October 17, 2008

The Verizon Information Research Network Utilizes Technology For Strategic Impact

This is the second document in the "Market Research/Intelligence: Challenges & Solutions" series.

by TJ Keitt and Brad Bortner
with Ellen Daley, Madiha Ashour, and Chétina Muteba

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The challenge of managing numerous research requests with a small staff is one that affects many market research organizations. Verizon's repository of secondary research, managed by the Verizon Information Research Network (VIRN), has adopted a robust self-service model to tackle this problem. Its research portal, powered by Northern Light's SinglePoint, provides knowledge workers with enterprise access to research from more than 20 sources. However, the VIRN staff encourages Verizon employees to contact them directly when they cannot find specific information. VIRN fields 2,500 research requests a year and has managed this by funneling requests through its Web site and adopting customer relationship management (CRM) systems. This approach has allowed VIRN to grow into a trusted partner of the business.

VIRN HAS DEVELOPED METHODS FOR DOING MORE WITH LESS

One of the eternal challenges facing market research professionals is the need to balance a large workload with a small staff. This was the exact issue Verizon's repository of business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) secondary research, VIRN, faced when it formed 10 years ago. At the time, consisting of six full-time researchers reporting into telecom marketing, the group needed an innovative way to meet the needs of an expansive organization that needed information not only to make strategic decisions but also to inform large research projects. Its solution? Automate as much of the process as possible.

The Key To Success Was Creating A Self-Service Model For Obtaining Research

VIRN fields roughly 2,500 research requests from management-level clients in the fixed-line business a year. This figure would surely be much larger if it had not figured out a way to make large amounts of information available to users in a way that is logical and easily searchable, allowing for self-service. After initially working with a system that was unwieldy, it found a perfect solution in Northern Light's SinglePoint portal.

- **It developed a robust intranet research portal.** SinglePoint — a unique system that allows for the seamless management of permissions and content associated with various syndicated research offerings — provides VIRN with a framework to distribute its various research from more than 20 sources that Verizon holds.[1] With unified search functionality, VIRN subscribers can pull from syndicated research reports, equity reports, internal research studies, and statistical databases. Northern Light handles the maintenance of the portal, alleviating the small organization of the need to rely on technical staff.

- **It launched a successful marketing campaign to get the word out.** VIRN sent out emails alerting Verizon employees that the portal was in place and to be used for business research purposes. Additionally, it did road shows and funneled people looking for information into a VIRN search from the intranet page. However, VIRN Group Manager Donna Skrzyniarz, the team leader, and Senior Staff Specialist Marcia Schemper-Carlock, the client research manager, admit that the biggest marketing resource is word of mouth. Satisfied VIRN users sang its praises to their colleagues driving up portal use. Although well penetrated within the firm, the portal is still averaging about 150 new clients a month.

- **It allowed users to reach out to trained researchers when necessary.** Even though the advent of the portal allowed Verizon employees to locate a lot of their own information, 2,500 information requests a year are still coming directly to the VIRN staff. This is facilitated by an "Ask VIRN" button on the portal landing page and, for users who choose to wade through VIRN's resources themselves, a pop-up that activates after the user has been searching for 10 minutes asks if they need assistance. The message is clear: Feel free to do your own search, but ask a professional if what you're looking for is hard to find.

When Fielding Information Requests, VIRN Relies On Productivity Tools And Teamwork

Because the staff is small and the workload is rather large, VIRN had to put into place systems to make it manageable.

- **Funneling requests through the Web site makes fielding easier.** The move to SinglePoint eliminated a lot of the manual administrative work needed to manage the content. Additionally, having an inquiry button on SinglePoint creates a channel through which requests can be made and seamlessly distributed to the VIRN team. While some Verizon employees gain comfort with researchers and prefer to contact them directly, the majority of the research requests come through the Web site and are load-balanced with the available researchers.

- **Implementing request management tools streamlines the work process.** To further streamline the process, VIRN is in the process of implementing Altarama Information Systems' RefTracker. This CRM system allows the researchers "to deliver quality information to clients using a variety of contact methods, to record statistics about the requests being handled and the effectiveness of library resources in handling them, and to utilize [sic] staff time and skills most effectively by passing questions between staff as appropriate."[2]

A Robust Portal And Efficient Information Delivery System Has Made VIRN Invaluable

Skrzyniarz and Schemper-Carlock are in agreement that what VIRN produces for Verizon makes it a valuable strategic asset for the organization. This is not simply because VIRN provides data to the company, but because the service it provides makes obtaining and digesting the information easier.

© 2008, Forrester Research, Inc. Reproduction Prohibited

- **It has proven to save information and knowledge workers' time.** One stat Skrzyniarz and Schemper-Carlock shared was that, while it takes an information and knowledge worker 13 hours to search for a piece of information using Google and other methods, it takes a VIRN researcher only about an hour. In addition to this time savings, VIRN's researchers make finding the salient pieces of information prominent when they provide Verizon employees with links to information — i.e., accompanying each link is a synopsis with the critical takeaways of the article. They can also present numbers in easy-to-use Excel spreadsheets or create PowerPoint presentations.

- **It is constantly working with the businesses to fulfill their needs.** VIRN guarantees that it can provide the information to its clients on the date they request it, if possible. If this isn't possible, the group typically can negotiate an acceptable compromise. As it stands, Skrzyniarz and Schemper-Carlock report that it has a 97% success rate of getting information to its clients on the date they request it. In addition to this, VIRN spearheads the Market Research Forum at Verizon, which provides it with an opportunity to hear what each of the business units are planning in regards to research as well as plan its research acquisitions accordingly. VIRN's work is also looked to by the custom research arm of Verizon to ensure that it does not duplicate the work of resources it already has on hand.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ALLOW BUSINESS LEADERS DIRECT ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Making the research holdings of the organization widely available will not temper the strategic importance of the research entity. To the contrary, it will free up market researchers to focus on the strategic direction of the company, allowing them to provide guidance for larger decisions.

- **Leverage portal creation tools.** There is no need to reinvent the wheel here. Firms like Northern Light exist to help you build and deploy a portal that makes sense for your organization. To build yours from scratch can often be difficult because of resistance from IT, problems integrating numerous permissions from various research vendors, and challenges creating search capabilities applicable to a diverse set of research holdings.

- **Try to put the research where your clients live.** To truly make the research holdings relevant to your internal clients, make it available in places where they spend a lot of time — team sites, intranet landing pages, etc. This will cut down on the time they spend looking for information, while also making them aware of what the organization has on hand.[3]

- **Creating a portal should go hand-in-hand with a trained research staff.** The portal will not eliminate the need for researchers to provide insight and assistance to those who are self-serving. Having a staff of researchers to provide information beyond what is available in the portal presents an opportunity to provide business leaders with advice about findings and guidance on what they should take away from the reports that you are examining.

© 2008, Forrester Research, Inc. Reproduction Prohibited

ENDNOTES

[1] Proving the worth of the market research department is the biggest challenge that researchers face. The keys to overcoming this challenge are couching data in business vernacular, gathering data to show market research's return on investment (ROI), and effectively marketing the services to the organization. See the September 13, 2007, "Make Yourself An Indispensable Market Researcher" report.

[2] This functionality is provided within an environment that provides a host of communication and management features. Source: Altarama Information Systems (http://www.altarama.com.au/reftrack.htm).

[3] A good example of this is what HP's MarketVision is evolving into. The organization is currently working toward pushing market research into business processes through Web services. See the May 16, 2008, "HP's MarketVision Brings Insight To Biz Decisions" report.

Forrester Research, Inc. (Nasdaq: FORR) is an independent technology and market research company that provides pragmatic and forward-thinking advice to global leaders in business and technology. For more than 24 years, Forrester has been making leaders successful every day through its proprietary research, consulting, events, and peer-to-peer executive programs. For more information, visit www.forrester.com.

© 2008, Forrester Research, Inc. All rights reserved. Forrester, Forrester Wave, RoleView, Technographics, TechRadar, and Total Economic Impact are trademarks of Forrester Research, Inc. All other trademarks are the property of their respective companies. Forrester clients may make one attributed copy or slide of each figure contained herein. Additional reproduction is strictly prohibited. For additional reproduction rights and usage information, go to www.forrester.com. Information is based on best available resources. Opinions reflect judgment at the time and are subject to change. To purchase reprints of this document, please email resourcecenter@forrester.com.