As one of the first hotel chains to accept bookings online, Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) has a history of being at the forefront of marketing technology. Mobile is no exception. As mobile adoption has grown, IHG has responded with successful mobile websites and mobile applications. When mobile adoption exploded in the U.S. and around the world in 2011, IHG sensed that content was critical to staying at the forefront of mobile marketing in 2012 and beyond. And, with seven global brands under the IHG umbrella, IHG knew their approach to content had to be smart.

In this case study, learn about the challenges IHG faced, our solutions, and the results IHG experienced.
The Situation

In 2011, IHG’s Mobile Solutions Group had enjoyed several successes such as

• Exceeded $100 million in bookings revenue through mobile websites and applications.
• Earned international awards and outstanding customer reviews for a content-focused tablet application, Intercontinental Insider Guide.
As IHG faced 2012 and beyond, the Mobile Solutions Group recognized several challenges, including:

- **Optimizing planning and booking**: How can IHG make planning and booking a hotel even easier?
- **Beyond booking and planning**: How can IHG best reach customers before, during, and after a trip through mobile?
- **Ownership and process**: With mobile growing quickly, how should IHG plan their investment in resources and adapt their processes?
- **International needs**: How should IHG adapt its mobile content strategy for global markets?
- **Multibrand needs**: How should IHG make mobile UX and content more distinct for each brand while keeping the costs down?
- **Mobile complexity**: How can IHG best reach customers before, during, and after a trip through mobile?
- **Evaluating impact**: How can IHG go beyond web analytics to understand the impact of mobile on their customers?

To turn challenges like these into opportunities, IHG turned to us for high-end consulting.
Our Solution

Our consulting engagement began by talking extensively with IHG’s Director of Mobile Solutions Bill Keen and Product Manager Darin Wonn. We mutually decided that strategic analysis and planning were in order. Our goal? To inform the priorities for IHG’s 2012 mobile roadmap.

To start, we conducted analysis.

Analysis

As part of our analysis, we

• Interviewed stakeholders including Keen, Wonn, and members of other teams.

• Documented IHG’s mobile ecosystem.

• Took inventory of and audited all existing IHG mobile sites and applications.

• Examined how IHG’s current mobile sites and applications were performing.

• Compared IHG’s current strategy to that of competitors.

• Reviewed mobile marketing technologies for reach, stability, and more.

• Summarized pertinent best practices in content and UX strategy.

What did we discover? A lot. For instance, we found that most customers who booked a hotel on mobile viewed at least two properties first. However, viewing multiple properties on the mobile websites and applications was not as easy as it could be. An opportunity to boost bookings was to make browsing more than one hotel much easier.
Our Solution continued

We presented this and many, many other detailed findings to IHG in an analysis report. This report did not include recommendations. Instead, the focus of the report laid out all of the pieces of IHG’s mobile situation, like laying out the pieces of a puzzle. This 90+ page report helped align Mobile Solutions Group and other IHG stakeholders around a clear understanding of their current circumstances. Says Wonn,

[The analysis report] was in a format that was very easy to digest and very easy to share with primary stakeholders and other stakeholders.

It’s impossible to create a plan for where to go if you don’t understand where you are. Our analysis report helped IHG understand their current situation.

Trustworthy Advice Along the Way

While we conducted the analysis, we kept the conversation open with Wonn and Keen. This consultative arrangement allowed IHG to get value from our engagement right away. As Wonn explained,

We had a lot of questions, and Colleen [principal of Content Science] always stepped up. Even if a question was out of bounds of the project, she had an answer and was able to make strong recommendations. She gave us constant feedback and guidance throughout the entire process.

So, during the analysis phase, we shared insights and a way of thinking that laid the groundwork for our recommendations.

Synthesis + Final Recommendations

As a consultancy, we rarely offer analysis and recommendations at the same time. Why? Strategic recommendations take deep thought. We don’t simply spout off best practices

MOBILE CONTENT + UX STRATEGY:
IHG GAINS A SMART APPROACH FOR ITS SEVEN GLOBAL BRANDS
Our Solution continued

because a collection of best practices is not a strategy. IHG came to us for valuable advice on how to overcome their unique challenges, not a cookie-cutter solution. So, we synthesized our analysis with best practices and IHG’s goals. We took time to consider different possibilities, develop recommendations, and think through the impact of each recommendation on the others. The result was a set of recommendations that complemented each other and worked together. Our recommendations turned IHG’s mobile content and UX challenges into actionable opportunities. Wonn notes,

*The recommendations were clear and concise and to the point—everything you’d expect from content experts. Most importantly, they were all very actionable.*
The Results

Did the engagement inform IHG’s 2012 road map? Yes, says Darin Wonn. The process educated the entire team.

We were impressed. We learned a lot, not just about deliverables, but about Colleen’s definition of content strategy and what it means to plan content from the inside out, rather than trying to force content into a product.

By the time we presented our recommendations, IHG’s Mobile Solutions Group was ready to take action. Wonn explains,

During our final meeting, we were able to go through line by line and assign actions and end dates for most items. It wasn’t just a set of recommendations. It was a working product that allowed us to be very productive.

Our work together also led to opportunities for the group to promote their success and expertise. For example, Wonn spoke on our content strategy panel for Atlanta Interactive Marketing Association.

In short, because of this project, IHG Mobile Solutions is well positioned to stay at the forefront of mobile marketing in 2012 and beyond.
Why Partner with Us

Our partnership with IHG succeeded because it started with a clear mutual understanding of the engagement. Wonn noted that

*This was one of the easiest statements of work to go through, ever. It was dead on. We knew exactly what we were going to get from the very beginning and throughout the process.*

When you work with us, you can trust that we mean what we say and deliver what we promise. We’re professional and make your life easier—no matter how complex your situation is. Wonn explains,

*Colleen and Michael [project manager at Content Science] are very easy to work with in general. They both have great dispositions and were not easily flustered by anything we threw their way. They were also highly dependable. They did exactly what they said they would. They were highly organized so I didn’t have worry about doing much management myself.*

So, if you work with us on a global, mobile, or multibrand content or UX strategy, you could gain benefits such as

- Better communication on your team and among stakeholders about content and UX strategy.
- A clear understanding of your current global, mobile, or multibrand situation and how it affects your strategy.
- A motivated, ready-to-act team thanks to a well-understood plan for moving forward.
- A strategy that gives value both now and later.
- Industry recognition for your efforts.
About Content Science

We’re an award-winning consultancy in Atlanta, GA advising Fortune 500 companies, startups, institutions, and government agencies around the globe on digital content strategy. Our services include consulting, research, and training.

We named our company Content Science because content is, indeed, a science. We study what works well – and what doesn’t – so companies can make informed decisions about content.

Our principal, Colleen Jones, is the author of the top-selling book *Clout: The Art and Science of Influential Web Content* (New Riders Dec 2010), as well as a contributor to countless past and upcoming reputable publications.

Want to make your content work for your organization? We can help.

Contact us to find out how.  
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