

Rotman School Web Site
Karen Christensen
Rotman School of Management
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

NEED/OPPORTUNITY

The Rotman School has set out to become one of the world's top-tier business schools, as ranked by *The Financial Times*, joining the ranks of Harvard, Wharton and Stanford. To achieve this ambitious goal, the school must accomplish the following: differentiate its brand and programs from those of competing schools; augment the global dimensions of its students, faculty and research; increase engagement with the global business community, top-tier schools, alumni and donors; and become recognized as a leading provider of research and thought leadership.

Far behind the top-tier schools in both scale and resources, the Rotman School cannot expect to compete by replicating their models. It has opted instead to pursue a strategy of uniqueness, setting out to redesign business education for the 21st century by developing a curriculum built around Integrative Thinking™ —a new approach developed by the dean that moves beyond teaching the standard MBA “silos” of finance, marketing and strategy to also teach big-picture thinking, model building and business design. When Dean Roger Martin joined Rotman in 1998, the school was ranked 72nd in the *Financial Times* ranking of the world's top 100 MBA programs. Rotman has since risen to 24th place (January 2006). Moving from 72nd to 24th place was a feat in itself, but moving forward further will be exceedingly difficult, because every school ahead of Rotman is extremely strong. One of two key dimensions affecting the FT rankings is diversity (nine of 21 measures, or 42 percent of the score), which measures the number of international students and faculty at a school, the international job experience of students, the international mobility of graduates, and the number of female students and faculty.

The school's recruiting program involves several marketing elements. Rotman sends representatives on the annual “World MBA Tour,” a series of tradeshows for business schools that visits more than 30 cities worldwide. Rotman produces an MBA brochure/viewbook annually, which is handed out at these tradeshows and advertised on the web site. The school holds information sessions throughout the year and has a comprehensive web site that is always available.

Usage of the World Wide Web as a marketing tool for organizations has increased dramatically over the past decade, and for good reason: In wealthy countries like Canada, the U.S. and Japan, the Internet is used daily by more than 67 percent of the population. It is also used daily by more than 60 percent of citizens in Germany, the U.K., South Korea, Australia and Taiwan; and close to half of the population in Italy and France. In less prosperous countries like Brazil, Mexico and Turkey, it is still used daily by more than 10 percent of citizens. Countries with huge populations living in rural poverty like India and China are lagging behind, but citizens in their bigger cities are managing to get online daily: 5.4 percent in India and 9.4 percent in China. Obviously, for any organization that is aiming to reach and attract a global audience, the Internet is the marketing tool of choice. The Rotman web site therefore presents an opportunity to define the school's distinctive brand and reach a global audience with targeted messaging.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The primary audience for the Rotman web site is prospective MBA students: highly-ambitious, young business professionals from around the world who are seeking information about world-class MBA programs. Prospective students range in age from 25 to 35 (the current first-year class average is 27). All hold an undergraduate degree from a recognized university and have been working full-time for at least two years (the current first-year class average is four years). Like all business schools, Rotman is particularly interested in filling its two-year MBA program with world-class candidates, as this is the program measured by the FT rankings and the key to a school's overall global reputation. To give an idea of how much weight the FT rankings carry with the primary audience, 89 percent of incoming 2006 class rated MBA rankings as a major or medium factor in their decision to come to Rotman. The only factors more important to applicants were the school's reputation (97 percent) and its location in downtown Toronto (92 percent). A February 2006 report by Washington D.C.-based Pew Research Center shows that globally, 18-

to-29 year olds are more likely than any other age group to use the Internet on a daily basis, with 88 percent going online daily, closely followed by 30-to-49-year-olds, at 84 percent daily. The target audience (ages 25 to 35) is therefore highly predisposed to use the Internet to find and compare products and services that meet their needs.

Secondary audiences for the Rotman web site are diverse and include:

- Prospective students for Rotman programs other than the MBA, which range from recent undergraduates for the bridge-to-business program to senior managers for the executive programs.
- Faculty members from leading business schools around the world.
- The business community worldwide, seeking to get a feel for the school and possibly hire its students.
- Alumni seeking details about upcoming events or school news or attempting to connect with fellow alumni via the alumni portal.
- Media and the general public seeking news or event details, or trying to connect with Rotman faculty experts.
- Current and potential donors seeking information about the school's fundraising needs, research activities and current initiatives.

GOALS and OBJECTIVES

The primary goals of the Rotman web site are to increase global awareness of the programs it offers, to appeal to the best and brightest MBA candidates in the world, and to drive overall strengthening of the Rotman brand. Specific objectives for 2006 included:

1. The incoming MBA class in 2006 should rank the web site as the most popular recruiting tool in the marketing arsenal.
2. As the school's global profile grows, the site should attract more visitors from each individual country outside of Canada, year-over-year.
3. The web site should help attract students from outside of Canada to the MBA program.
4. As the number of global Internet users continues to increase, daily traffic on the Rotman site should also increase year-over-year.
5. The web site should foster understanding of Rotman's unique approach to business education by having at least 300 visitors per week view the "Integrative Thinking" home page and the "Why Choose Rotman?" page, and at least 100 should watch the online video, *Think Rotman*.
6. The two-year MBA (the school's flagship program) home page and admissions page should consistently rank in the top 10 pages on weekly Web Trends reports.
7. Regular feedback from actual web visitors/users should be generated, dialogues generated and positive ratings obtained from them.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

Given that a large part of the primary target audience uses the Internet on a daily basis to find and compare products and services that meet their needs, it is critical to clearly communicate the school's distinct approach and generate interest in the school via the web site. The home page sets out to tell the "Rotman story" on a variety of levels. The predominant images that greet visitors are of actual Rotman students, faculty, and high-profile guest speakers like Jack Welch and Warren Buffet, photographed in the school's dynamic environment. If you refresh your screen (hit F5 or return to the site repeatedly), there are actually 10 different rotating images on the home page, which are intended to welcome visitors and portray a visual "slice" of Rotman life. The team deliberately chose photos that highlight the diversity of the school's students and faculty and its female-friendly environment.

Rotman's bold approach to business education is what differentiates the school from its competitors, so the "Rotman: a new way to think" logo is used instead of the regular "Rotman" logo at the top right of the screen. The approach revolves around Integrative Thinking, so a prominent link to "What is Integrative Thinking?" appears at the centre of the screen. Also prominent is the orange "Why Choose Rotman?" button, which leads to a description of what makes the school different from the competition. Underneath this button in the black column are several brand indicators that help to further explain "why to choose Rotman," including a link to "Read a Student Blog." With the increasing popularity of blogging amongst

younger Internet users, the team felt it was important to include some unedited, brutally-honest firsthand accounts of “life at Rotman,” courtesy of the students. This year, a total of 12 students—the majority of them international—volunteered to keep a weekly diary on the Rotman site.

Rotman’s business programs are the main reason visitors come to the site, so the “Degree Programs” button appears first on the navigation bar. To give a quick snapshot of current Rotman news, a list of “What’s New?” appears prominently on the home page, displaying the latest news and linking to detailed descriptions. Prospective students and faculty are very interested in how the school fares in business school rankings by the *Financial Times* and *BusinessWeek*, so links to these are featured at the right of the screen, under “Rotman in the Media.” Visitors are also engaged with an “Ask, Share, Tell” button—a link to the Guestbook, where visitors can provide feedback and ask questions. This button appears on each page of the main site, encouraging as much feedback as possible. Underneath “What’s New?,” the school’s personality is displayed with large images inviting visitors to “Meet some of our alumni,” to read the “Current issue of our Magazine” and “MBA Viewbook,” and to “Meet our Dean.” First-time visitors to the site should be encouraged to view the Rotman School as a dynamic, diverse environment that they want to be associated with—whether it be as a student, faculty member, recruiter or guest at one of the school’s events.

IMPLEMENTATION and CHALLENGES

The look of the Rotman web site is refreshed every two years, but the site architecture remains consistent, with minor adjustments made on a continuous basis as a result of user feedback. The annual web budget alternates between CDN\$3,000 in a non-design year and CDN\$10,000 in a design year. The current design was introduced in June of 2006. The 2006 budget of CDN\$10,000 covered the professional design and production of three levels of templates: a new look for the home page, first-level pages and second-level pages. The in-house webmaster then took these templates and did all further coding in-house, taking content from the previous site and moving it over to the “new look” templates. This took one full month of his time, and led to some delays in completing work orders for internal clients.

The director of marketing and communications is responsible for ensuring that the content on the web site remains up-to-date on an ongoing basis. Together with the webmaster (who reports 50 percent to her, 50 percent to the IT department), she performs daily content updates and approves the addition of all new information, affiliated sites and navigation elements. This entails working closely with senior managers throughout the school—including faculty, the admissions and recruiting team, the career centre, alumni relations, media relations, student clubs and research institute staff. One key challenge lies in bridging the interests of such a large and diverse community—often in the face of conflicting time lines, goals, priorities and opinions. The director often has to make judgment calls whereby one internal customer has to wait while the two-person team deals with a priority request from another department, which she has judged to be more important to the school overall. Creative management of technology, content and design is a necessity. Another macro challenge is working with limited resources to compete with better-funded top-tier schools. While competitors can afford external consultation and expensive multimedia add-ons, the 2,500+ page Rotman web site is produced and managed entirely in-house by a two-person team.

MEASUREMENT/EVALUATION

Objective 1: The web site should be ranked as the most popular MBA recruiting tool, based on a survey of the incoming MBA class.

Result: In a survey of the incoming class in September 2006, the web site was chosen as the school’s leading marketing tool. When asked, “How did you first learn about the Rotman MBA program?”, the web site was cited as a major or medium factor by 63 percent of respondents—handily beating all other recruiting tools, which include the MBA brochure (48 percent), MBA fairs (i.e., tradeshow booths at 21 percent), *Rotman Magazine* (17 percent) and newspaper ads (9 percent). This isn’t too surprising, as current studies confirm that the Internet is the tool of choice for the primary audience.

Objective 2: The site should attract an increased number of visitors from countries other than Canada, year-over-year.

Result: The Web Trends report for 18 to 24 September 2006 indicates 56 percent of visitors are from the U.S., up from 47 percent one year earlier. A comparison of weekly visitors from specific countries for

September 2006 vs. September 2005 shows that visitors from most have doubled in just one year: the U.K.: 874 (2006) vs. 408 (2005); Australia: 827 vs. 408; Germany: 665 vs. 356; Japan: 363 vs. 220; Hong Kong: 247 vs. 135; Taiwan: 309 vs. 173; India: 475 vs. 160; Brazil: 475 vs. 181; and Singapore: 613 vs. 334. This indicates that the “buzz” is spreading over time in these countries as the school becomes increasingly recognized in the global MBA marketplace.

Objective 3: The site should help the school attract top students from outside of Canada to its MBA program.

Result: The most recent incoming MBA class of 237 students was made up of 36 percent international students from 25 countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, France, India, Iran, Israel, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, the U.K., the U.S. and Venezuela, and since the school’s web site was named the most powerful recruiting tool by this group, it follows that many of these international students were attracted to the school by the web site. In addition, in a year marked by a global trend of significant decline in applications to MBA programs, the number of applicants to Rotman’s program was 1,020, up slightly from last year’s 1,010, and the quality of applications improved: This year’s incoming class’s average GMAT score was 652, in the 82nd percentile of test-takers worldwide, compared to last year’s average score of 641 (81st percentile).

Objective 4: As the number of global Internet users continues to increase, daily traffic on the site should also increase.

Result: The Web Trends report for 18 to 24 September 2006 shows an average of 9,893 visitors per day, compared to 9,073 visitors per day for the same week in 2005, amounting to a 9 percent increase in traffic, expanding the school’s brand awareness globally.

Objective 5: Attract at least 300 visitors per week to the “Integrative Thinking” home page and the “Why Choose Rotman?” page, and at least 100 to watch the online video.

Result: The Web Trends report for 18 to 24 September 2006 indicates 339 visitors to the integrative thinking home page (vs. 392 in 2005); 310 to the “Why Choose Rotman?” page (vs. 264 in 2005); and 197 video viewings (vs. 135 in 2005)—an average increase of 30 percent in traffic to three of the key online branding pages.

Objective 6: The two-year MBA home page and its admissions page should consistently rank in the top 10 pages on the site.

Result: The Web Trends report for 18 to 24 September 2006 shows the two-year MBA home page as the fifth most popular page on the web site, with 3,734 visitors that week (more than double the 1,789 visitors for the same week in 2005). The MBA admissions page ranks in the top 10 for both reports, with 2,630 visits for 18 to 24 September 2006, up from 1,146 visits for that same week in 2005 (an increase of 29 percent year-over-year). The global MBA customer is Rotman’s most important audience, so the more attention these pages generate, the better for the school.

Objective 7: Generate regular feedback from web site users, answer their questions and obtain positive rankings from them.

Result: The “Ask, Share, Tell” button that appears on each page of the site leads to the online Guestbook, which receives on average 15 feedback entries per week throughout the year. The average rating given by users is an eight out of 10, and 90 percent say they were able to find what they were looking for. For the 10 percent who have trouble locating something, they receive an e-mail from the director of marketing within 24 hours, advising them where to obtain the information they need, or which individual to send an e-mail to at the school. This often opens up a dialogue between a potential student and an admissions team member, whereby the Rotman representative can encourage the individual to apply to the program. At the same time, consideration is also given to how to make the “elusive” information easier to locate on the site.