$$$

TARGET AUDIENCE

How to *Really*
Market
on the Internet

INFORMATION

http://www.SSSSSS.com

CONTENTS

Dear Business Owner,

The Internet has become part of our lives, both personal and business. Yet, many businesses are unsure how to use the Internet to effectively market and grow their businesses. Costs, resource allocation, and return on investment can seem daunting when dealing with a business Web site, e-mail, and e-commerce in addition to the daily pressures of managing a business.

This brochure, published in conjunction with our partner SCORE, provides answers and resources to help you harness the most powerful sales and marketing tools available—the Internet and the World Wide Web.

As the world's leading print and online directory publisher, we serve small and medium-size businesses through Verizon SuperPages and Verizon SuperPages.com. For years, small businesses have relied on the Yellow Pages to reach customers. Today, however, the reach of the Yellow Pages also includes the Internet—your connection to customers next door and around the world.

Through Verizon's national field force, we work hand-in-hand with you to help your business grow. Our most recent Annual Small Business Internet Survey shows that small-business Web sites are increasing and e-mail communication with customers is now an integral part of growing businesses. We will continue to provide you the resources necessary to most effectively manage and use these new tactics and tools.

Tools for today include the Internet Learning Tutor (www.superpages.com/ilt), a series of online Internet courses for everyone from beginners to advanced users. SCORE, a contributing partner of this program, is also providing how-to columns to the Business Center (www.business.superpages.com), a resource section of SuperPages.com designed specifically for small and medium-size businesses.

We wish you success in your Internet endeavors and appreciate your business' important role in making progress everyday.

Regards,

Katherine J. Harless

Katherine J. Harless
President
Verizon Information Services

Put the Web to Work

The number of Web sites doubles every four to five months. By 2003, the Web will have up to 80 million users logging on either through standard Internet access accounts or online services.

Utilizing the Web becomes a business decision critical to all businesses. Small businesses are moving online with Web sites, e-mail marketing, and in some cases, e-commerce transaction sites. According to eMarketer, a leading Internet research firm, 78%—or 5.9 million—of all small businesses are connected to the Internet and nearly half have active Web sites.

Five essentials for any site. Once users find a site—through a search engine, through the business' marketing materials, or from a link on another site—Web visitors expect some basic elements to a Web site. Begin your Web venture with the five "must-have" characteristics of a Web site, which include:

1. It delivers what it promises. Say a Web user types "car repair" into a search engine, and AutoMile Car Mart turns up among the sites that list "car repair" in their keyword sections. The AutoMile Car Mart site must have more than a line reading, "Our repair shop is open 12 hours a day" to justify listing "repair" in the keyword section. Otherwise, the user will be angry about visiting a site that offers nothing on car repair. Keyword justification must be backed by abundant information on your site about that topic.

2. It loads quickly. The classic mistake that many companies make is to include a large photo or sound or video clip on their site (e.g., the CEO, who is saying something such as, "Welcome to our Web site; we hope you like it"). Compared to text, graphics and sound take a long time to load. Web users who must wait several minutes for an image and message are bound to move on to other sites. There are many interesting visual effects that take little time to load. For example, skinny horizontal graphics that stretch across the screen take less time to load than large ones that use a lot of vertical space.

3. Contact information is easy to find. In the "virtual" marketplace, it doesn't matter if a company is in Wilmington or Walla Walla. With the click of the mouse, it's just as easy for Web users to reach one as it is the other. Because users want to know where companies are in the real world, always list your physical location, including address, phone and fax numbers. The information reassures the visitor that the site belongs to an actual company. It also meets the needs of those who still prefer to call a company or mail an order rather than e-mail it.

4. The site is frequently updated. Keeping the site refreshed is key for companies that expect visitors to return. The Web is such a fluid environment that visitors will quickly jump somewhere more exciting if your site rarely changes.

5. It provides user interaction. One of the big advantages of this medium is that it allows for immediate interaction. Users can always send e-mail, fill out a form, enter a contest, or request information. This immediate response is part of the excitement of browsing the Web. A site with no "user feedback" e-mail forms, no games to play, or no forms to fill out is a site that will soon sit "un-clicked."

A clever site entices visitors to return often to see what's new. One tip to encourage repeat Web visits to your site is to program a short notice to flash on the monitor when users click on an external link. The message might say, "You're leaving our site now. Bookmark this site, so you can return easily." Users can then choose to save the Web address by just pulling down the "save" option on the menu bar. This is called "bookmarking," and it saves users from having to remember long, awkward URLs of the sites they visit often.

$$$?

How much should you pay for a site?

For an overwhelming majority (96%) of small businesses that responded to a recent *Inc* survey, Web-site development costs were less than $3,000, and the monthly fees for site maintenance averaged about $71, with few companies (only 11%) spending more than $100 a month.

1. Do it yourself. You don't have to be a computer whiz to build and manage a successful Web site, nor do you have to make a huge investment. Not counting the cost of "back-office" operations (e.g., order processing, billing, fulfillment, and post-sale service), which vary widely by industry, small business owners have successfully launched their own sites. Some smaller companies have launched for less than $400, including domain name registration ($35), Internet access ($30), software ($200), and set-up ($50).

2. Use a search engine or an online directory. For a monthly fee, many search engines and online directories offer to design, market (e.g., headings, banner ads), and host your Web site. Based on your

company's needs, you may choose a customized package that includes one or more of these services.

3. Hire a Web Designer/Developer. Web designers agree that site investment falls into three broad categories: basic, intermediate and complex. Basic sites usually involve up to 15 Web pages and little high-tech work. Intermediate and complex sites cost more because, among other reasons, they require software engineers and computer programmers. Besides having sophisticated e-commerce features, the pricier sites often have detailed databases that mesh with back-end systems.

Most Web developers charge a flat fee for design and development. However, to calculate the flat fee, the developers first determine how much in hourly labor a site will cost to produce. Then they charge their customers a multiple of that amount. Most web developers charge roughly double their labor costs. One way to avoid overpaying is to learn precisely which labor costs are involved in the construction of your site. Has the developer used database programmers? Java programmers? HTML writers? The labor costs associated with each of these functions depend on the skill of the technical specialist and the pay scale for the work. Most developers will share their fees for service in hourly rates charged for particular tasks (e.g., copywriting from $85 to $235 an hour; database programming, $115 to $250). ■

What Makes a Web Site a Winner

Nearly 800 smaller businesses entered *Inc* magazine's recent third annual Web awards competition. Here's what the 16 "Best of the Web" winners have in common:

☐ **Web sites are run by people who know what they want.**
Clear strategies, goals, and priorities are their hallmark.

☐ **Web sites use technology that's appropriate to their mission.**
The options range from simple product illustrations to judicious use of Flash animation technology.

☐ **Web sites streamline design.**
The most important ingredients are clarity and ease of use.

☐ **Web sites make it easy for customers to learn about the firm.**
This is accomplished with two key pages: "About Us" (a brief history and mission statement) and "Contact Us" (mailing address, e-mail links, phone and fax numbers).

☐ **Web sites change because the owners focus on marketing innovation.**
The innovations range from digital newsletters and online forums to contests and relevant activities encouraging customer participation and loyalty.

☐ **Web sites are evaluated based on the ROI for the business.**
It's important to know just what you're gaining from all the time, money, and labor you invest into your site.

Win the Name Game

Branding your business online begins with your domain name. Even if you don't plan to use the domain right away, it's important to reserve it. By doing this, you are reserving your name into a registry of all the domain names on the Internet.

Secure a domain name

Names ending with .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net, or .org can be registered through many different competing registrars. In addition, many portals, search engines, and online directories offer services for domain name registration. The registrars submit the contact information to a central directory, or registry, which provides other computers on the Internet with the information necessary to send you e-mail or to find your Web site.

You may check for domain name registration at a number of sites, such as www.networksolutions.com, www.register.com and www.verisign.com. If your company's name isn't available as a domain, choose something close to it; abbreviate it or try adding an initial or hyphen. When choosing a domain name, remember that people will get to your Web site from numerous sources, some by search engines, others by bookmarks in their browsers. Many will try to reach your site by typing what they think your Web address may be—a good reason to consider every conceivable way that people might enter your site's address into their browsers, and reserve additional domains.

Choose a consistent Web domain and e-mail address

What about customers who confuse e-mail and Web addresses? Most customers are familiar enough with online addresses to recognize that any address with an "@" is e-mail. However, you can prevent confusion by merging the two addresses. For example, you could be both www.petespool.com and pete@petespool.com.

Protect your domain. You will have a registration contract with the registrar that spells out the terms under which your registration is maintained. Each registrar has the flexibility to offer registrations in one-year increments, along with 1-, 2-, 5-, and 10-year renewal periods. Each can set the price it charges for registering names. The prices vary significantly, although the cost is generally less than $35 a year (some registrars offer discounts or free registration in connection with other services, such as Web hosting). To identify which service best fits your needs, visit the Web sites of several registrars (check www.icann.org for a directory). Only those accredited by ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) are authorized to register .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net, and .org names. ICANN is the nonprofit corporation that assumed responsibility from the U.S. government for management of the domain name system. ∎

What's in a Name?

Choose your domain name extension based on your type of business.

.biz – businesses*　　　　　　　　**.com** – commercial
.info – all uses*　　　　　　　　**.name** – personal names
.net – organizations involved in Internet infrastructure
.org – nonprofits　　　　　　　　**.pro** – professions*
*new top-level domains

To register the new top-level domains, visit the following Web sites:

.biz – www.neulevel.biz　　　　　**.info** – www.nic.info
.name – www.nic.name　　　　　　**.pro** – www.registrypro.com

Is your Web address easy to find?

If you check no to any of the items listed below, you have a checklist for adding your Web address to your marketing materials. The more yes answers, the better. Your basic marketing materials should feature both your Web address and e-mail address.

Web Address	**Email Address**	
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Stationery
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Business cards
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Marketing brochures
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Window signs & vehicles
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Media kits
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Direct mail flyers
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Yellow Pages ad
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Premiums and giveaways
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Follow-up surveys
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Rubber address stamps
Yes__ **No**__	**Yes**__ **No**__	Boxes, bags, etc.

Set Goals for Your Site

Your Web site should be an integral part of your marketing strategy, with specific goals for measuring its success. Once you know the costs of setting up your site, establish a goal for your return on the investment (ROI). This should include three considerations: What kind of return is desired? How will it be measured? And over what period?

The type of return doesn't have to be solely financial. It could be to gather a certain number of names for a mailing list, or to cut mailing or telephone expenses by a certain amount after handing over some customer service functions to the Web site. Perhaps you hope to cut marketing expenses, while still posting the same sales growth. Regardless of criteria, the return should measure the main focus of the site. In the beginning, choose one main aspect to measure.

Once the criterion is identified, make sure that systems are in place to measure the effectiveness. Web sales can easily be measured at a site that handles online transactions. But how would you measure the portion of decreased mailing expenses attributable to the site? How would you decide if customer service functions are successful? It's important to take the time up front to establish clear guidelines for measuring your site's success or failure.

Site design : Outsource?

Should you design your site or hand it off to a professional Web designer or team? The advantage of tackling the job yourself is that you maintain control and can make instant changes without worrying about cost. Software programs have point-and-click interfaces that are designed for non-programmers. Using one of these, you should be able to have a Web page up and running in a short time. The disadvantage of self-designing the site is that it may end up lacking in professionalism or functionality.

For many small businesses, outsourcing site design is the preferred option. Good designers have the tools and know-how to do a great job, but Web design services can be costly, and the skills of designers vary greatly. Be sure to screen the designer's work and check references.

Another approach is to have a search engine or online directory design, market and host your Web site.

Find an ISP to host your Web site

If you opt for an outside service, keep these six points in mind as you shop for an Internet Service Provider (ISP):

1. Does the ISP provide the basic services you may need, such as e-mail and file transfer protocol (FTP)? If you're going online solely to get customer feedback, e-mail alone may be enough. But if you want to ship reports to satellite offices, your provider will have to offer FTP.

2. Can it help you set up and maintain a Web page? Some ISP's only host, or store, sites. If the provider doesn't offer design expertise, it should be able to recommend someone who does.

3. Does it offer the bandwidth, or speed of Internet access, that's most appropriate for your business? If you have large groups of employees who will be using the connection simultaneously, you need more bandwidth. And, you will need an ISP that has a high-speed connection to the Internet.

4. How many POP, or remote connection, sites does the ISP have? If you or your employees travel frequently for business, a nearby POP provides Internet access at the price of a local phone call.

5. How good is the ISP's technical support? Your business must have someone who understands your special needs. If the ISP's representatives can't help you, then it doesn't matter if it offers 24/7 service.

6. Is the price right? Most hosting services fall within the $20 to $40 per month range. Expect to pay more if you need high bandwidth and more than basic hosting service (i.e. site design, updates, URL distribution).

Web site mistakes to avoid

Most small businesses outsource the development and maintenance of their Web sites, at least at first. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't have clear ideas about how the site should look, feel, and operate. Here are five pitfalls to avoid as you seek to drive traffic to your site.

❏ **Going live too early**. It pays big dividends to beta-test your site before publicizing it.

❏ **Lack of clarity**. As with any type of marketing, it's important that your home page lets the Web surfer know exactly what you do and that every other element of the site promotes its basic purpose.

❏ **Bad navigation**. Make sure each page has a navigation bar allowing browsers to move around without going back to the home page. (But they should always be able to go to the home page, if they wish.) Also, prominently list an 800 number, because that's a familiar touchstone for many people.

❏ **Failure to respond to e-mail.** Check e-mail from customers with

the same regularity that you check voice mail—certainly at least twice a day. And, you must respond or people won't come back.

❏ **Poor marketing.** With so many sites out there, it's increasingly difficult to get noticed. To make it worse, search engines change their algorithms almost weekly, so you have to keep finding new ways to make your listing rise to the top by experimenting with links, banners, and meta tags (keywords or descriptions used by search engines to categorize your site; see "Use Search Engines to Build Traffic," on page 12). ■

The One-Minute Web Test

Once you have a site up and running, use this one-minute test to spot potential problems before they take a toll on your online traffic. If your answer is yes to these 10 questions, your Web site represents your business well.

- ☐ Do my Web pages load quickly?
- ☐ Is it immediately apparent what my company does or sells?
- ☐ Is my menu viewable and easy to navigate?
- ☐ Does my site look attractive when viewed with different browsers?
- ☐ Are colors and graphic elements consistent on all pages?
- ☐ Are my company's address, phone number, and e-mail address easily accessible?
- ☐ Is my site free of unnecessary gimmicks and graphics?
- ☐ Does my site offer valuable information?
- ☐ Does my site reflect my commitment to quality?
- ☐ Would I want to do business with my company?
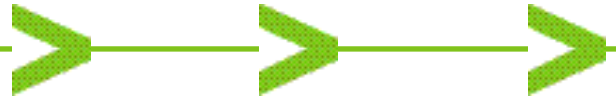
Checklist—Where's Your Online Business Headed?

Setting realistic short-term marketing goals will help you clarify your long-range objectives. This list of questions will help you define the future of your online business.

I. What are your Internet marketing goals for the next year and the next three to five years in these areas?

❏ Dollar sales   ❏ Unit sales   ❏ Profits   ❏ Market share   ❏ Markets to enter   ❏ Customer-base expansion

II. What are your six biggest marketing challenges, in order of urgency?
(e.g., consumer trends, technological challenges, customer mix, competition, staffing, margins, media, etc.)

1. _____   4. _____

2. _____   5. _____

3. _____   6. _____

III. What major threats and opportunities will your company face in the next three to five years, in these areas?

❏ Products and services   ❏ Customer attitudes and trends   ❏ Competition   ❏ Changes in technology
❏ Staffing   ❏ General business conditions

IV. What new competition do you expect within the next three to five years?
(Consider technological developments and product/service innovations, as well as alliances, mergers and acquisitions.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

V. Which competitors do you expect will decline or disappear within the next year? Three to five years? Why?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

VI. What proportion of your online sales a year from now will come from new products or services? _____ %

From new markets? _____ %   What about three years from now? _____ %

Sales from new products? _____ %   From new markets? _____ %

Make the Most of E-mail

E-mail is the single most effective electronic tool for strengthening customer relationships, reports Forrester Research, a leading technology research firm.

Forrester estimates that by 2004, more than two-thirds of the e-mails sent to customers will be geared towards keeping present customers, rather than acquiring new customers.

As a unique communications and marketing tool, e-mail can be used to address customer relationship management needs, such as responding to a request for warranty information or confirming when a shipment will arrive. Some e-mail responses may be as simple as directing a customer to a particular page on your Web site, while other e-mails will lead to a phone conversation between customer and service rep to answer complicated questions.

1. E-mail provides immediate access, anywhere. E-mail is so popular because it can be used by anyone, anywhere. Business travelers can log on at hotels and airport business centers; people without computers can use free e-mail services like Hotmail and Yahoo and log on at public libraries, community centers, and cyber-cafes.

Universal access to e-mail is a double-edged sword. When customers see that you are available via e-mail, they assume that you are checking your e-mail frequently. They'll expect you to respond promptly. Companies that deliver on their promise to respond to e-mail queries within an appropriate timeframe are at a distinct advantage over those that do not. Prompt responses capture a customer's attention, loyalty, and orders.

2. Utilize key e-mail functions. Some of the most common Internet browsers used for e-mail are Netscape, Microsoft's Outlook and AOL. E-mail functions are also being added to sales support software programs that let you screen, file, and organize e-mail. If your company is small, or if you have relatively few clients, you may not need much more than the simple database functions embedded in these e-mail programs to manage your customer contacts. The most common functions include:

❏ *Multiple personalities.* Set up different e-mail accounts for specific brands, locations, or projects; e.g., bbq@hotsauce.com or sizingquestions@swimsuits.com. This enables you to automatically forward e-mails to a specific person in your company assigned to answer them. The specific e-mail addresses can be posted at the appropriate places on your Web site.

❏ *Filters.* Create sub-categories in your mailbox so that mail is automatically deposited in, say, each client's or project's slot. You can also tell clients to flag urgent messages with a certain tagline—such as "urgent"—and set up a box to receive only those. This enables you to prioritize your e-mail flow.

❏ *In-boxes.* Even if you don't use filters, you can still build archives of e-mails on particular topics, or projects, or from certain people, by creating internal in-boxes. These are useful for keeping track of "conversations" you have with clients, and ensures that you can refer back to requests—and your responses. If you want to broadcast an e-mail to everyone who has corresponded with you on a particular topic, you can use the topic-specific in-box as a de facto e-mail list.

❏ *Templates.* Called "stationery" by some, this function lets you create boilerplate messages and simply plug in the recipient's e-mail address. This is excellent for answering standard questions, such as driving directions to your office. However, if you find that certain questions are asked often, you may want to post the answers on a frequently-asked-questions (FAQ) list on your Web site.

❏ *Auto-respond.* This function bounces back a canned answer to a general e-mail. Most basic browser e-mail functions will only let you send out an "I'm not here" message that explains why you're not going to respond to the e-mail. More sophisticated programs let you craft different auto-responds that are tailored to the customer's request or order history.

❏ *Embedded links.* Use the "link" function to connect customers with a Web page within your site or at another site. The e-mail will be sent in HTML format and the customer can click on the highlighted link to be transported immediately to that page. This is an easy way to direct customers to a particular page on your site that they may not have been able to find.

No matter how you organize the e-mail that flows into your business, consider what type of response customers are likely to expect. If they're making a routine inquiry, such as asking if you carry a certain brand or item, short and snappy is fine. But if you're staking your reputation on customized, high-ticket products or services, be sure to give a "you're special" tone to your responses.

3. Make "rich text" e-mail an option. Most Internet users are accustomed to receiving e-mail in plain text format. But as Web sites have become more sophisticated, so has e-mail. Options such as graphics, embedded video and audio that are enacted with a click, and the ability to respond without going back to the original Web site have become the cutting-edge in Internet marketing.
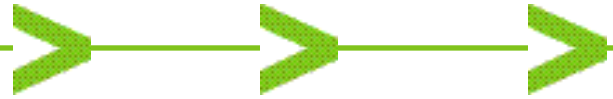
Enhanced, or "rich," e-mail is most useful to customers with fast Internet connections. "Rich" e-mail may be rich text or HTML e-mail. If many of your customers don't have fast connections, offer the option of receiving either a text or rich format e-mail when they initially sign up. Trip.com, a travel Web site, has a simple, easy-to-understand format for helping visitors choose which format they prefer—text or rich e-mail—for its newsletters. Most people are more impressed by an e-mail message that specifically addresses their needs than with fancy technology, unless that technology makes their communication with you significantly easier.

4. Give customers opt in/opt out options. The average U.S. Internet user received 40 commercial e-mails in 1999, but will be deluged with 1,600 by 2005, according to Jupiter Communications, an e-commerce analysis firm. People will become increasingly selective about which e-mails they will read. Response rates will drop dramatically for e-mails that are considered irrelevant, too pushy, or too intrusive.

When customers find your messages genuinely useful, they eagerly anticipate, open, and act on your e-mails. But don't take advantage of customer goodwill. Even if you already have a database of e-mail addresses, you want to elicit the permission of those customers before automatically putting them on your e-mail list. It's fine to send out an introductory e-mail, but go no further unless you have a recipient's buy-in.

Marketing consultant Seth Godin champions the concept of eliciting a "yes!" from consumers before signing them up for any follow-up. "Opt-in" is the term for requesting customers to specifically ask to be put on your list. "Opt-out" is the term for requiring that customers specifically instruct you not to use their information for marketing purposes. Some e-mail marketers adopt the opt-out tactic—that customers are assumed to be signing up for future e-mails unless they specifically "opt out."

The trouble is that many customers won't scroll far enough down the e-mail to see how to get off the regular mailing list. If they can't figure out how to get off the list, they will automatically delete any e-mail you send.

A more painstaking, but more productive, tactic is opt-in. Briefly outline the benefits that customers will get by actively choosing to be on your e-mail list (e.g., advance notice of sales, first to receive breaking news, etc.) and then provide a response mechanism for them to put themselves on your list. Usually that mechanism is to simply hit "reply" and put in the message line "subscribe."

Customers are much more likely to say "yes!" if they know exactly what they are signing up for. ■

E-Mail: King of the Marketing Tools

Internet advertising fads come and go, from simple banner ads to increasingly clever pop-up windows. However, to reach your target audience, e-mail is still one of the most effective tools available. But be aware that some dos and don'ts apply:

☐ *Don't send spam.* If you have trouble building a database, investigate the online sites that stock fresh lists of e-mail addresses of consumers with a variety of interests. To avoid sending spam (the electronic equivalent of junk mail), find a source that sells lists of users who have "opted in" to the list— i.e., have elected to receive e-mails on specific topics.

☐ *Do build an e-mail database.* Ask everyone you come into contact with for an e-mail address. Your database of addresses will become an invaluable e-marketing tool.

☐ *Do focus on the subject line.* Because subject lines (the "titles" of e-mails) are so short, every word counts. A good subject line shows recipients how to solve a problem ("Apply for new, lower interest rate"). A great subject line throws in a whiff of intrigue ("Win a $10,000 spending spree").

Drive Traffic to Your Site

The key to any site's success is traffic. No company can advertise, generate sales, or offer customer service online unless people visit its Web site. Your site must be promoted so Web users can find it among the vast number of sites. But this doesn't mean launching an expensive ad campaign. One of the great advantages of the Web for small businesses is that it's inexpensive to let people know about a site. E-mail is one of the best ways to get the word out.

E-mail ads invite visitors. Most e-mail programs allow users to create small files of text that automatically append to the bottom of every e-mail message they send. For example, at the end of each e-mail message, you can say something like, "Pike's Peat, meeting your landscaping needs since 1962." The file is called a "signature file," and any company with a Web site should include the URL and a brief description of the site in employees' signature files. Thus, every e-mail sent could also include a brief ad like, "Visit our Web site at www.pikespeat.com to play Land in Clover!"

The key to an effective signature file is to keep it short, ideally four lines or fewer. Elaborate signature files just take up space and are not read more than once. A short file usually gets at least a glance every time, prompting visitors to remember the message.

Adopt direct e-mail, too. Begin by setting up your site to collect e-mail addresses of visitors. Add a question next to that section asking if they would like to receive e-mail notifying them of changes to your site and updates on key information.

Once armed with a list of users willing to receive e-mail, start sending it to them. Don't abuse their trust by overwhelming them with press releases every time a minor change is made to the site, but do create a regular mailer, perhaps once a month, pointing out a few new products available on the site or key issues discussed there. The mailer shouldn't steal the site's thunder. It should be more of a teaser designed to make readers want to visit the site. Keep it very short and current.

Think rich and informative "passive content"

Enhanced passive content is information that provides general customer support for access any time of day or night. Such content might include:

❏ Company backgrounders
❏ How to contact service reps
❏ Directions to your facility, and business hours
❏ Instructions for using your products
❏ Technical specifications
❏ Schedules for maintenance and upgrades
❏ Product catalogs

Much of this information can be reorganized and placed on your site— a task that can be accomplished relatively quickly, if you already have digital files of text, graphics, and other elements. Standard HTML can be used to make your existing information Web-ready simply and quickly. Beware, however, that the organization and layout of most printed pieces are not Web-friendly. If you simply download a brochure, for example, online visitors may have difficulty navigating through it— especially if it includes four-color pictures. Break it into simpler graphic and textual elements and place them separately on your site where people will look for them.

The "About Us" category is nearly universal on all business sites, so most people visiting your site will expect to see this internal link. It's the place to put basic information about your company—its history, mission, and short profiles of key managers. Because it's important to have a consistent graphic style on your site and in your printed materials, have a designer simplify the graphics from existing materials so that they'll fit the Web format and, more importantly, download quickly.

Define key pages of your Web site

Beyond basic "who's who" information, what other content should you post? Start by posting information about items that drive the top 20% of your sales. This enables customers to find information on the products they frequently want. Then you can measure requests for additional information and add Web pages as demand dictates. Because it costs so little to post each additional page of information, you should post the routine material that you provide customers. Here are some examples of content that will enrich your site:

❏ **Directions to your physical location.** There are three ways to make it easy for people to find you. First, MapQuest (www.mapquest.com) offers a free link to an interactive map of your location on its site. Second, license the map software from
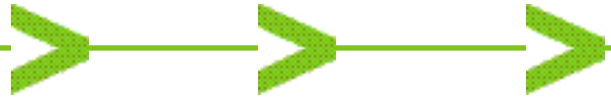
companies such as MapQuest (www.mapquest.com), Rand McNally (www.randmcnally.com) and MapPoint (www.mappoint.net). A third option is to compose and post driving directions to your business from two or three local landmarks (i.e. airport, downtown), and include a self-created map.

❏ **Company directory.** Customers can feel disconnected if their only option for sending e-mail is to an impersonal address such as "Webmaster," or, even worse, "customer support."

Include a "real person" address for generic customer support, so that customers don't feel that they are sending their e-mail into a void. Better yet, include pop-up e-mail forms with manager profiles so customers can connect to them directly.

❏ **Product and service background information.** It may seem logical to group product descriptions together in one spot, but it's actually more helpful to customers to position it throughout your site with marketing copy.

❏ **Assembly directions and replacement parts.** Online replicas of the type of printed material usually packed with a product—e.g., warranties, product registration, a form for ordering replacement parts—are a time and labor saver for your customer service reps and consumers who have lost or tossed the originals.

Include FAQs within your site

The popular question-and-answer format was one of the first customer service tools adapted to Web sites. This format is easily understood and reflects the actual questions that customers ask. This gives customers a sense that you're listening to them and responding. It is easily updated and expanded as your service reps track the questions that are asked often and then work with your Webmaster to post the answers. You can leverage the friendly FAQ format even more by adding links to other parts of your Web site and useful links to other sites.

When marketing products that elicit many questions, it's important to include in-depth product descriptions, e-mail contacts, and your toll-free number to supplement the generic site-wide "Help" button. This is an inexpensive way to aid customers and maximize the impact of your content.

For example, Vitamins.com covers an extensive list of subjects under its "Help" button that appears at the top of every page. Every product description is also accompanied by buttons that introduce the site's nutritional experts, including pop-up e-mail forms that can be used to ask them questions. ■

Use Search Engines to Build Traffic

Think of the Internet as the world's largest library, and search engines as its card catalog system for the 1 billion documents that are on the Web. Search engines create their listings by crawling across the Web to gather information from existing pages.

Research by eMarketer shows that 78% of Web users initially find sites through search engines. A listing near the top of search engines such as AltaVista, HotBot, or Infoseek will initially bring more visitors to your site. Return visits can be reinforced by e-mail, banner ads, print media and advertising.

Maintaining a top search listing can be challenging. Some pointers:

❏ *List with search engines upon launching.* As soon as your Web site is up and running, list its contents with several major search engines and online directories. For help in registering your site, start with the DirectoryGuide (www.directoryguide.com), which features more than 400 search engines and directories.

❏ *Use meta tags.* Search engines look for your site's meta tags— special lines of code or keywords that identify what your site is about. When creating these tags, put the most important information first. For example, if you sell apparel and footwear to racewalkers, the first word in your tag should be racewalking, followed by clothing, apparel, sportswear, and shoes. (For more information on meta tags, visit www.siteowner.com.)

❏ *Put keywords in titles and tags.* Pages with keywords in their title and meta tags receive higher rankings from search engines.

❏ *Resubmit regularly.* While submitting too often can result in your site being classified as a spammer, failure to submit at least every two or three months can keep your site from staying in the search engine's index.

❏ *Get as many other sites as possible to link to your site.* Search engines use link popularity as part of their ranking criteria.

Track Visitors—and Your ROI

While browsing your site, users may buy something. If there is no sale, how do you know that anyone has stopped by? Web site operators can collect more information on customers than brick and mortar store owners can.

Methods of measurement

There are several ways to track visitors. One method is based on number of "visitors," which refers to the number of users who visit the site. Another method is based on the number of "page views." A person visiting a site clicks on a page, enlarges a graphic, listens to an audio recording, or moves within the site.

Each activity makes a request of the site's host computer to send the visitor's computer some electronic information. Those requests are tracked as "page views." A page view registers each time a visitor clicks on part of the site. Companies monitoring visitors and page views can get a general idea of a site's traffic and trends by relying on their own server software or by paying an ISP to track the information.

Some companies have adapted visitor tracking software that offers even more information. In addition to the number of visitors and page views, they can determine what browser software visitors are using, what site the user just came from (so a company can judge how many visitors come from a link from another site), what modem speed the visitors are using (so the company can put fewer graphics on the site, if most visitors are using slow modems, for example), and what type of Internet access accounts visitors have.

With either type of traffic tracking, the names and e-mail addresses of visitors usually remain anonymous unless they voluntarily provide it. If visitors provide that, they might also be willing to provide demographic information, such as where they live, their income level, and a few details about their purchasing decisions. Gathering this data online has become more common. With such information, companies can tailor their sites to visitors' demographic profiles. The tracking data can also become a valuable tool for driving your product research and marketing decisions.

It's important to precisely track the results you get from Internet-based marketing so that you can quickly modify the online tools that aren't capturing leads or creating customer loyalty. The simplest formula for measuring the ROI is to first create a baseline for comparison—the percent of customers who respond to e-mailed special offers, for example. Then, track the expenses associated with adding in a particular customer support technology, such as instant chat. After the customers have used the new technology for a month, review the number of sales per site visitor, compared to the number of sales per site visitor prior to the addition of the technology. Divide the incremental increase in the number of sales by the cost of the new technology to determine if the technology is beginning to pay off (taking into account, of course, other factors that may affect sales, such as discounted prices, addition of new products, and special advertising campaigns).

Try a trial run

Consider setting up a customer advisory board to test new site features, offers, customer service technologies, and changes in your fulfillment operation.

Customers genuinely appreciate the chance to offer feedback about what does and does not work with your online efforts. eLoan, a company that provides online applications for consumer and business loans, has set a company policy that a human must answer the customer service phone within six seconds. Its goal is for 90% of its e-mails to be answered within two hours, and 100% within 24 hours. Follow-up surveys with eLoan customers about the quality of service indicate that 95% of customers report that they'd use eLoan again—an extremely high repeat rate by any standard.

The quality of customer service directly impacts your company's reputation. You may want to assign an employee to regularly check chat sessions, message boards, and listservs outside your Web site that are frequented by your regular customers to see what kinds of comments are made about your products and level of service. Also check out BizRate (www.bizrate.com), Epinions (www.epinions.com), Better Business Bureau Online (www.bbb.org), any online service ranking offered by your local chamber of commerce, and even your state attorney general's office to be sure that an unhappy customer hasn't lodged a complaint. ∎

Menu of ROI Metrics

The payback from a Web site needn't be solely financial.
Here are nine ways to measure your return on investment:

❏ Number of new accounts
❏ Number of repeat purchases
❏ Market penetration
❏ Percentage of customers accessing the site
❏ Cost per qualified lead
❏ Gains in sales and profits
❏ Impact on productivity, loyalty, and turnover
❏ Time savings
❏ Reduced costs (phone, postage, literature, market research, support)

Resources for Marketing on the Internet

For newcomers to the Web as well as veterans of cyberspace, here are contacts and references that can help you create and fine-tune your online marketing programs.

WEB SITES

General/Business

EntreWorld—www.entreworld.org
Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership; information on starting and growing a business

Inc magazine—www.inc.com
Information, products, services, and online tools for starting and growing your business (marketing is one of five major focuses)

National Federation of Independent Business—www.nfib.org (800-NFIB-NOW)
Contains a broad array of educational information for small business owners

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)—www.score.org (800-634-0245)
Expert problem-solving assistance, ranging from information on business planning and marketing to its e-mail counseling service (resources include 1,000 active e-mail counselors, plus 389 counseling offices across the country)

U.S. Chamber of Commerce/Chamber Biz— www.chamberbiz.com (888-948-1429)
Network of more than 300 state and local chambers of commerce and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce

U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA)— www.sba.gov (800-827-5722)
Guidelines for starting a business; links to research and marketing information. Provides information on small business loan guarantees.

General/Internet and Marketing

Direct Marketing Association—www.the-dma.org
Oldest and largest trade association for direct, database, and interactive marketers

eMarketer—www.emarketer.com
Publishes a broad range of e-business and e-commerce statistics

Forrester Research—www.forrester.com
Independent research firm specializing in the Internet and future of technological change

Internet Learning Tutor—www.superpages.com/ilt
Offers a series of online courses for beginners to advanced users (sponsored by ASBDC, Internet Education Foundation, SCORE, Verizon, and the Welfare to Work Partnership)

Verizon SuperPages.com—www.superpages.com
Leading online directory and shopping reference includes Business Center resource

WebTrends—www.webtrends.com
Provides analysis services of Web logs and Net usage statistics

Workz.com—www.workz.com
Comprehensive resource for small businesses that want to create and maintain a Web site

CRM Software

CRMCommunity—www.crmcommunity.com
Community-oriented resource for information on evaluating, purchasing, and implementing customer relationship management technology and solutions

DestinationCRM—www.destinationcrm.com
Resource for companies that have identified CRM as a key strategy for creating enhanced customer value across many industries. The site is associated with CRM Magazine.

E-mail List Management Publications

EzineCentral.com—www.ezinecentral.com
Sells names and e-mail addresses for relevant lists

Ezine-Universe.com—www.ezine-universe.com
Online directory of 8,000 e-mail publications

E-mail List Management Software/Services

List-Universe.com—www.list-universe.com
Resources, directories, tips, and tools for owners of e-mail lists

SparkLIST.com—www.sparklist.com
Provides reliable, easy-to-use e-mail hosting solutions for e-mail lists

Feedback and Tracking Software/Services

BuyStream.com—www.buystream.com
Developer of reporting and analytics software for online retailers and content providers

Informative—www.informative.com
Sells tools that allow e-businesses to interpret and apply customer feedback

Keynote Systems—www.keynote.com
Provides products that enhance Internet performance for e-businesses

Security and Fraud Prevention

Bureau of Consumer Protection (Federal Trade Commission)—www.ftc.gov

Internet Fraud Complaint Center (FBI)—www.ifccfbi.gov

TRUSTe—www.truste.org
Non-profit, self-governing board of online retailers

BOOKS

Building Brandwidth: Closing the Sale Online, by Sergio Zyman and Scott Miller (HarperCollins, 2000, $27)

Complete Guide to Internet Publicity: Creating and Launching Successful Online Campaigns, by Steve O'Keefe (John Wiley & Sons, 2002, $34.99)

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Online Marketing, by Bill Eager and Cathy McCall (Que, 1999, $16.99)

Connecting to Customers: Strategies and Solutions for Growing Your Business Online, by Harry Brelsford, Michael Toot, and Karishma Kiri (Microsoft Press, 2002, $39.99)

CRM at the Speed of Light: Capturing and Keeping Customers in Internet Real Time, by Paul Greenberg (McGraw-Hill, 2001, $29.99)

CRM Automation, by Barton Goldenberg (Prentice Hall, 2002 & 2003 New Edition, $39.95)

e-Loyalty: How to Keep Your Customers Coming Back to Your Web Site, by Ellen Reid Smith (Harperbusiness, 2000, $16.99)

Internet Marketing for Dummies, by Frank Catalano and Bud Smith (Hungry Minds/John Wiley & Sons, 2000, $19.99)

Poor Richard's E-Mail Publishing, by Chris Pirillo & Peter Kent (Top Floor Publishing, 1999, $29.95) ■