

Dreamwright Articles and Blogs

Diversify Your Portfolio

Saturday, 23 July 2011 14:09 Last Updated on Saturday, 23 July 2011 14:13 Written by Administrator

User Rating:  / 2
 Poor     Best

Diversify Your Marketing Portfolio

I am often asked how I can put a customer's web site at the top of a search engine. The idea has somehow been implanted into business owner minds that the number one spot on Google search engine will result in instant success. This is far from the case. In fact we teach that even having a web site doesn't guarantee success in business.

I know what you are thinking. Why is a web development company like [Dreamwright Web Design Studios](http://www.dreamwright.com) telling customers that a web site will not bring them success? It's the same reason why financial analysts don't tell their clients to buy lottery tickets every day as a sound retirement plan. No one thing will result in instant success.

The key to marketing your business is diversity. You need a web site but it can't be the only marketing your business has. A web site should be your anchor. In other words, a web site should be the central location that all your other marketing points to. You need a web site because it is a 24-hour brochure of company information with call-to-actions to capture interest. Everything else you do should point to your web site.

If you hand a client your business card and it doesn't contain your web site address you missed an opportunity. Your business card alone may not have enough information to convince your potential customer. If you have a blog or social media site page like facebook, twitter, or linkedin and never refer to your web site you again have missed an opportunity. Do you have your web site on your company vehicles?

You need to diversify your marketing by empowering other avenues that all eventually redirect back to your anchor: your web site. I read in a book recently an authors response to the question: What is better than being number one on a search engine? The answer is being number one, two, three, four, and so on. Give a potential customer every opportunity to find you and utilize everything in your surroundings to advertise your web site. ~ M. Ryan Corbin 07/2011

M. Ryan Corbin is the owner and CEO of [Dreamwright Web Design Studios](http://www.dreamwright.com) ([dreamwright.com](http://www.dreamwright.com))

Detecting Trojans Before Launching New Applications

Thursday, 12 May 2011 20:58 Written by Administrator

User Rating:  / 1
 Poor     Best

Michael Ryan Corbin

Article 3 - Trojan detection using MIB-based IDS / IPS system

The final result of any application development or systems design is the implantation of the software. In the midst of reading about the procedures and general outlines for installation, I failed to read a mention of system security. Since most applications are installed on existing hardware I found the following article by Colin Pattinson and Kemal Hajdarevic to be most interesting. The authors tackle the possibility and certain threat of existing viruses and Trojans on end user PCs. Their article is entitled *Trojan detection using MIB-based IDS/IPS system*.

As a system analyst I would imagine that a threat of existing viruses on a newly developed system would be of great concern. A virus like a Trojan is exceptionally dangerous on a workstation and a network. The Trojan type virus has the ability to spread itself and open a portal on a workstation exploiting the vulnerability by opening a portal to allow other viruses to enter the workstation or network.

The main concern of an existing Trojan virus on a PC would be the opportunity it would have to access information on the new application loaded after the Trojan was installed. This would allow the virus to use its open portals within the workstation to access information in the application such as secure data. This could also leave the opportunity for a virus to alter the application from its original purpose and destroy data or worse share secure data outside the network. Most dangerously is the ability of a Trojan to be hidden from the user so that it could not be detected for days or months.

As explained in the article, an application often uses the workstation internal memory (RAM) to effectively run the program. A Trojan type virus could easily access this memory especially if it was preinstalled before the new application. As Trojans multiply they also use internal memory of the workstation. These viruses can overtake the RAM and limit the amount available to the rest of the programs on the workstation. Eventually it can become so powerful that a new application would not be able to function at all with the ultimate result of a PC that has no memory for basic functions. This leads to a “crash” of a computer making it completely unusable.

So the question becomes how do you detect a Trojan or eliminate it efficiently? Since Trojans are so hard to find what can be done to detect them early enough? Many of the more effective viruses can actually prevent antivirus programs or scanners to operate on the same workstation. They can easily disable basic functionality like opening a browser. The authors propose a simpler solution to third-party programs for detection and elimination. They propose using the information in the host computer memory – specifically the Management Information Base or MIB for short. Using such a system could become a proactive way to prevent viruses without using valuable resources to do so.

So how would MIB be useful? First of all MIB is where system information is stored. Information such as the hardware inside the PC, the connections to the network or outside (Internet), and running software is all collected inside the MIB. If you knew what was supposed to be in the MIB you could easily detect something that wasn't supposed to be in the MIB. Sounds simple right? Actually it would take a fair amount of data and a way to process to see these changes to information inside the MIB. Storage isn't the biggest issue but the way it transfers from one end to another is. The bandwidth between the host and the translator could be swamped by the transfer of this data which in turn takes away network speed and Internet usage. Because of the bandwidth issue intrusion detection only takes place periodically and apparently not often enough to be effective.

The answer is to keep the MIB observations on the local machine only. Instead of checking every process inside the MIB you can check certain ones which are smaller and are most likely to indicate an intrusion. One such process is the Host Resource called “HrSWrunName”. This can be used to isolate a process to a local spot. Other useful ones might be “HrSWrunPerfCPU” which can see how much CPU is being used at one time to process a process. If there is a shift in

either one it could be a Trojan. Both of them being affective is even more likely to be a virus. With these processes running locally it is possible to catch them sooner before they cause a bigger issue for the entire network or new application.

The authors continue their article by outlining a decision tree algorithm that would include a series of if/and/or situations to examine the changes in the MIB to determine if the threat is real or a false positive. The article concludes with time trials of processing times averaging 300 msec and next-step measures.

In conclusion I propose that a new step in application installation and launch be initiated. This new step would account for the possibility of foreign agents on the end user computer that might affect the usage and operations of the new application. User workstations should be inspected and cleaned using proactive techniques such as the MIB detection and other resources to ensure a sterile environment exists before a new application is installed or accessed.

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Using XML and XAML to build better user interfaces for applications

Thursday, 05 May 2011 15:55 Written by Administrator

M. Ryan Corbin

Article Review

Source: Using XML Files to Document the User Interfaces of Applications

The face of any software application is referred to as the UI or user interface. It is said that a good UI is the difference between good software and bad software. I believe this to be more than a true comment and more of mission statement for any programmers. After all, how useful is an application when it is too hard or confusing to use?

Inside the article “Using XML Files to Document the User Interfaces of Applications”, the authors Mohammad Tubishat, Izzat Alsmadi, and Mohammed Al-Kabi describe particularly helpful insight into software design techniques in regards to saving and preserving the elements of the graphical user interface. The overall idea is to create a way to recreate the GUI (graphical user interface) states from one application to another.

While reading I thought the idea to be somewhat redundant in my personal experiences until I looked back at my previous course work. In my company we use programming elements and design tools to help generate a lot of the GUI. The project tool, like Microsoft Visual Studio for example, has built in tools where you can easily drag and drop UI elements into you project and save the GUI state as a template. This becomes incredibly handy when creating the other parts of your application as you can refer to the saved template files to rebuild the interface. In further reading of the article It becomes clear that this might not be an option for everyone. While it is simple for us to use a project management application suite how do you solve the problem of preserving the GUI state from our application to a completely different one? What do you do if you are designing an application from scratch?

The author’s answer is to simply translate the GUI state into XML. XML has long being the universal language understood by every program and programmer. It’s simple to create and easy to understand. Beyond XML for simple translation it also becomes a way to easily record changes in your development. Changing one area of an application

could cause a domino effect throughout. The use of XML to keep track of each design state at every change allows for an easy “redo” if needed.

XML as the universal language of edits is not a new idea. The authors are actually proposing a different way to look at XML to keep track of the states. They give the example of a simple program in Windows like Notepad. Notepad has around 200 controls inside with each control possibly having 40 properties. (font / font choices). By multiplying these numbers you could be looking at 8000 states. If you change any one property from the 8000 it would trigger a new state which would then have to be remembered. The authors suggest that there is a simpler way using XML in a parent-child formation that could significantly reduce the 8000 down to 2000 creating a 75% reduction in the size of the XML. Smaller XML could mean faster processes, less space, maybe happier user.

XAML (eXtensible Application Markup Language) has grown out of the evolution (or idea of) regular XML. It became the specific generic mark-up language for applications and developers. Most likely XAML was needed because XML is too often considered a web development language. In XAML you can define a simple button in the graphical user interface without listing out arbitrary elements like color and style which is usually done in the design theme files. The state of the button can be easily defined to a few words which tell where and what about the button. The example given is <Panel11> <Button Content=“OK”/> </Panel11>.

To simply the relevance of the article I can relate it to the building of my home. In layman’s terms I should not have to reframe the house if I change the color of the front door. Sounds silly but that is what happens in the way software states were kept. One change in a property could alter every element in the user interface. The suggestion is to separate the states and provide “children” or lower classes of the state that only pertain to that state. So if I want to change the color of my front door it will only affect the door – not the framing. When programmers try and revert or compare past states they would have to look at the entire list as a whole and find a change. The authors suggest a tool that would look more at the tree structure (parent/child/child) structure and report back any differences there.

The point is that a better structure creates consistency that can be reused by all programmers when building one app or other applications. The ease-of-use factor is mirrored by the ease-of-programming that occurs with the consistency.

Like many computer and internet related elements there is a lack of consistency among developers. Each believes that their newest code is better than the others therefore competition fuels advancement. Advancement is great but eventually the populus has to agree to some sort of standards that become the “norm”. The norms are what allow work to progress even further simply because you don’t have to reinvent the tires when making a better automobile. The authors of this article are simply suggesting alternatives to help create a better standard.

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The Importance of the Human Experience in Software Development

Friday, 29 April 2011 10:17 Written by Administrator

Article reviewed: Analysis of Human Factors in Software Application Design for Effective User Experience

In the most generalized classification I can create, I submit that software development is broken down into two often opposing sides. The first side is the technical development side where developers, designers, and analysts reside. The other side of development is populated by the end user. In the article written by Sami Abduljalil and Dae-Ki Kang, they attempt to bridge massive gap between the two sides that is always present.

Naturally you would think that developers and end-users would be on the same side. Isn’t the point of development to provide a working application that can be easily used by the end-user? The answer is a surprising “maybe”. In their article the authors summarize that the “human factor” or the usability of the end-user to use the application, is overlooked and sometimes forgotten till the last minute.

In defense of developers, all design models have foundational layers which represent every stage of software development. Each development layer building on the importance of the other. A layer representing the data structure is certainly important in early stages to ensure the scalability of the software. You certainly wouldn't consider the user interface to be more important than the security layer that represents access and protection of the data. After all, how good is the software if it looks pretty but breaks down at every turn?

The authors make the point that the interactions between the humans and computers are the pivoting balance between software success and software failure. From a marketing standpoint, if an end-user finds a program too difficult for practical use they will not purchase it. From a company standpoint, bad interface design could decrease worker efficiency. The article stresses the fact that there has been little to no research done of the contributing factors of the end user to understand the how and why questions that are left out of the development stages.

I am often amazed at the lack of thought that goes into the things we create for public use. For example, a movie studio will create an entire movie from start to finish spending millions of dollars to do so. Before the movie is released they will have a special screening for "marketing" purposes where they will survey the audience for feedback. If the audience doesn't like the ending of a movie the studio will again spend millions of dollars to rewrite it before the movie is released publically. The question I have is why could they have not included a survey-type process during various stages of production before it was complete? This would probably save millions of dollars and cut down on the production timeline. Software development is often done the same way. Programs are given to the end user without any considerations and often fail from the start. This of course leads to rewrites, new development, or the "version 2.0" scheme.

The article outlines a new model approach to developing user interfaces and functionality layers called "Intensive Prototype Modeling" or IMP for short. IMP is a work flow process in which there are stages in the design where the human factor is considered in the form of user feedback, surveys, and testing.

The modeling starts by having the developer collect from the end user all the requirements of the application. The application is then examined to determine if all the requirements have been satisfied thus far. If the answer is no then user feedback is gathered to determine why and what is missing. Next in the workflow is the release of the application prototype which again asks the user if the software requirements have been met in the beta version. If the answer is no then feedback is given to determine what is missing and how it can be improved. The beta version is then continued in the development cycle where it gets tested and approved and put in operation. The final stages of the IMP include redesign feedback gathered from the users' feedback after the application has been in use for an extended period of time.

The feedback mentioned in the previous paragraph is collected using a series of user interaction tools. Feedback being the direct question and answer technique where as a user provides written or oral opinions of the subject. Other methods include automated responses and data gathering taking into consideration things such as how long it takes a user to go from function to function in the application. This can be broken down into specific tasks that a user needs to perform in the software where time is kept to see if it is in fact more or less efficient than the previous application. More traditional methods include user surveys where specific questions are asked of the user and the user can provide feedback by selecting choices on a sliding scale.

By implementing the model on several projects the authors received some interesting feedback. Most of the information received could be translated into useful functionality and upgrades to the application. Some feedback seemed insignificant in its randomness. Using a majority rules type mentality to the received feedback they were able to produce a final product that satisfied the masses. The purpose of the IMP is to help reduce errors in the beginning phases and to create a better application for those who end up using it the most. They found that this type of thinking also helped to reduce the redesign time for future versions. I believe there is also a third element not written in the article where an end user feels pride in their contribution which can lead to a more successful start/launch of an application.

In conclusion it is apparent that human factor research is a big deal that needs to be considered. Psychology and the understanding of how humans think are needed to understand how to develop software for humans. The authors' proposed "Intensive Prototype Model" could be a good starting point to change the traditional design models outlined in our textbooks.

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Author, Abduljalil, Sami , Author, Kang, Dae-KI, Feb 2011, Analysis of human factors in software application design for effective user experience, Advanced Communication Technology (ICACT), 2011 13th International Conference, pages 1446-1451

No More Simple Search

Tuesday, 26 April 2011 09:07 Last Updated on Friday, 29 April 2011 10:03 Written by ryan

In recent news Google search engine announced changes to their algorithms which shocked the Internet. Getting your web site on the first page of a search result used to be a matter of sneaky code placement and adding as many residual links as you can get. Fortunately the search engines have become smarter to recognize these little tricks of web developers. Those who used to have web sites filled with useless content (content farms) are really upset as they will lose their entire placement under these new rules created in the Google code. The good news for our clients is Google has made the search more relevant and now gives the small web site a chance to compete for position. Truth is that applying SEO tricks will eventually backfire and hurt your site. Search engine placement is all about good, relevant content that changes on a regular basis. Dreamwright can help you keep your web site updated on a weekly or monthly basis. We have affordable packages designed to keep your site relevant.

Honesty Still Matters

Thursday, 07 April 2011 11:39 Last Updated on Friday, 29 April 2011 10:03 Written by Administrator

Remember when you were younger and your parents took you to the local retail stores in your town to purchase an ice cream or pick up a new screwdriver? What happened to the honest small town mentality that we grew up with? Has the internet made everyone a faceless customer? I would like to think that honesty and respect still exists in today's business world. There are honest proprietors providing highly technical services like IT consulting, Web Site Design, and Application Programming. They can be hard to find, however.

The best way to judge an internet-based company is to examine the past and current customers they have. Web sites like eBay and Angie's List are founded on the idea that previous customers are the best source of honest feedback. Feedback and testimonials are today what "word-of-mouth" advertising was 20 years ago. Search engines have even put their stock in local business by providing more leverage towards collections of local, unbiased feedback and ratings. Maybe this trend will help to bring back the small town integrity that has been missing for so long. I certainly hope so.

M. Ryan Corbin

CEO – Dreamwright Web Design Studios

15 No-Nos for E-commerce Sites

Wednesday, 20 April 2011 09:09 Last Updated on Friday, 29 April 2011 10:02 Written by Administrator

Build a Better Online Store

The internet has expanded the global marketplace by providing access to customers across the globe. While brick and mortar stores isolate retailers to small cities and towns, an e-commerce store can be made accessible to anyone anywhere. Having a well-built e-commerce store is the key to tapping into this world wide marketplace. We present a "what not to do" approach in the next 15 chapters to instruct and inform proprietors on how to build a better online store.

[1. Setting Unrealistic Expectations](#)

One of the biggest mistakes that most e-commerce store owners do is set an unrealistic expectation of their store performance. Those who are just starting out with brand new online stores often are clouded by high hopes and big money dreams. The reality for new store owners is that most stores take several months before sales start to occur. This is partly due to the owner's inexperience with online marketing and product placement. An online store is very different from a brick-and-mortar retail store in the way it operates and functions and most importantly in how it is marketed. Without a large marketing budget or professional help a new online store can expect at least 6 months up to 12 months before gaining ground on the internet.

[2. Forgetting the Competition](#)

The internet presents a global marketplace and as such your competition is more than the store down the street. Your online store is now competing against a hundreds and possibly thousands of businesses selling a product just like yours. Many competitors have bigger budgets or have been on the internet for so long that they have brand recognition and reputation. Tony Anicic wrote on a popular blog regarding internet marketing, "Now look at your business realistically

and ask yourself if you can compete with that.)(1) Compare your prices with other online stores. Ask yourself if you can make a profit trying to compete in a price war. If the answer is no, you will need another strategy in order to set your store apart from all the rest.

[3. Selling the Wrong Product](#)

Not every product is a good choice for online commerce. While tangible products like electronics, books, and clothing seem to every on the internet there are some products that are more difficult to sell. You need to consider your market when choosing your products to sell. If customers tend to need to physically experience a product before making a buying decision then your market will be severely limited. Some products require special shipping and handling making them more costly to maintain a reasonable profit margin therefore making them too costly to sell online versus a local retail store. Selling a popular item online in which many other stores also sell decreases your chances of gaining the sale especially if you cannot compete by price or selection.

[4. No Money For Marketing](#)

According to www.WHOIS.sc there are currently 128,312,765 domains (.com, .net, .org, .info, .biz, .us) at the time of this posting. Hundreds of thousands of those domains are e-commerce stores. Creating a new web site today adds you to this list and practically makes you invisible. Without allocated resources for marketing your store will never be found. Online stores require web site traffic. The magic formula of “how many visitors does it take to equal one sale?” is different for every web site but the fact remains it requires at least some traffic to compute. Marketing efforts and budgeted dollars are needed to help promote your site among that thousands. Popularity can be purchased with enough capital and can help reduce the time needed to get that first sale. Guerilla marketing techniques such as discount coupons, promotions, search engine optimization, and gift certificates can help increase awareness but take considerably longer.

[5. Purchasing a Bad Domain Name](#)

One of the first purchases when creating a new e-commerce store is the domain name. The domain name is extremely important since it the address in which potential customers will find your store. Having a domain name that is too long or too complicated decreases the customer’s ability to remember it and spell it correctly. Domain names that have unpopular or misguided extensions such as .biz or .org can decrease your search engine placement. Many search engines look to the domain name as a source of relevancy to determine the correct listing therefore without a domain name with keywords about your business or product you will be overshadowed initially. All these mistakes can lead to a missed opportunity to find your store.

[6. Choosing the Wrong E-Commerce Platform](#)

A popular option when creating an e-commerce store is using an open source or pre-packed e-commerce software platform. The entire online store’s functionality is managed by these systems. Choosing a platform with restricted features or inability to be upgraded/customized will leave you stranded when your online store starts to grow. Migrating from one system to another after your store is online and active can be expensive and timely costing lost revenues. The software platform can often control your ability to manage products and orders therefore it is very important that your chose provide you with all the functionality you require today and can foresee needing in the future.

[7. Not Hiring a Pro to Design Your Web Store](#)

Many first-time online retailers believe they can save money by design their web site store themselves. This mistake can lead to lack of web traffic and lost sales. The store’s appearance is the first impression a potential customer has of your company. In mere seconds an opinion is formed about the professionalism and competency of your company simply by the initial glance at your web site. Online sales require customer confidence. Your online store should always be focused and designed around your potential customers providing them all the necessary information and functionality to instill enough confidence that they would provide their account information.

[8. No Security](#)

Dafydd Studdard in his book entitled: The Web Hacker’s Handbook: Discovering and Exploiting Security Flaws, states how a web site’s reputation plays a critical role in success and continues by stating that “few people want to do business with an insecure site”. (2) While this idea sounds elementary there are thousands of web site stores who do not feel the need to address security when handling customer account information. Lack of security on an e-commerce store can ultimately lead to legal action if exploited. It is essential that any online store have security measures in place including secure servers, data encryption, and well-built software platforms. Again, customer confidence is the key to online success.

9. Too Many Links

The focus of an online store should be obvious when first opened. Convoluted web sites with pages under pages and a menu bar a mile long create customer confusion. Minimalist web sites work best with the right options exactly where customers expect them to be. An online store should be easy to navigate preventing the user from having to click more than once to find the information they need.

10. Forgetting the Value of Existing Customers

The recent trend online is the value of user feedback. Your online store's most valuable salesperson is the existing customer. Forgetting the value that these customers can provide is a mistake that can limit your repeat business and new business. Customer feedback creates a new level of confidence that your store presence alone cannot. Your online store should showcase this feedback with ratings modules, comment forms, and testimonials. The store should provide user-friendly access to these functions allowing customers to easily give their opinions.

11. Not Enough Product Information

You have one shot to convince a customer with your images and text to purchase the product you are selling. E-commerce stores often make the mistake of not providing enough information about a product to allow the customer to make the buying decision. Stores without product images are 75% less likely to convince a potential customer to buy versus those with at least one product image. Multiple images, detailed descriptions, highlighted bulleted list of features, and reminders of promotions and incentives will increase sales. Studies show that single item options are also better than trying to overwhelm the user with multiple variables and attributes. (3)

12. Trying to Make Money on Shipping

Online consumers are smarter than most shoppers when it comes to price. So often online retailers will use shipping as a way to increase profit margin. While the appearance of lower cost products may drive traffic to your store the user will quickly realize the obvious overpriced shipping cost and quickly leave your site. Shipping information such as pricing rates are easy to find online at sites such as UPS, USPS, and FEDEX. Customers do not mind paying for shipping if it guarantees safe delivery of their product as long as the cost is reasonable and accurate.

13. Not Telling the Customer Who You Are

To repeat yet again, Customer confidence is key to a successful e-commerce store. Customer confidence comes from knowing who they are buying from. Hiding your phone number or contact details from your customers can cause frustration and anger and lead to missed sales. While some stores do not have a public phone number to post there are many options available to provide those at minimal cost. If this is still not an option you should always post clearly information about your company and provide at least an online form for customers to reach you.

14. Not Knowing Your Hosting Company

Your hosting company holds your online assets and makes them available to the world via their internet connection and servers. Understanding your hosting company means that you are aware of the limits and abilities they provide to you and your store. If your web site were to skyrocket in popularity overnight would the hosting provider be able to handle the traffic? Does the hosting provider give you the tools to help you analyze traffic and bandwidth? Will your hosting cost increase over time due to the growth of your site. So often online retailers dismiss the importance of the hosting provider assuming that their services are all-inclusive and ever expanding.

15. Forgetting Full Disclosure

In order to effectively manage your online customers your store will be gathering personal account information from your customers. To keep customer confidence it is essential that you outline just how you intend to use that private information. By letting your customers know ahead of time that you plan on emailing them a newsletter or selling your marketing data to a third-party, you just might keep your customers happy and possibly avoid any potential legal action.

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Focus on Focusing

Monday, 21 March 2011 09:00 Last Updated on Friday, 29 April 2011 10:03 Written by Administrator

FOCUS PLEASE!

I have said those words to my children on more than one occasion. I see so many web sites with the same problem that I just want to call them up and ask what were you thinking when you had this designed? A web site should be designed from the ground up starting with the most important question, "What do you hope to accomplish with your web site?" Your web site should have a measurable purpose so you know when it is working and when it is not. This is just one of the many elements we will discuss with you when you call Dreamwright Web Design Studios. We love working with businesses in Charlotte, Indian Trail, Lake Norman, Denver, and Concord but we have clients as far as Las Vegas and Canada that we appreciate just as much.

~Ryan Corbin

Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce

Wednesday, 23 March 2011 20:02 Last Updated on Friday, 29 April 2011 10:03 Written by ryan

LINCOLN COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Today Dreamwright joined the Lincoln County Chamber of Commerce. We are proud to be a part of the local business market in Lincolnton and Denver, North Carolina. Small towns like mine (I live here) are exploding around the larger metro areas like Charlotte. We offer affordable web site packages for small business allowing them to compete with the larger business in the larger cities. We are honored to be a part and look forward to meeting more local businesses.

~Ryan Corbin