

Why Web?

A Guide to Why Your Company Should be on the Web



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Tame Your Technology

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INTRODUCTION

This article is about why you should be on the Web. I'm not going to talk about the resources that are out there for you to surf. What I want to discuss is the benefits of setting up your own Web site...your presence on the Web.

Not everybody is on the Web. But it's growing so dramatically that they soon will be. I just produced the new directory for a club I belong to. In the last couple of years, we've added a field for email addresses. Out of 196 non-technical people, 75 of them have email addresses. That is a 150% increase over the previous year. I'm guessing that by next year, at least 80% of our membership will be on the Internet, at least at work.

And if your customers are not quite there yet, there is always access at the library, Kinkos, etc. I spoke at a user group a year or so ago, and this shabby, dirty-faced guy, wearing every piece of clothing he owned, came in and sat down. I was expecting some disruption from him, but he was very quiet. At the end, I passed around a questionnaire, and he filled it out, and included his Hotmail email account! Let's face it. If homeless people have access to the Web...

Are YOU ready for the Internet? Because if it isn't here yet, it isn't going to be long.

This report is going to cover five broad areas:

- A brief discussion of the Web itself
- The evolution of a typical Web site
- The fundamental benefits of the Web
- Some specific examples of the Web's capability
- Some things to watch out for

One of the things that I'm not going to do in this report is delve too deeply into the "gotchas" of getting on the Web. There are lots of them - so many that they're the topic of several other reports and programs. But I will cover some of the most important at the end of this whitepaper.

WHAT IS THE WEB?

First of all, let's talk about what the Web is. Simply put, it's a collection of computers functioning as "servers." These servers are all hooked together over the Internet. The Internet is a worldwide data communications network that allows users and servers to send data back and forth to each other continuously. The servers are theoretically available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. They are accessed by users with "browsers" (eg. Netscape) installed on their computers. Those browsers can find the servers, log into them, exchange data and documents and even run programs. The Internet is more than just the Web. There are other services, including email, file transfer, terminal emulation, electronic data interchange, and wide area networks. But I'll stick to the Web for this article.

Let's put it in a "real world" context. Imagine a library that's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You can access any book, document, video, magazine, map, or image via a magic box that sits on your desk. The card catalog is available to you as well, and it's searchable by various categories and key words. Lots of people are working very hard to help you easily find the information you're looking for.

But we're not finished. Now imagine that every business, organization and government agency has a "site" on the Web. These sites would have basic contact information, hours of operations, phone numbers, email addresses and other useful data particular to their mission. And unlike the Yellow Pages, it doesn't cost them a lot to have a nice, information-packed advertisement. Plus, they can change it constantly.

If you want to apply for a loan, you can log on to your bank's site, print out their loan application, and then bring it with you to your meeting with the loan officer on Tuesday. Or, maybe you can just apply for and close the loan over the Web, without leaving your desk.

Or let's say you need a plumber. You can search for plumbers in your town, visit their sites, look at the types of jobs they've done, review their payment terms, etc. It'll be more interactive and up to date than what you can see in the Yellow Pages. And since all of the plumbers will have Web sites, you'll be able to do comparisons.

But we're still not finished! Now let's say that every business that sold actual products could sell you those products over the Web. They would allow you to log on to their sites, research the products you're interested in, compare prices with other businesses, and order whatever you wanted. And you don't have to wait for the catalog to arrive in your mailbox, or deal with an incompetent order clerk.

Do you need new muckluks? Don't remember where the catalog is for Muckluks Are Us? No problem. Go to www.muckluks.com, find your favorite style, and order. Depending on how fast you want them, they can be on your feet by tomorrow night.

Obviously, the pervasiveness that I've described isn't here today. I'll bet that only a couple of the

plumbers in your town have Web sites, if any do at all. And muckluks still aren't available on the Web. But that day isn't very far away. When you look at the growth of the Internet to date, universality is pretty close. Consider touch-tone phones, voice mail and fax machines. They used to be a novelty...now we can't do business without them. That will be the case with the Web. The benefit is obvious...the only thing stopping us is inertia.

THE THREE STAGES OF A WEB SITE'S EVOLUTION

One way to look at the value of the Web is by analyzing its potential in terms of three progressive stages of growth. I'll do that and discuss some of the benefits as you and I go along.

To summarize, however, let me list the three stages right away. They are:

Business card - A presence on the Web that allows people to get basic information about your company. It would likely have the same content as your printed business card.

Online Yellow Pages-type ad - More than a business card, this presence would be akin to the kind of information you provide in your brochures, Yellow Pages advertising, printed collateral, technical information, etc. Except it would be better.

Ecommerce - As with the other categories, this is a broad description of a lot of different approaches. But fundamentally, this means that your trading partners can actually interact with you and do business with you via the Web.

It's very important to note that you can grow your Web investment slowly. You can start out with that online business card and grow into the online advertisement and then into ecommerce.

A business card on the Internet

At the most basic level, any company should at least make themselves visible on the Internet. They should set up (or have set up for them) a simple Web site that essentially is an on-line business card.

At the very minimum, you can show logos, slogans, phone and fax numbers, sales contacts, and a general email address. Now your simple page is the foundation for any future Internet marketing, such as ecommerce, which I'll discuss later.

You must literally think of this stage as an easy way of distributing your business card, and **KEEPING IT IN YOUR CUSTOMERS' VIRTUAL ROLODEXES.**

Imagine that the local sheriff's deputy has just delivered a legal-looking packet of information to my door. I'm in a seminar and unreachable, but my quick-thinking secretary's first inclination is to

call our lawyer. But we don't have a lawyer...there's no one in my Rolodex. She remembers meeting a nice guy at the last Chamber of Commerce mixer. She searches the Web for lawyers in Batavia, and sees a list of 10 firms. She easily spots the firm she talked to, hits their Web site, finds the phone number, and makes the call. The problem isn't solved, of course, but at least I've got an expensive professional on the case.

Or I might be on the road when I decide I need to talk to my pals at Dewey, Cheatum and Howe. I don't have my Rolodex with me, but there's a Kinko's up ahead. I duck in, rent a computer for a few minutes, search for DC&H's site, and shoot an email message to them on the spot.

I'm more able to find this firm because they've made themselves available on the Web. It may not result in a big pay off, but the cost is VERY low. Not including the design (which is peanuts for such a simple page) you can figure about \$40 per month or lower, depending on whether you want email and Internet access.

I've talked to many business owners who haven't "gotten around to setting up our site." In some cases, they've asked a friend or relative to help in their spare time, or they think it will be too time-consuming or expensive. Maybe they believe that they first have to put a complete marketing plan in place. Then again, they might just be stalling. The reality is that they can set up a Web page very quickly, with little effort, and they can use their new site as a platform for future efforts.

On-line Yellow Pages ad

Adding a little more to your site costs you much less than a Yellow Pages ad, but it can be more colorful, powerful, interactive, flexible, and current.

Let's say someone wants to know about widget makers. By getting yourself set up in Internet search engines, your company can pop up when prospective clients are looking for your type of product or service. And when they click on your listing, they'll be taken right to your Web page...designed by you and updated frequently by you. At the minimum, you put the kind of thing on your page that you'd put in the Yellow Pages:

- phone numbers and addresses
- testimonials
- credit cards accepted
- types of services and products offered
- trade affiliations
- slogans
- hours of operation
- your logo

But with a Web page, you can add even more. You can make the site more colorful and larger. You can offer detailed product information, technical specifications, price lists, customer service

policies and procedures, etc. You can not only show your vendor affiliations, you can link to their sites. You can provide as much information as your staff can create. And you can keep it all current and up-to-date.

You can make the site interactive. You can offer forms for visitors to fill out. They can email you directly from your site. They can subscribe to your company email newsletter. And you can even link to Web-based map sites to help people find your locations.

An advertisement Web page costs less than almost all other forms of advertising, depending on how fancy you want to get. And most of the costs will be in the design, not in the media.

Ecommerce

The final leap in the typical Web site evolution is ecommerce. There are lots of definitions, but essentially ecommerce means that your customers can accomplish much of the routine elements of their business relationship with you over the Web.

They can research products, query stocking levels, make purchases, arrange delivery options, follow up on orders, resolve minor delivery problems, arrange returns, and even pay via the Web. In a business-to-business environment, the Internet can also serve as the foundation for serious electronic data interchange (EDI).

This last major step in your Web site development is a big one. The costs really start to pile on. In addition to more complicated design issues, you must find ecommerce software or a vendor to host your ecommerce activities. More importantly, you'll have to reorganize your business to deal with the special challenges of marketing, customer service and fulfillment.

Look very carefully before you take this plunge. There are lots of risks, but ecommerce CAN open up your business to a vast new market, not only of Web users, but also of potential customers all over the world.

If you're waiting for the right time, it's now. If your competition isn't doing anything, this is an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage. Or, if they are ahead of you, you'd better catch up - fast. Remember what George Patton said: "a good plan executed today is better than a perfect plan executed tomorrow." You can get a solid, basic presence on the Web in a few days. And it will be the foundation for your future Internet marketing. Who knows? Maybe that dream customer will find you next week on the Web.

Now that I've described the three major stages of your site's growth, let's talk about two side branches that may be useful.

The first is "extranets." This is another one of those technology terms that has a lot of definitions. The easiest description is that you've oriented your site towards your customers, allowing them to

get detailed product and technical information, enter and track orders, etc. Now some of you may wonder what the difference is between this and an ecommerce site. Frankly, there isn't much. However, with an extranet the focus is on business-to-business and existing customers.

For example, on an ecommerce site, you might not provide the ability to accept PO's, but on an extranet site, you would probably be able to deal with PO's, releases, requisitions, etc. You might provide some private information, like employee directories, organization charts, etc. that will help your customers more effectively deal with your organization.

Some organizations, like Dell, also provide very customized homepages for their customers. Others, like copier companies, for example, might provide their corporate accounts with detailed information on copier leases, due dates, service agreements, etc. Still other organizations, like software companies, have private sites for their dealers, where they keep sales information, literature, leads, brochures, special technical support material, presentations and other proprietary information.

The reality is that extranets are essentially a more finely targeted subset of ecommerce, with a business-to-business spin.

The other branch is intranets. As the name might imply, these are internal versions of the Internet and extranets. They provide Internet resources to your employees. More and more companies are implementing intranets, particularly those with a sizable IS staff, sufficient network infrastructure, and lots of data processing capability. Intranets can do a LOT, essentially providing your users with access to documents, groupware and your business systems. I'll go into a little bit more of the benefits of intranets in a few moments, but essentially these provide all of the benefits of the Web, only for your employees.

FUNDAMENTAL BENEFITS OF BEING ON THE WEB

Now that I've discussed the potential evolution of your Web presence, let's look at the specific capabilities that the Web offers you.

Cheap media

The Web gives you the ability, once you've set up your site and built your infrastructure, to add attractive, colorful, professional-looking content very inexpensively. The media is almost free...the only cost is in the preparation. This allows you to provide vast amounts of information on your site with very minimal outlay, particularly if the information is already on hand and in electronic format.

Think of how much money you'll save by not having to print all of the material that you currently

use. Here's one easy example. You produce an employee directory for your company. It is in booklet form and costs a couple of thousand dollars a year to produce and distribute. And there are ALWAYS extra copies left in the closet at the end of the year. Except that there are also many employees who never got a copy, lost it, didn't ask for a replacement, or didn't know how. With an intranet, you've solved the problem. No extra copies, no wastage, and you didn't spend any money printing the directory. Plus, you can constantly update it, as we'll talk about next.

Instantly revisable

Going hand in hand with the fact that the media is cheap, the Web also allows you to instantly revise the material. I can literally create a brand new document, and have it posted on my Web site in a matter of seconds. I've often been on the phone with a client, revising their site, and having them provide instant feedback as we talk.

The Web is ideal for posting information that is constantly changing, such as price lists, product information, etc.

Access to business systems and programs

Fundamental to the concept of ecommerce and dynamic Web sites is the fact that you can provide access to "back-end" applications. You see your inventory applications on an AS400, accounting systems on a mainframe, or customer databases on a client/server system. Technology exists that will provide a browser-based interface to all of these types of systems. This gives you an easier way of interacting with your customers and also lets you provide a more friendly interface to your employees.

Not only does the Web give you a platform for people to access your business systems, but you can also provide access to purpose-built programs that can run on the server, or on workstations. The simplest example was all of those millennium countdown clocks. Those were Java applications that downloaded to your PC and ran using the processing capabilities of your computer. On the other hand, when you access an Internet search engine, they're using the server's processing power to provide you with the results, and your computer does nothing but wait.

Accessible by everyone

If someone is on the Internet and they have a browser, they have access to your information - if you wish. My site, for example, doesn't get as much traffic as I'd like. Frankly, no one's does. BUT, I know that anyone in the world CAN access it if they choose to. It only remains for me to make them aware of that information. Distribution isn't a problem...marketing is the only remaining barrier.

Accessible all of the time

Notwithstanding the occasional crash of AOL, Mindspring, Earthlink or a hundred-thousand other vendors, your Web site is open for business 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no breaks for holidays and vacations.

If one of your customers gets a new computer on Christmas day and want to check something out on your site, it's there and she doesn't have to wait until the next morning. How do you think I wound up with fans in Australia if my business weren't a 24-hour operation?

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

Time sensitive materials

If your business or organization publishes information that is time-sensitive, or for which there will be great demand immediately upon publication, consider the Web. Courts have used this method to publish rulings. Businesses announce price changes.

If you're a retailer, you can let people know about sales, publish coupons, and set up very quick sales. You don't have to wait for normal media lead-times.

Federal government agencies have used the Web to publish business statistics. We've all heard about the occasional slip-up where some Webmaster published the information too early and the markets went blooey.

Want to add a new product or make an announcement quickly? Then the Web provides the platform to do this.

You can combine posting the information on your site with an email newsletter which can proactively advise people about changes, enhancements, news, etc.

The Web can make your information instantly available to everyone. The power is limitless for a creative organization.

Multimedia

One thing that is out of the reach of many businesses is television or radio advertising. The Web supports video and audio, so you can offer this kind of content on your site. You can do something as simple as offering a video tour of your offices or plant, or audio testimonials from your customers. Let's take public speakers, for example - a topic near and dear to my heart. On some speakers' sites, they offer a video sample of their program to prospective clients. This is

currently somewhat rare, but it is happening more and more. It's not the best video in the world, but if you're a terrific speaker, it's a great way to sell yourself.

If your business would benefit from this hotter medium, then the Web is a great distribution platform.

Open up new markets

No longer is your widget company limited to the greater East Mckeesport marketplace. Now, Chicago, Denver and West Mckeesport can also take advantage of your services. Remember, the Web is global. Someone in Siberia can access your site just as easily as they can see a page in Vladivostok. It might take a few more seconds to download, but that's all. Assuming language isn't a barrier (and the Internet provides some technology to deal with this), and Siberians actually NEED widgets (that's up to your marketing people), you can get some new customers. Soon, you'll be worried about exchange rates, hiring local emigre Siberians to provide customer service, and shopping for that hundred room mansion in Mckeesport Heights.

I have a small Web site. I use it as an outlet for my writing, to promote my services, etc. I get inquiries from all over the world. I've gotten newsletter requests from Australia, Singapore, Turkey, Hungary and Tanzania.

If you are already a 24-hour operation by virtue of the fact that you have international customers, you may be able to provide much of the information they need via the Web, thereby reducing your staff coverage, or providing better customer service and winning more sales.

It's important to remember...the Web connects the globe. Your page can be seen by anyone on the Web. The opportunities are limitless. You can be seen, assuming anyone wants to see you, by the world.

Not only do you serve the world, you can also provide information for a limited audience

One example of this is press kits, photographs and bios, particularly for your CEO. This is the kind of information that you might not want to have professionally printed, particularly if it changes regularly (executives come and go and bios change constantly). But since most media outlets have Web access, you can point them to the appropriate information on your site. And if you've designed the pages effectively, the user can even print them out and they look well done, even on paper.

Other examples of this type of material might be technical information on old and out of production inventory; article reprints from several years ago that might only be important to the odd researcher; or the special Slobovian language version of your Model 38 Widgetmaster 2000.

Last week, the local paper printed an article about yours truly. They were in a hurry and wanted a picture of me. As it happens, I was running errands that day, and wasn't in any condition to be photographed, let alone for publication. So I told the reporter that I had my publicity photograph on my site, and gave her the exact location. Not only did I get some nice coverage, they actually had a very flattering shot of me (which is saying a lot) instead of some hokey photograph of me "showing" someone a piece of paper.

Once you create the material, you don't have to maintain an inventory of paper versions. You don't have to pay for printing costs. All you have to do is point people at the appropriate page on your site.

Provide basic reference information

If you can provide some basic reference information on your page that is very useful and presented well, you'll keep people coming back. And the more they visit your site, the more they're exposed to your product and your message. For ideas, look at the places you regularly visit on the Web and ask yourself how you can translate the value those sites offer into something that you can do.

Look at your industry and ask yourself what information is frequently needed. Look through industry handbooks and manuals for ideas.

Calculators

Financial institutions have led the way in providing financial tools on their sites, such as mortgage calculators and retirement planners. Other industries provide configurators that let you enter the specifications you're looking for, and then generate a recommendation or quote. I have seen industrial supply sites that provide metric conversion calculators, for example.

All of this requires some programming, but can be a powerful, useful resource to your visitors. If you do it well, and it adds significant value, people will frequently visit your site.

Databases

Many sites offer databases that offer look-up capabilities, generally against their own proprietary files. The US Postal Service, for example, will let you look up the ZIP code for any city and address in America. They and other shipping companies, such as FedEx, will let you look up the status of any shipments.

Maybe you can offer a calendar of events for your industry - something that people would frequently check to see what's going on.

Link pages

This is the classic resource to add to your site. It gives your page some value by piggybacking on the content offered by others. This is not a bad thing, if you do it properly. But since everyone does this, you have to differentiate. In my Web pages, I've tried to offer some review or abstract of the site so that people can get an idea of what they're clicking to.

A classic example is a page I set up of sites for Y2K news. Many of us, yes, I'll admit it, were a little worried about Y2K. I was sitting in a meeting last fall where a city government was doing a table top exercise. They kept talking about how they would find out that such and such is happening in New Zealand and this and that is going bonkers in China. I asked myself how they would easily get this information.

After doing a little searching, I created a Web site that offered not actual Y2K news, but links to OTHER sites that were planning to offer real-time Y2K news. As it turned out, there were a lot of them that cropped up in the last couple of weeks of December. With some carefully placed messages on a couple of Y2K mailing lists and bulletin boards, I found myself mentioned on OTHER people's lists of sites. And I wound up getting 5000 hits on the page on December 31st, with an additional 3000 over the next 2 weeks. While the payoff wasn't enormous, it did generate lots of new subscriptions for my email newsletter. All of this was FREE.

That said, don't rely on link pages to provide permanent value. Real content is what's important. People might hit your site on the way to another site, but you want to make them stop...at least long enough to know who you are, read a promotional blurb or sign up for your newsletter.

You have to give people a reason to visit your site. And providing highly useful reference information can be just the ticket. If they say, "hey, this is pretty good" and bookmark your site, then you're on your way. But as I said, beware of hit rates that don't generate any marketing value. Once you've got the people coming to your site, then you have to figure out how to get your message to them, or convert them into prospects.

Virtual tours of your plants and offices

I talked about this earlier with regard to multi-media. Think about whether or not your customers and prospects would feel more comfortable with you if they had an idea of what your organization was really like. While it might be prohibitively expensive to produce an attractive, color publication or brochure, you can do it much more inexpensively on the Web. Plus, you can update it more easily.

Show photographs of your buildings, both interior and exterior. Show photos of plant equipment, happy employees at work, processes, labs, products, etc. Maybe you can even offer a video tour.

Give your visitors the warm fuzzies that you're a real company, with real people. Any marketing

person will tell you that "warm fuzzies" are critical to your customers' making a purchase. And short of flying your customers in to see your operation, a multimedia site can be just the ticket.

Technical information

If your business involves lots of arcane information, such as technical documentation, manuals, and research reports, your site can be used to provide that information to your clients. The easiest way to determine if this is a possibility for your organization is to ask yourself how much literature, reports, manuals, etc. your staff mails or faxes out every month. If you're doing a lot of it, then you may want to consider using your Web site.

Intranets

As I mentioned before, the same benefits that are available to people outside your company are available internally as well. Instead of publishing policy manuals, forms, memos, etc., set up an "intranet" site and provide the information to your employees at their desktops. You can develop a "portal" that will provide them with a simple and complete gateway to the information for your company, as well as providing them with basic Internet information like search engines, maps, news, quotes, references, etc.

Some common uses of intranets include:

- expense reporting
- sales guides, presentations and product information
- HR policies and employee handbooks
- HR benefit information
- HR enrollment
- network-based video conferencing
- access to host systems and databases
- client and marketing databases
- archived proposals and proposal templates
- employee resumes
- client reports
- articles and whitepapers
- sharing workgroup documents, plans, specifications, etc.
- training videos
- instructions for various tasks
- distributing additional services, like fax and email
- contract, proposal and other boiler plate libraries
- purchasing policies, forms and standards
- IT policies and standards
- work order management

- help desk call tracking and management
- help desk FAQ's
- tech support forums
- reference and support information on installed equipment
- gateways to vendor purchasing sites
- collaboration forums and chat areas
- authorized software updates
- purchase requisitions
- travel
- org charts
- experts within the organization
- Web cams to do security and operational monitoring
- employee newsletter
- employee directory
- time entry for payroll, job costing, and time and billing
- access to company systems for remote users
- workflow
- document management
- imaging
- job postings
- employee recognition

By using an intranet to provide access to your business systems and other resources, you'll have lower training costs. Introducing new applications and revisions will simply be an addition to the browser interface which your staff is already used to. In addition, by making key information more easily available to your staff, you will improve customer service.

There is one point to consider as your mouth waters at the functionality that I've discussed. Be careful not to overload your employees, either with too much technology, or technology that is too complicated. Roll out functionality at a pace they can deal with. Even if the software is easier to train, that doesn't mean that no training or adjustment will be necessary. Don't overdo it or you'll fail miserably.

And make sure you get it right the first time so that your credibility isn't damaged.

Have your own domain name

Right now your email address is bucky985@aol.com. Do you realize how unprofessional that looks? Get your own domain name, and the Web site and email service to go with it. Not only do you look smarter, you'll now have a URL you can use in your advertising, marketing, letterhead, business cards, premiums, etc. It's a nice adjunct to your toll free number and, to people on the Web, actually a better address.

By the way, do you have an 800 number? Why? If the reason is to make it easier for your customers to reach you, then there's no excuse for not having a Web page.

Your Web site is a terrific marketing platform

If you do it right, your Web site can be a constant marketing tool for maintaining contact with your customers and prospects. Create a newsletter. Publish it regularly and provide weekly or daily versions on your site. Try to put new content on your site every day.

Collect demographic information via surveys, allowing you to tailor your marketing efforts to the customers' needs and situations.

Provide online chats and forums to get additional feedback from your customers, for you to offer advice, and to provide an opportunity for your clients to share ideas and tips with each other.

Advertise on the Internet

If your product or service is compatible with this, advertise on the Internet through banner advertising, affiliate programs and search engines. In order to take advantage of this additional marketing opportunity, you must have a Web site.

Collaboration

The Internet is a great place to foster workgroup collaboration. This applies whether you're talking about the Web, intranets or extranets. You can facilitate easy file transfers, chats, bulletin boards and forums, document management, email, working on documents simultaneously, and video conferencing.

However, don't expect to put these tools in place and automatically have a complete knowledge management system. It takes cultural changes as well. But the well-planned installation of pieces of the technology can make your organization more productive in small increments.

Make paperwork available

If there is paperwork involved in doing business with you, such as forms, contracts or material that must be reviewed, a Web site is a terrific way to give your customers and prospects access to that information more quickly.

If you're a bank, put your loan forms online so customers can have them filled out before they come in. If you're a distributor, have your credit application on your site. There really isn't any

excuse for having your customers filling out forms in your office when they could have gotten them off the Internet.

Set up a FAQ

Do you, your sales reps, your customer service department, and your receptionist get the same questions over and over? Why not put these frequently asked questions (FAQ) on your Web site? Even if you don't reduce the phone calls, you'll know that you're providing valuable information that people are looking for.

For example, I do a LOT of presentations, speeches and seminars. The most common questions that I get are "Can you send me a description of your talk and a bio?" Needless to say, those two items are on my site. I point people to my site constantly where they can find the information they're looking for.

Recruit

Depending on your business, this may not be the best reason to set up a site, but it can attract potential employees, sometimes even if you don't want any. I get about one email a week from some poor soul who flatters my design and writing, says I have a wonderful idea, and asks if I have any openings for programmers or sales reps.

If you do need people, this is one more way of getting resumes to your HR department.

GOTCHAS - THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

We've talked about all the wonderful things that the Web can do for your business. Now, it's time to bring you down to earth.

Cool

One piece of wisdom I'd like to offer to you right off the bat...if someone ever starts to refer to the technology they want you to invest in, whether it's your own people, a consultant, or a sales rep, and they use the word "cool", run like the wind. Or slap ~~em~~ upside the head. I'm kidding, of course. I don't believe that OSHA allows physical assault of employees. But if they say that word, they deserve whatever punishment you choose to mete out. Because they're not focusing on YOUR business, your profits, and your payback. They are in love with the technology. And while that may be a good thing for the technicians, it's a bad attitude for you, as the decision maker. Beware of cool.

Payback

Before you rush out and get Webbed, pay attention to the most fundamental rule of a successful technology acquisition...look at the real financial payback. Don't get blinded by the "cool" technology. Ask yourself: how will it help improve your business? Consider the cost/benefit ratio. Yes, a minimal, static page may not build your business too much, but it is also dirt cheap. On the other hand, a dynamic, ecommerce site has the ability to add significantly to your revenue, but at what cost, and what net impact on your bottom line?

Management

This is a business project, not an engineering one. Don't let your IS department, network manager, or your genius seven-year-old run the project. Get your marketing, manufacturing, sales, operations and financial people involved as well.

Letting your technical people run your Web site is like having your copier repairman design your literature. He knows how to make copies, right? Let your IT staff manage the infrastructure and programming, but your business people should be directing the content and design.

Keep it up to date

If you're going to have a page with lots of information on it, make sure you're committed to keeping it up to date. If not, it could do more harm than good. I've seen too many sites that had event calendars that were 9 months out of date, price lists that had expired and bulletin board questions that hadn't been answered in weeks.

If you're going to do it, do it right.

That said, it doesn't mean that all sites must be frequently maintained. If you go with the basic "business card" approach, you can build it and forget about it. By definition, you only have to revise it when you change your business cards. It's much easier, is effective as a first step in building your presence on the Web, and can be obscenely cheap.

It'll cost more than you think

Even if you're doing the minimal business card type of page, it'll cost more than you think. With proper planning and processes, you can reduce those unexpected costs, but you always should plan on it costing more than you expected. If you haven't done any planning, it'll cost a LOT more.

Security

There are a lot of concerns here. They range from credit card fraud, to hacking into your data, to Web page defacement, and domain hijacking. Make sure your technical people have a plan that covers all of the bases, and is frequently updated. The simpler the page, the less a problem it will be.

SUMMARY

You **MUST** be on the Web...unless you operate your business without a toll-free number, voice mail, a fax machine, a copier, business cards, or literature. If you're in that category, and don't want to grow, then forget everything I've said.

But if you want to meet your customers, and future customers, where they expect you to be, then you **MUST** be on the Web. The **ONLY** decision you need to make is how much to invest. Using the evolution I've talked about, you can easily get on the Web with minimal cost. You can grow from there.

The Web can find you new customers, serve them better, save you money, and make your employees more productive. There are some "gotchas" but they are truly minimal compared with the benefits.

Why **AREN'T** you on the Web?



The Gadwall Group™

Reader Survey

We hope that you enjoyed this whitepaper. Now we'd like to ask you for a favor. Please give us some feedback so that we can improve future editions of this report, as well as develop new ones on other topics. When you've completed this form, please fax it to us at 630-879-2034. Or you can mail it to The Gadwall Group, Ltd. PO Box 925, Batavia, IL 60510-0925. If you prefer, you can email your comments to us at survey@gadwall.com.

Did this report provide you with valuable ideas or information? yes/no

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