

# EContent™

Creating, Delivering, Finding, and Managing Digital Content

**Nancy Davis Kho**

## On the Road to Improved Information Experiences

**W**hether it's on a desktop monitor or a tiny mobile screen, "information experience" is the moment when the user experience and information-intensive applications meet. Over the past few years, as the volume of structured and unstructured data within organizations has exploded and the channels on which that information is consumed has diversified, content consumers have been revising their expectations for what qualifies as an acceptable information experience.

Joe Gustafson, chief executive officer of Brainshark, which provides a web-based platform that allows users to create on-demand multimedia presentations, says, "These days workers are equipped with a multitude of devices; you come to work with your own smartphone and maybe a tablet computer. Companies have to figure out how to communicate with you." Brigitte

Ricou-Bellan, vice president and managing director at Dow Jones, agrees, saying, "Users are influenced by consumer devices and web-based experiences. They want simplicity, no training required."

Most vendors would agree the facets of an effective user information experience include simplicity, speediness, flexibility, and accuracy. The Google User Experience team, for example, says its goal is to create designs that are "useful, fast, simple, engaging, innovative, universal, profitable, beautiful, trustworthy, and personable."

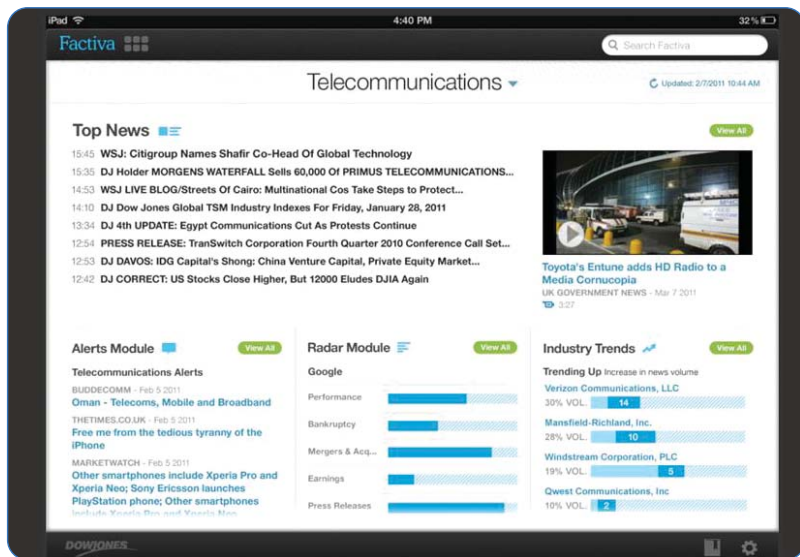
While the basic principles are evergreen, there are a number of environmental changes that affect how solution providers deliver products and platforms that provide a positive information interaction. Among the influences driving major change is the accelerated adoption of mobile computing; a desire to offer a more interactive, engaging

experience for the end user; the ability to customize the user experience; and a need for tools that integrate with workflow in order to maximize productivity in a time of tight budgets.

### USERS ON THE MOVE

It's no surprise that one of the major requirements with which publishers are contending is the user's desire to consume information on the move and across channels that didn't even exist 3 years ago. "The dynamics of business communication are shifting," say Gustafson. "Conversations that took place 10 years ago via face-to-face interaction requiring travel, or via phone, now happen via WebEx, video conferencing, and social media."

With regard to devices, an October 2010 report from Gartner, Inc. found that media tablets are poised for strong growth, with



Dow Jones' refresh of Factiva.com included the launch of an iPad app incorporating a new dashboard design.

this as “taking the path that matters most to them.” Andrews says that one of the core principles of Endeca’s approach to information experience is to put the end user in control. Another principle is to allow the content owner or knowledge manager to guide and influence the user experience.

“The analogy I use is that the consumer is saying, ‘Get out of my way, but keep up with me,’” Andrews explains. “The end consumers want to drive the search, but they also want the content owner to make suggestions or show relevant information,” based on what is known about specific users, be it past purchases, demographics, or search history. Practically speaking, this means allowing the user to use faceted search to drill down and refine a search and giving tools to content owners to enable them to expose related content that may help users make decisions or find what they’re looking for more quickly.

Beyond search, enabling customers to choose exactly how the information appears to them is another key precept for the modern information experience. Letting customers personalize the user interface as they move through the product was a primary goal when Dow Jones released a “refresh” of Factiva.com in April 2011. Users now have a dashboard on which they can monitor news by a specific region, industry, or portfolio of companies. Ricou-Bellan says, “An enterprise can create a default version of the dashboard for their employees, and then employees can create their own views based on their

worldwide end-user sales projected to total 54.8 million units in 2011, up 181% from 2010, and to possibly surpass 208 million units in 2014. As enterprises figure out the role that powerful tablets can play in their organizations, consumers are already shifting consumption habits; a March 2011 “State of the News Media” report from the Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism found that nearly half of Americans get some form of news on a mobile device.

So making content flow across platforms is a key means to improving information experience. That may mean thinking about content differently. Jeanney Mullen, global executive vice president of Zinio, which offers a “buy once, read anywhere” digital distribution network for publishers, says, “Users move to mobile reading for three reasons: convenience, content, and enhanced interactivity.” The arrival of fully featured tablet computers ups the ante for end users, who have little patience with device-specific presentations that are simply static digital interpretations of print.

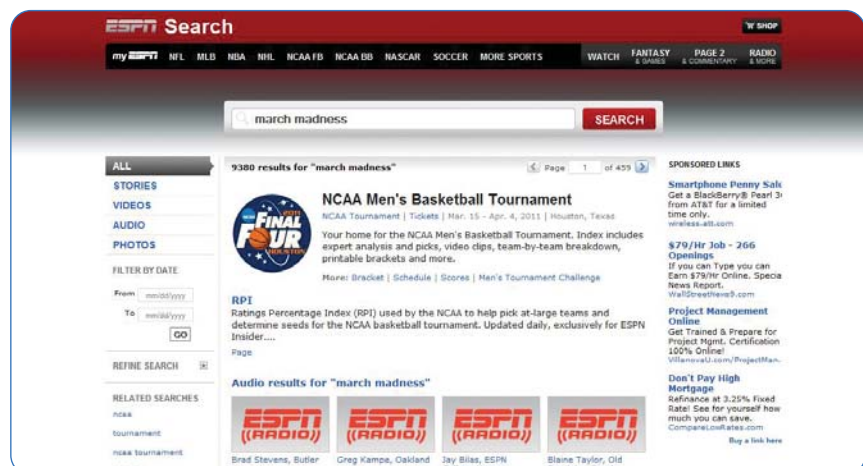
Magazines on the Zinio for iPad application, for instance, can incorporate video and audio extras, interactive maps, quizzes, and social sharing aspects such as bookmarking, clipping, and sharing. While the consumer world is adapting to this quickly—Mullen reports that *People* and *Us Weekly* are the top sellers via the Zinio for iPad app—the trend is impacting the enterprise world as well.

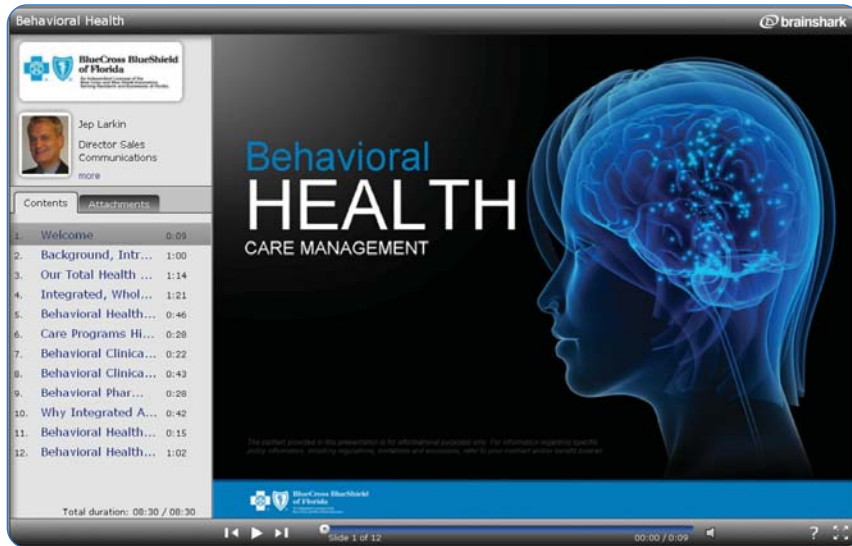
Endeca’s faceted search enables visitors to ESPN.com to “take the path that matters to them” through filtering and related searches.

“I can’t even bear to refer to it as mobile, because it’s so much more than that,” says Ricou-Bellan of the demand for cross-platform information accessibility by end users. While she says that the majority of Dow Jones’ Factiva.com customers, who are primarily in the B2B space, haven’t yet been clamoring for an iPad version of the product, the company rolled one out in April, incorporating video and a dashboard-based interface. “Our role is to help push new ideas and to ride some new waves to help customers position themselves for success,” she says.

#### THE PATH THAT MATTERS MOST

Another growing aspect of effective information experience is the ability to put the user in control of the information with which they’re working. John Andrews, vice president of marketing and product management for ebusiness at Endeca Technologies, a search and business intelligence software company, refers to





Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida uses Brainshark technology to improve information retention and enable tracking.

## GETTING THERE FASTER

In some situations, demand for improved information experiences hearkens directly back to economic pressures that are making companies do more with less. Not only are information experiences that are unnecessarily complicated or duplicative annoying to end users, but in many cases the resources simply don't exist to cope with them anymore. In this context, vendors who can offer solutions that offer improved productivity or direct cost savings through their information design are going to have an advantage.

Jep Larkin is the director of sales communications for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Inc. (BCBSF), which serves 4 million consumers in the state of Florida by providing health insurance to group employers and individual consumers. "We have thin margins as it is, and we're always trying to control costs," Larkin says. But at the same time, "Healthcare is complex, and there's a real need for people to explain it." His group's challenge is to attract and engage new customers who don't have coverage, to welcome them and help them understand BCBSF's offerings, and to provide ongoing care and service to consumers regarding claims, coverage, and the like.

In an effort to lower costs and improve end-user engagement, Larkin turned to Brainshark to create on-demand multimedia presentations that could take the place of a team of employees who were traveling around the country presenting open enrollment options in person. Brainshark's technology enabled Larkin's team to create materials that could be viewed on demand, without having to use professional video production tools.

"We've seen a savings of \$500,000 in direct administrative costs," Larkin says, primarily from travel budget reductions. But there have been other benefits. "The information retention is higher," he says, consistent with findings by the U.S. Department of Labor that "retention of information three days after a meeting or other event is six times greater when information is presented by visual and oral

specific information needs." Part of the strategy in simplifying and modernizing via the dashboard approach, according to Ricou-Bellan, is also "to be a simple entry to Factiva" for users who might not have used the legacy version of the product.

Similarly, in March 2011, LinkedIn rolled out a news sharing feature called LinkedIn Today that enables users to view the business news most shared by industry and peer group contacts. Users can further customize their views of the news by sources and narrow their views of comments on specific articles using LinkedIn Signal's faceted search tool; this allows them to see only what connections in certain industries, locations, or companies are saying.

## HELPING USERS READ THE MAPS

When it comes to information experience, users seek solutions that will provide as little friction as possible between finding information and putting it to use. Information mapping tools have been steadily gaining ground as a means of helping information workers cope with the increased flow of structured and unstructured data in which they function.

Blaine Mathieu is chief products officer at

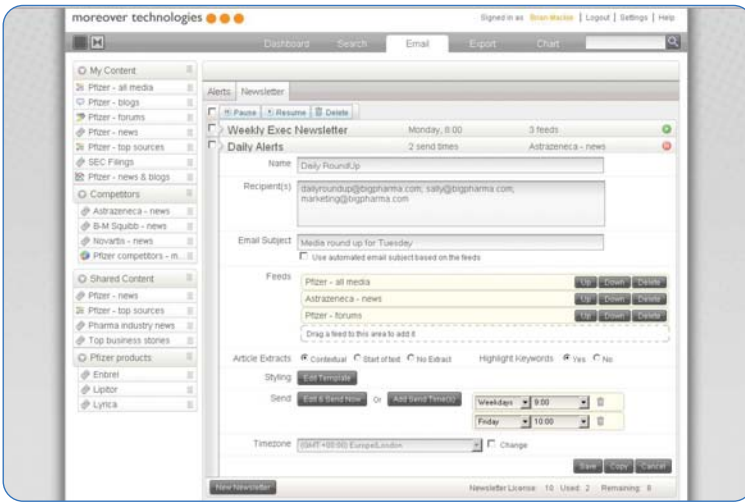
Mindjet. The company's MindManager solution provides a visual productivity application, commonly called mind mapping, combined with a comprehensive collaboration platform. Mathieu says that with the volume of raw data created both in a user's personal and organizational world, "It's hard to capture information, make it actionable, and then make sure that an action is taken."

The goal of information mapping tools such as MindManager is to facilitate visualization of complex data, to create hierarchies of information that can be followed logically, and to enable content to be dynamic, hidden, or exposed as is helpful. Mathieu provides the example of a marketing planning project. "It used to be siloed—there was a marketing manager, a website team, a direct marketing team, and maybe a social media team. Now all those managers have to take an integrated approach to marketing planning." A tool such as MindManager enables all players to see a complete marketing plan, both by enabling a big picture view and letting team members drill down into the details of execution.

Via its cloud-based architecture, MindManager also enables customers to integrate the visual mapping technologies with other data sets. "MindManager is integrated into Salesforce.com so sales teams can visualize how a deal is progressing," Mathieu says. Similar initiatives with SharePoint and Twitter are designed to help Mindjet's customers more easily visualize the data resident in those environments.

## Resources

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, Inc. <a href="http://www.bcbsfl.com">www.bcbsfl.com</a>	LinkedIn Corp. <a href="http://www.linkedin.com">www.linkedin.com</a>
Brainshark <a href="http://www.brainshark.com">www.brainshark.com</a>	Mindjet <a href="http://www.mindjet.com">www.mindjet.com</a>
Cengage Learning <a href="http://www.cengage.com">www.cengage.com</a>	Moreover Technologies, Inc. <a href="http://www.moreover.com">www.moreover.com</a>
Dow Jones & Co. <a href="http://factiva.com">http://factiva.com</a>	Zinio, LLC <a href="http://www.zinio.com">www.zinio.com</a>
Endeca Technologies <a href="http://www.endeca.com">www.endeca.com</a>	



Moreover's Newsdesk 4 offers workflow integration of custom newsletter production from the social media monitoring dashboard.

means than when the information is presented by the spoken word alone.”

Larkin also appreciates the fact that presentations made on the Brainshark platform are easy to update. “Things change all the time with regard to benefits, so we can be sure [when] using this platform that users are always getting the most current information.” An unexpected benefit also surfaced with regard to compliance: Because digital presentation of the materials enables tracking of who has seen what information, BCBSF's compliance team can confirm that a member has received and reviewed information on benefits more easily than before.

#### GOING WITH THE WORKFLOW

Given the pressures for increased productivity, information experiences that don't take the user out of workflow or that save time in doing regular tasks have built-in market advantages. Brian Mackie, senior product manager for Moreover Technologies, which provides online media monitoring tools to enterprise customers, says, “You have to embed it and make it easy. It's about categorizing things under the hood—you don't want [users] to have to think about what they're accessing.”

In the case of Moreover's Newsdesk 4, a SaaS news and social media discovery and sharing service, end users can send customized newsletters and emails directly from the social monitoring dashboard, as well as set up feeds directly to corporate intranets or other enterprise information products. Social sharing is also

built into the product. “The sharing aspect in Newsdesk 4 is a better way of tapping into the enterprise directory,” says Mackie, noting that users can now set up groups and comment on and share stories that might have interest, for example, just to colleagues in a product team or a marketing department.

Looking beyond the enterprise, Cengage Learning, which provides teaching, learning, and research solutions for the academic, professional, and library markets, recognized a need in the academic market for a solution that would more easily integrate disparate tasks and content types. In March 2011 the company introduced MindTap, which it bills as “the first in a new category of Personal Learning Experiences (PLEs).” According to William Rieders, executive vice president of New Media at Cengage Learning, “Given that half of the U.S. student population is considered ‘non-traditional [not full time],’ that anytime, anywhere access is key.” Cloud-based MindTap is a multimodal environment that enables educators to distribute content from multiple providers to students and builds in interactivity and tracking to improve engagement.

Rieders says, “MindTap is designed to be the ultimate mashup of content, technology, and pedagogy.” It assembles all of a student's course materials in one spot for easy access—their ebooks, homework solutions, quizzes, multimedia content, assets from Gale's library databases—and students can access MindTap from mobile devices, desktops, or iPads. By integrating

grade books and tutoring into the platform, Cengage is also striving to simplify lower-value tasks for professors using the system, to free them up for more complex teaching tasks.

#### A WELL-WORN PATH

Taken together, the “new” precepts of improving information experiences—mobility, customization, enhanced productivity, visualization, and workflow integration—are simply updated names for what has always won end users over: simplicity, speed, flexibility, and accuracy. Similarly, the underlying supports for user experience, such as excellent customer service and responsiveness to the changes in a customer's environment, will only become more important as the pace of technological change quickens.

As Ricou-Bellan says, “It's difficult to predict how platforms will change over time. But as traditional business models are challenged, adapting and innovating products based on changes in the customer's organization is critical.”

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