



Filling the On-line Content Gap for T&T

By Atiba Phillips

Providing generous amounts of content on-line about our country is a must. Local and international stakeholders all expect to be able to learn about our geographical nuances, cultural diversity, history, industrial climate, and even the state of our beaches, any time of the day or night. Market players expect to purchase our products and services, book a flight and secure accommodation with a down-payment, all while sipping coffee after breakfast on a Sunday, and to receive immediate confirmation of the success of their transactions with a promise of receipt of any physical goods ordered within a week. They expect to find interesting video content about niche aspects of our society on YouTube or Google Video, and to be able to fill out some kind of on-line subscription form to receive updates (and discounts where applicable) on their areas of interest.

Countries that do not offer sufficient "original" information (i.e. information that doesn't come from a third party) immediately accessible on-line risk being forgotten totally from the international consciousness, or being thought of as backward, unsophisticated and even unsafe. People will wonder about the civil liberties and about their own ability to communicate with their home communities or businesses when in such countries. An insufficiency of compelling and well-indexed content available on-line will cost the country revenue. The first thing that the businesses looking at investing in the Caribbean do is pull up the Google or Yahoo! search engines to profile initial prospects. If Trinidad and Tobago's content is not readily available, easy to find and compelling, then our competition will benefit at our expense.

Indigenous Content: The need to generate indigenous on-line content (e-content) has been at the heart of passionate debates in the ICT arena. It's not a problem limited to this country; UNESCO says "the lack of local content is evident across all media and information channels". The presence of content from providers in the developed

countries is overwhelming, and reflects language, values and lifestyles often vastly different from those of the community 'consuming' the content". Our premise must be that producing high-quality, interactive and compelling content is not simply a matter to be philosophically debated, but a clear and present issue to be addressed if we are to assure our nation's current and long-term economic competitiveness.

Governments & On-line Content: The public sector is a significant producer of content (data/information, images, film, etc.), but it's sometimes hard for the public to access publicly-funded digital content, which is potentially valuable for commercial and non-commercial use. To use outstanding government content to push the market forward, there must be a mindset change in the public sector culture around information-sharing, and legislation must be updated to clarify the structure of and access to public information, including structures that facilitate the commercial re-use of public sector information (e.g. geographical, meteorological, traffic, business, and economic, social, educational data), thus making more valuable and user/business friendly content on T&T available to niche consumers.

Initiatives should be put in place to:

1. Provide co-ordinated access to research data, cultural and educational public resources as a public policy objective.
2. Develop 'community fund' initiatives that will be used as sources of funding to digitise valuable local and indigenous content.
3. Create jobs in local communities to digitize non-commercial public sector and other content which can eventually be aggregated and made accessible online.
4. Create digital archives on cultural heritage while driving standardisation of the use of meta-data (title of work, author, information on right holders, and conditions for use) to optimise searching, browsing and use of digital archives within/across museum and government databases. The focus should first be on resources that are "high on public

value but low on commercial value", and next on knowledge information resources with higher industrial impact.

Availability of skilled personnel: One problem that has plagued T&T is the considerable mismatch between skill demand and supply for ICT skills in general and software skills in particular. Digital content industries rely on substantial R&D and technological innovations, each requiring specialised skills, but few educational institutions offer opportunities to learn these skills. And not all of the skills needed are of a technical nature; we need management and organisational skills; legal proficiencies, including the complex management of intellectual property rights, and programmes in digital content for SMEs.

Co-operation, Linkages & Clusters: Fragmented industry structure and lack of co-operation can slow the adoption of new digital content products and long-term investment in the digital content sector. In addition, new intermediaries may include smaller less-established players that will have to be integrated into the mix. Therefore, fostering closer collaboration between firms along the value-chain and between traditionally separate industries and sub-sectors will become necessary. These include mobile operators, internet service providers, artistes, videographers and animators, seasoned executive management as well as finance houses and the public sector – all with the aim to improve industry linkages and foster national cluster formation.

Clarify Brand T&T: Our goal as county should not simply be to get as much content out there as possible. Nor should it be to create the most cutting edge digital content available (though there's nothing wrong with that). Our goal should be to make available content that is truthful, insightful, positive and consistent. This will help us clarify our brand and its different elements to those unfamiliar with T&T and ultimately will serve to help us attain our national objectives.