

# Sink or Surf! – Optimising The Net

**The Marketing Edge**

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.The Internet is hot and businesses are jumping on the surfboard into cyberspace. You want to join the crowd, but do you know what you're getting into?

Before you ask your ten-year-old to help you navigate in this new world, let's take a few minutes to talk about marketing your business on the Internet. After all, the Internet is more than fun and games. Marketing your business in this growing medium means making a business decision based on solid information, a sound marketing strategy and some guidance.

As the world's largest computer network, the Internet connects millions of individuals, businesses and organisations around the globe and is quickly becoming a mainstream communications tool. More and more

businesses are using the 'Net' for communicating, public relations and marketing. Being on the 'Net' is as essential as having a telephone and fax. But like any business tool, it is important to know the 'how to's.'

The Internet provides quick and low-cost access to markets, product research, technical information and communications. It has a large potential customer base and presents an opportunity for your business to speak directly to them. But there are differences between traditional marketing and marketing on the 'Net'.

## A Shift From Traditional Marketing

The Internet represents an inversion of traditional marketing and advertising methods. In traditional marketing, the message is pushed towards an audience through selected media, such as print, broadcast, outdoor or direct mail. The audience is passive, loyal to their favourite medium and doesn't have to work at finding these messages; the message is inserted in their newspaper, magazine, mailbox, TV or radio programme.

Since the Internet is dynamic and non-intrusive, a business must pull their target audience into their site. The goal is to keep them there, keep them interested in coming back, motivate them to purchase your product and tell others about your site.

## So How Do I Attract Customers?

What do you do to get potential customers to visit your site, maintain interest and respond? How do you get this large pool of people to pay attention to your message?

First of all, identify your reasons for using the Internet. Do your customers or suppliers use the Internet? Does your business need access to databases, libraries or other information services? Do you want to sell your products electronically? Do you want to communicate with other business professionals on the 'Net'?

Once you have decided on the Internet as part of your overall marketing strategy, you must decide which forum you're going to use. The most effective application on the Internet is the World Wide Web (WWW) which uses text, images, sounds and interactive multi-media. With its ability to distribute high-quality, interactive documents to a potentially unlimited customer base, the Web is an excellent business tool to disseminate information on your company to people around the globe.

Besides having our own Web Site, The Marketing Edge has designed sites for businesses and other organisations who want to benefit from the Web's format. Building a presence on the Web requires forethought and planning. A well-designed home page will pay dividends for anyone trying to get their message across on the Internet. It must be designed with as much attention to detail as advertising, a public relations campaign or any promotional material, and be an integral part of your overall business and marketing strategy. In fact, a truly effective Web Site requires the efforts of specialised people, including graphic designers, copywriters and other marketing professionals.

## Steps to an Effective Web Site

Here are some proven steps to build your company's presence on the Internet:

- 1 Start with a marketing strategy. Who do you want to attract, what will interest them, and how can you make this site fun, interactive, useful, and memorable while giving all the right information?
- 2 As with other marketing communications, develop a creative strategy. Your site should project a clear and consistent image, and be interesting and unique so people notice and remember it. First impressions are important, because competition on the 'Net' is intense and word of mouth travels fast.
- 3 Announce your site to the marketplace. Consumers must know about the site before they can look for it.
- 4 Register your site with as many search directories (or 'engines') as possible. Establish as many links to other Web Sites as possible. This makes it easier for people to find you.
- 5 Include your Web Site address on all your stationery, packaging and promotional materials.
- 6 Draw customers with strong content and design. Stay up-to-date and be prepared to change. Without these fundamentals, customers will have no reason to visit, or re-visit, your site. Remember the Internet is a form of entertainment and, unlike TV commercials an audience may tolerate, Internet audiences control what they want and don't want to see.
- 7 The best marketers make their sites interactive, entertaining, attractive, and loaded with information and fun. Create services/information that your audience will find interesting. Internet users refuse to be bombarded with commercialism. Your site cannot be too self-serving. Sites which look like advertisements will turn visitors off for good.
- 8 Encourage interaction with your visitors. Make it easy for them to communicate with you.
- 9 Try to understand your visitors. One of the strengths of the WWW is that you can analyse who has visited your site and what parts of the site are most popular. Use this information to constantly improve your site.
- 10 Above all, have fun creating your site. Because if you're not having fun, your visitors won't have fun.

The Internet will continue to grow and evolve and no one will be immune to its influence. Now is the time to develop an effective strategy for its business use. To be an effective player in this medium, make sure your Web Site is an innovative, creative and integrated facet of your total marketing strategy.

Providing useful information through an effective Web Site will show potential customers that your business is flexible, adaptable, creative, interesting and, most of all, responsive to others' needs. Fuse your marketing message with some kind of service, information or entertainment. That's the key to good marketing on the 'Net'.

## Catching the Wave

One of our clients, a major national distributor of engineering consumables, hired us to market their products. The Marketing Edge created a national consumer and trade marketing campaign including trade magazines and an Internet Web Site. In our planning, we conducted focus group research where we discovered that over 40 per cent of the group had access to the 'Net'.

After conducting our research, the next step was deciding on how to integrate these media. We decided to use each one to promote a consistent message. For example, if you saw a magazine ad, you would find a 0845 number to call or a Web Site address to visit for more information, such as:

- available products
- branch locations to buy the products
- technical information
- technical workshops

When you call the number or visit the site, you can ask for more information to be mailed to you, or download information from the Web Site.

So far, we have achieved excellent results and given our client a more integrated marketing thrust using the latest in technology and cultural trends. The campaign is accountable because every visitor is tracked and asked to respond to on-going research for future marketing projects, resulting in a true "customer relationship marketing" (CRM\*) programme.

\*Customer relationship management (CRM) is a business strategy to acquire and retain the most valuable customer relationships. CRM requires a customer-centric business philosophy and culture to support effective marketing, sales, and service processes. CRM applications can enable effective customer relationship management,