
THREE REASONS WHY FRANCHISORS NEED A FLEXIBLE CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

How to Achieve Brand Consistency and Local Flexibility

Geoffrey E. Bock, Principal

Bock & Company

April 2017



THREE REASONS WHY FRANCHISORS NEED A WEB CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

How to Achieve Brand Consistency and Local Flexibility

Geoffrey Bock, Principal, Bock & Company

A THRIVING FRANCHISE BUSINESS

Franchising is thriving. With almost 733,000 franchise businesses throughout the United States in 2016, the franchise sector accounts for approximately 3 percent of U.S. GDP in nominal dollars. This sector supports more than 7.6 million jobs nationwide, and job growth among franchises continues to outpace employment growth in American businesses overall.¹

Franchising empowers thousands of entrepreneurs to become turnkey business owners. Beyond direct commercial ties, franchising also enables independent groups to join forces and form consortia, associations, or other entities that create competitive advantages in their marketplaces.

CHALLENGES IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Yet franchising faces a critical challenge: how best to leverage the power of the Internet and profit in the fast-moving digital landscape. Conventional franchise businesses need to find ways to blend their traditional expertise and operational insights, honed through years of practical experience, with the needs and expectations of the digitally savvy customer.

Core to successful franchising is a consistent brand experience, one designed for specific targeted market segment(s). When engaging current and potential customers, a franchisor needs to deliver a traditional range of products and services supported by coherent marketing programs across its network of independently owned franchisees. This is basic to long-term success, as customers want and expect consistency.

This consistency applies to any digital footprint as well and should support and enhance the existing product offerings, in-store presence, customer services, signage, physical layouts, and other familiar aspects of a brick-and-mortar venue. Digital extends to online experiences delivered through the franchisor's branded websites.

Managing content in these websites has become an essential capability for franchisors, both in engaging with customers and supporting internal operations. Yet, franchise businesses have local presences. The digital experience has to accommodate the customization and flexibility for the franchisee as well.

¹ IHS Markit Economics, *Franchise Business Economic Outlook for 2017*. This report, prepared for the International Franchise Association, Franchise Education and Research Foundation, is available at:
http://franchise.org/sites/default/files/Franchise_Business_Outlook_Jan_2017.pdf

THREE REASONS FOR A FLEXIBLE WCM SYSTEM

Content creates connections between a franchisor and its franchisees. Managing that content is an essential element of digital franchising. Here are three reasons why franchisors need flexible Web Content Management (WCM) software as the platform for channeling their digital business activities.

Engaging Customers Locally

Typically, a franchisor owns the online experience and delivers it through a branded website that supports its network of franchisees. As with other franchise-wide marketing programs, the franchisor produces the content that attracts customers, publicizes products and services, and promotes the overall messages for individual franchisees.

Yet a single, centralized branded experience is not the whole story. When it comes to the customers themselves, all franchising is local. As independent firms, franchisees expect the autonomy to add content tailored to their own venues. Content is the currency that connects franchisors with their franchisees, and franchisees with their customers.

Delivering Consistent Branding

Many, if not most, large franchisors spend millions in advertising and PR to create an awareness and value proposition within the target market(s). Today much of the customer's buying process is done online before a potential customer even visits the franchise. It is imperative that the digital experience closely matches the overall image and message of the franchisor. This is particularly true if the advertising promotes ever-changing deals or sales. Controlling the consistency of the overall brand message and special offers can only be done from a central point.

Supporting Internal Operations

A franchisor owns key business operations and processes— such as sales training programs and lead generation activities—that ensure a branded presence among its franchisees. To ensure the necessary consistency and efficiency among these internal business activities, the franchisor can create a digital experience, as well as manage all of the relevant content, through a website accessible only to franchisee staffers and managers.

A branded web portal makes it easy for independent franchisees to access essential operational information, train their employees, participate in co-marketing programs, coordinate sales strategies, and benefit from the multiple programs and services provided by their parent franchisor. Franchisees need to be able to access all information through a single website.

HARNESSING CONTENT FOR FRANCHISE-BRANDED EXPERIENCES

How does a franchise business profit from Internet-enabled connections? Franchising focuses on relationships delivered through branded experiences. An essential first step for a franchisor is to adopt a flexible WCM platform. This platform needs to easily support consistent content across a federated network of websites.

This digital environment begins with a consistent look and feel, as well as a shared, centralized source of content for all franchisees that is easy to set up and manage. The WCM platform maintains all of the content that the franchisor distributes to external customers and internal business staffers alike. It has two key capabilities:

- Keeping the content current and up to date. There's a common source that all franchisees, their customers, and their staff can access.
- Delivering content to both full-screen websites and various mobile devices. There's an adaptive experience that works well both in the office and on the go.

Since most franchisors have already made IT investments to run different aspects of their business, it is important to leverage what they already have in house. To protect these investments and multiply their effectiveness, a WCM platform should be able to integrate with existing CRM, marketing automation, and other applications wherever required.

MIRRORING BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Moreover, the WCM platform should mirror how a franchisor expects to do business with firms across its franchise network. One franchisor might operate in a highly centralized fashion, seeking to maintain many operational and marketing controls. Another might offer flexibility and decentralization for the various businesses under its umbrella. A third might feature only an ad hoc consortium of shared services with the ability to select from a menu of options. A WCM platform should structure and manage the content that supports a franchisor's business objectives, operational norms, and other factors critical for its success.

At the same time, it's important to pay attention to the overall franchising culture. While the franchisor may drive the experience, not all content needs to be centrally managed and distributed. It's essential for the WCM platform to reflect the ways in which franchises operate. Content technologies should enable—and not dictate—creative processes.

Local autonomy is important. After all, franchisees are local entrepreneurs who provide unique offerings tailored to individual markets. In most cases, these firms need to augment the franchise-wide content and add original information for their own customers and employees.

TECHNOLOGY CHANGES

There's another aspect to digital engagement: the continuing evolution of the underlying technologies fueling the digital transformation. Both the franchisor and its network of franchisees need to stay abreast of ever-changing capabilities in various areas, including:

- Sales enablement
- Marketing automation
- Content marketing
- Search engine optimization (SEO)

- Omni-channel content delivery, including mobile experiences
- Social media and other next-generation approaches to audience engagement

A modern WCM platform makes a difference by future-proofing technology changes and enabling both franchisor and franchisees to keep up with disruptive transformations.

Be sure to adopt a platform that manages content through a shared repository. Franchisors and their franchisees also expect easy editing and publishing, where they can add and remove across their various websites and digital experiences using familiar desktop tools. Among the contemporary WCM platforms on the market, Webtreepro from Primero Systems is especially designed to meet the needs of franchisors and their networks of franchisees.

THE VALUE PROPOSITION FOR FRANCHISE BUSINESSES

In short, when it comes to franchising in the digital economy, connections matter. Thriving franchises are embracing the power of a flexible WCM platform to deliver competitive results. They are going to blend the ways in which they have traditionally done business with the agility to deliver consistent branded experiences and content.

Success within digital franchising depends on managing the flow of content across a franchise network. Whether it is an entrepreneurial firm or a nonprofit consortium, a savvy franchisor should have the expertise and web-based capabilities to weave connections among its various franchisees, customers, and potential franchise owners. To succeed as a digital franchise, it is essential to rely on a comprehensive WCM solution designed for franchising.

Geoffrey Bock, principal of Bock & Company, focuses on strategies for content management, mobility, AI, and digital transformations. A technology analyst and consultant, he has authored hundreds of in-depth reports, case studies, and articles on the business impacts of content technologies. He is a frequent contributor to the Search and Content Management channel at TechTarget.

Working with development and marketing teams, he has helped launch several successful software products. He advises enterprises and software firms on the essential activities for creating, curating, and publishing digitized information to shape customer experiences and drive revenue.

For more information see Bock's [LinkedIn profile](#).

About Primero Systems

Primero Systems Inc. brings people, processes, content and ideas together to produce better business experiences. For more than 20 years, Primero has been helping businesses achieve their goals and their potential through the infinite capabilities of software. From their award-winning Webtreepro content management system to their mission-critical, enterprise-grade custom software, Primero Systems' solutions improve efficiency, accuracy and contribute to the bottom line.

Get more from Geoffrey Bock in "Empowering Franchise Relationships" which details Bock's review of Webtreepro for franchise businesses. [Download Now](#)