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Rebuilding Japan with Foreign Tourists

Blueprint for building Japan's largest
travel advisor website

Terrie Lloyd
October 2011

メトロポリス
METROPOLIS



Terrie's Credentials

- 53 years old, in Japan for 28 years
 - Entrepreneur for 27 years
- First company at 25
 - Since then 17 companies in Japan, 5 elsewhere in Asia
- Built from ground floor up, gaining broad business experience
 - Marketing, media, company start-ups, recruiting, software engineering, and network engineering
 - Largest publisher of English-language periodicals in Japan
 - 200K copies/month
 - 7 M&A earn-outs, US\$25MM raised in various fundings
 - Currently group of 7 companies, 120 people
 - IT and recruiting, software development, online and print publishing, website development, media distribution, market entry consulting, business incubation
- Personal mission is to open up Japan to other countries
- Technology and information focus



Agenda

- 3/11 and Other Challenges
- Reinventing Yourself
- Key Elements for a Successful Service



Only Constant is Change

- Even before 3/11, Japan has been in an important period of change
 - Lehman Shock disrupted the domestic market, forcing many companies to shift abroad
 - Graying society means less tax payers to cover social welfare (40:1 in 1970's, now 2.5:1)
 - Government debt is 200% of GDP and increasing by 20%-30% a year, something has to give by 2015-20
- Industries and markets are disappearing
 - High yen has been causing my main market, foreigners and foreign companies, to move off-shore (Singapore and Dalian for example)
 - Consumers are earning less and have far less confidence
- Yet, opportunity is everywhere and today's winners are opportunists
 - Does your business take advantage of the macro trends?
 - Are you helping someone else take advantage?
- As foreigners:
 - Helping facilitate Japanese domestic winners
 - Bring foreign innovation to Japan
 - Bring foreigners and foreign capital to Japan
- To turn our business around, we decided to leverage our foreignness, and our technology skills

Challenges Peculiar to Publishing



How will publishers make money?.

- Small-to-medium sized publishers globally are suffering
 - Advertiser revenues are dropping
 - Paper readers, subscriptions falling
 - Need to extend to Internet, smart phones, tablets
 - People don't want to pay for content
- Publishers don't extend to Web because:
 - Don't want to cannibalize remaining paper ad revenues by putting same content up on line free
 - Don't have technology
 - Don't know how to let readers find them (SEO, etc.)
- But publishers do have:
 - Large communities of qualified, loyal readers
 - Sales and marketing resources
 - Will to change and find news ways to make money
- Solution is to engage existing readers with new applications that don't cannibalize existing business



Online duplication = cannibalization



Publishers own large, loyal communities



Decision Points

- To fix our paper publishing business, we decided to:
 - Pick a sector that is in deep pain and no dominant players
 - Web sites need a theme and central purpose
 - Apply technology and “foreigner” advantage
 - Eliminate employment costs by changing business model to a franchise
 - Create a powerful story that will excite sponsors and users alike
 - Launch the business as cheaply as possible
 - Since venture capital is hard to get
 - Do it quickly before someone else does



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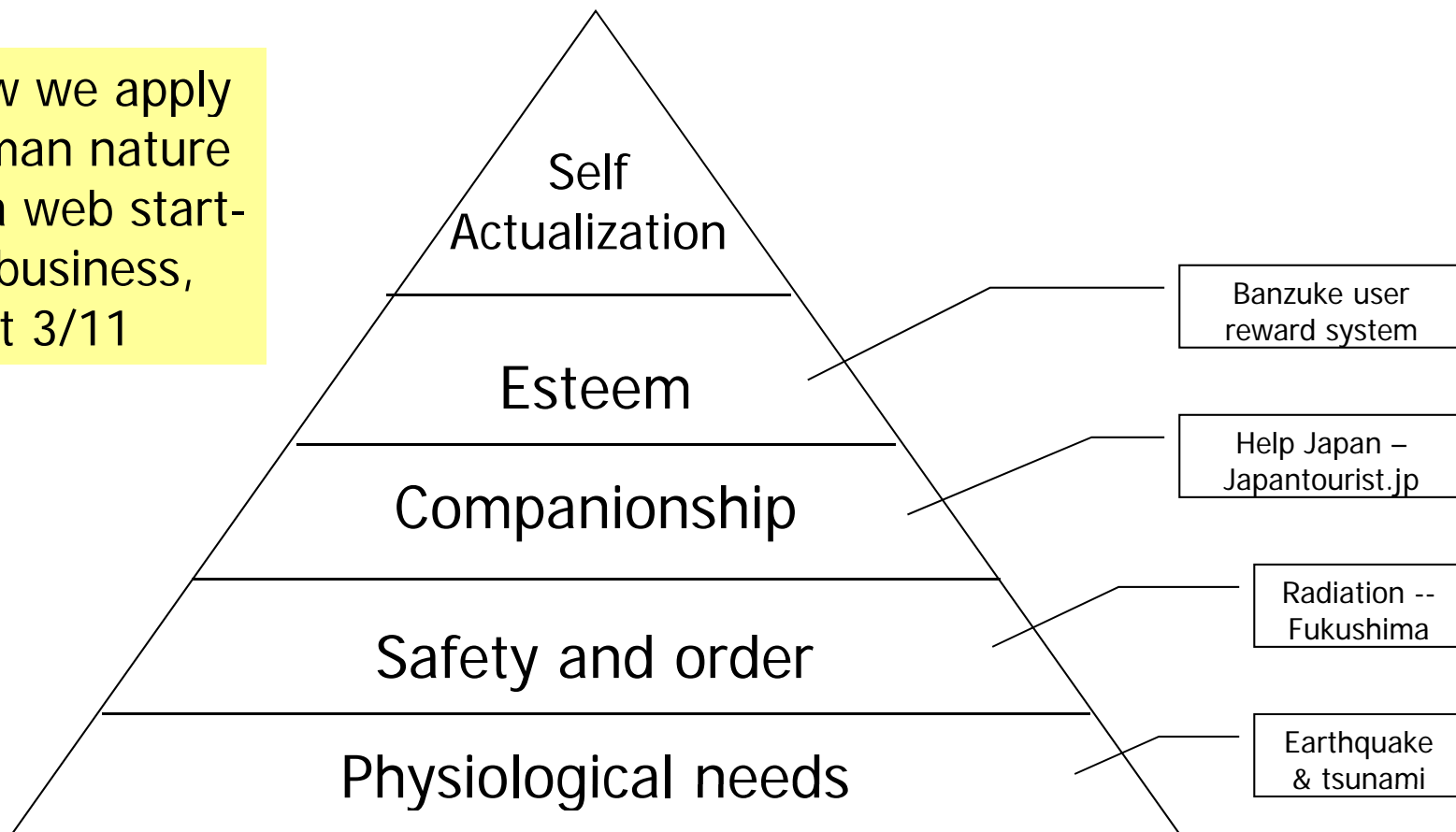
Creating Something Sellable

- Sometimes your existing products are no longer sellable – the world just passes them by
 - Harder work and more efficiency can't help a product/service that is dated
- Visualize – roll of leader/entrepreneur
 - Propose, Listen, Refine
 - In uncertain times, the leader of the business has to use personal instincts to steer the company through choppy waters
 - Means going against the wishes of employees wanting a “comfortable demise”
- Pre-produce – roll of program manager/leader
 - Create concept, test on clients, then investors, THEN colleagues
 - Create production system, test audience, listen, refine
 - Team has to be flexible enough to refine, within the vision
- Launch – role of marketing/leader
 - Publicize, Market, Sell, Deliver, Listen, Refine
 - Marketing needs to understand the value proposition in a way that makes the “new thing” stand out
 - Role of online buzz cannot be underestimated – budgets need to be opened up to develop social media groups to support the new thing
 - Work all forms of PR, traditional, online, and in-community
- Endorsements
 - In uncertain times, customers want certainty
 - Business with governments and large organizations – credibility
 - Tie-ups with Google and other famous brands – credibility and volume of user
 - Tie-ups with other content owners wanting your access – credibility and volume of content



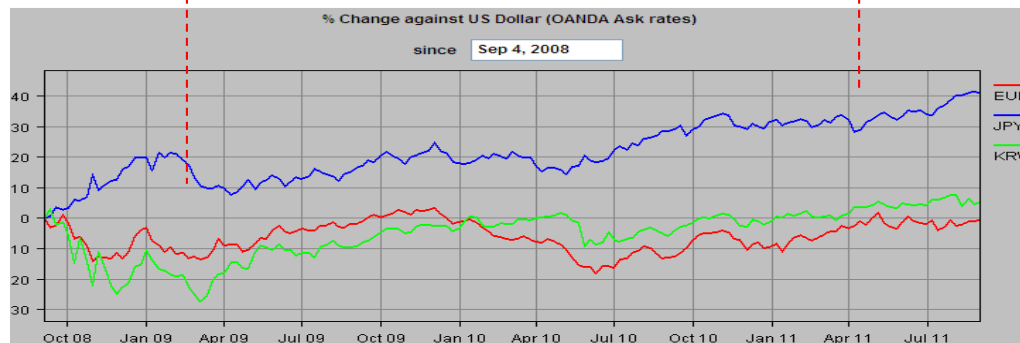
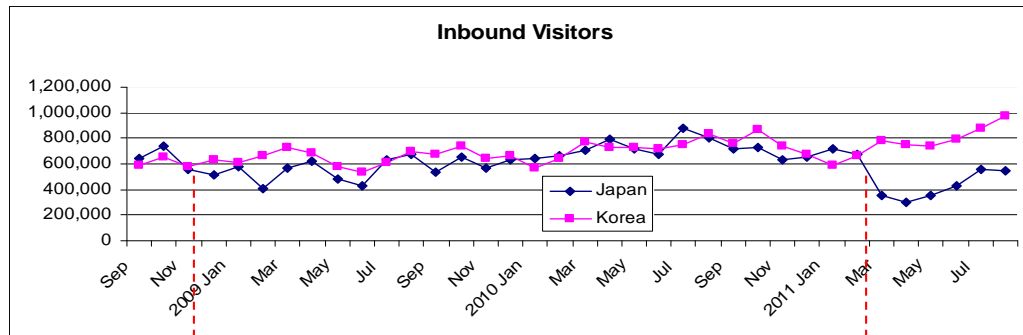
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

How we apply human nature to a web start-up business, post 3/11





Japan's Tourist Problem



■ Tourism 3 ills said to be:

- High Yen
- Language
- Fukushima nuclear power plant

■ But:

- Yen impact not seen in 2010 travel numbers
- Korea has foreign language but same or higher tourism
- Fukushima impact will be resolved soon

■ Real problems are:

- No coherent international marketing
- Lack of variety and volume of information
- Lack of modern social media sites
- Old fashioned tourism sector with low appeal to young people and special interest groups

■ Solution:

- A broad, detailed travel website that appeals to tourists and helps tourism operators understand interests of foreigners



First Steps to Reinvention

- Challenge
 - How to restore the Metropolis value proposition of being “The Biggest” data resource for the sectors it is in
 - How to get advertisers excited to be part of the shift
- Solution
 - Launch, new, large, integrated service
 - We want to be biggest in Japan
 - Be the best and encourage others to collaborate
 - Friendly, business sharing
 - Retain control of technology and content
 - Ensure means of production is protected, consistent, and reliable
- What we did
 - Created a software resource to create the software platform – MetroWorks KK
 - Created the software reader/advertiser platform
 - Automated as much as possible
 - Brought in partners through franchise arrangement, reduced costs as much as possible
 - Networked to web “nexus points” as much as possible
 - Google... many others coming (one reason we need to be biggest)
 - Ready to launch on November 4th, 2011
 - We’re ready to change as much as is needed as we gain experience



Don't Forget Soft Skills

- In adverse times, employees (and customers) look for **leadership**
 - Important while launching a new business to stay engaged
- Leaders Stay Informed:
 - Being right about external events
 - Study world economic patterns and trends
 - Talk to clients at strategic level and learn what they know/think
 - If you can forecast future accurately, your team and clients will believe and follow your vision
 - Staying on top of internal events
 - You need continual feedback from trusted employees (more than one)
 - Always tackle problems immediately or schedule immediately
 - Do conscious training sessions with your managers
- Leaders Stay Visible:
 - People buy into visions and ideals, not cash
 - Being heard (yet listening)
 - Personal newsletter Terrie's Take, 8,400 readers
 - Frequent posts to partner group and to internal staff
 - Making things happen, moving quickly, getting results
 - Creating the layout and production planning myself
 - Staying in constant contact with producers (software, content, partners, etc.)
 - Doing sales BEFORE launching, emphasizing that project is real and viable



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Comparing JapanTourist

- Collaborative
 - Unique, not just one company but
 - 47+ partners
 - Around each partner a “cell” of 20-200 contributing writers = 1000’s of writers
 - Japan’s only English-language “kuchikomi” travel site
- Targeting
 - Like TripAdvisor.com – but just Japan
 - Targeting independent, repeat travelers
 - Focusing on ADVENTURE
- Eliminating language barrier with natural, compelling English
 - Partners are foreigners, bilinguals
 - “Foreigners-to-foreigners” means better messaging and targeting
 - Chinese and Korean in 2012
- Using latest technologies
 - Sophisticated kuchikomi engine
 - iPhone, Android apps
 - Automated reward system for contributors

Features	lonelyplanet.com	tripadvisor.com	japan-guide.com	jnto.go.jp/engl	japantourist
User reviews functions	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
1,000+ Japan full-length articles	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
100+ Japan editorial contributors	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Full IP/syndication rights	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Commercial site	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
User incentives/rewards	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
iPhone, Android apps*	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Merchant content tools	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
No. full-length articles	1,778	479	826	4,500	900/mth

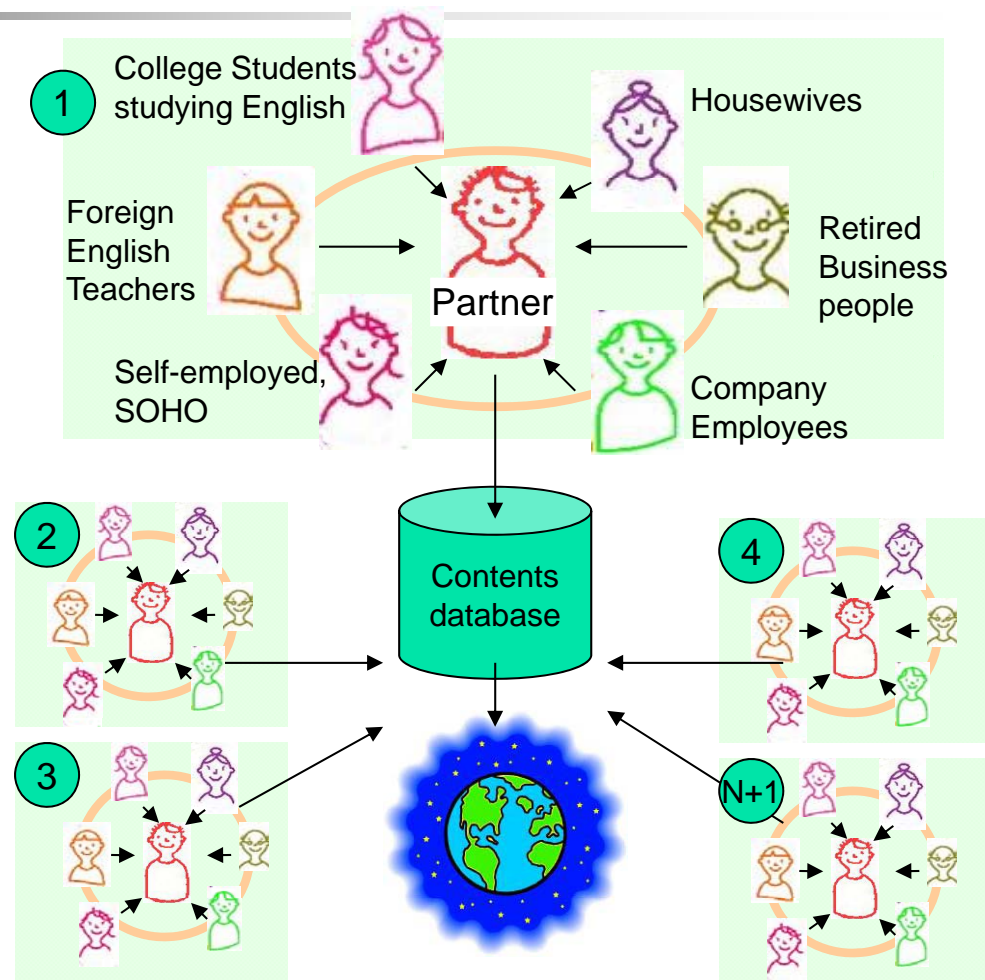
- Notes:**
1. All japantourist numbers are Dec 2011 estimates
 2. iPhone, Android apps under development
 3. TripAdvisor doesn’t publish full-length articles. We approximated shorter traveler articles (not to be confused with user comments)
 4. Competitor article counts are approximate



Method

- Massive grass roots campaign
 - Network of 45* regional partners recruit 100's of contributors – articles, photos, videos
 - We PR appeal to millions of Japanese – to kick-start
 - Totally new approach to Japan inbound tourism – high interest value
 - Resulting volume of content makes us largest
- Grass roots means we can reach regions in Japan not normally involved in foreign inbound tourism
 - Adding to the novelty and interest both domestically and abroad

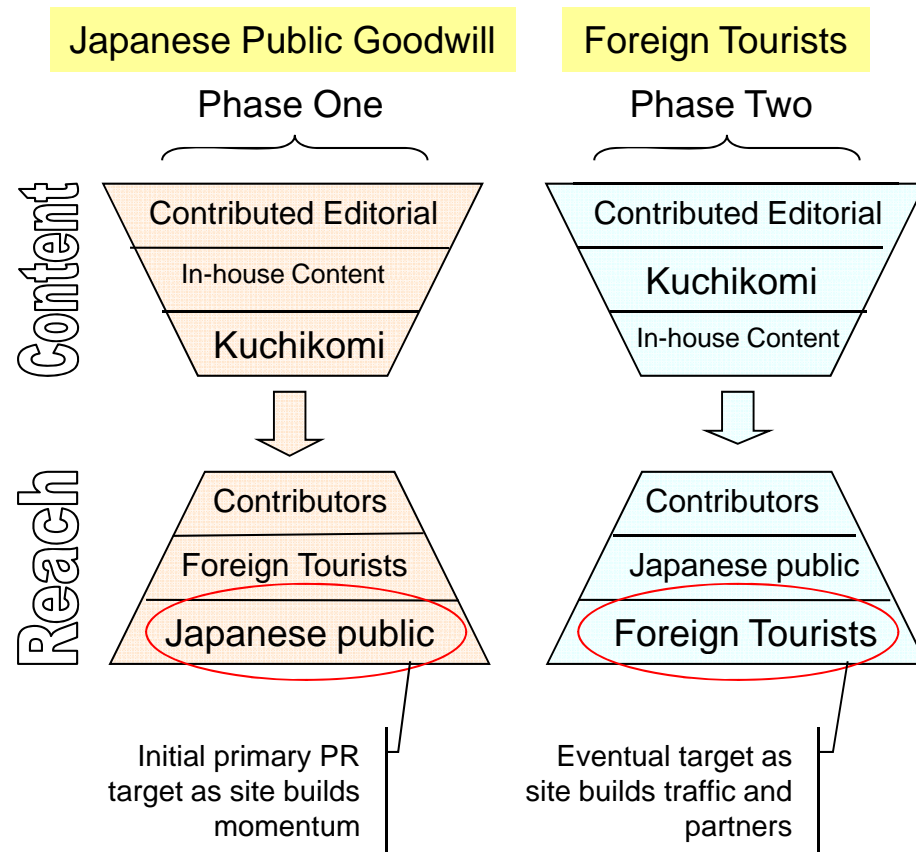
Note: Currently 27 partners – remainder by Dec12





Project Scope & Staging

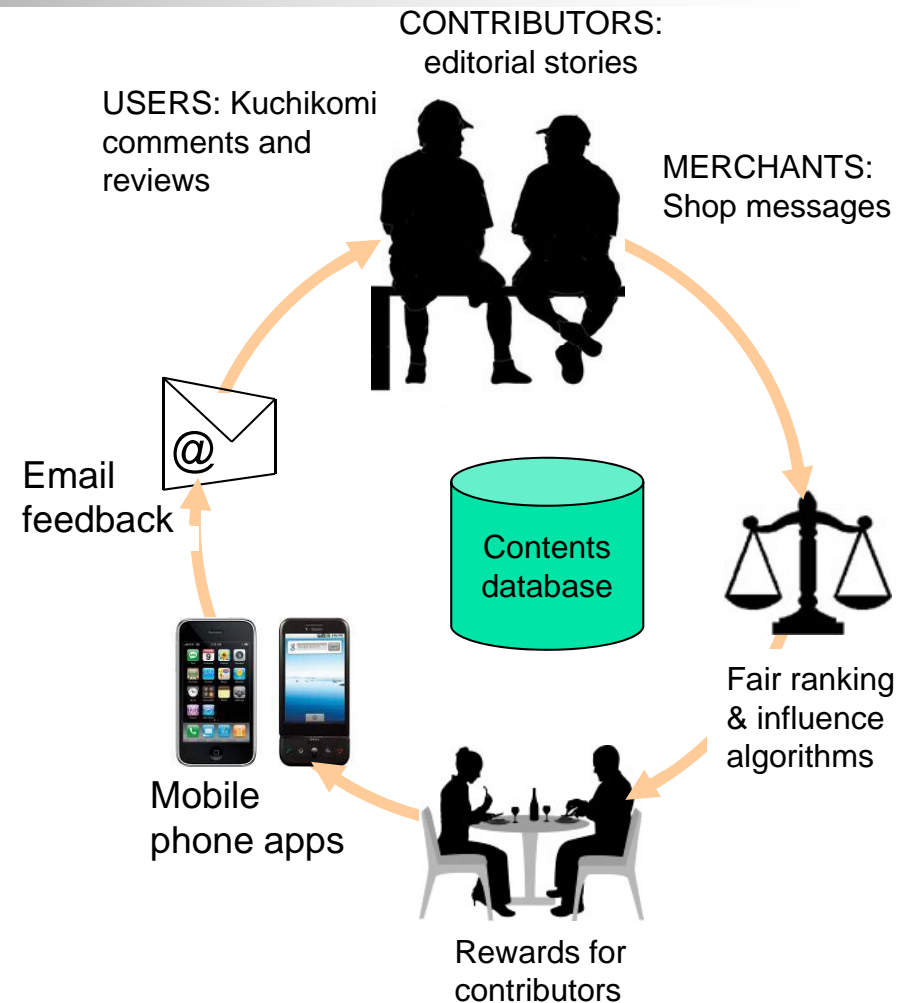
- Two-stage roll-out, anticipating Fukushima clean-up by Jan-Feb 2012
- Phase One
 - Target Japanese goodwill
 - Cells of 45 x 20-200 = 900-9,000 contributors
 - PR to 1-3m audience with Delta brand name
 - Create massive content
 - 1,000 stories, 3,000 photos by Dec 2011
- Phase Two
 - Focus on foreign tourist interest, w/tie-ups, PR
 - 10m PVs/month by June12
 - Create automated content (kuchikomi)
 - 10,000+ kuchikomi reviews
 - 10,000 editorial stories, 15,000 photos and videos by Dec2012



Content Ecosystem



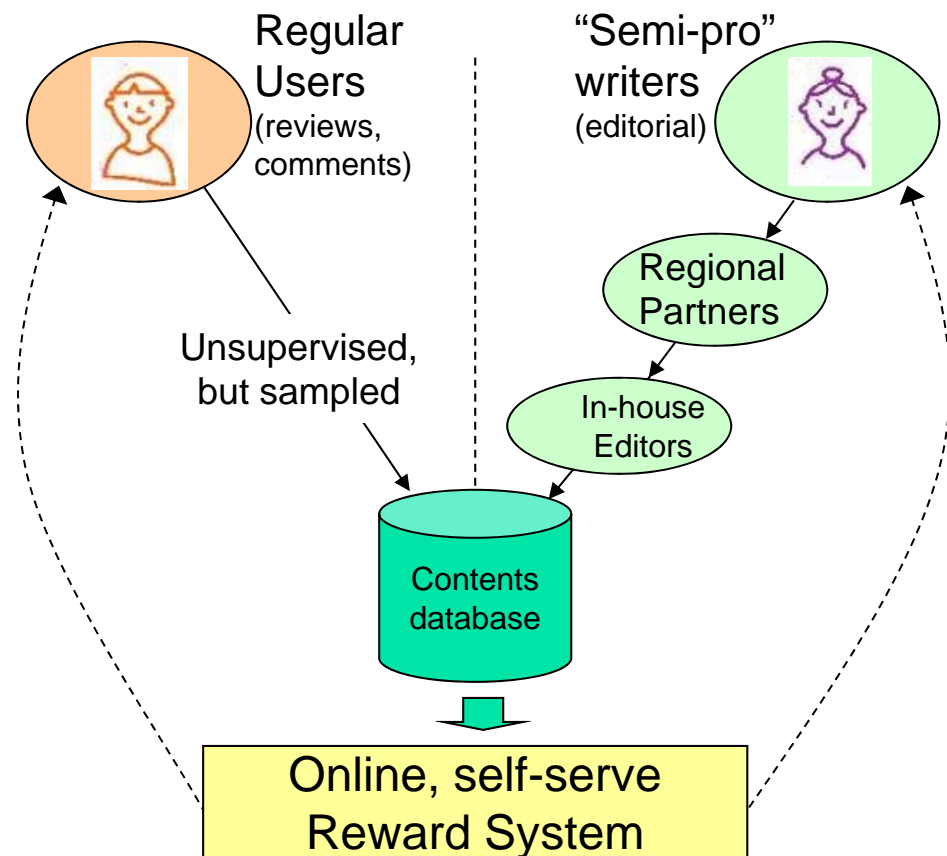
- 3 types of content
 - Served on PCs and Mobile
- Editorial
 - Until tourists start coming back, this is our major content
 - We reward contributors both with recognition and vouchers
 - Voucher system is unique for user supported site
- User reviews (“kuchikomi”)
 - Proven way to build credibility and user action
 - Popularized Japan and abroad (Tabelog, Yelp, Rakutentravel, Lonely Planet, etc.)
 - JapanTourist is only English-language kuchikomi site in Japan
- Merchant messaging
 - Menus, promotions, discount vouchers, introduction of staff and improvements, etc.
 - Commercial Partners are a *special version* of Merchants, with additional acknowledgement and branding





Work-Reward System

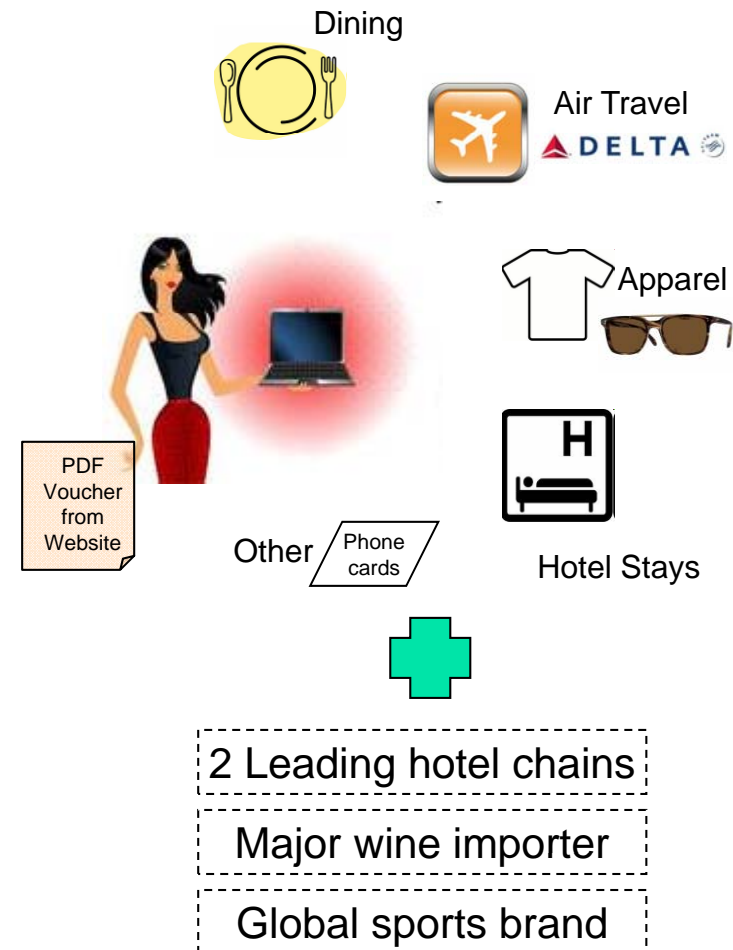
- Unique system provides rewards for users who contribute to the site
 - Reinforces interest of contributors
 - Improves quality of contributions
 - Provides companies with a non-cash way to be involved in the project
- Two types of contributors
 - Casual users, who are unsupervised
 - Content is sampled, reviewed for appropriateness)
 - Casual user contributions go into User Reviews content stream
 - Rewards points are small and frequent
 - “Semi-pro” contributors, who act as freelance journalists
 - Content fully reviewed, accepted/rejected by Regional Partners
 - Semi-pro contributions go to into Editorial content stream
- Rewards come from Commercial Partners
- Rewards are self-serve for easier logistics



Vouchers and Logistics



- Goodwill aspect of Japantourist is very strong – everyone wants to help with the 3/11 recovery
- Rewards are services, goods vouchers from participating companies (Commercial Partners)
- Contributors add content to system, as they do they earn points that can be “spent” on shopping page
- Users redeem rewards by “buying” vouchers
 - Our shopping cart system has to be approved by human before approval – thus preventing “gaming” of the system
 - After receiving reward PDF, user reads instructions on how to redeem at stores, online, etc.
- Per the website terms and conditions, users are limited to just those items on the shopping site
 - If they are dissatisfied with offerings, they can wait for new offerings or can drop out
- Rewards are attractive, but are subject to terms and conditions specified by Commercial Partner
- Commercial Partners have call center or online system to take redemptions
- Vouchers good for one year from date of issue
 - Typically 6-9 months from date reward is claimed





Wrap-up

- Japan is going through an intense period of change
 - 3/11 Earthquake+Tsunami, Lehman Shock, and aging demographics are breaking down old attitudes
 - Many firms have cash and they are spending on strategic investments
 - Japanese companies are looking to partner – especially if you have something new
 - Lots of inefficiencies, but the spirit of the people is still strong
- Reinventing a new business has never been more viable
 - Starting at the bottom of economic cycle is right time
 - But it requires vision and confidence
 - Internet – every knows it's the future
 - Get out of businesses that are not working for you
 - Figure out how to be relevant in a connected, group-enabled world
 - Reinvention does not have to cost the earth – the real value is in your idea
 - To measure that idea – does it excite people?



Contacts

- People
 - Main contact point
 - Metropolis KK group principal – Terrie Lloyd
 - terrie@metropolis.co.jp, +81-3-4550-2926
- Web
 - Terrie's Take newsletter – weekly www.japaninc.com
 - www.japandoor.com
 - www.biosjp.com
 - www.japaninc.com
 - www.metropolis.co.jp
 - www.lincmedia.co.jp
 - www.accjournal.com
 - www.metrodining.jp
 - www.japantourist.jp (from November, 2011)
 - www.metrohomes.jp (from November, 2011)