

Globalisation lessons
learned
Draft findings

MCY

Background

- MCY is a digital music site offering downloadable tracks, hard copy CDs and concert merchandise (fulfillment to be handled by outside vendor), and webcasts of concerts and multimedia events.
- MCY is based in Germany, and already has some presence in Europe. This project is being run from MCY's New York office, with oversight provided by American employees.
- The site will be fully bilingual in English and German. Most of the editorial copy will be written in English and then translated, but there will be some original German copy for German bands.

Pitfalls & false assumptions

Who was doing the translating?

First of all, we believed, from early in implementation, that MCY would be doing the translation in-house. While the switch to a third-party translation firm may not have affected workflow radically, it changed what we could assume about the translators' familiarity with the voice, tone, and style of the site.

What role would the client's own international staff play?

The content team, and the creative leadership, was so overwhelmed by the project that we made a conscious decision to leave German-language issues for the end.

We missed the opportunity to involve the company's own German employees in the process—had we done so, perhaps we could have avoided some of the translation issues and been more confident about the original German-language content.

Inappropriate deliverables

We assumed the translators would start by hashing out the global nomenclature, and by the time they were done we would have finished pages for them to look at and translate page-by-page. To support them, we wrote a detailed memo outlining the global and secondary navigation, and explaining the context of each term. We included the design guidelines, the editorial guidelines, and a click-through of the site. The client's translation manager came back to us and asked for a list—no context, no supporting documents—just a list of every word of instructional copy on the site. So we gave them a spreadsheet, divided into the site's instructional sections (Shopping, Checking out, etc.) with one column headlined "English," and a blank column headlined "German."

I insisted to the translation manager—an MCY employee—that they look at the memo we gave them, and they did. The most important deliverable, however, was definitely the spreadsheets, which they returned to us with the German column filled in.



Unanswered questions

Who is checking the German content for voice and tone?

We've been promised a German proofreader by the client, but s/he will be a freelancer. No one on Sapient's end is prepared to determine how appropriate the translation is to the site. The editorial guidelines for working with translation companies points out that it's a good idea to "create processes to monitor and ensure editorial quality and brand voice expression throughout the process," but that requires creating some way to do so.

Who is writing the original German-language content?

How does it fit into the workflow? The CMS? How do we know if it's consistent to the site's voice and tone?

What grammatical structure should we use in German?

Formal or informal? Should it differ from the artist copy to the instructional copy? What about sites which use gendered languages? Some of these issues will overlap with brand strategy, but we should take the lead. These are questions that can be answered in a translation audit early in the discover/define process.



Amelia

The inspiration for Amelia – the “home CEO”

Amelia began as a business creation project by Andersen Consulting and CBD, a bricks-and-mortar retailer of groceries and electronics throughout the populated and urbanized areas of Brazil. The two companies’ idea was to create a site to fulfill the needs of what CBD labels the “home CEO” – the head of a household that does all of the care-taking for a family. Whether that might be planning for day-to-day household tasks, planning for a child’s education, planning for weekend/recreational activities, or reading articles on improving a relationship with a partner – basically anything and everything that might be of family or personal concern to the head of a household – the plan for Amelia is to be there to help fill those needs.

The inspiration for “Amelia” came from the title character of a Brazilian folk song, a long-suffering caretaker who labored long and selflessly for the needs of her family, without asking for anything in return. The branding for Amelia is that the site can fill the role of what in the minds of Brazilians is the ultimate caretaker – *use* Amelia (amelia.com.br), so you don’t have to *be* one.

Think Webvan, iVillage and Kozmo.com – all rolled into one

From a functionality perspective, CBD sought to accomplish this by knitting together three of its major shopping franchises – the grocery chains Pão de Açúcar and Extra and the electronics chain Eletro. The idea was to create a one-stop shopping environment so that the home CEO could shop for groceries, shop for products for the home (televisions, CD players, etc.), and arrange for their delivery at a time convenient for the home CEO, similar in many ways to Webvan in the United States.

In its attempt to fulfill every possible need the home CEO might have, CBD also added third-party services to its plan for Amelia’s mix of offerings. So, in addition to shopping for groceries on-line, a user could also make an order from any or all of five services – shoe repair, video rental, dry cleaning, flower delivery and film developing.

Content – what Amelia is using to bring the site together

CBD looked to editorial content – articles, essays, tips, how-to guides, etc. – to be the glue that held all of the above together for Amelia’s users. The idea was to have a rich, magazine-like content environment users could browse and read, built around subjects of interest to the home CEO and using the same model as sites like iVillage and Women.com.

The plan from CBD and Andersen was to organize the editorial content around what Andersen calls the “intentions value network.” By that, they meant basically to organize the site’s content around the purposes, or “intentions,” users in Brazil could be expected to want to satisfy. They created seven intentions for Amelia: Casa (Home), Família (Family), Você (You), Seu Bolso (Your Pocket), Culinária (Food/Eating), Diversão (Entertainment/Recreation) and Dia a Dia Fácil (Day-to-Day Life).

CBD and Andersen sought to make all of this work by creating connections among content, products and services throughout the site. So, an area of the site with an article on preparing healthy meals for a family would contain teasers that linked to suggested recipes for healthy meals, all of the items in which the user could purchase in Amelia’s supermarket area. In making editorial content and products/services just a few clicks away from one another



throughout the site, Amelia sought to be a place where home CEOs could learn more about how to fulfill their own and their families' needs and also take the action(s) necessary to fulfill those needs.

Findings and Challenges

Brazil is a very Western country, though subtle-yet-significant cultural differences exist. In the business plan Andersen Consulting wrote that serves as the blueprint for Amelia.com.br, explicit mention is made of the fact that CBD is targeting not just a market segment, but a particular social class in Brazil. The business plan mentions that Brazil is divided into classes A and B, and that Amelia is targeting class A citizens only with its site. While the political and social climate at the moment in the U.S. would likely call for at least a modicum of discretion when discussing matters like this, in Brazil the climate simply isn't the same. Social and economic divisions are topics Brazilians appear, in my experience, to be quite open to discussing.

Indeed, the cultural difference is reflected even in the site's name. Amelia, the title character of the Brazilian folk song mentioned on the previous page, probably wouldn't be used as the public image of a major business in the U.S., due to the character's associations with domesticity and servility. At worst, it might very well be seen as sexist. But in Brazil, the word "Amelia" connotes nostalgia for the warmth and caring of home and family, the mental images of an idealized domestic life.

In Brazil, the Web is still very young – but it's growing up fast

The best way of describing where Brazilians are in their adoption and use of the Internet is to compare them to their U.S. counterparts about three or four years ago. They are experiencing the hype and excitement of using a technology that is brand-new and seems to be revolutionizing the worlds of business, media and communications there in much the same way that it swept through the U.S. in 1996 and 1997.

Because the Internet is still a novelty to most Brazilians and to most Brazilian businesses trying to figure out how to use it, the results of that inexperience are apparent on many web sites. In surfing sites to determine how Amelia might compare with its peers in Brazil, I found several major sites with content that really wasn't what an American Internet user would call "deep" or would give an experienced Web user much reason to return. This suspicion was confirmed by a New York Times article I read recently about the merger of two large Brazilian Internet media companies – the acquiring company's network of sites had been having trouble succeeding because its research showed the sites actually had little content users wanted to spend time consuming.

Nevertheless, Brazilians are throttling forward at full speed into a world they, by all outward appearances, expect to be dominated by the Internet and wireless communications of all kinds. On nearly every street corner in the two major Brazilian cities I visited (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), I saw signs, billboards and banners for companies such as BOL (Brazil On Line), America Online Brazil, Internet Gratis, StarMedia, Terra Networks, UOL, Embratel, Telefonica, Microsoft, and even the beginnings of the ad campaign for Amelia.com.br, just to name a few. (And when I saw a sign that wasn't for an Internet company, it was usually for Pão de Açúcar!)



Brazilian workstyles are lively and fun, but can hinder the progress of a project. In Brazil, business meetings rarely followed a format those of us at Sapient are accustomed to using. In meetings during which decisions were being discussed that had a large impact on the Amelia project, it was not at all uncommon for key decision makers from our client's company to enter and exit meeting rooms several times during the course of a meeting, take telephone calls on their cellular phones and/or attend to matters that had little or nothing to do with the topic of discussion at hand. Distractions like these often were frustrating to those of us from Sapient, but they also appeared to be typical of the way business and decision-making were handled by both the client and Andersen Consulting during the project.

While these habits might seem annoying only on a personal level, they reflected the way in which decision-making and progress were handled on the project as a whole. Progress rarely seemed secure, if ever, during the project. Questions which would normally have been raised, discussed and settled during a garden-variety Sapient project appeared always to be up for discussion on Amelia. During the course of the project, we often returned several times to the same questions and issues, issues we at Sapient usually thought had been discussed and settled. That appeared to be the way business is handled in Brazil – flexibility and openness in people were valued by the Brazilians (to a fault, it seemed), but these same qualities prevented the kind of progress and closure on issues we at Sapient are used to making on projects with domestic clients.

These ways of conducting business likely are going to be a part of any project Sapient takes on in Brazil, a factor that will have to be taken into account by teams that work on projects there in the future. This doesn't necessarily reflect poorly on Sapient's or Andersen's project leadership on Amelia; it does, however, mean that Sapient projects might not always follow the same path toward conclusion in other countries that they follow with U.S. clients.

Contracting with a third-party firm: Tempestade

Though Amelia is tentatively set for launch in late October/early November, an early version of the site is already available, known internally as "little Amelia" or "Amelinha" (pronounced ah-mel-EEN-ya). To produce nearly all of the site's content, Amelia hired a third-party content firm called Tempestade.

Tempestade was a kind of company that has no real equivalent here in the U.S. They are a freelance content agency, specializing in creating content for any and all clients, and they created the feature articles, tips and other content for all of the Amelinha intentions areas. They are also slated to supply a considerable amount of the launch content for the new Amelia site, a fact that explains at least partly why the client has kept its expectations high for creating all of the unique content pieces on the site. Whatever they cannot produce in time, Amelia representatives feel, they can rely on Tempestade to produce.

Contracting with a third-party firm: Working with 2pG

To execute the creative track work for Amelia, Sapient hired 2pG, a creative design firm based in Rio de Janeiro. Its staff, made up mostly of graphic designers, all displayed an eager attitude toward those of us from Sapient, eager to learn about our ways of working and our project methodology. Working with 2pG mirrored the experience of working with our client, however, making it an often-frustrating experience.

From a personal point of view, working with 2pG's staff was often fun and rewarding. Mostly young designers in their early twenties, they worked in a startup-like atmosphere – electrical



cords hung from the ceiling throughout the cramped office space shared by the firm's 30 to 40 people, and conference calls had to be made on the firm's one speaker phone, which served double-duty as a fax machine.

The perfect example of how eager those at 2pG were to learn and grow occurred at the end of my first day there, when Paul Bryan (Sapient's information architect on the project) and I were finishing work for the day. We looked up and noticed that we were practically the only people left in the office. On the way out, we saw why: in the hallway, most of the staff had stayed after their regular work hours to take a class taught by the head of 2pG, all about Sapient's one-team approach to project methodology.

It is worth noting that the roles of content strategist and information architect were, before Sapient introduced them to 2pG, basically unknown in Brazil. Gile, one of the firm's three founders (his name is the "G" in 2pG), remarked on one of our visits there that our work and guidance with their information architect, Pedro Ivo, had probably made him into one of the leading IAs anywhere in the country. At the time, Pedro was only about twenty years old or so, and had been hired by 2pG only a matter of weeks before!

For content strategy, working with 2pG occurred on a somewhat smaller scale than with the IA or graphic design practices. Around the end of Concept/Design and the beginning of Implementation, 2pG hired its first full-time content strategist and its first full-time copywriter. During my visits to Rio, I spent most of my time educating the content strategist on how Sapient approaches content strategy during the various phases of a project, concentrating on the needs and tasks for the content of Amelia during Implementation.

Problems surfaced, however. The first problem we faced was that 2pG had begun and continued work on the graphic design for Amelia far in advance of beginning work on its information architecture or content strategy. As a result, IA and content strategy played catch-up from then on during the project.

This caused many communication problems when the clients saw design examples from 2pG and reacted to elements such as the placement of objects on a page, the nomenclature of buttons, and instructional text. The clients reacted to elements of the design that really weren't elements of graphic design, but were rather elements of the site's IA and content strategy. However, no one had made that distinction for the client, even though decisions on those elements hadn't been made from an IA or content strategy perspective. Eager to please, the designers at 2pG would then rush to change the site designs based on the client's comments, further muddying the situation for the roles of information architecture and content strategy on the project. Sapient asked 2pG on more than one occasion to suspend work on the project's graphic design so that information architecture and content strategy could be given a chance to get up to speed and give input, but those requests went unheeded, unfortunately.

Sapient's creative team never had a clearly defined role

In the work Sapient's creative team on Amelia did with 2pG, another problem surfaced. Representatives from the content strategy, graphic design and IA practices initially were brought in during the project's eight-week Concept/Design phase to perform an audit of the work 2pG had done to date, and provide recommendations throughout the remainder of the phase. 2pG hired its first information architect and its first content strategist and writer during this time, and looked to Sapient to guide the new hires through the creation of the



site's IA and many parts of its content strategy (e.g., nomenclature, instructional text, help text).

When Concept/Design gave way to Implementation, the role of Sapient's creative team became less one of auditing and guiding 2pG, and more one of overseeing and managing closely the development of the creative work for the site. This transition was never noticed or planned for at the beginning, but Sapient's Atlanta creative team (working nearly 5,000 miles away from the client location) became increasingly responsible for the success of the project's creative track. By the latter weeks of Implementation, the client and 2pG had become dependent on Sapient, probably to a degree they shouldn't have.

Educating our client, and persuading them to work with us

At the beginning of Sapient's involvement in Amelia, content strategy was not involved in the project, and the client questioned whether its involvement was even necessary. 2pG was unable to get Andersen or CBD to share much information around its plans for the site's content, and it took several conversations with the client before they were ready to talk about content.

There was an undertone of resistance from Andersen/Amelia at the beginning of our involvement in the project, an attitude that they wanted to share only the minimum amount of information necessary around content. At many instances, when I asked questions of Andersen's content contact about the client's plans around content, I was in turn questioned as to why I needed to know the information. They seemed to feel they had to guard zealously any information about Amelia, and that they could only release it on some kind of piecemeal basis, bit by bit. Changing this attitude took many weeks of conversations and attempts to demonstrate good faith with the client (and the replacement of a key person from Andersen with someone who showed a much greater willingness to work cooperatively with Sapient).

Our main tools to accomplish this change were presentation tools (such as a Content Strategy Update, presented to the client by Mary Jane early on in the project) and other deliverables (we worked with the client to build a content matrix of all site content, nomenclature needs lists, and an editorial calendar, to name a few). These definitely helped educate the client on the role we would play on the project, but doing so was a slow, evolutionary process. Sapient will likely have to pay greater attention in the future to assessing how deep an understanding foreign clients have of our creative practices, and to educating them so they will understand how best to work with us, to minimize the kind of friction we experienced while working on Amelia.

Since the project has not yet been completed, it still remains to be seen whether this relationship turns out to have been a productive one. However, the relationship between the client and Sapient is much improved from where it began at our initial involvement, and that's something that would never have seemed likely during our first visits and conversations with them.

Until we pushed, Amelia's content plans hadn't progressed past being just a concept. To build amelia.com.br, the client was going to have to think in a detailed way about exactly what they wanted the site's content to do – where they wanted it to surface on the site, which users they wanted to see which pieces of content, etc. Their concept for Amelia called for a robust, sophisticated system of managing content, one which called for them to think at a detailed level about what the site content would look like and how it should be manipulated by



the system running the site. But by the time Sapient's creative team became involved in the project, they hadn't progressed past the "drawing board" stage of thinking about the site content.

In our early conversations, it became apparent that their understanding of content management wasn't sophisticated; whenever we raised questions about the details of content, the content representative from Andersen always retreated to a discussion of the overall vision of the site and the general purpose of the intentions areas. They seemed unable or unwilling (at least at the beginning) to think about the details around content, preferring to put off those decisions to some-unnamed time in the future.

When, after many conversations, they realized the importance of thinking about the way content should look on the site, and that those details were critical to building the site, they began to realize that the scope of the project was overly ambitious. Cuts were made to the content matrix to reduce it to something that could actually be built in the project's timeline. But this involved several conversations over the matter of a few weeks, and probably would have been helped by better educating the client on the project practices mentioned above – content strategy, content management, and the decisions clients need to make within each.



Recommendations

Spend more time educating and developing relationships with clients

As mentioned above, a longer and more in-depth period of education and assessment would definitely have helped with Amelia. Especially in a country like Brazil, where the Web is still very new and where the specialized roles Sapient has developed aren't familiar to many companies (and potential clients), we need to spend time educating our clients on the roles we perform on a project. They're much more likely to work well with us if we explain clearly what it is we intend to do with them on the project.

The question of developing strong, productive relationships with clients seems self-explanatory, but I don't think its importance can be overstated. In the case of Amelia, however, it became clear that it was particularly necessary, because personal relationships are extremely important in the Brazilian business culture. After we became acquainted with our client, it wasn't difficult at all to do so – they freely shared their friendship and hospitality with us. But there was an initial period when neither side was sure what to make of the other, something that probably slowed our initial progress.

Use care when selecting/recommending a content management system

Sapient should examine content management systems in the future to determine whether a given system supports multiple languages. Blue Martini, the package selected by Sapient for the Amelia project, does support multiple languages, but that was learned after the package recommendation had been made to the client. Though many of the representatives we dealt with from the client spoke English more or less fluently, we cannot assume that everyone using the system will know English.

In Latin America, adjoining countries speak several different languages. Portuguese is spoken in Brazil, while Spanish is spoken in other countries. Some clients may want to publish a site in multiple languages simultaneously, especially if they want to target more than just their home country. Content management systems will have to be evaluated to determine not just whether they support international languages, but two or more languages at the same time.

Clients are being forced to pay exorbitant prices, sometimes in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, for the purchase and installation of content management systems for their sites. Blue Martini, Sapient's pick for Amelia, cost about \$1 million! When clients are spending that kind of money on a system based on Sapient's advice and recommendation, we owe to them to make sure they're getting value for their purchase.

Don't assume everyone builds Web sites the way Americans build them

In discussing the site content with the client, we noticed that they made some unusual suggestions around the way they wanted content presented on a page. The page layout, with a list of links to articles and other featured content, seemed amateurish compared with Web design and layout conventions for sites in the U.S. But, when we compared the idea with several of Amelia's peer sites in Brazil, they used the same format that Amelia was discussing.



Not a huge difference, but it's worth noting that design and layout conventions that are familiar to those of us in the U.S. aren't necessarily used by other countries. The differences were not major, but they were definitely there.

Wherever possible, take advantage of local resources

Despite the problems mentioned above with working with 2pG, the project couldn't have moved forward without them. The language and cultural barrier was simply too high for a U.S. firm to overcome in the time frame we were allotted on this project. 2pG had native Brazilians who could speak the language the site was being created for, and who could also understand the cultural factors driving much of the client's decision-making.

The client made many requests for changes to the layout and design of the site during the project, to accommodate decisions several of us at Sapient thought ill-advised. When we brought this up with people at 2pG, however, they replied that the site changes the client sought to make would, in fact, resonate with the audience the site was intended to reach. Though we didn't always make the changes requested, it was definitely worthwhile to have people working for us who understood the Brazilian market (and even local and regional differences within that market).

Clarify roles among Sapient, client, and 3rd-party translators

On MCY, the client employed a translation manager, but communication with him was stilted. It was never totally clear who was responsible for what pieces of the translation relationship. In part, we were hindered by understaffing on the English editorial side, which delayed decisions about content, but a clearer relationship with the client's translation point person would have helped.

