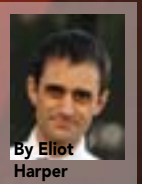


All aboard

The second annual XMPie Users Group was held in Las Vegas last month. Eliot Harper attended the conference to find out where XMPie is steering its ship and what's in store for passengers onboard.



By Eliot
Harper

The XMPie conference in Las Vegas attracted 200 delegates.

» When company president, Jacob Aizikowitz, founded the Israeli-based start-up company and Scitex spin-off, XMPie Inc, he could have never imagined eight years later he would be addressing an almost 200-strong audience of XMPie users in a Las Vegas casino. Nor could Aizikowitz have dreamt that today this same company would be Xerox-owned with a diverse portfolio of variable-data Printing (VDP), web-to-print and cross-media publishing solutions. So, how did they arrive here and create XMPie to be a household name in our industry?

XMPie's success can be attributed to its original vision — to develop a commercial platform for VDP and cross-media personalisation. As former Scitex employees, XMPie's company founders were well versed in the challenges of variable-data printing and recognised that there was an opportunity to bridge the gap between printing and the new media world. The use of personalisation within different media channels had already gained the attention of marketing organisations and professionals, but its use was media dependent, so the practical viability of integrating online and offline media was significantly limited.

Before XMPie appeared on the scene, there weren't any commercial cross-media

solutions available. Only a handful of marketing organisations had begun to exploit the capabilities of leveraging data for online channels together with print, with limited success. The requirements for online data are very different from offline. In the online world, no one is carefully cleansing, formatting and preparing data — it's live, raw and is constantly changing through updates. XMPie recognised the need to build a cross-media platform, enabling variable-data print to work with the demands of online media. And that's exactly what they did.

Today, cross-media personalisation is no longer just a trendy buzzword. It's an established practice and a proven enabler for effective, targeted and measurable communication. And XMPie, arguably, enabled this paradigm shift. Print service providers from across the globe are now touting cross-media personalisation capabilities — some have even realigned and rebranded their entire businesses as "marketing service providers" to remove the stigma associated with print. This new breed of service providers is offering a blend of marketing services, where print is often only one of several channels used in campaign execution. The best-of-breed providers offer a complete cross-channel marketing service, from personalised web sites and URLs, emails and text messaging, to a selection of both online and offline measurable touch points. Cross-media

publishing has transformed the way marketers communicate with consumers and has created a stronger value proposition for digital printing.

In 2006, the XMPie Users Group was established to foster dialogue between XMPie users, sharing best practice, business processes and applications within a peer-to-peer environment. The XMPie Users Group is formed of a joint board of XMPie executives and customers worldwide, operating as an independent, non-profit organisation. In 2007, the Users Group held their first annual conference in Las Vegas.

The 2008 XMPie Users Group conference attracted a strong mix of nearly 200 users from across the globe. With conference topics spanning multiple disciplines, from marketing to design and programming, the event was comparable to a marketing seminar, creative workshop and Star Trek convention, all blended together. Developers, designers, marketers, sales staff and other user professions networked, learned and evangelised on different levels, sharing code, creative and marketing practices.

But the conference wasn't just a networking event, it also provided an insight into market trends, best practices and XMPie's business direction.

The CMO (Chief Marketing Officers) Council took centre stage for the opening keynote session of the conference, presenting their findings from their 2008 Marketing Outlook study. This study revealed that the focus of marketing organisations during 2008 is in upgrading the efficiency and effectiveness of their marketing operations. This will be enabled by investment in campaign management, data management and marketing automation solutions.

Marketing automation is an emerging trend among marketing organisations today, as it enables automated, trigger-based marketing from determined events, such as customer lease renewals, service reminders and much more. In turn, such platforms not only create efficiency, but when combined with automated digital print workflows, enable targeted marketing when the audience for any individual production run can be as few as one, and still be cost effective.

The CMO Council also studied the effectiveness of customised communications, and noted that while there is a high perceived value of customised communications, adoption is still considerably low, despite years of practice. The study noted that while an overwhelming 56 per cent of marketers believe personalised communications outperforms traditional mass-market delivery, they still fail to adopt it.

One company that is fully embracing personalised communications is leading aerospace company, Boeing. As an XMPie software user, Boeing joins a growing list of large enterprises that have invested in XMPie's personalisation platform, including Target, Charles Schwab, CVS and others. Boeing's core business focus is in maximising customer intimacy, and personalisation plays a significant part in creating highly tailored experiences for their customers. At the recent conference, Boeing shared their inspiring, but ambitious vision for digitally customisable marketing materials, "to achieve an unprecedented level of 'one to one' in our marketing approach, frame the conversation uniquely to our customers in a breakthrough way and to express the brand through state of the art technology".

XMPie also shared its business vision with conference delegates, disclosing interesting technology themes and new products on the drawing board. Over the next 12 months, XMPie will continue to expand its product portfolio, which has already become a "Swiss Army knife" of market offerings complete with tools for database planning, web-to-print, variable-data printing, personalised web pages and marketing analytics. New technology themes planned for XMPie's utility knife include integration, variable-data printing,

cross-media, web enablement, application enablers and marketing tools.

While XMPie will continue to push the envelope on feature development, it will also focus development on quality, speed, scalability, robustness and usability of variable-data printing. In web enablement, XMPie demonstrated how it is expanding its existing web-to-print solution, uStore, and will also enhance its cross-media platform to enable more streamlined, integrated campaign deployment and response management.

XMPie president and founder, Jacob Aizikowitz: XMPie is well versed in the challenges of variable-data printing.



XMPie shared several technologies under development, including XMPie Marketplace, a new online service for XMPie customers. Built on the web-to-print uStore platform, Marketplace enables customers to purchase campaign assets and applications. The initial focus of Marketplace is to provide off-the-shelf personalised images, which are packaged together with licensed image templates and other required resources.

Marketplace also includes an image library of both font-based and image-based characters for use in print and web. The selection of previewed images was very effective and surprisingly affordable. XMPie has also incorporated a useful preview feature in Marketplace, enabling users to generate image previews by entering desired text.

XMPie's biggest challenge in building image personalisation adoption to date has been its own audience. While most print service providers offer design services, the skill set required to create effective personalised images falls outside of the occasional Photoshop user. By offering an extensive library of shrink-wrapped personalised images, XMPie users can incorporate personalisation

into campaigns cost-effectively, and with the announced pricing structure, very profitably.

Customer Beta testing for Marketplace has already commenced and the service will be launched in March. While the initial focus of Marketplace is in personalised images, XMPie intends to expand this offering to include other popular campaign assets and applications.

Capturing the attention of all delegates, XMPie also demonstrated how it is possible to create personalised videos using

ulmage, enabling both text and image variables to be incorporated in a movie sequence and rendered as individual files. While the current implementation is limited, the potential to expand this feature and enable generation of personalised, on-demand movies, is significant.

XMPie also showcased recent improvements to uEdit, its Flash-based document editor tool, which now includes several significant enhancements including new font support, allowing users to choose from a selection of server-side fonts and dynamically edit text through uEdit's Flash interface. uEdit includes an extensive API enabling third-party integration, and is included with uStore.

Summary

The way organisations market to their audience is changing rapidly. Cross-media publishing is taking our industry on a voyage into a brave new world. Its course is far from certain, and neither is its final destination, but XMPie's passengers realise the journey is a prosperous one and potentially critical for survival. «

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