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Organization's Name: Sinickas Communications, Inc.
Category/Division/Subdivision: Communication Skills/Division 12/Subdivision 12.3

Title of Entry: www.SiniCom.com

Time Period of Project: Throughout 2005

Brief Description: A Web site communicators can return to time and again as a resource for information about communication measurement.

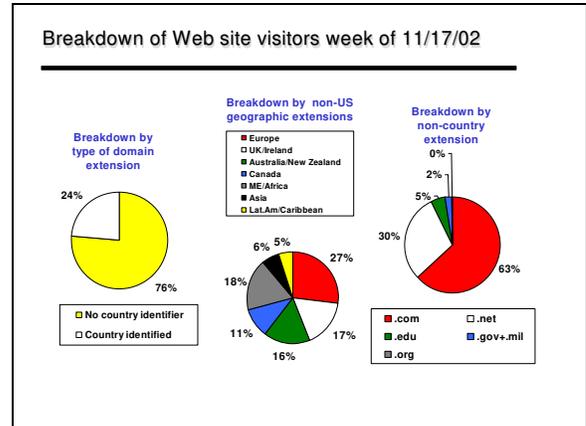
Need/Opportunity

Audience needs: Communicators are expected to prove the value of their functions to their leadership teams. However, several barriers make it hard for communicators to do this effectively, primarily lack of knowledge, budget and staff time.

My business needs: I made communication measurement a major element of the consulting firm I opened in June 2000. My need is to manage a financially successful business, making myself known to prospective clients and having them think of me when they need help with a measurement project. From two years of surveying clients and prospects, I know speeches and publications are the top two ways people learn about my services. We wanted to reach an even larger audience world-wide by developing a Web site that offers communicators as much practical value as speeches and publications, but with less of my time required. We wanted communicators to think of our site as their first resource to check if they had any communication measurement or strategy needs. We wanted them to have free access to detailed and specific information that would be useful to them in doing their jobs—and to have them think so well of us that when they do have a need for outside help, they will return to us for a bid.

Intended Audience(s)

Audience: Our intended audience is corporate communication professionals, with a special emphasis on internal communicators in management positions, worldwide. The illustration at right shows how our site's actual visitors break out demographically by geography (inferred from domains) and by type of organization. We also analyze the visitors who ask to be added to our free reprint mailing list. In 2002, those reprint requestors included 81 communicators in corporate positions (67% of whom were managers or higher), 17 consultants or university professors, 3 communicators in non-profit or governmental roles. About 40% came from outside the USA.



Goals/Objectives

1. **Use the Web site to help generate revenue for Sinickas Communications, Inc. (SCI).** A survey of our 2002 mailing list contacts told us the site directly impacts the financial success of my business—68% of contacts who had seen the site said it made them more likely to want to hire us. Our measurable goals (with lower goals for behaviors and higher goals for attitudes) were to:
 - a. Be in the top 5 Internet search results on the most popular browsers for combinations of several key words: employee, internal, communication, audit, survey, focus groups.

- b. Identify at least two leads a month to follow up for potential new business through our site's solicitation to "sign up for free reprints" or try free trials of our online tools.
 - c. Have 50% of non-clients say visiting the site made them more likely to work with us and have 25% of 2002 clients say the site influenced their buying decision.
 - d. Increase sales of CD-ROM products and online subscriptions, which are promoted primarily on the site, by 25% over 2001.
- 2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners from the site itself:**
- a. Have at least 50% of visitors to the site return for more information and recommend it to their communication colleagues.
 - b. Have at least 67% of mailing list contacts who visited the site say the free information pages have provided them with information that they use in their jobs or find of interest.
 - c. Have 67% of those who visited the site say it is better or much better than other similar sites as far as volume of information, writing, graphics, navigation and interactivity.
 - d. Double the number of visitors who view at least 20 pages before leaving the site. Since our weekly average during the first five weeks in 2002 was 22.2, a 100% increase would be 44.4 visitors per week viewing 20 or more pages.

Solution Overview

For several years the SiniCom site had been used exclusively for selling a manual I wrote about measuring communication effectiveness. Once I opened my own consulting firm in 2000, we repositioned the site as a practical resource for communication professionals about communication measurement—a site that also offers some useful tools and services for sale as well. The Web site manager, Sam Shiromani, and I brainstormed about what types of information communicators could use that would bring them back repeatedly and created the site with that in mind. Then, in 2002, we added a number of interactive features, such as a search engine and a quiz on how employees use intranets (including a report feature where respondents can see the right answers and how other respondents answered). We also redesigned the site's graphics in response to visitor feedback (see before-and-after screen shots in "Other Documentation").

We also contract with an outside vendor to develop a second site (available by subscription) with interactive tools for strategic planning and measurement—CommToolboxSM. This site needs to be separate for contractual reasons, yet we want users to be able to travel freely between the two sites. So we decided to have two somewhat different looks for the sites, but to interlink them in both directions. This movement between sites does affect visitors' perception of ease of navigation because they don't expect there to be two separate sites with two different places they might return when they click on "Home."

We consistently and proactively "drive" people to the Web site with prominent references to www.SiniCom.com wherever our name or the Starter Kits are mentioned, such as conference brochures, periodicals, ads, etc. Samples are included behind the "Other Documentation" tab.

Implementation and Challenges

- **Budget.** Sam Shiromani, who is an employee of Sinickas Communications, Inc. (mostly on the business side), has developed the site in his spare time. He is also the art director for the CommToolbox site. The SiniCom site costs \$25 per month for Web hosting services, plus the original purchase price for the Front Page software. We paid \$2,200 to an outside programmer to create the intranet knowledge quiz and to build a search function for the site. (Developing the CommToolbox interactive site that links to SiniCom cost about \$36,000 in 2002.)
- **Time.** We spend about 10 hours a month preparing and posting new material on the site.

- **Measurement.** Our Web hosting service, DNAI, was acquired by RCN in late November. We didn't realize until mid-December that the RCN usage statistics were far less detailed than our previous ones. We were not able to change hosting services until January 2003.

Measurement/Evaluation of Outcomes (See "Research Results" tab for detailed results). We measure the value of the site through a combination of Web usage reports and surveys of clients and contacts on our mailing list.

1. Use the Web site to help generate revenue for Sinickas Communications, Inc.:

- SiniCom.com is the #1 search result for our key words under Google, Yahoo, Netscape and AOL. On MSN, it is #4 or #10 (goal was to be in top 5).
- About 4.8 U.S.-based corporate or government leads sign up each month for free reprints (goal was for two world-wide). We also generated at least 3% of our 2002 revenue directly from these leads who found us and decided to buy products from us solely based on the Web site.
- About 68% of non-clients said visiting the site made them more likely to want to work with us (goal was 50%) and 46% of clients said visiting the site either influenced their decision to hire us or reminded them to consider us for a project.
- Sales of products increased 37% over 2001 (goal was 25%). Plus, 15% of all our revenue in 2002 came from the Starter Kits and CommToolbox products, which provided a great cushion during a difficult economic year for most consultants.

2. Provide enduring value to communication practitioners from the site itself:

- 67% of mailing list contacts who visited the site returned at least once in 2002 (goal was 50%). In fact, 14% of them returned 6 or more times and 73% referred other communicators to the site.
- Of our mailing list contacts who saw the free features on the site, from 69% to 100% said that various pages provided them with information that they either used in their jobs or found of interest (goal was 67%.) More than 50% of respondents said they have already used something at work from two of the free features.
- From 74% to 96% of surveyed mailing list contacts who have visited the site said it was better or much better than average for other communication sites as far as volume of information, writing, graphics, navigation and interactivity (goal was 67%). This is especially gratifying since most of the other communication sites have large funding from companies or associations from 10 to 2000 times our size.
- Increased by 307% the number of visitors who view at least 20 pages before leaving the site, now running at an average of 90.4 per week during the last five weeks in 2002 this measure was available (goal was 100% increase).

