



How to *NET* More on the *WEB*

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So you're not sure what to make of the Web. How will it work for your company? Is it really worth it? A Web site isn't for everyone. I've outlined at least two factors to consider when making this decision. If you're ready to develop a Web site, you should carefully consider the process in which to create an effective and strategically sound Web site.

Do You Really Need a Web Site?

There are two key things to consider when deciding to build a Web site. The first consideration is your customers. If you know that your customers are on the Web, you should consider developing a Web presence. They may be looking for you on the Web already. The second consideration is your competitors. If your competitors have Web sites, you may want to visit these sites and determine if they have a distinct advantage over you in the marketplace by having a Web presence.



Finding that your customers and competitors are on the Web should make you think twice (literally!) about creating your own Web site. Your customers may be missing out on learning more about your company while your competitors may be gaining access to a market that has yet to be tapped. How do you see this affecting your business?

1. Plan the Development of Your Web Site

If you need a Web site, the next step involves planning. Determining the Web site's purpose and goals is essential to development. If you focus on the purpose and objectives of your site during the development stage, you will create a Web site that attracts your target audience and effectively communicates who you are.

How will the Web site fit into your business and marketing plan? Think about how your other marketing materials will work in conjunction with a Web site. For example, your Web site may be a recruitment tool for attracting new members to your association where as your newsletter may be used to update your members on the latest industry trends. Defining the purpose of each will make your marketing materials more effective.



2. Create Your Web Site

The first step in creating your Web site will be to gather content. Your marketing materials may give you the best content to start with. If you don't have any material, you might have someone in your company write up the material you need or hire a copywriter to do this.

Understanding those elements that will increase traffic to your site is important. Meta tags include your keywords and company de-

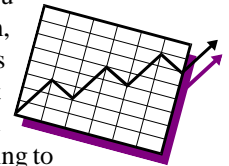
scription. Search engines will use your meta tags and site content to index your site. It's critical that your meta tags are developed properly and that your Web site is registered with the major search engines. Search engines help those of us find you on the Web when we don't have your Web address.

It's important to carry through the same look and feel of your printed material to the Web site. Your company colors and style communicate your identity. Shouldn't your Web site do the same?

3. Monitor the Effectiveness of Your Web Site

Monitoring the effectiveness of your Web site will help you to see just how valuable your Web site is to you and your target audience. Track the incoming orders or other feedback you receive from your site. Calculate the sales that your Web site is referring to you.

Utilize a Web site traffic analysis package. This tool can tell you more in depth information about your site. You will learn where your visitors are coming from, which Web pages are most popular, which sites are referring the most traffic to your site, what are the top search engines being used to find your site, which keywords your visitors are using to find you, and much more. Even if you just insert a counter on your Home page to track hits, you are getting a rough estimate of how much your site is being accessed.



4. Update your Web site

Updating and improving your site will not only benefit your company but your customers will take notice. Sites that do not get updated may indicate a lack of interest and may reflect poorly on a company.

Use the feedback that you receive from your audience on the Web to improve your Web site. If you are being asked the same questions, add a FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section to your Web site or update the information you already have to answer those questions.

Improve your Web site with the results of a Web site traffic analysis package. If there are pages on your site that are not being visited, you may want to ask yourself why. Are these pages difficult to find from your Home page? Is there no interest in this information and, thus, no need to have this information posted on your Web site?

Finally, take advantage of the flexibility that you have with the Web. Unlike printed materials, you can change anything on your Web site within a very short timeframe without all the expense.

If you're ready for a Web site, follow the steps of planning, creating, monitoring, and updating your site. You'll net more on the Web by creating an effective and strategically sound Web site! ♦