

One Size Fits All – How to Enhance Sophisticated Travel Information for Cross Media Use.

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One Size Fits All – How to Enhance Sophisticated Travel Information for Cross Media Use

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Abstract

The paper provides a practical insight into the development of cross media travel guides for a target group demanding sophisticated quality content. At first, two critical questions for the design of the cross media content production process are described and their area of conflict is specified. Second, the paper outlines the content production process and the balance of technical and human support of the writing process with a group of authors. Additionally, the paper finishes with an outlook on technical challenges and changes to the field of work and new requirements concerning lectors and publishers.

1 Travel Guides Go Multichannel

Printed travel guides that provide travellers with relevant information during different stages of travel (before, during and after the trip) experienced a basic cross media extension within the last years. Travel guide publishers extended the printed editions by digital and mobile applications, for example apps or facilities to download GPS-tracks. Providers of web-based platforms developed new offers for travel preparation, for example the choice of travel destination or booking. Last but not least, new web-based platforms for customer reviews, for example hotel review sites, as well as individual travel reports in blogs provide a totally new dimension of authentic travel recommendations. Therefore, traditional content, designed as printed travel guides, is losing relevance among their readers. In fact the sales quantity of printed travel guides was relatively constant so far – contrary to the negative overall trend in publishing. Nonetheless, negative trends can be seen at the horizon. The turnover within the German market of printed travel guides in February 2015 was 1.8% less than in the same month of the year before [Börs15]. New competitors are arising that are much more flexible and skilled in operating with media channels others than print only. Therefore, the urgent question for travel publishing houses arises: how can we provide new offers for the changing needs of our readers to prevent ourselves from giving away market potential?

The following paper provides a practical insight in the development of cross media travel guides for a demanding target group searching for sophisticated quality content. Additionally, the paper finishes with an outlook on technical challenges and changes to the field of work and new requirements concerning lectors and publishers.

To conclude, both print only and digital only guides keep the traveller from receiving the most relevant and comprehensible trip information possible. Cross media enhanced travel guides have the potential to appeal to all kinds of traveller and assist them from planning their trip to the end of it, and beyond that enables them to follow their favourite travel spots afterwards.

2 The Starting Points – and their Area of Conflict

2.1 Starting Point 1...

Travel guides for a demanding target group need to fulfil high quality standards:

- News value and currentness of content;
- Aggregation with background information;
- Authenticity: how relevant is this point of interest (poi) for the overall impression of the travel destination;
- Unique content and individual writing style;
- Interesting writing that creates moments of surprise when reading;
- High quality pictures;
- Support of orientation at the destination.

This kind of travel guide stands out from:

- search engine optimised information about poi on web platforms and in tourist information brochures, often paid by organisers or operators with economic interests in tourism;
- travel guides that focus on common tourist highlights within a destination;
- web-based platforms and apps with location-based services that, above all, serve the on-site orientation, but only provide bits of high quality content;
- review platforms and recommendations that only provide selective experiences with single hotels or tourist attractions. They therefore deliver only little support for travel preparation. Furthermore, the content is not set within a regional context.

Producing high quality travel guides gives access to a customer segment with higher income. Therefore, the essential question for cross media enhanced travel guides is:

How can a high quality of the content be ensured?

Traditionally, in print travel guides, high quality of content is ensured by the selection of good authors and a competent linguistic and journalistic lectorship.

2.2 Starting Point 2...

The consumption of travel information has divided across different media channels within the last years:

- Research for travel preparation and choice of destinations via internet: 80% via desktop, 53% via smartphone, 70% via tablet [lpsol3a]
- During travel: 59% print travel guides [WTM13] [Sch14], 42% smartphone and tablet [lpsol3b]

According to this, travel guides in terms of integrated travel information need to provide access to the information via different media channels during different stages and for different use cases of the trip. This suggests providing cross media enhanced travel information and making use of the advantages of the particular media channel.

When special content is to be distributed via different channels and end user devices, one must deal with the problem of different formats (literally and figuratively). While creating the content, the producer is faced with the challenge to design it in such a manner that the content does not need to be adapted and reworked for the delivery via every single media channel. Furthermore, the production of special travel guide content needs to be designed as a process in which different travel authors can consistently contribute their part. Last but not least, the challenge is to supply the content product to different devices with a high degree of recognition and transparency, provide a familiar navigation within the particular media and thus raise loyalty towards the cross media travel guide.

The essential question for cross media enhanced travel guides is:

How can multiple use or reuse of content be guaranteed without too much single adaption and rework?

Traditionally, this is achieved by standardising and similar technical support.

2.3 ... and their Area of Conflict

At first sight there is a contradiction in between these two essential questions of cross media production and exploitation of travel information for a demanding target group: uniqueness of content is eye-to-eye with tight process management and standardisation of the production process.

In the following, an approach will be presented how, despite of this conflict, both requirements can be linked up. The approach was developed at ScotlyScout and is presently under trial.

The ScotlyScout approach: On a web-based platform, selected local authors, so called scouts, write in travel blogs about their favourite places and discoveries in their region or city. The travel tips of the local scouts are distributed to a demanding target group via different media channels: printed travel guides, e-books, responsive website and mobile app.

The approach describes thus the creation of sophisticated content, targeted at a special group – in this example the group of travellers and those who are interested in traveling – and contributed by many different authors. The present development efforts are to identify whether the amount of (partly) technical support within the content production process can be increased adverse to the necessary amount of human intervention or later reworking without the loss of quality of the sophisticated content.

3 The Cross Media Production Process

3.1 The Traditional Process of Content Creation

The traditional production process is distinguished by several feedback loops and reworkings of the product:

- Authors receive general guidelines (amount of characters, etc.) and write;
- Lectors edit the product, give feedback, remind them of the guidelines, etc.;
- Authors rework the product;
- Lectors or editorial staff adapt the content and graphics to particular media channels.

3.2 Alternative Sustainable Process Management through Cross Media Approach

Before starting content production, the general conditions of the different media channels and end user devices are being analysed and the common intersection is deviated. This intersection defines the requirements of unique content units. Additionally, the preferences of the target group are taken into consideration. These requirements enable a differentiated but at the same time fixed framework (e.g. formatting, length of text, size and layout position of pictures, special boxes for touristic information etc.) These specifications

for the content units are built in the web-based editor and enable self-control for the authors throughout the creation process by, for example, continually visible text length or immediate visualisation of pictures and their impact on the layout.

Production process with double loop feedback

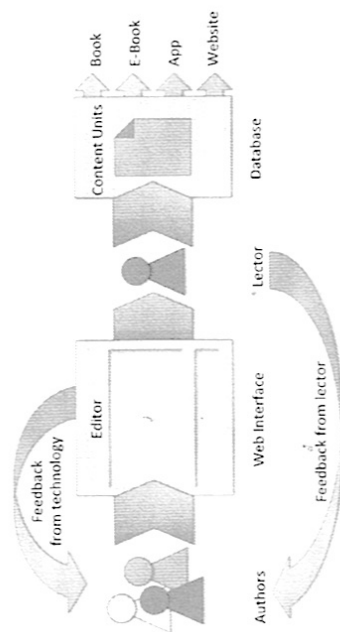


Fig. 1: Production process with double loop feedback

A widely used part of the lector's feedback is therefore relocated to an earlier stage within the creation process; lectors can now concentrate their work more on the content, the structure, writing style etc.

The transfer of the created content into different media channels and end user devices does not present any further efforts because of the set common framework.

Define framework and provide support throughout production process

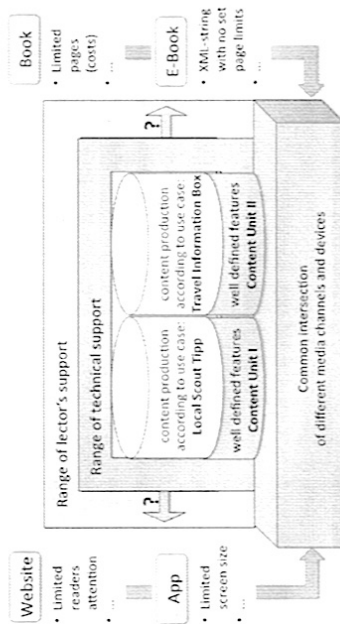


Fig. 2: Define framework and provide support throughout production process

3.3 Further Steps towards Cross Media Content Exploitation

The next step comprises the relocation of further tools into the production process. Often the authors do not use the provided guidelines during the writing process. These documents are put somewhere and the search for it would interrupt their writing process – if it is at all in the authors mind that there are guidelines to be taken into consideration. This aspect is especially important to consider if the content is created by authors who are not professional writers. It is the objective to visualise the guidelines and hints immediately within the range of vision during the production process and therefore ease the writing process by an additional feedback loop. Such synchronous support tools can improve writing skills and help to avoid friction losses between lector and author – the latter having the evitable *already finished* work in mind.

An enhanced writing support may for example be provided by journalistic basic patterns that are imported into the web-based editor to support building the text structure. Stimulating questions in pop-ups can motivate the author to find a distinct structure that eases reading. Considering the content of travel

guides, the following basic journalistic patterns are of interest: informative texts; texts that stimulate reflection; texts that aim to convince the reader of a particular topic.

In the mentioned example of cross media travel guides for a demanding target group by ScottyScout, stimulating questions would be:

- What characterises the chosen location in your opinion? What did surprise you? What is especially important to you when dealing with the chosen topic?
- Have you already described your personal relationship with the location?
- What repeatedly came to your mind days after visiting the location the last time?
- When you wrote about something well known: does your text present something new, something that you cannot find in traditional travel guides?
- Is there additional information that you could weave into the text on the basis of your local knowledge, for example *The local council decided to rebuild the villa Mies van der Rohe in Gubin*.

Up to:

- There are a lot of commas in this sentence. It might be easier to read if you split it in two sentences.
- Depending on the text preferences of the target group the particular technical tools and the range of human support by a lector are to be balanced. Especially when
- the expectations towards the content exceed informative basic content and reach out for journalistic quality and
- less trained authors with their local knowledge are to be introduced to the content production process.

With the help of enhanced technical support for authors within the writing process, the lector can later concentrate on more intensive aspects of supervising content creation, for example writing style, journalistic quality.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

Cross media products provide special value in complex situations with varying needs and customer expectations. Depending on the situation, differ-

entiated answers and solutions can be offered of a piece. It saves time and effort if, at the stage of the very design of the content production process, the requirements of the target group towards the content are analysed, and the general framework of the single content units is defined with the help of a common intersection of the aimed media channels and end user devices. In the next step these definitions are to be transferred and translated into the production process.

Within the support of the production process it is important to balance the crossing from technical to human support, to relieve as much as possible by technical support without substituting human core competences in the field of supervising the creation of unique high quality content.

4.1 Which Consequences Are to Be Considered?

A number of technical challenges are to be faced:

- In addition to formal guidelines, enhanced (technical) production support is needed that is at the same time close to the process and provides control of the writing process and thereby reduces detailed reworking of the content in the long run, for example the lector's work in the mentioned example by ScottyScout.

- The transfer of content units from one medium to the next, for example from blog to e-book is definitely to be improved because special formatting is transferred from one medium to the next and needs to be eliminated by hand.

But this means also a change in the work of lectors and editors and in the expectations towards their roles in designing and producing content products:

- Concentrate on the core business: according to the particular target group, care for unique, interesting content that stirs curiosity amongst the readers – instead of dealing with formal details.
- The customer within sight: to be able to think from the perspective of the customer and their use case.
- Think consequently cross media: know the particular logic and advantages of media channels, recombine them in a creative way and help to improve the multiple use of cross media content. This requirement can only be met by direct experience in handling different media channels and comprises more than merely knowing *print and web*.

Literature

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