

UK rocks BigTime with digital media superdistribution from IBM



Overview

■ The Challenge

To promote new CD releases in a unique and timely way, in a managed environment using digital media superdistribution technology

■ The Solution

The BigTime Multimedia player utilizing IBM Electronic Media Management System (EMMS) within the IBM Digital Media Factory framework, together with project management, support and co-location services

■ The Benefits

Supplies a system with robust security features for content distribution, provides new marketing opportunities, establishes and protects viable new business models, paves new way to deliver content to the market

Unlocking the value of digital media

In the world of wired and wireless, digital media—the ability to create, manage and distribute digital content to virtually any media—is quickly becoming the industry standard for retail and entertainment enterprises.

As more consumers turn to the Internet as a primary source for music, books, software and video games, these businesses are exploring new ways to distribute content directly to consumers in their homes, safely and efficiently.

Culture, creativity and community

A primary exponent of the digital distribution revolution is UK/France-based Spero Communications (www.sperocom.co.uk). Spero Communications is a leading authority on cultural and affinity marketing, specializing in the creation of Live Brand Experience® (LBE) and marketing partnership programs that employ lifestyle needs and interests to capture the attention of particular target markets.

“This is a first-of-its-kind promotion that opens up many new possibilities for music marketing.”

Alec McKinlay
OASIS Management



Working with UK-based media, *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* (www.timesonline.co.uk), Spero developed BigTime™, a bespoke LBE that serves as a media hub centered around music, film, fashion, multimedia and the visual and performing arts. Users can share ideas, interact and obtain privileged access to lifestyle-related information and events, products and services.

Promoting a new distribution outlet

With a view to providing *The Times* and other media and entertainment clients with a BigTime data generation

and content distribution system, Spero teamed with IBM to establish a business model for a dedicated multimedia platform, that facilitates sell-through and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) requirements.

The BigTime Multimedia Player allows rights owners to showcase digital content to a receptive audience in a controlled environment, without fear of cannibalizing traditional sales. The media owner generates valuable consumer data, while promoting increased circulation and loyalty.

The platform serves as a powerful engagement tool for companies and brands, which are finding it increasingly difficult to produce relevant and credible promotions that add genuine value for consumers.

By launching a BigTime CD promoting the British rock band OASIS, utilizing IBM EMMS superdistribution technology, Spero Communications created a new purchasing environment via the Internet that enabled previews and advanced purchases of the group's new album, *Heathen Chemistry*.

The no-charge CD was circulated with *The Sunday Times* to 1.7 million newspaper readers one week prior to the album's official release date. It allowed consumers to preview three new *Heathen Chemistry* album tracks on their PCs using the BigTime Multimedia Player. From the CD, users registered online and obtained a digital key to unlock the encrypted tracks. Users could play these new tracks up to four times or until the end of the promotion period, at which point they were offered the opportunity to order the album by a direct link to the Web site of music retailer, HMV (www.hmv.co.uk), and have it delivered right to their homes.

“The BigTime promotion with The Sunday Times worked very well for OASIS. Week one sales were up 30,000 on our forecast and this momentum has been maintained to date. We have also captured 50,000 new names and potential fans, so for us, the promotion had nothing but a positive impact.”

Emma Greengrass, General Manager, Big Brother

“One of the best sales ever. This was a truly innovative concept and totally appropriate for The Sunday Times to facilitate.”

Andrew Mullins, Marketing Director, The Sunday Times

The promotional CD also contained three previously unreleased OASIS tracks—accessible using a conventional CD player—along with a promotional video and a ten-minute video interview of the band. Links to the Web sites of all the companies involved in the promotion provided a further interactive element to the user experience.

IBM delivers on the promise of new technology

With the ability to distribute digital media over the Web, content providers and retailers also face the threat of unauthorized copying. Spero Communications trusted IBM to create a leading-edge system with tight security features to enable content distribution in a closely managed environment. IBM

delivered the digital media solution within a very short time frame to meet the launch date, complete with IBM software, hardware, co-location services and support.

At the core of the IBM solution is EMMS, which is revolutionizing the way people purchase, receive and enjoy music. With EMMS superdistribution technology, consumers can share files while at the same time helping to prevent infringement of artists' property rights. For this promotion, high-quality content was delivered on the CD, eliminating the need for high-bandwidth downloads or low-quality streaming more usually associated with typical Internet-based promotions.

A key feature of the OASIS CD promotion was that EMMS supports both new and existing business models in the entertainment industry—content creators, distributors and retailers all have a role and add value to the customer experience. “IBM has enabled Spero to establish a viable business model through the provision of a dynamic multimedia platform that meets the needs of our clients,” says Ian Spero, Managing Director at Spero Communications.

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Photograph of Ian Spero courtesy of Revolution Magazine

IBM support and services from Europe to the USA contributed to the success of the initiative, including project management, co-location facilities and digital media services. "Only IBM had the vision, products, facilities and people to pull together this extremely sophisticated environment in such a short time frame," notes Ian Spero.

The players

Identifying the most appropriate players, together with implementation and relationship management are critical components of the Spero LBE mix. With the OASIS promotion, key players included *The Sunday Times* newspaper as the promotion/distribution channel, Big Brother—OASIS' record company—as the content provider, and the online arm of the music retailer, HMV. "This is a first-of-its-kind promotion that opens up many new possibilities for music marketing," says Alec McKinlay for OASIS management. Other technology providers, including Dolby Laboratories, Fraunhofer IIS and Apple worked with IBM and Spero to provide the high-quality audio and video technology used in the promotion.

The numbers speak for themselves

Sales of *The Sunday Times* increased by over 300,000 on the day of the OASIS CD promotion, representing the second highest circulation in the paper's history. "One of the best sales ever. This was a truly innovative concept and totally appropriate for *The Sunday Times* to facilitate", says Andrew Mullins, Marketing Director, *The Sunday Times*.

A percentage of profits from online sales was also donated to the BigTime Cultural Bank, a fund set up to support disadvantaged young adults seeking a career in the creative industries.

Looking to the future

Spero Communications plans to extend the BigTime platform to include collaborations with broadcasters as an interactive extension to TV programs, as well as developing partnerships with leading games manufacturers.

For more information

For more information on IBM Digital Media Solutions for your business, call your local IBM representative or visit: ibm.com/industries/digitalmedia

For more information on BigTime you can also visit: ibm.com/software/data/emms/success/bigtime.html



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