

Triumph of the service strategy

Online media increasingly offer comprehensive packages

The 2004 **Media Tenor** Online Award was dominated by major US publications. Two out of the top three award winning online media are based in the United States: **The Washington Post** and **New York Times** left most of their competitors behind. So would it be fair to say that the virtual Gaul is occupied by the US media? Not entirely, since there is strong resistance in Hamburg: On the one hand, the German flagship **Spiegel Online** gave a riveting finish in the race for the top position, just as in previous years. And on the other hand an innovative newcomer caught up with the best in their field: the online edition of the **Financial Times Deutschland (FTD)**.

Focusing on loyal readership

Compared to the analysis for the 2003 Award, it becomes obvious that the front runners in the **Media Tenor** ranking rely increasingly on interactive services. Online media are more and more turning into full-service information providers, reaching far beyond the traditional borderlines between different communication channels by focusing more on services and dialogue with the reader/customer than in previous years. The idea is that readers are most likely to remain loyal to their chosen media outlet when they not only receive general information but also individual consideration.

The **Financial Times Deutschland** is one ex-

ample: One brand, all media”, this is the motto of the editorial team in Hamburg. Whether online, via PDA, print edition, mobile phone and even radio – on ftd.de readers can construct an information package for all the situations in life. However, the **FTD** receives only average scores in the category “Interactive Possibilities”, because chats, opinion forums or services such as tests have not (yet) become standard. Still, when it comes to responding to the mobile information needs of its readers, the **FTD** is leading the way.

Good score for Washington Post

An exceptionally good score in “Interactive Possibilities” laid the basis for the Washington Post coming first in the overall ranking. Aside from a multi-channel strategy, which is comparable to the **FTD** concept, its US counterpart has allowed for a personalized homepage:

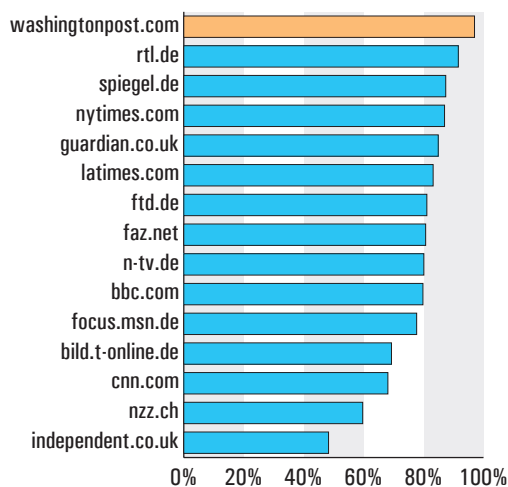
Online readers can create “their own” personal site. News pieces that are of no interest to a given reader simply do not appear on the page and it can be adapted to individual reading habits and information needs. Moreover, **washingtonpost.com** provides a comprehensive pool of additional services, starting with consumer information and ending with a database for real estate. Chats and opinion forums are equally established.

The Washington Post reached the highest scores ever awarded for “Interactive Possibilities” throughout the seven years of **Media Tenor** online analysis. No other web site – whether run by media outlets, companies, parties, NGOs or the



Ryan Thornburg, Politics Editor, washingtonpost.com, at the Media Tenor Online Award ceremony

1 Results in the category “Interactive Possibilities”



100% is equivalent to a perfect score

Source: Media Tenor September 2004

Basis: 16 criteria in the category “interactive possibilities”

The screenshot shows the 'CUSTOMIZE HEADLINES' interface on washingtonpost.com. It includes a navigation bar with links for NEWS, OPINION, SPORTS, ARTS & LIVING, ENTERTAINMENT, JOBS, CARS, and REAL ESTATE. Below the navigation bar is a 'CUSTOMIZE HEADLINES' section with instructions: 'ADD headlines using the tools below. Instructions', 'CHANGE THE ORDER of headlines using the up/down arrows. Instructions', and 'SELECT A NUMBER of headlines to be displayed for each choice. Instructions'. There are 'Save Changes' and 'Cancel' buttons. Below this is a 'SELECT YOUR NEWS HEADLINES' section with three columns: 'Select a Category' (listing Metro, Politics, Nation, World, Sports, Business, Style/Living, Health, Education, Science, Technology, Live Online), 'Select Sub-Categories' (listing Metro, Politics, Real Estate, Maryland, Virginia), and 'Your Headlines' (listing World, Near East, Nation, Business). There are 'Add' and 'Remove' buttons between the columns, and a 'Change display order' button on the right. At the bottom, there is a dropdown menu for 'Number of headlines to display for each choice' set to 3.

Source: washingtonpost.com November 2004

Vatican – has ever been able to achieve a similarly good result.

User-friendliness matters

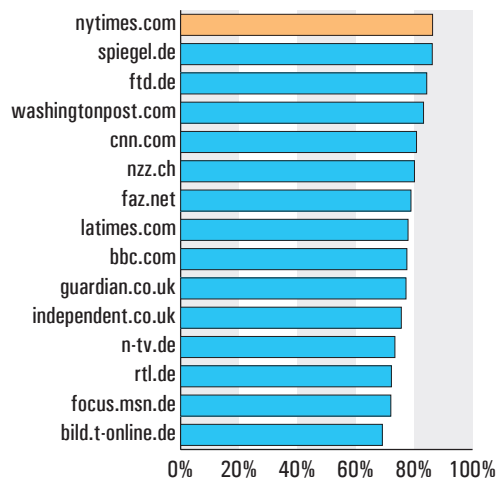
Ambitious customer loyalty programs must be based on a technically and graphically mature web presence, because unnerved users are quick to click away. Like in the previous year, the **New York Times** set the benchmark for user-friendly design. Its focus on text may not be to every one’s liking, but the design is clear and concentrates on the essential. The navigation has been thought through, and technical extras work without problems. What is more: The New York editorial team takes accessibility seriously and offers a text-only-version of its site, being the only one to do so among the media analyzed.

Proven features from print edition

The **Spiegel** also scored high in the category “User-friendliness” once again. This shows that color based navigation schemes do not have to turn out to be playful or overloaded, but can easily be a functional and customer-friendly tool.

The web site of the German tabloid **Bild-Zeitung** turned out to be even more colorful but far less coherent at the same time, providing an almost exact copy of the printed version online. It remains the secret of the marketing strategists at **Springer** and **T-Online**, why Internet users should take any interest in this. Aside from the **Bild-Zeitung**, other online media, such as **NZZ** and **Independent**, also

2 Result in the category “User-friendliness”



100% is equivalent to a perfect score

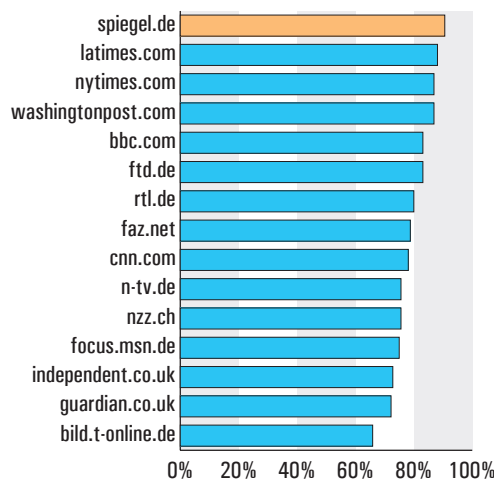
Source: Media Tenor September 2004

Basis: 49 criteria in the category „User-friendliness“

rely largely on proven features from their print edition. But especially the **Neue Züricher Zeitung** shows that this approach does not necessarily result in a loss of coherent design.

As in previous years, major broadcasters had a hard time structuring their immense news flow. For instance, struggling through the **BBC** online archive definitely requires some patience – comprehensiveness has its price.

3 Result in the category “Information”



100% is equivalent to a perfect score

Quelle: Medien Tenor September 2004

Basis: 25 criteria in the category „Offer of Information“

Triumph of stars and starlets?

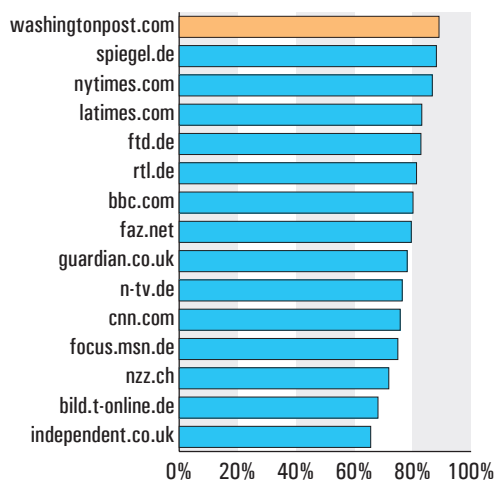
When it comes to broadness and topicality of information, **Spiegel Online** managed to beat its competition on the other side of the Atlantic. The editorial team in Hamburg continuously expanded its service, including an English language edition. The topical coverage of the US elections was also a highlight in 2004: No other German online medium put quite as much effort into its political coverage.

Intensive coverage on human-interest stories

But the longstanding German Internet medium has also been placing its human-interest stories more and more prominently. On the **Spiegel** homepage, the so-called “Panorama” section often precedes politics and business.

In the fall of 2004, its intensive coverage on the trashy reality-show “Jungle Camp” left no question unanswered – except for the one whether or not satire was truly the underlying motive for it all. However, the web sites of private TV chan-

4 Media Tenor Online Award 2004: overall results



100% is equivalent to a perfect score

Source: Media Tenor
September 2004

Basis: A total of 91 criteria
in the 3 categorys

nels continue to be front runners in human-interest coverage. Looking for any “hard news” on their pages can turn into a difficult task.

As in previous years, **Media Tenor** criticized the blend of news content and advertising on some sites. For example **Bild**: Consumers were misled by an advertising piece for a mobile phone company that was presented as a news story.

What is service worth?

Internet users pay for extended services in different ways: Even the most sophisticated popup-blockers cannot prevent all the advertising messages from coming through, and more and more exclusive information services are now charged for. Without submitting personal data there is no personalization and often no information.

But at least the front runners of last year’s Media Tenor ranking charge a reasonable price for good service. With the **Washington Post**, **Spiegel Online**, **New York Times** or **Financial Times Deutschland** users do get their money’s and personal data’s worth, especially those who are constantly on the move and wish permanent topical information. The multi-channel strategy also harbors a lot of potential for the future, above all for the printed parent publications. Several publishing houses are already pursuing the sales strategy “one subscription for all channels”. If it proves successful, this would put a (progressive) end to an endless discussion: Whether or not the Internet will some day make the printed newspaper obsolete. sm

On the methodology:

On the methodology:

Each category was either evaluated on a five-point scale between “insufficient” and “excellent” or, depending on the criterion, with “existent” or “non-existent”. Each criterion was also weighed according to its significance.

In the analysis, 100% was equivalent to the maximum number of points – which would represent the “perfect web site”.

Excerpt from the catalogue of criteria for the category “User-friendliness”:

“Domaining” (how recognizable is the URL?)

Download-time of the homepage

Clarity of the homepage

Topicality of the links

Selectivity of the linked texts

Target groups addressed

Consistency in content

Need for vertical scrolling

Site map available?

Visibility of text lines

Comprehensiveness of sentences

Enough paragraphs?

Contrast text/background

Consistent typeface?

Mouse-over effects

Adapted graphics resolution

International scope

Search feature

Obvious topicality?

Availability of navigation menu

Position on the site in view?

Existing streaming?

Other audio/video formats

PDA/mobile phone/RSS info service

Text-only-version

Special format for downloading documents

Configuration for printout possible?

Error management

Basis:

Media: bbc.com, bild.t-online.de, cnn.com, faz.net, focus.msn.de, ftd.de, guardian.co.uk, independent.co.uk, latimes.com, n-tv.de, nytimes.com, nzz.ch, rtl.de, spiegel.de, washingtonpost.com (alle www)

Time: September 2004

Analysis: The quoted websites were analysed due to 91 criteria within the categories „interactive possibilities“, „user-friendliness“ and „information supply“ (please also see box on page 21)