



CREATING COMPETITIVE EDGE

## **Web Content Development and Management: The IT and Marketing Communications Tug of War**

### **Introduction**

In the digital age in which all businesses now operate a high quality, regularly updated website is crucial not only as an information tool but for many companies it is a key sales transaction channel. In the early years of the Internet the website was seen as the equivalent of the company brochure but with huge technological development over the last few years, increased internet access across the globe and now web 2.0, the website is one of the leading communications channels for all companies, used by customers and prospects alike.

Historically, by its very nature, the website was the responsibility of the IT team but as the technology has been simplified and the need for constant updates has increased, who is responsible for the website now – IT or marketing? Or even sales? Corporate and product differentiation is essential in the global environment in which all large organisations operate. The website is one of the key tools to deliver such differentiation but if there is no cohesion between key departments in the business, the website will fail to have the right impact – indeed the impact will be very damaging to the brand and reputation of a business. Timeliness of changes is critical not only to meet customer expectations but also regulation and compliance.

The 2008 SDL Tridion Web Content Development and Management Survey set out to explore the relationship between sales/marketing and IT with direct relation to website activity. How harmonised is the activity? Who should take the lead role? Who should own content development? As more and more people use the web for the initial engagement with a company – the growth of Google is clear evidence - getting the right content on the website on time is crucial to ongoing business success and brand image. The results from the survey are a fascinating insight into the workings of corporate business in the UK and the US and in some cases are quite surprising.

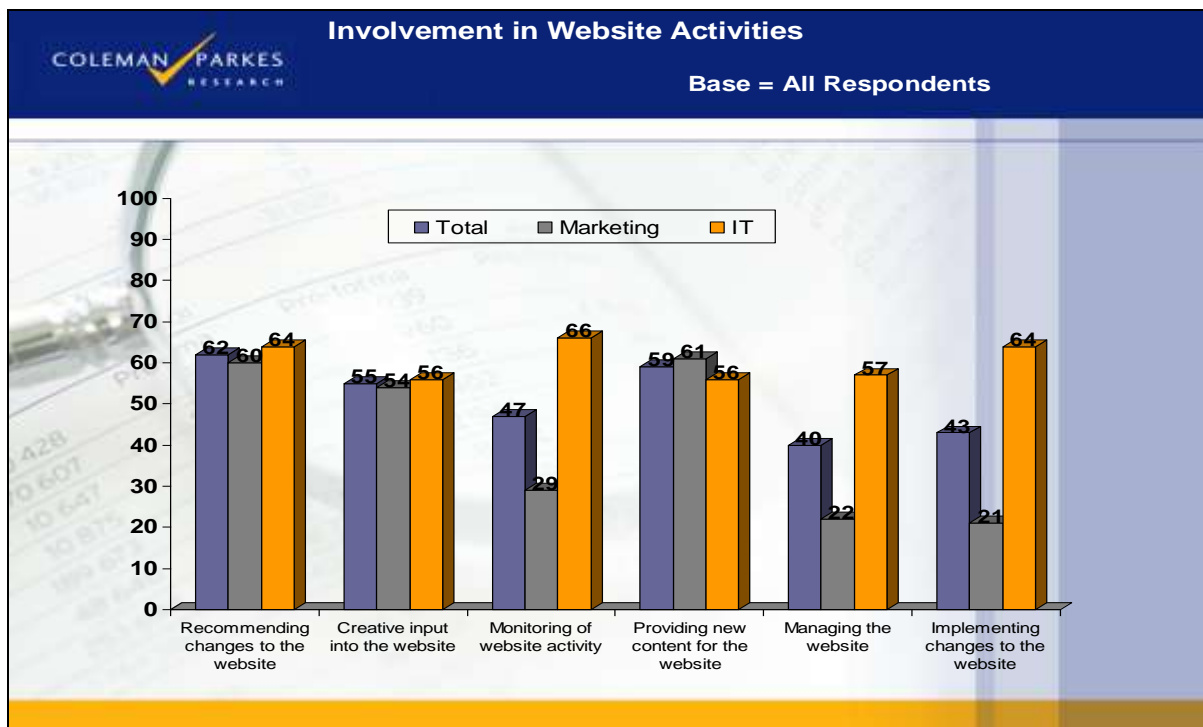
### **A little about the survey**

200 detailed online interviews, split equally between the UK and US, were undertaken in April 2008 using a carefully designed questionnaire. Half of all interviews were with senior marketing and communications professionals and the other half with IT/website development managers all in larger companies in each geography. The survey was undertaken by the independent research firm Coleman Parkes Research under the strict rules of the MRS in the UK.

### **Involvement in key website activities**

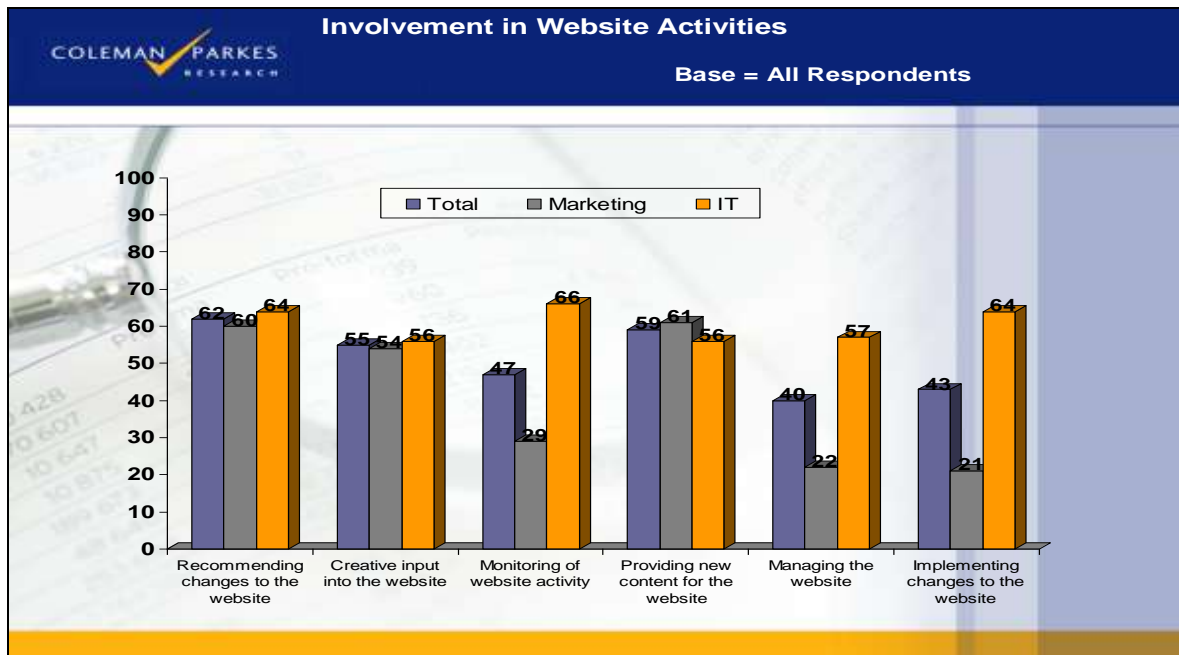
As might be expected there are clear lines of demarcation with respect to the IT team's and marketing's involvement in website activities. Recommending changes to the website and providing creative input into the website development are a shared responsibility but the more technical the activity the more it will fall to the IT team. 57 per cent of companies say that their IT team is responsible for managing the website compared with only 22 per cent

who leave it to marketing while 64 per cent of companies ensure that IT is responsible for implementing changes to the website compared to only 21 per cent of companies who have the marketing team involved. Almost three times as many US companies (33 per cent) have their marketing teams involved in managing and implementing changes to the website compared with the UK and in all activities covered by the survey more US IT team members are involved compared to the UK. For example 49 per cent of all UK companies say that the monitoring of website activity falls to the IT team compared with 82 per cent of US firms and 48 per cent of UK firms report that the IT team is responsible for implementing changes to the website compared to 80 per cent of US firms.



Changes to websites are very frequent in both the US and UK. 28 per cent of IT team members report that website changes are daily compared with only 11 per cent of marketing communications managers – the implication being that some of the changes are technical rather than marketing based. Just over one third of all IT and also marketing communications managers report that website changes are “every few days” and in total 82 per cent IT and 81 per cent of marketing communications managers report change are at least weekly – highlighting the importance the website now plays in corporate communications activities. Interestingly UK marketing managers are more demanding with respect to the frequency of changes to the website. 59 per cent of UK marketing communications managers requires websites changes at least every few days compared to only 37 per cent in the US.

But the first indications of a real tug of war between IT and marketing appear with respect to the time that it takes to make the required changes to the website. One third of IT managers report that changes are made in a few hours – but this view is not at all shared by the marketing team where 35 per cent report that the changes take in excess of 3 days. Only 19 per cent of marketing communications managers agree that the changes are executed within a few hours. UK based marketing communications managers are more likely to say that the time taken is beyond 3 days compared with those in the US – who seem to agree that changes take around 2 – 3 days but still not what IT is reporting.



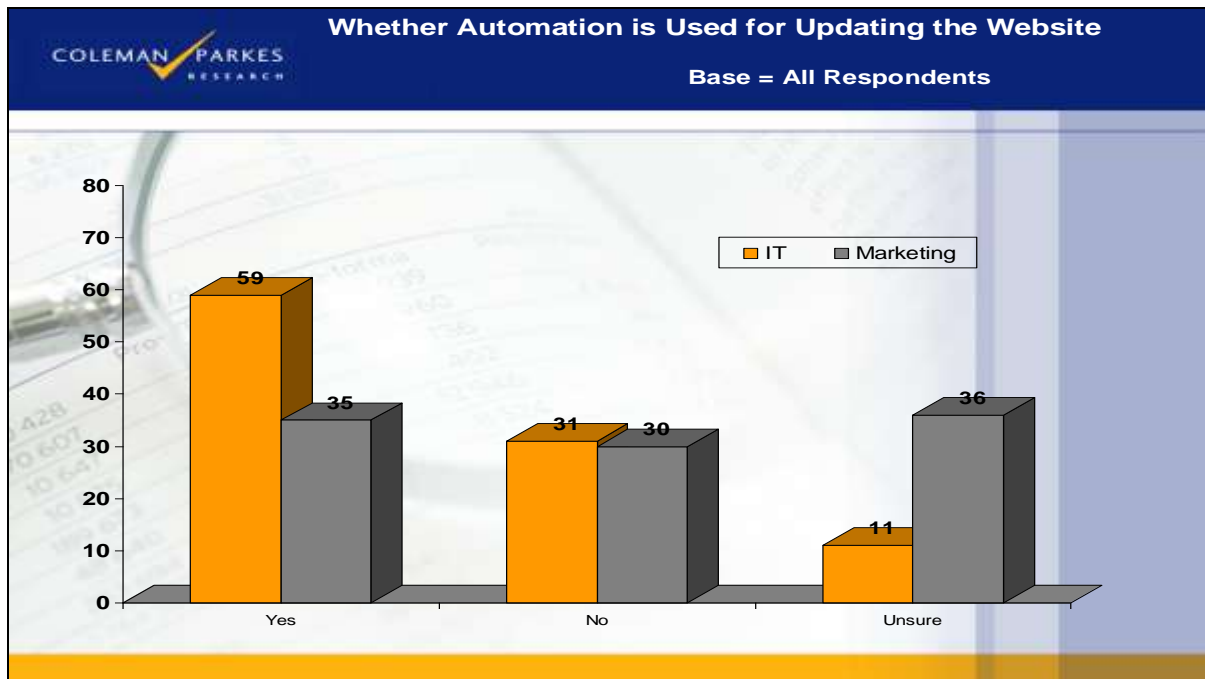
But when looking at what people think is an acceptable time frame from website change request to implementation there is evidence that neither IT nor marketing are happy with the current situation which in its own way may be a key to the tensions between the departments – as reported later. 40 per cent of those in IT feel that changes should be made within a few hours compared to 33 per cent who are actually meeting that timeline (US IT experts are far more demanding on themselves in this respect) and overall 79 per cent of IT managers (83 per cent in the US and 76 per cent in the UK) agree that changes should be made in less than 2 days – this compares with 79 per cent of marketing communications managers.

Acceptable Time Frame	UK Marketing %	US Marketing %	Total Marketing %	UK IT %	US IT %	Total IT %
A few hours	21	19	20	28	51	40
A day	32	45	39	33	20	26
2 days	27	14	20	15	12	13
3 – 5 days	6	18	12	16	12	14
5 days to a week	12	2	7	5	2	3
Other	2	2	2	3	4	4

In addition 48 per cent of all marketing communications managers and 51 per cent of those in the US report that marketing campaigns are delayed at least fairly often due to website change requirements being late – with the obvious impact on brand reputation and sales capability. This will certainly serve to heighten the tension between the two departments. One of the reasons why the changes are delayed is because 64 per cent of all IT managers – 74 per cent of those in the US - report that priority for web changes is given at least fairly often to other departments other than marketing highlighting the real tug of war between the two departments and possibly a lack of understanding about the brand impact of late web changes amongst IT managers. This also throws into the spotlight the often cited “better alignment between IT and business need” but this does not seem to be the case here as IT is clearly not meeting the needs of the marketing teams and shows a poor understanding of the impacts of its actions. Given that there is common acceptance that the website is serving customers and prospects – it is surprising that its importance is seen to be lower than other departments by the IT team.

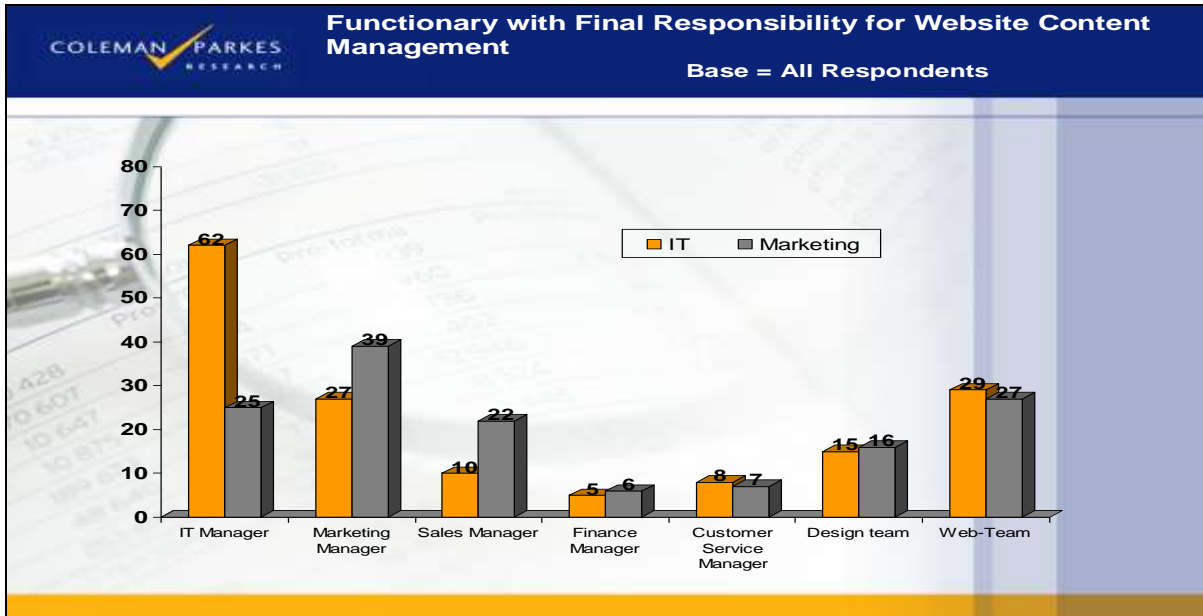
## The use of automation

47 per cent of all companies across both the UK and US report the use of automation for updating the company's website. As might be expected more IT managers report the use of automation in their company than marketing but the fact that over one third of all marketing communications managers are unaware of whether automation is used is a clear indication that there is a lack of real understanding between the two departments about what really happens. Marginally more US companies are using automation compared to those in the UK.

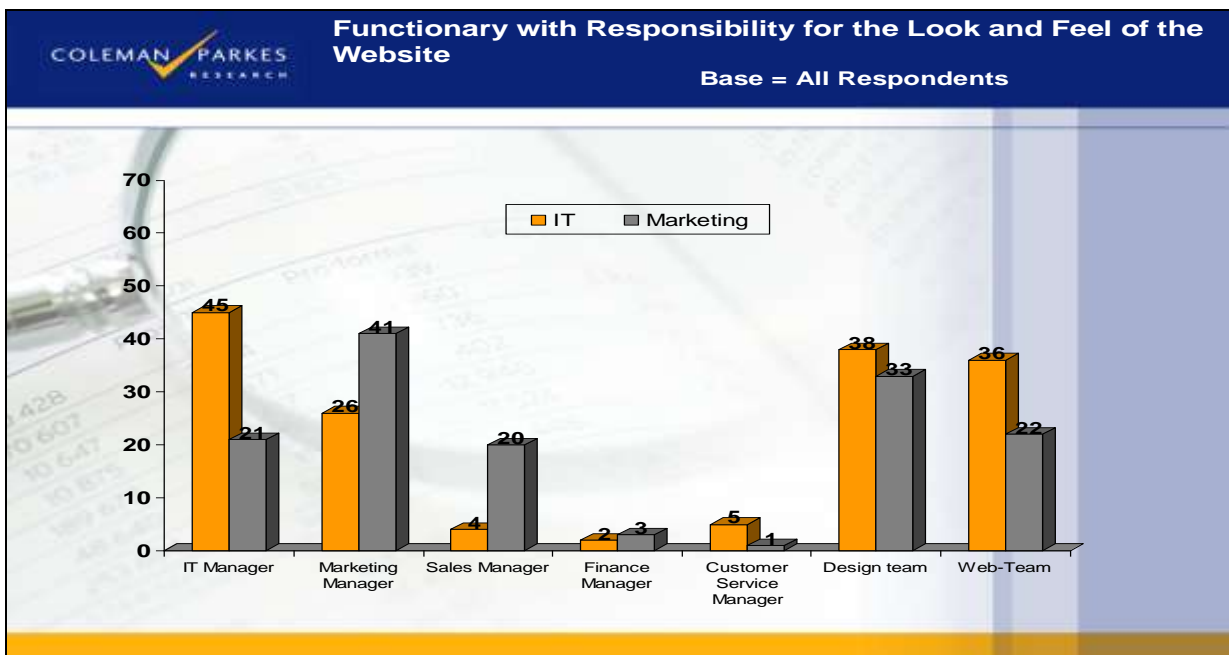


## Website management – the struggle Continues

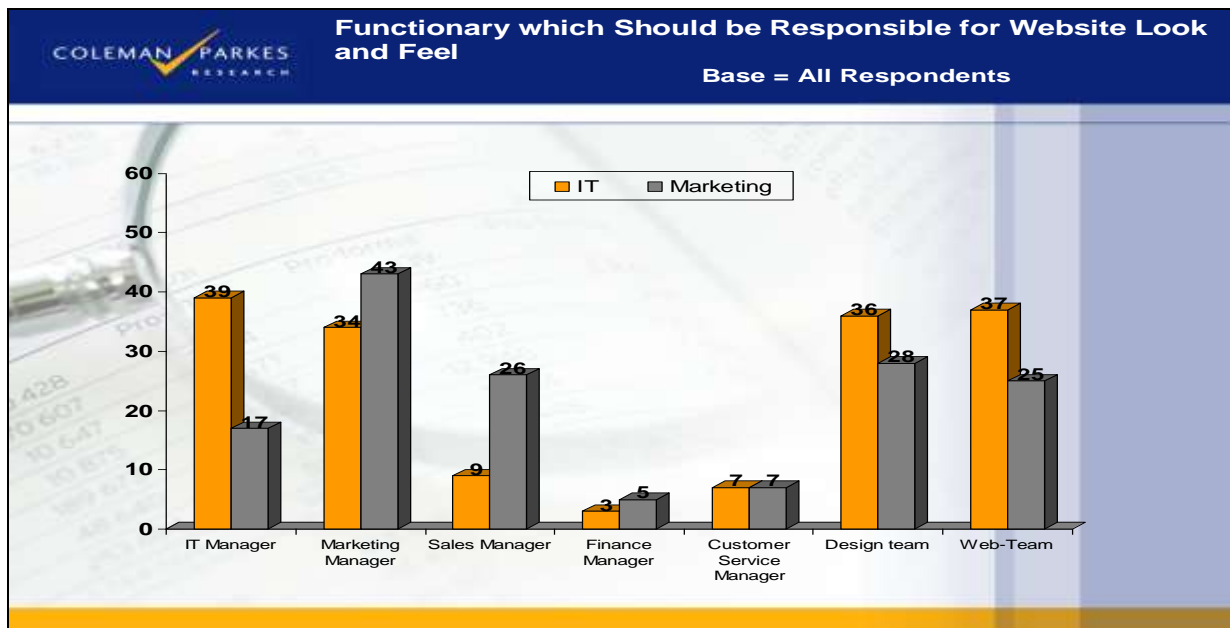
There is clear discord between IT and marketing with respect to who should be the functionary with the final responsibility for website content management. 62 per cent of IT managers (fully three quarters in the US) feel that the role should fall under their key responsibilities while only 27 per cent agree that marketing should take the lead – but here 31 per cent of UK IT managers think this should be the case compared to only 22 per cent of US IT managers.



But marketing communications managers do not share this view at all – with 51 per cent seeing the responsibility clearly in the sales and marketing arena and only 25 per cent agreeing that IT should take the lead. This flies in the face of reported developments in better business and IT alignment and IT and marketing are clearly not seeing things in harmony. IT managers in the US are far more likely to say that the responsibility should lie with them than UK based IT managers.

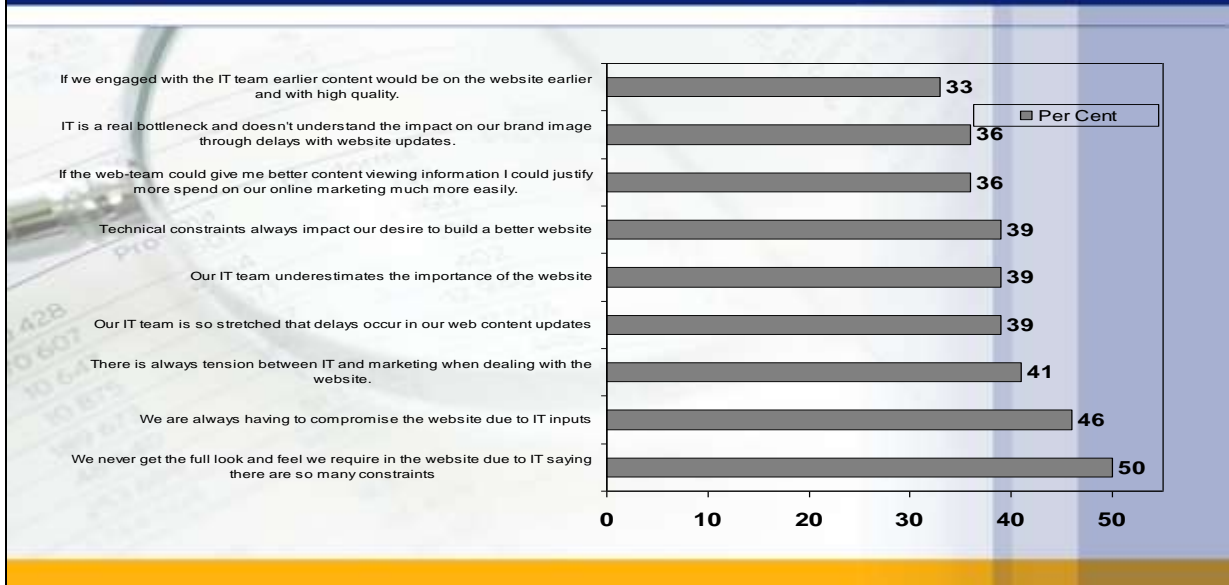


Things are no different when looking at the responsibility for the look and feel of the website – where IT still has a very strong view that it takes the lead but there is some element of closer working together as 26 per cent of IT managers driven by those in the UK (those in the US still see IT taking the lead for the most part) see the role falling to the marketing manager. 70 per cent of marketing managers questioned felt that they or the sales managers take the lead in terms of website look and feel but with engagement with the design and web-teams. It is interesting to note the similar view about the role of the web-team and design team amongst both Marketing communications and IT managers.



Finally, what is ideal scenario? Well companies are far from it as there is a clearly still a divergence of opinion between marketing and IT. 39 per cent of IT managers still think that they should take the lead responsibility for website look and feel but 34 per cent do see it as a marketing lead role, working alongside the design and web teams. But only 17 per cent of marketing managers across the board with similar views in both the US and UK feel that the responsibility should lie with IT. 43 per cent say it should be their responsibility and a further 28 say that sales should take on the role. The involvement of the web and design teams seems to be consistent amongst all functionaries. Views differ by country also as the IT managers in the US are more likely to say that the role should fall to them than to marketing. UK It managers have a more open view with almost an equal proportion saying that IT and marketing should take the lead. With marketing communications managers sharing similar views between the US and UK it is clear that US based marketing executives are likely to be most frustrated with their IT departments as they do not share the UK's more open view about roles and responsibilities.

This lack of cohesion between IT and marketing may explain why some of the changes to websites are implemented far later than would be expected. It may also explain why 50 per cent of marketing communications managers report that they never get the full look and feel they require for their company website due to IT saying there are too many technical constraints. 39 per cent of all marketing communications managers (44 per cent in the UK) also report that the IT team is so stretched that delays occur in website content updates. More worrying is the fact that fully 41 per cent of marketing communications managers agree that the IT teams underestimates the importance of the website and 46 per cent are always compromising the website due to IT inputs.



It is also a little more encouraging to see that one third of all marketing communications managers agree that earlier engagement with the IT team would lead to earlier content changes and higher quality website. At the same time 41 per cent (44 per cent in the UK) also highlighted that there is always tension between IT and marketing when dealing with the website – clear indication that things do need to change going forward.

Looking at the issue from the side of the IT team, one third of managers believe marketing overemphasizes the importance of the website and 30 per cent also agree that there is tension between marketing and IT. Generally the IT team seems more understanding of the issues being faced by marketing than is the other way round.

### Importance of the website

There is no doubt that the standing of the website has increased as a key communications channel and a significant proportion of marketing communications managers rate the website as more important than press coverage; investor relations (especially in the US) and stakeholder relations. This is undoubtedly driven by the fact that the website is aimed at existing customers (82 per cent of companies said this) and potential customers (82 per cent). So as perhaps one of the first key channels of communications where the brand image of the company is promoted to prospects, it is essential that the website is of the highest quality and regularly update. But with delays occurring in content updates it is clear that companies are suffering some form of brand image and reputation impact amongst customers and prospects alike.

### Conclusions

There is a clear tug of war taking place with respect to website development and management between the IT and marketing communications teams within large companies in both the US and UK. Reports of tension; poor service delivery and a need to change roles and responsibilities all indicate that all is not well between the two. Business and IT alignment is therefore thrown into question as this is one of the most basic areas where operating departments should work in unison for real business gain. Half of marketing

communications managers report they never get the look and feel they require – a situation that can not go on unchanged as the negative brand impact is truly significant.

Over one third of marketing communications people see IT as bottleneck but at the same time IT is quick to prioritise other departments ahead of marketing.

As the battle continues the website, a key customer and prospect communications channel, will be the real victim. Greater alignment of roles and responsibilities needs to take place with clear demarcation of lines of communication. Marketing wants to take more of a lead that IT thinks it needs and indeed IT seems to want to take on the lions share even though it is failing to meet expectations now with respect to updates and content management and is showing a poor understanding of the external impact of the website.

Fundamentally there needs to be a mind-shift with greater harmony seen between the IT and marketing communications teams. Only then will the website develop further into a core business communications and sales tool for all organisations, with high quality regularly update content.

~ ENDS ~

This research was commissioned by SDL Tridion.

