

QuickFill®

Application Notes

Revenue Maximization Story

Cash for Clicks

How a newsletter publisher took control of online content to improve payment rates

In early 2003, Ragan Communications was, quite literally, giving away the store. Visitors to Ragan's website, www.ragan.com, could view, copy and print content from any of Ragan's publications.

So a subscriber to *Ragan's Media Relations Report*, for example, could read that publication online and also any of Ragan's 20 newsletters to corporate communicators and executives. *Web Content Report*, *Speechwriter's Newsletter*, *Journal of Employee Communication Management*—it was all free.

Software developers around the world could visit Ragan's Pinnacle Publishing subsidiary and download actual code—it was like having a free consultant on staff. Anyone could sign up under any name—Mickey Mouse and Santa Claus were two popular aliases—and access for free high-end technical content and generous source code samples.

It was time for a change.

The Internet Matures

In the early days of the Internet, Ragan's strategy of free online content made sense. Internet users were a small percentage of the total population. Content providers needed

to gain an understanding of online behavior. And the technology for restricting access was in the preliminary stages of development.

But those days are gone. As more and more people went online and the Internet became a mainstream medium, Ragan's "free for all" strategy started to affect sales—especially renewals. "Our telephone reps would call a subscriber who had canceled and ask why. The subscriber would respond, 'I can get all your content free online. Why should I renew?' " says Brett Spearing, Ragan's director of web services.

Crackdown on Online Access

So in October 2003, Ragan, a long-time QuickFill user, started using QuickFill Internet Extensions (Qfie)

to control access to online content as well as to process transactions online. Four months later, Ragan moved to a new content management system that integrates seamlessly with Qfie. Provided by Oxycon, the content management system handles indexing and retrieval. Qfie handles access permission.

Here's how it works:

A visitor to the site clicks on the name of one of Ragan's publications, let's say, *The Ragan Report* on employee communications. That brings up a page where the visitor can order the weekly newsletter or see its table of contents. Following the description of each article is a small padlock with the legend "Paid Subscribers—Please Sign in to View Article." At the sign-in page, which is hosted on the Qfie server, a paid subscriber can pro-

Are you ready for online subscription processing?

Here's how you can tell:

- You want to increase print circulation using online sales
- You want to experiment with email reminders
- You need to protect your customers with secure credit card payments
- You want to sell your valuable content online—not give it away

Seamless connection from permission to content:

The image displays three overlapping screenshots of the Ragan Report website interface:

- Top Screenshot:** Shows the main navigation menu with links for Home, About Us, Contact Us, Site Map, Newsletters, Online Store, Join Mailing List, and My Account. The page title is "The Weekly Survey of Ideas and Methods for Communication Executives". A sidebar on the left contains a comprehensive list of navigation options including "Message Boards", "For Subscribers Only", "Archive", "Current Issue", "European Supplement", "Contact the Editor", "Web Extras", "Customer Service", "Related Resources", "Other Employee Communications Newsletters", "Conferences", "Ragan Research Reports", "Grapevine—Free eNewsletter", "Other Resources", "Awards", "Ragan Coaching Club", "Contact Us", "Join Mailing List", "Contact Info", and "FAQ".
- Middle Screenshot:** Shows a "Sign In" form with fields for "Email address:" and "Password:", a "Sign In" button, and a link for "Forgot your password? Click here". Below the form is a "Create Password" section with a link to "Click here to update account or create password for online access."
- Bottom Screenshot:** Shows a subscriber's content page. It includes a "Welcome Brett Spearing | log off [Tuesday, July 26, 2005]" message. The main content area features "The Ragan Report" header, a "Dear Subscriber:" greeting, a thank-you message, and a list of articles under "Ragan Report July 25, 2005 Issue". The articles include "Benchmarking File" (Health care CEO promises 'courageous conversations' with employees), "Briefly" (Briefly July 25, 2005), and "Feature Articles" (The bestest can be the worstest Superlatives out too much pressure on us all). A sidebar on the right promotes "Ragan's FREE eNewsletters" and "Ragan Report Europe" with a "Subscribe Now" button and a "Click to learn more" link. A "Sponsors:" section at the bottom right includes a link to "Check out IABC's Latest & Most Popular Manuals".

The Ragan corporate website, the Qfie subscription management page, and the Oxcyon content management site work together to give paid subscribers immediate access to premium content—and allow new customers to pay and then access content immediately.

vide his or her email address and password.

Qfie then passes a token to Oxcyon, informing the content management system to unlock access only to those publications for which there is a paid subscription. With this one sign-in, a subscriber to three Ragan newsletters would gain access to the content for all three, for example, but not to others. A subscriber to just *The Ragan Report* would gain access to only that content.

“The interface to Oxcyon is controlled by background programming that’s already contained in Qfie,” said Spearing. “So if another publisher wanted to use Qfie with Oxcyon, the programming is already built into Qfie.”

Surprise!

As soon as Ragan installed Qfie, customer support started receiving emails from people who couldn’t get the free content. “In our Pinnacle unit, we had people downloading computer source code for free. Now they would have to pay for that. A lot of people didn’t like it,” Spearing said.

But Ragan liked it just fine. “QuickFill Internet Extensions solved the problem of the delivery of the product quickly because that’s what QuickFill does. It makes the order process easy,” Spearing said.

“We want people to be able to take a trial subscription of three free issues. But subscribers that are unpaid do not have access to our archive of online content. To get the archive, you have to pay,” Spearing said.

By distinguishing between paid and unpaid active and expired subscriptions, Qfie enabled Ragan to reduce the number of bogus trial subscriptions. Previously, Pinnacle was receiving 500 bogus online orders a

month. With Qfie, Santa Claus and Mickey Mouse would have to pay to play.

Matching Web Strategy to Business Strategy

With its large number of publications and marketing offers, Ragan wants the flexibility to treat subscriptions in many different ways.

“We view the website as we view an 800 number. We just have to have it in order to do business in today’s business climate.”

Spearing noted that Ragan had a lot of specific requirements, for example, the capability to let a subscriber to multiple pubs log on only once.

Working with CWC Software, Ragan was able to suggest enhancements

that have subsequently been included in later versions of Qfie, for example, prepaid discount, which was originally added for Pinnacle. Another new feature makes it possible to implement the “bill me vs. prepaid” option at the tracking code level. Previously this was implemented at the publication level; the new feature gives publishers finer control over payment options. And, also on Ragan’s suggestion, Qfie now can be used to associate a premium with a URL for immediate delivery to the customer. “The people at CWC have a great willingness to listen to us and then make adjustments,” Spearing said.

Using Qfie, its four business units—Lawrence Ragan Communications, Inc., Ragan’s Management Resources, Ragan’s Motivational Resources, and Pinnacle Publishing—can use different philosophies of online access while still providing a consistent backend and processing system. And because the actual processing takes place at the Qfie site hosted

At a glance

About Lawrence Ragan Communications, Inc.

Lawrence Ragan Communications, Inc. is the leading publisher of corporate communications, public relations, and leadership development newsletters. Ragan publishes more than 16 targeted newsletters in the areas of employee communication, Web PR, organizational writing and editing, sales and marketing, media relations, motivational management, and investor relations. In addition, Ragan produces several communications conferences, workshops, and senior-level forums throughout the United States. And Ragan’s Pinnacle Publishing delivers high-end technical content to software developers and database administrators.

Employees: 50, including 5 in fulfillment and 3 working on the website

QuickFill user since 1992

Qfie user since 2003

Approximate size of exported database, 140,000 subscriber and prospect records

Web traffic: 800 new orders per month. Including renewals, prospects, payments, and customer account changes, web transactions average 400 per week.

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by CWC Software Ragan is assured of seamless integration with its in-house fulfillment system.

Better marketing information

Ragan, a QuickFill user since 1992, uses QuickFill to handle all of its reporting. "We use QuickFill heavily for marketing as well as accounting," Spearing said. "We use QuickFill to

"Email renewals are so easy to do. We run print renewals on one day and email renewals the next. If you can run a report in QuickFill, you can send email renewals out of QuickFill."

balance our cash on a daily basis. We want QuickFill to be the driving database for everything."

With Qfie, Ragan can easily track email and direct mail offers. Using the customer code, Qfie makes sure that the online price matches the customer's offer price, whether that price is the standard web price, the first-time promotional price, the

direct mail price, the direct e-mail price, etc., etc.

"With Qfie, our marketing information is better," Spearing said. "Because everything—online and offline—is in the same database, things can't fall through the cracks."

Immediate customer satisfaction

In addition to the expected benefits of control of the online content and integrated online and offline subscription processing, Ragan has discovered other advantages to using Qfie. "Qfie opens the door for more creative marketing," Spearing said.

For example, using Qfie Ragan can offer the immediate benefit of a free premium. Customers get their free white paper or report immediately—they don't have to wait to receive an email link. Such timely fulfillment goes a long way toward increasing a customer's post-sales satisfaction.

New revenue opportunities

With the e-delivery capability provided by Qfie, Ragan has introduced a new type of product: pdf manuals and white papers on subjects including intranets, the business value of communications, and how CEOs talk to their employees.

For example, to order Ragan's \$199 report, *The Editor's Strategy*, the customer is brought to the Qfie server, where he or she pays by credit card. Qfie sends a token to the content management system and the customer can click to download the pdf file immediately. "Often, people are preparing a report and need some backup information right away. We had been sending these by second-

New revenue stream:



Using Qfie, customers can purchase pdf reports and access them immediately

day air. Now, it is such an easy process through Qfie that we're seeing increased opportunity with these reports," Spearing said.

Fundamental to meeting customers' expectations

Spearing sees online account access as a basic utility that all customers expect. People assume they will be able to make purchases and pay bills online, he says. "It's standard that subscribers should be able to pay and renew and change their addresses or privacy preference online. These are fundamental services, not an extra."

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