

Management Focus

dynamic intelligence for today's leaders



Featured article

Website accessibility and usability



Guru interview

An interview with Barbara Cassani

Interview by Alistair Craven

Welcome to Management Focus

... and welcome to the November/December issue.

Despite an increasing requirement for organizations to provide accessible websites, many have shown a reluctance to move forward.

Several still hold the mistaken belief that an accessible site lacks any graphics or multimedia elements, making it "boring", and others do not wish to spend the money on additional resources. In fact, well developed accessible sites can actually generate income and could thus be deemed to increase organizational wealth. Find out how to move your company's website forward with our article on website accessibility and usability.

In our last issue of 2005, we are pleased to bring you an exclusive interview with Barbara Cassani. Described by the BBC as "sharp, shrewd and knowing", Ms Cassani has spent much of her career in the airline industry; first as a manager at British Airways, then as founder and CEO of the low-cost airline Go. Here she discusses management styles, Go's clash with easyJet, and the challenges of heading the London 2012 Olympic bid.

In our *Management Matters* section, our in-house expert answers questions raised by the controversial views of Martin Lindstrom in an article featured on **ManagementFirst.com**. Lindstrom believes that, by overlooking the sense of smell, brand managers are missing a great opportunity to develop new and strong emotional associations with the brand. Has branding gone too far? Or is sensory branding the missing link that will bring branding back to the forefront of marketing in the postmodern era?

If all this has left you wanting more – visit www.managementfirst.com, where, as an Emerald subscriber, you can access over 140 interviews, 290 articles and much more besides.

See you in the New Year,

Debbie Read
managementfirst.com



CONTACT US

Editors: Alistair Craven
acraven@managementfirst.com

Debbie Read
dread@managementfirst.com

Marketing: Michael Guyatt
mguoyatt@managementfirst.com

Customer service: Stuart Bleese
sbleese@managementfirst.com

Jessica Lawlor
jlawlor@managementfirst.com

Tel: +44 (0) 1274 785151
Fax: +44 (0) 1274 785200

Address: ManagementFirst,
60/62 Toller Lane,
Bradford BD8 9BY,
United Kingdom.

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Website accessibility and usability

The issue of website accessibility has so far been largely ignored in favour of more innovative development practices that test new technological boundaries. However, accessibility remains an issue due to the fact that many people with disabilities are currently unable to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Web.



This is largely attributable to poorly designed or inaccessible websites, which prevent them from fully experiencing the graphical and aural benefits of the medium. This raises several concerns for organizations that may currently be lagging behind in conforming with legislative requirements for the provision of an accessible website.

The *Guidelines for State Government Websites* (2002) highlight the requirement under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) for site owners to provide “equitable access to people with disabilities”, which should be addressed in pursuit of improved

accessibility. Owing to its broad definition, this requirement may be open to various interpretations and thus provide a climate of risk to site owners, as legal precedents do not exist in many instances to test the practical application of this legislation.

Accessibility versus usability

There is an increasing requirement, both commercially and legally, to provide sites that deliver information to all users in the same manner to prevent the creation of technological élitism, which favours those individuals who do not have a disability. In effect, it is suggested that individuals who have a disability are demoted to second-

class netizens who are precluded from normal online participation.

In addressing website accessibility, the internationally recognized applicability of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has emerged as an important benchmark in applying uniform web accessibility standards. Whilst the W3C does not possess any legal standing, and thus the implementation of their standards is not mandatory, they nonetheless provide valuable input in the web arena with regard to determining suitable methods that improve website accessibility and usability. Most notably, the W3C have developed *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines*, which seek to define the elements of web design that extend the level of site accessibility to include people with disabilities. The need to ensure that the web interface remains consistent throughout the site is a further area that, if systematically addressed, contributes to the overall usability of sites and provides a positive experience for all site visitors.

The advancement of site usability is largely achievable by first understanding the concept of human-computer interactivity, then developing websites which provide a sufficiently intuitive environment that supports this.

Accessibility and usability, whilst being distinct entities, are interlinked and thus cannot be viewed or applied in isolation. Sites that are developed to meet accessibility standards are generally, but not always, more usable in their practical application.

The development of websites that conform with both accessibility and usability standards will support the creation of web environments which perform their function more effectively and provide an enhanced experience for the user: thus accessibility and usability standards are central to good design methodologies.

Inhibitors of accessibility on the Web

Many organizations remain uncommitted to implementing any large-scale accessibility-focused web development initiatives, despite the clear advantages associated with doing so. Some inhibitors of website accessibility enablement are:

- Many organizations are “not interested” in making sites accessible, suggesting that strong motivators, such as legislative requirements, are not a sufficient incentive to pursue a proactive accessibility initiative.
- “Making the site accessible makes it boring” – this perception is based on the mistaken belief that an accessible site lacks any graphics or multimedia elements, when this is clearly not the case.
- “We don’t want to spend the money” is often cited, and perpetuates the myth that additional resources are required to make sites accessible.

In analyzing these inhibitors it is evident that much of the current reluctance on the part of organizations may be attributable to a lack of understanding of the principles of accessibility and usability. The fact that organizations claim to be disinterested in accessibility issues suggests that they may not be aware of their legislative

responsibilities to advance accessibility, or that by improving accessibility they could reap financial benefits.

The notion that accessible sites are “boring” may have had some basis during the early days of website development, in that a simple method of addressing the page accessibility was by opting for a “text-only” version. The use of “web-safe” colours may provide fewer options than a full colour palette, which may be viewed as detracting from the overall appeal of the site; however, sufficient colour choices are still available.

The last inhibitor, suggesting that companies perceive that there is a high cost associated with the development of accessible websites, is easily challenged in as much as there is some suggestion that well developed sites actually generate income and could thus be deemed to increase rather than decrease organizational wealth.

The path to website accessibility requires proactive efforts on three fronts within the organization:

1. There should be active support from management, which may require a shift in organizational culture to accommodate and promote this new direction in web accessibility.
2. An educational program for all employees should be formulated, which outlines the legal responsibilities as well as the financial benefits to the organization of providing an accessible and usable website.
3. Web developers should receive appropriate training in coding techniques which adhere to W3C standards and minimize common development barriers.

“By improving accessibility organizations could reap financial benefits.”

Enhance website accessibility and usability

Disability is an important consideration in the development of contemporary websites. By understanding the needs of all users, not only those with disabilities, organizations may begin the process of advancing both accessibility and usability and integrating these elements into their web development strategies.

While it has been suggested that the uptake of website accessibility has been largely slow, and driven in part by the threat of legal recourse, the added benefits associated with the introduction of improved usability for all stakeholders may prove to be the trigger for more widely implemented initiatives.

Despite the compelling reasons which exist to develop accessible and usable websites, however, many organizations lag behind in the implementation of these elements of web design. The notion which suggests that the development of accessible websites is a cost-intensive exercise has been a factor in inhibiting strong uptake in this area and needs to be addressed before large-scale progress can be made.

The combination of accessibility and usability, due to their close relationship, enhances the efficiency of the site for the user and provides an efficient medium by which to access corporate information.

Ross Yates, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Australia.

Read the full version of this article in *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, Volume 22 Number 4, 2005.



An interview with Barbara Cassani

Interview by Alistair Craven



Barbara Cassani is best known for founding the low-cost airline Go in the UK and for her work in driving London's successful bid for the 2012 Olympic Games.

Described by the BBC as “sharp, shrewd and knowing”, Ms Cassani has spent much of her career in the airline industry; first as a manager at British Airways and from 1997 to 2002 as founder and CEO of the low-cost airline Go.

Go was established with a mere £25m investment by British Airways but was profitable in less than three years. Ms Cassani headed a £110m management buyout, backed by 3i, and a year later the company was sold to easyJet for £374m.

Here she discusses management styles, Go's clash with easyJet, and the challenges of heading the Olympic bid.

Q: As the founder of British Airways' low-cost airline Go, you and your team were able to transform an initial investment of £25m into a £374m payback in four years. Can you explain some of the key challenges you faced in achieving this remarkable feat?

A: The key challenges were threefold: we were fourth in a crowded UK market, we needed to grow quickly to make up time and gain a serious market position, and we also needed to grow quickly to become profitable.

Our shareholder, British Airways, was sceptical that a start-up airline could make money. We had three years to break even and a pot of £25m. There would have been no more capital if we had overspent. This scepticism gave us room to set up the business independently – without undue interference from head office.

We believed that low prices could equate to great service. This was our philosophy. We were always looking for ways to surprise customers – our people, punctuality, professionalism and friendly style won customers and allowed BA to be proud of its low cost offspring.

Q: The art of management is a consistently popular subject amongst our readership. How would you describe your management style? And what do you see as the main differences between management and leadership?

A: My management style is a combination of clear objectives, bear hugs and trusting people to get on with it. Any business, but particularly a start-up business, needs a very clear road-map to profitability. My job was to ensure that we had clear objectives, allocated them to members of the team, monitored progress and helped break down the inevitable road-blocks. Sometimes this was coaching one of the management teams, other times it was supporting external negotiations, and other times it was to modify the objectives. The bear hugs refer to motivating everyone to achieve the objectives.

Trusting people to get on with their jobs was the only way to ensure that everyone did their best for customers and one another. An environment of mistrust and blame is the quickest way to destroy an employee's

desire to take a risk to improve the way we do things. This philosophy goes equally well for directors, telesales people, pilots or cabin crew.

I don't think there should be a difference between management and leadership.

Q: Much has been said about Go's bitter competitive rivalry with easyJet, which eventually bought the company in 2002. At the time you made it clear that you were not happy with the deal. What are your general reflections on this period?

A: I feel pretty much the same today about the sale of Go to easyJet as I did in 2002. I think consumers lost the better airline, investors lost out on better potential long-term returns and the employees lost a better employer. 3i decided to sell Go because the short-term return was irresistible, since the rest of 3i was doing so badly.

Q: Your latest challenge has been the successful campaign to bring the 2012 Olympic Games to the UK. How has this project compared with your previous business ventures?

A: Becoming involved in the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Bid in 2003 was my chance to give something back to London – the home of Go's customers and employees. As the first employee and Chairman, I started from scratch (just as at Go) and put my energy into building the team. Getting the right people who had passion, determination, the right skills and a track-record of winning was critical. With this core team, we sketched the outline plans for the London Games in just a couple of months. Other cities had been given years to do this. But the time pressure helped us gain commitment from government, sports and many organizations around the country. The Olympic bid was completely different from running a business. There would only ever be one winner. Rarely is the outcome so all or nothing in business. But rarely in business would you be able to do something that could touch so many people's lives.

To read the full, exclusive interview with Barbara Cassani, log on to www.managementfirst.com and click on the “Strategy” community.

Management Matters

Welcome to our Q&A section – Management Matters – where you can find actionable advice on today’s top management issues.

A recent article featured on ManagementFirst.com discussed Martin Lindstrom’s thoughts on what he terms “broad sensory branding”. Lindstrom argues that 99 per cent of all brand communication today is focused on two senses: what we hear and what we see. However, in sharp contrast 75 per cent of our emotions are generated by what we smell.

Q Has branding gone too far? Or is sensory branding the missing link that will bring branding back to the forefront of marketing in the postmodern era?

Lindstrom’s idea of “smell your brand” seems fanciful, at first glance. But essentially he is prompting two courses of action for managers; open your mind to possibilities; integrate your product/service and message.

Broadband technology has brought televisual messaging to e-mail and the web – what in itself is a relatively new positioning medium. While many companies are still trying to figure out whether the web is an effective advertising or informational medium, some others are pushing technical possibilities as far as they will go – can we

animate it? Can we make it talk? Can we make it interactive? And, well before the web, people were experimenting with multi-sensory product communication, such as small swathes of fabric built into magazines; scent-impregnated perfume ads; attached free CDs or cassette tapes; sachets of soup, candies or sweeteners.

Not all – indeed, not many – products lend themselves to being tasted or smelt. But taking “smell your brand” as a metaphor prompts the question – what can we do to make communications multi-sensory?

The second issue behind sensory branding is the alignment of messages to experience. Lindstrom talks about aligning the messages around banking, of “attentiveness, comfort and security” and aligning them with sensory cues – the décor and furnishing

within a bank branch; the way the staff dress and look; the language used in communications. If any of these are misaligned, it will create a psychological jarring.

Alignment using sensory branding means understanding and lining up the full consumer experience, not just a clever sales slogan. A “clean” hotel means clean-smelling, visually bright and relatively quiet. A “precision” bearing may mean shiny, lightly-oiled rather than wiped clean and dry. Why? Because sensory and emotional cues will intrude subconsciously on experience.

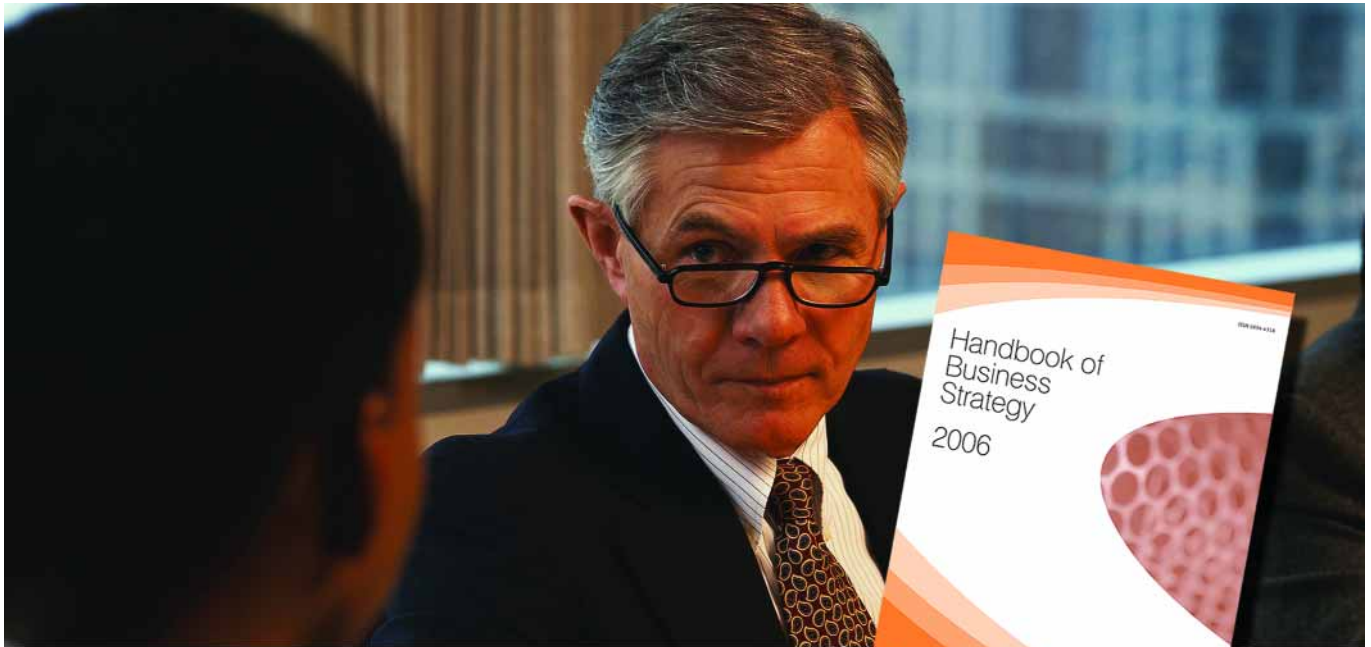
An experiment some years ago showed that canteen customers who were greeted with smiling staff and an amusing chalked menu perceived their food to be hotter than a similar control group the week before with plain chalkboard menus and polite but unsmiling staff. Not just better or tastier – hotter. “Expensive” in glassware will normally equate to “heavy”. In a bicycle it will normally equate to “light”. In a camera, it might be either. Technology will normally be black or metallic silver; unless it is funky technology like an iPod, in which case it may be anything but.

The important point is – think it through!

Our resident expert has over 25 years’ professional experience in management. If you would like to send him a question, write an e-mail to Web Content Manager Debbie Read at dread@managementfirst.com and the best submissions will be featured in a future issue of Management Focus.

To read the article “Martin Lindstrom – broad sensory branding”, please visit our Marketing Community on www.managementfirst.com/tk.php?brand

Have your say on the branding issues discussed here and in the article in our ManagementFirst discussion forum at www.managementfirst.com/tk.php?brandchat



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