conversion from PDF to XML

- Thorough meta-tagging to enable robust searching
- Sophisticated Digital Rights Management technology that allows them to sell secure digital editions and to offer widgets for the sampling and promotion of their titles while rights and permissions functionality secures and controls access to Harlequin content on a customized, partner-by-partner basis.
- A browser based display engine that faithfully portrays their content on a broad range of digital display devices from cell phones to ultra-wide displays.
- A flexible business model that allows Harlequin to market their content with numerous marketing partners across all channels.

Although they have only been working with LibreDigital since January, they are very happy with the results to date. They appreciate the system availability, performance, and security that results from the turnkey software-as-a service model.

Brent Lewis and the Harlequin team are true cross media publishers. It is their goal to provide their content to their loyal customers on their media platforms of choice with outstanding ease of purchase and delivery. They design their product and marketing mixes before the first word of a book is written and develop the content using technologies that make it relatively easy to release multiple versions of book content on platforms and devices that include: iPod, XM radio, cell phones, and dedicated book readers. They also build relationships with their customers via blogs, forums, and the Harlequin Community and by partnering with MySpace, Second Life, and other social community sites. Because of their entrepreneurial approach to digital publishing, they were attracted to LibreDigital's forward looking development efforts and willingness to share risk on unproven new ventures.

Results

Lewis states that "Harlequin uses digital to develop and sell entertaining content in a variety of formats, to nurture reader relationships, and to build our brands". They published 100% of their 2007 frontlist titles in both print and digital formats. EBooks are priced lower than printed books. They work very closely with digital channel partners to build demand.

- They have had an enthusiastic response to their community features. There are plenty of opportunities to recommend books to other readers with similar tastes. The blogs encourage interaction with Harlequin's editors and authors. They even have a section devoted to encouraging new authors.
- They have just begun the transition to LibreDigital's Warehouse but report:
- The uploading process has proceeded on schedule and on budget.
- They are finding that the drm configuration and widget manager are easy to learn and use.
- They are now planning collections of titles that can easily be created using LibreDigital's "mash-up" feature

Lessons Learned

- Harlequin's readers like eBooks because they
 - provide immediate access to new titles and fast free delivery
 - Allow favorite books to be saved in digital form
 - Are very light and portable
- Their readers are very loyal. The brand building aspects of their digital publishing programs are very important to maintaining their current readers and to reaching out to new types of readers who may be younger or prefer digital versions.
- They are quite willing to be on the leading edge of developing technology products and use the approach of a perpetual beta to test and refine their product offerings and channel strategies.

Gilbane Group Conclusions:

- Over the last five years, we have witnessed many well respected publishing brands be threatened or even decimated by web-based digital products. Unlike those brands, Harlequin has treated the digital revolution as an opportunity to expand the appeal of their already formidable brand. Their experimental new products should help keep their readership younger.
- A sophisticated and standards based repository is essential to developing a cross media publishing strategy. Hopefully, XML structuring will continue to move earlier in the publishing process.