Introducing CGM (Consumer Generated Media) Functions to "WebryBlog," a Communications Service Provided by BIGLOBE

Since March 2004, BIGLOBE has been providing a blog service called "WebryBlog." Much interest is being expressed by from users in the recent trends in EC (Electric Commerce) sites and portal sites that are gaining advantages from the comments and reviews posted to blogs. In response BIGLOBE has developed a CGM platform that enables use of the advantages of the "WebryBlog" system and its accumulated blog articles and data. This paper introduces three main subjects; the CGM platform architecture, a "CGM Map" service that pools the resources of blog articles with the map function (Google Maps API) and a "Profile" service that enables the control of posting access to the portal site.

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Introduction

As a result of the explosive spread of blogging, various approaches using blogging data have been adopted. In particular, the portal sites providing shopping functions and the information providing services are intended to employ more of the CGM (Consumer Generated Media) functions that adopt the best advantages of word-of-mouth information such as blog articles and reviews, etc.

Under the strategy of launching a means of viewing the interests and criticisms of ordinary people, BIGLOBE has made an appraisal of the introduction to our portal sites of CGM functions that are useful in supporting people's everyday lifestyles. We have developed three technologies for services employing CGM; a CGM platform based on the WebryBlog[1] system, a profile function to control reviews of the individual user, and a CGM map service using Google Maps API[2]. This paper explains BIGLOBE's approach to these CGM technologies.

Advantages and Issues in the Introduction of CGM Functions

CGM is widely known as a means for consumers to generate their own information dispatching opportunities. Such a system that employs information from users so called word-of-mouth information can offer the following two advantages.

1) The information quality of the site can be enhanced as a result of valuable information being posted by the users
2) The spin-off of attracting new customers via word-of-mouth information may be expected. Accordingly, an increase in EC sales can be anticipated.

On the other hand, issues related to the introduction of CGM are; a) the requirement of a large-sized development, b) the possibility of confusion in the posting of reviews and trackback, and c) the preparation of a system to increase the volume of word-of-mouth information posted by users without the site provider attempting to apply influence.

BIGLOBE's Approach to CGM Introduction

BIGLOBE (one of Japan's largest Internet access providers) has tried to solve the issues described above by developing the WebryBlog system. First of all, we employed the WebryBlog resource for the CGM platform. This resulted in the low cost development of the platform which features functions such as page creation, trackback, review posting, etc. In addition, easy linkage with blog articles and bloggers, a "Profile" and "WebryMap" functions are provided. The "Profile" function is one that enables the coordinated control of reviews posted to more than two CGM sites. The "WebryMap" function can link a blog with a map and a CGM site by using a map function. The details of these functions are explained later in this paper.

(1) Page Creation on the CGM Platform

The CGM platform is composed of a page creation platform,

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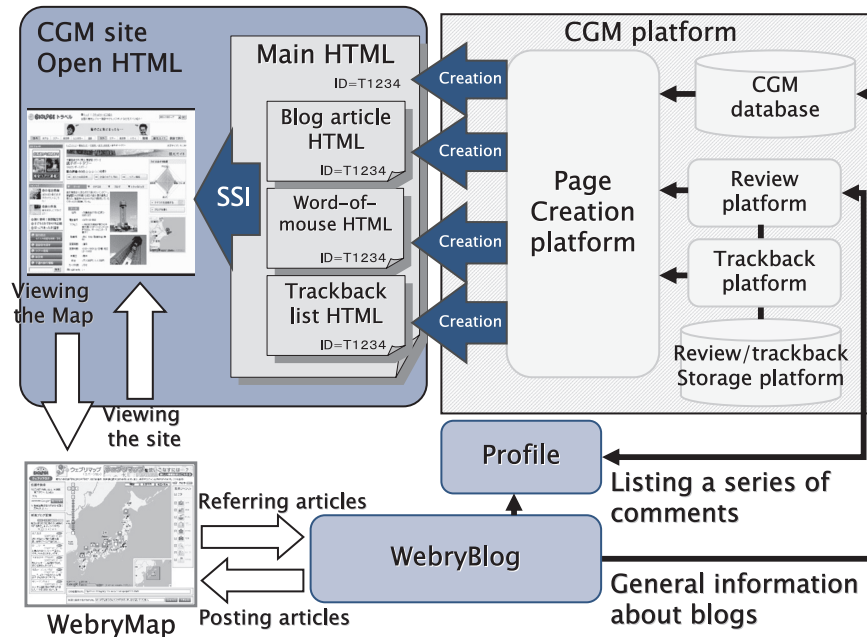

Fig. 1 Relationship between the CGM platform and the pages created by the CGM platform.

a review platform, a trackback platform, and the CGM and review/trackback storage databases (**Fig. 1**).

The configuration of how to create a CGM site is explained by employing "BIGLOBE Travel" as an example. "BIGLOBE Travel" provides pages of various information sites such as amusement parks, hot springs and sightseeing spots, etc. The page creation platform creates these pages as HTML files by using the information stored in the CGM database.

When a review is posted or a trackback is executed to this page, information is first stored in the review/trackback storage DB as word-of-mouth information or trackback information. Then, they are combined with the accumulated word-of-mouth information and generated as static HTML data.

HTML data including generated word-of-mouth information and trackback lists are integrated by the SSI (Server Side Include) system and displayed as a sightseeing spots information page. When the trackback list or the word-of-mouth information data is generated as dynamic content by using JavaScript, commented information sometimes cannot be detected by a crawler search engine. Also a downgraded cost performance results because a greater number of servers are required. This occurs because a greater load will be added to the platform when dynamic content is employed. On the other hand, when the static content of an HTML page is generated with SSI, CGM sites can be cre-

ated with fewer servers and the advantages of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) may also be acquired.

(2) Linkage to Profile Pages on a Portal Site

One of the issues with CGM technology is the possibility of intrusion of the site by malicious comments or a chain of criticisms aimed at a subject. These threats generally originate from an anonymous source. However, bloggers who have established a certain status on the network usually try to retain their reputation, which stops them posting malicious comments and instead encourages them to post constructive comments or reviews.

BIGLOBE provides a profile function on the "Profile" page of WebryBlog that displays a list of reviews posted by various CGM functions. This system discourages users from posting malicious comments to the site.

When a user posts word-of-mouth information to the BIGLOBE CGM site the profile function displays it in the related column on his/her "Profile" page. A linkage is thus established between word-of-mouth information and the BIGLOBE CGM site. For example, if a user posts his/her word-of-mouth information of a sightseeing spot to the "BIGLOBE Travel" page, the word-of-mouth information will also be displayed on his/her profile page (**Fig. 2**).

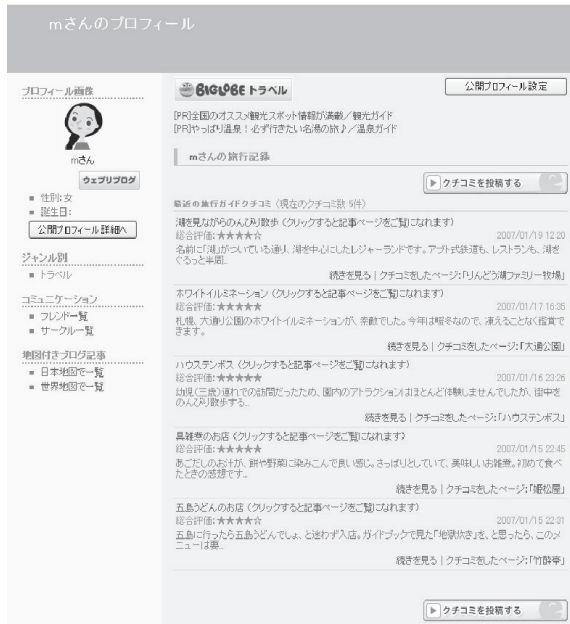Consequently when a user views the word-of-mouth information on "BIGLOBE Travel," it may easily be discovered

Fig. 2 Profile page.

who has posted the information by accessing the profile page, where other information about what he/she has written may also be found.

Listing comments and information that a user posts on his/her profile page will bring about the following advantages and create an information traffic circulation between users and the portal site.

1) Enrichment of the profile page of a user

2) The incentive of being able to access reliable word-of-mouth information on the portal site

The Profile/Portal linkage function was begun on the "BIG-LOBE Travel" site in January 2007 and it is intended that in the future it will be employed for other portal sites provided by BIGLOBE.

(3) Map Linkage

Another issue to be solved for CGM is to establish a system whereby an increased amount of word-of-mouth information is posted voluntarily by users, without them being influenced in any way by the site provider. In the early stages of a recently begun service not many postings from users can be expected.

BIGLOBE has tried to sort out this issue by providing a CGM map service. This service links comments on the WebryBlog and the CGM site, which means that the comments posted to the WebryBlog can be used at the CGM sites. The following two functions have been provided this time; "A map attaching function" that enables a user to post his/her blog comments with a map without performing any complicated procedure, and a "WebryMap function" that displays a blog site or CGM spot information linked to the map.

The map attaching screen employs a WYSISYG user interface so that a user can attach a map to his/her blog with intuitive action. When a user attaches a map, he/she can specify the size and type (terrestrial or aerial photo) of the map, an icon classified by different purposes to indicate the target place and his/her rating with up to five stars. Moreover, metadata including latitude, longitude, genre and evaluation are added to the blog comments so that the CGM content of the enriched area information can be created and accumulated automatically.

"WebryMap" is a service that displays multiple blogs with a map (**Fig. 3**). The blog articles on the "WebryMap" can be displayed in different genre so that more specific information of the target area can be easily searched by linking with an address search engine.

A new function has been developed and was launched in March 2007. It displays location information stored at BIG-LOBE's portal site on "WebryMap." The locations information provided by BIGLOBE and the blog articles posted by users of "WebryBlog" are displayed on the same page so that a word-of-mouth information search of the target area is enabled. This also enables the creation of interactive traffic between the locations information page of the portal site and the user blog articles pages.

In future, by applying this service to a mobile phone with a GPS function, a solution can be realized that a user may post

Fig. 3 WebryMap.

a blog article with a map while he/she is outside. This will improve the function ability as a word-of-mouth information collection engine, and will also improve and maintain the quality of the area CGM content.

Results and the Future of Business Development

Functions such as comments and trackback have been provided to "BIGLOBE Stream" which is a portal site that the users can enjoy various movies and animations since October 2007. CGM functions have been provided to more than 3,000 nationwide sightseeing spots information pages at "BIGLOBE Travel" since January 2007. In future, BIGLOBE will continue to introduce CGM functions to the BIGLOBE portal sites in order to accelerate enrichment of the site quality and increase the number of users. At the same time, ASP services will be provided to enterprises, which will enable providing the CGM function with low cost to conventional EC sites as well as to information sites.

Conclusion

This paper so far has introduced the CGM platform configuration that adopts the best advantages of "WebryBlog" resources and the CGM map linkage function by using the Google Maps API technology.

BIGLOBE will promote business development using technologies applied by "WebryBlog," a communications service for individual users.

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* Some products and services introduced in this paper are mainly provided for the domestic market.

* The corporate and product names mentioned in this paper are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.