SOUND IDEAS FOR BUSINESS WEB SITES

How To Achieve Online Success At Minimal Cost

MIKE STEWART with MARTY AFTEWICZ

A Web Business Book From Soundpages.com
SOUND IDEAS FOR BUSINESS WEB SITES
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SOUND IDEAS FOR BUSINESS WEB SITES
How To Achieve Online Success At Minimal Cost
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................5

CHAPTER ONE
INTERNET OF DREAMS ....................................................................................................6

CHAPTER TWO
FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESS ..............................................................................................11

CHAPTER THREE
LOW COST MARKETING ....................................................................................................21

CHAPTER FOUR
SPREADING THE MARKETING NET ....................................................................................34

CHAPTER FIVE
MAINTAIN TO RETAIN .....................................................................................................46

CHAPTER SIX
E-COMMERCE BUSINESS SENSE ...................................................................................49

THE FINAL WORD .............................................................................................................54
ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WEB SITES ON THE INTERNET. ONE FROM WHICH WE CAN ALL LEARN SOMETHING.
INTRODUCTION

BY MARTY AFTEWICZ

I contemplated a Web site for my small business for over a year, but never did anything about it. Then I met Mike Stewart. I was completing a business transaction for him, which had nothing to do with the Internet, when I learned of his talents as a Web Designer.

Mike persuaded me to design a Web site for my business and began to tell me how to direct traffic to my site. As he explained all the methods I should use to attract people, and increase my business, Mike must have noticed the glazed look in my eyes. He’d seen that look many times before when talking to owners of businesses of all shapes and sizes. I tried to listen, comprehend, and retain all the information he shared, but I couldn’t.

Jokingly, I told him he should write a book about the subject so I could put his suggestions into action. After many meetings, and the burning of much midnight oil, we finally produced this “how to” book to assist business owners like me to get the best from their Web sites. The words and wisdom are primarily Mike’s. I learned a great deal about marketing my own small business on the Internet from him and contributed portions of this book from my experiences in applying what I learned. So this book comes from Mike’s technical expertise and my own successful utilization of his knowledge and experience.

If you’re reading a printed version of the book, you can use it as a workbook. Check off each item as you accomplish it, and make notes of ideas, and your progress, in the space provided. If you’ve purchased an electronic version of this book, you can link directly to the referenced Internet sites by clicking on the URL’s that appear in the text. They are highlighted in blue. Mike and I have made every effort to be accurate in our listing of Web addresses and prices. However, the Internet changes so rapidly, we can’t be responsible for price modifications or address changes for the referenced sites that have taken place since we wrote the book.

I hope you enjoy the experience of watching your online business grow when you apply what you have learned from this book about marketing your Web site.
“If you build it, they will come.”

That phrase that echoed through the mind of the character Kevin Costner played in the movie *Field of Dreams*. Unfortunately, those words also describe the attitude many business owners have when they create their Web sites. But, since they can’t rely on the divine assistance that drew thousands to the baseball diamond Costner’s character built in his ploughed-over cornfield, business owners need to find other methods.

Here’s a question that I hear many times over: “Now that I have my Web site, how can I attract visitors?” I hear it often because business owners have a habit of designing Web sites without a plan to attract visitors. There are millions of Web sites on the Internet and they’re all competing for the attention of a growing but finite audience. When you build your site, you should also create a reliable marketing plan to attract your audience.

That’s the purpose of this book - to guide business owners to increase traffic and boost sales on their Web sites with minimal expense. And here’s the first thing you need to do:

**THINK OF THE INTERNET AS TV.**

If you compare the Internet to television and your Web site to a television network, you will have the right focus. So, from now on, let’s talk about “viewers” instead of “visitors.”

Like any TV station, you must create interesting programming in order to retain viewers, but the best programming in the world will count for nothing unless you lead them to your network on the Web. There’s no weekly guide of Web listings in the Sunday papers through which they can find you so you must devise other ways of directing them to your site.

Real TV networks have competition from hundreds of cable channels, but you have *millions* of other TV networks competing against you, all trying to entice viewers back to their sites.
Some viewers will stumble across your Web site accidentally and, if you’re providing interesting programming, some of them may return. However, you can’t rely on this passing audience. You need to build a solid base of regular viewers and give them a reason to keep coming back for more.

If you’re creating a site now, review this book with your site development in mind. If your business already has a site, compare your site to my list of the basic fundamentals every site should contain and fine tune accordingly.

I don’t intend to go into the intricacies of Web site design, but please pay particular attention to the segment on designing your Web site. If you follow what I say, search engines will match your site with queries and viewers will find you more easily.

**WEB SITE FUNDAMENTALS**

**FUNDAMENTAL #1: INFORM**

Your Web site must provide clear and easy-to-locate information on your business and products.

This sounds simple enough, but many businesses design their Web sites with the assumption that consumers already knows the nature of the business, and its products, when they arrive at the site. On the contrary, this is often not the case. Here’s an example:

I recently logged on to the Web site of a major department store at which I have shopped frequently in person, but never online. On this occasion, I wanted to purchase some perfume for my wife. I had only a vague recollection of products I had purchased previously and knew only a few of the brands she preferred. I quickly located the right page on the site and requested a search for “perfume.” No matches were found.

A prompt message instructed me to enter a specific designer name, so I typed in the name of one of the products I knew my wife liked - *Tommy Girl*. No match. I then received the same prompt message asking for the designer’s name.

After several tries at entering different product names, I realized that this huge department store had assumed that I would know which designers made which perfumes. I didn’t. I only knew a few product names. In other words, they assumed that I knew as much about their products as they did.
I left that Web site and located a competitor. The site quickly led me to the online fragrance counter and immediately recognized *Tommy Girl*. It also displayed many other alternative selections, including gift baskets containing an array of products. I placed an order. I bookmarked this site so I could return and deleted the bookmark for my former favorite store.

The moral? Design and review your Web site with your customer in mind. Make your products and services easy to locate, with descriptions and alternatives. Don’t make assumptions about what they know. Inform them.

**FUNDAMENTAL #2: PROMOTE**

Your home page should boldly display key reasons for someone to purchase your products or services.

This is your main chance to sell yourself and draw people into the site. Don’t be shy. And remember that most Internet users are impatient. You should make your strengths and advantages obvious immediately, so as to attract them in.

Here’s an example for a tree cutting business:

- We have 25 Years of Tree Cutting Experience
- We specialize in Tree Cutting with NO damage to surrounding landscape or buildings.
- We employ only state certified tree cutters.

Don’t bore them with expansive details. Cut to the chase. If you want to tell them more about your company, create a separate business profile page with company history information.

**FUNDAMENTAL #3: ADVERTISE**

Your home page is your sign of business.

If your business prospects cannot easily locate you, then they will go elsewhere. Successful advertising is critical to your Web site, and should start with a meaningful site name. If your site exists to sell sweaters knitted by your Aunt Agnes, call it “Knitwear.com,” not “Stuff Made By Aunt Agnes.com.”

Advertising is an continuous activity and I’ll review specific paths to promotional success later in the book. These will include registration of the name of your Web site, utilization of search engines, relationships with other Web sites, and many other areas. In the same way
that a television station attracts viewers, you must broadcast your site and make viewers want to tune in to it.

**FUNDAMENTAL #4: MAKE YOUR TV INTERACTIVE**

In making business decisions about your Web site, keep the concept of interactive television in mind.

With a Web site, you have the opportunity to reach millions of viewers at little or no cost, but you need to take a different approach than you would for a print advertisement, radio or TV commercial, or a mailed leaflet. If a potential customer sees a product or service on TV, they must pick up the phone to place an order or ask questions. The same is true for radio, print ads or flyers.

You have a huge advantage over any other form of advertising. Your viewer doesn’t need to initiate contact with you to buy your products. Internet customers don’t have to write down a telephone number or carry around a flyer to order the product later. They are already on your site and can place an order immediately – providing you can persuade them to make a buying decision.

This means that when prospective customers reach your Web site, it must be properly geared up to serve them with your products or services quickly and efficiently. You already have them tuned into your station. Don’t let them slip away because the programming isn’t well organized.

I give this advice when telling my customers how to use their Web site successfully: Forget your experience of other forms of advertising and think interactive television. When you approach the marketing of your Web site this way, you can be sure that when you build it and promote it, they will come. And the Internet will then be a place where dreams come true.
ONE OF SEVERAL SITES WHERE YOU CAN REGISTER YOUR DOMAIN NAME AND BEGIN PUTTING THE FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESS IN PLACE. CHECK IT OUT.
If you’re considering creating a Web site for your business, you should start laying the foundations for your site by taking these four basic steps:

1. Select and register an Internet address.
2. Select a domain name that identifies your business and products or service.
3. Build your Web site to reflect your business.
4. Prepare your office for your Web site.

Let’s look at each step in more detail.

1. SELECT AND REGISTER AN INTERNET ADDRESS.

This is easier than you might think. You can do it yourself or ask the person who is designing your Web site to do it for you.

Until recently, there were only two locations authorized to assign and register names and addresses for Web sites. Since then, America Online and several other companies have received authorization to establish names and addresses on the Internet in the United States. No doubt, other companies will follow suit and establish themselves as registrars in the future so the number of options available for registration will increase.

Log on to www.networksolutions.com and you will be prompted through the name registration procedure. The cost is $70 for two years for each registration and you can register as many names as you want. This site currently accepts more than 50,000 registrations daily, so names are disappearing rapidly.

Names may be up to 32 characters in length, with any combination of letters, numbers, dots, or hyphens. Other keyboard characters such as &, ′, and # are not acceptable in your domain
Another great place to register your domain name

name. You can experiment with any name and you will be told if the name has been taken. If it has, you will also be told who registered that name and when.

You can also register at www.register.com, which will walk you through the set up process at no charge. Once you register your name online, you will be invoiced for the $70. The Internet business name that you have now registered is referred to as your domain name, or URL (Universal Resource Locator). Even if you aren’t planning to create a Web site for your business in the immediate future, I strongly urge you to register your domain name NOW. Here’s an example of why you need to act immediately.

A few years ago, I met with the CEO of a major restaurant chain in the Southeast and gave a presentation on the value of, and need for, a Web site for his business. For the purposes of this example, let’s call the restaurant chain “Happy Jacks”. The CEO informed me that business was great. It seemed as if virtually everyone in the Southeast had eaten at one of his restaurants
in the past and he didn’t need to spend much on advertising. He had no interest in creating a Web site.

Two years later, his office contacted me and said the company wanted to jump on the Internet bandwagon. They asked me to create and maintain a simple Web site for them. When they went to register their domain name, they were shocked to discover that one of their employees had already registered “HappyJacks.com.”

Several months later, after a great deal of negotiating, they finally acquired the rights to this name, but the cost was significantly more than the standard $70 registration fee they would have paid. The message is simple: Don’t procrastinate! It’s never too early to register your domain name.

2. SELECT A DOMAIN NAME THAT IDENTIFIES YOUR BUSINESS AND PRODUCTS OR SERVICE.

Select a name that is easy to recall and matches your services or products. Your name should be one that will become as easy to recall as a vanity phone number. For example, it’s easy to recall 800-FLOWERS and 800-TICKETS. Approach the selection of your domain name with this simplicity in mind.

Don’t make your name too literal. Let’s say the name of your business is “Marty’s Department Store,” but everyone refers to your store as “Marty’s”. In that case you should register your domain name as www.martys.com. By doing that, you will have increased the chances of potential customers remembering the name of your site (by the way, remember that apostrophes cannot be part of your Web address). Once registered, your domain name becomes your verbal business card and your channel for broadcasting your business to the world.

Your URL name may not necessarily be the same as your business name. Here’s an example. Smith Financial was a mortgage broker that was well known in the local community, but their name did not match a product search on the Web.

Although mortgages were their primary product, “Smith Financial” did not emerge when searches were made under the word “mortgage.” The majority of their Web site hits came from individuals who knew of their site, or from links or banner ads.

To rectify this, the company created a home page with the URL www.mortgagegeorgia.com and their number of hits increased significantly. The new name perfectly matched their business, and also matched queries on Web search engines. So choose your name with this accessibility in mind.
Most of you will register a name that ends with “.com” which is reserved for commercial sites. For the curious, here’s an overview of the categories you will see on the net in the United States.

- **.gov** = any government related site
- **.net** = a network site usually dedicated to a specific cause or interest; created by an individual or organization. This can be commercial or private.
- **.edu** = educational institution
- **.org** = non-profit organizations not selling products or services.
- **.com** = any site that sells or promotes services, products, or is related to commerce in any manner. This is by far the most populated category on the Internet.

3. **BUILD YOUR WEB SITE TO REFLECT YOUR BUSINESS.**

Your Web site should be a reflection of your business to customers. They will judge your business by how good your site looks and how well it works for them. Here are some basic points to consider:
**USE A PROFESSIONAL DESIGNER**

If you’re in the planning stage, or only just starting to develop your site, I urge you to select a professional to assist with site development. I encourage this even though there are many methods for you to learn how to create your own Web site.

For example, software, manuals, and community college courses will teach you the fundamentals of building a Web site. Despite these teaching aids, I still recommend that you use a professional designer.

Here’s why: A professional will do a better job than you would yourself. After all, that’s what they do. If you were meant to be a professional designer, that’s what you would be doing. With a professionally designed site, you can expect better graphic images, a smoother running and faster loading site, and avoid the costly downtime that can result from something going wrong. If you build the site yourself and it doesn’t operate properly, you will then have to turn to someone to get it fixed.

It can be extremely costly if you have to contract a designer to repair problems they didn’t cause. But even if you hire a professional designer, it’s still worth attending a community college course. This will pay dividends in working with your designer while planning your site. Also, it will improve your ability to maintain the site yourself.

If you have an existing site, review it against the list of criteria below and decided what improvements you need to make.

**CREATE A PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE**

First impressions count. Don’t be tempted to create a lot of unnecessary bells and whistles. Just have a professional-looking home page that loads quickly and shows pride in your business.

**MAKE IT CLEAN AND FREE OF CLUTTER**

Design the site to be simple yet impressive. Feature services and products on your home page. Keep the history of your company, the story of your life, or political statements, confined to a link to another page for those who are interested.

**USE SOUND AND VIDEO**

Broadcast from your TV station with streaming audio and video, but limit the amount you use on your home page. No one wants to watch silent television, but everyone agrees that commercials can be excessive. Don’t swamp your viewers with them.

Streaming audio and video present sound and images that can add to the professional look of
your site, with only a minimal effect on the load time of your page. Your Web designer should be able to add this capability inexpensively.

If you don’t have the capability to run streaming audio and video on your PC, you can download a free player at www.real.com. This site will also offer you the opportunity to expand from the basic service in return for a small purchase fee.

**HAVE AN INTRODUCTORY GREETING**

An introductory greeting that welcomes customers to your site gives it an immediate human touch. This can be as simple as a picture of you, or a key member of your staff, and a text message. Or it could be an audio message.

If you use audio, give people the option of clicking to hear the message, rather than playing it automatically. And remember here’s nothing more irritating than a welcome message that repeats itself over and over again.

**USE SPECIAL OFFERS**

You can put a brief reference on your home page to a particular product or service that is specially priced or new to the site. Make it something that immediately grabs viewers’ attention.
**PROVIDE DEMONSTRATIONS**
You can use streaming video or animated graphics to show customers how your product works, especially if it has a unique factor that sets you apart from competition.

Here’s an example: [www.concretebusters.com](http://www.concretebusters.com) is a concrete removal company. The company markets a unique item of equipment that smashes concrete into tiny pieces. The compact size and effectiveness of this equipment is difficult to describe in words alone, so they inserted a streaming video demonstration of the concrete buster at work.

4. **PREPARE YOUR OFFICE FOR YOUR WEB SITE.**

It’s critical for business owners to understand that successful Web sites need a commitment of time and an allocation of money to attract viewers. That means investing time and money in creating the right infrastructure to respond to customers.

Before people start watching your TV network, you need to plan how you’re going to respond to their calls, e-mails and orders for products and services. Organize your office to anticipate and deal with customer responses.

Web site designers are often referred to as Webmasters, Web Hosts, or Internet Marketing Consultants. Whatever his or her title, you need to work with your designer on the technical
aspects of your site so that it’s ready to respond quickly when the first order comes in. These are the things you need to do:

**DEDICATE A PC AND TELEPHONE LINE TO YOUR WEB SITE**

You will need to monitor responses to your Web site constantly. Don’t think of your Web page as a nine-to-five business tool. The site can make money for you while you sleep, but it has to be set up correctly. That means having a PC and a phone line dedicated exclusively to your Web site.

Today’s fast paced technology requires an immediate response time from Internet businesses. If you don’t have systems in place to respond immediately to prospects and customers, they won’t return to visit your site. Your response time to an e-mail question can determine whether you gain or lose sales. If you delay your response, your visitor will go to another Web site. The same applies to response time for product deliveries. As I said earlier, Internet customers tend to be impatient.

**SELECT A SERVER TO RUN YOUR SITE**

You have two basic choices here:

1. Purchase your own Internet-connected server on site.
2. Rent space from an Internet Service Provider (ISP).

The first option is costly and means that you run the risk of needing technical support if your server malfunctions. The second option is more cost effective and, although the server may still encounter technical difficulties, it’s the ISP’s responsibility to service it.

Another advantage of this option is that you will be less likely to encounter traffic delays from hits on your site. The ISP’s server will be designed for high traffic volume and they will expand capabilities if the demand becomes excessive. By comparison, you would have to spend more of your own money to increase your own server’s capability.

**MAKE SURE YOUR OFFICE HAS INTERNET ACCESS**

Don’t laugh. Believe it or not, many businesses overlook this need. Furthermore, if you have more than one PC, you may need corporate Internet access. This can be accomplished by any networking professional and is relatively inexpensive.

If your PCs aren’t already networked, you may wish to consider linking them. Networked PCs will allow each individual in your organization to monitor their e-mail throughout the day and perform whatever tasks are their responsibility.
If your site has a generic e-mail box, one person can direct e-mails to the proper person in your organization. These can also be electronically directed. Your Webmaster can create separate e-mail accounts for each member in your company, and direct questions, orders, customer service issues, and other inquiries, by inserting the appropriate e-mail links on your Web pages.

As you may know, you can obtain Internet access through any of the large pay services such as America Online or Mindspring. But it’s worth shopping around, because free Internet access through companies like NetZero is becoming more common.

Faster Internet hookups are also becoming more popular and more obtainable. Cable modems and fast connections through telephone lines, either ADSL or ISDN, can be cost effective.

**MAINTAIN YOUR WEB SITE**
Maintaining your own Web site isn’t as difficult as it sounds. Most Web designers will give you the choice, and charge a consulting fee to train you or a member of your staff. Alternatively, they may also do this for a monthly maintenance fee or additional hourly charges.

If you maintain your own site, you should update and edit your Web pages regularly. When you update and edit on your own PC, it’s referred to as “a client,” and you can upload and publish files from your client to your server (whether it’s your own or an ISP’s) through a process called FTP (file transfer protocol).

Maintaining your Web site means taking the time, money and creative effort to change the content to keep the Web site and information compelling, current and enticing to return the Web site in the future. Television broadcast is constantly doing this concept to capture and retain viewers, you must do as much as possible to capture your viewers of your Web site.

**MONITOR YOUR WEB SITE**
There are software programs that will monitor activity on your Web site. These programs are known as “Web page stat. software” and they log activity on all files accessed on your site. *Web Trends* is one popular package, but there are many others.

This type of software will produce reports of how many visits are made, to which pages, and the origin of the visitor – whether they came via America Online, Mindspring, .gov sites, and so on. These statistics will enable you to track the origin of your viewers and their primary interests. You can then restructure and focus your site accordingly. Later in the book, I will look at monitoring in more detail.
**ESTABLISH CONFIDENTIAL SUBMISSIONS**

Your viewers need to be confident that information they provide to you is secure. Internet security is a concern to everyone and personal information, particularly credit card data, should be absolutely secure.

Ask your Webmaster about 32-bit encryption. They can obtain for you the digital certificate necessary for this kind of security, known as SSL, or Secure Socket Layer.

*Now that you know how to prepare for your viewers, it’s time to think about marketing your site.*
In the Southeastern United States in the 1950s, motorists were bombarded by an advertising campaign persuading them to visit a place called Rock City. Colorfully painted signs covered entire sides of barns and commercial buildings directing parents to this recreational area near Chattanooga, Tennessee. Vacationing children would badger their parents until the car was heading in the right direction.

Rock City became a successful tourist attraction and the signs were the key reason. This advertising campaign was inexpensive. The signs lasted for years and became items of nostalgia in their own right. I don’t suggest that you paint whole barns with your Web address, but the concept still applies today. Businesses on the Internet need to direct viewers to their Web pages, by following these six stages of sales promotion:

1. Making your viewers aware of your existence.
2. Establishing the name of your site and the nature of your business.
3. Providing a strong reason to visit.
4. Selling your services or products.
5. Giving them an incentive to return.
6. Encouraging them to tell others about you.

And you can do all this inexpensively!

Some of the following methods are critical to the success of your Web site. You will have a number of choices in each category, and some decisions to make. Use the category options as a checklist to review your progress as you accomplish each stage of promoting your site.

The more activities you complete, the more traffic you will get on your site and the more you will sell. Some activities, such as signing up with search engines and lists, are essential. Others are desirable but not essential.
The number of nonessential activities you decide to undertake will depend on how aggressively you want to go after new business for your site, and how much you’re willing to invest in your advertising budget.

**CATEGORY ONE: SEARCH ENGINES**

I regard search engines, lists, and links as items that are mandatory for success. Search Engines contain databases of Web sites on the Internet. They guide viewers to Web sites that match their search request for a particular category, word, or phrase.

At the time of writing this book, there were over 900 search engines, with more being introduced regularly. Yahoo and Lycos are probably the most recognizable, but there are many others from which to choose. These are called general search engines, because of their broad-based information and wide appeal. I liken them to the yellow pages of the Internet.

There are also search engines that perform specific searches. These include engines that search for e-mail addresses, names and addresses of people, and software. There are even some that search using other search engines! In marketing your Web site, you will be most interested in the general search engines.

For a comprehensive list of search engines go to [http://server15.hypermart.net/searchitall](http://server15.hypermart.net/searchitall). This site provides links to the most detailed list of categorized search engines that I have seen. Ideally, you want your Web site to pop up at the top of the list when someone initiates a query, but that’s not going to happen without a great deal of effort.

Later in the book, we will review some techniques that will improve the ranking of your site on search engines. But first, let’s identify the methods you can use to list your site. This will serve our goal of getting your domain name to a mass audience.

**SIGN UP FOR FREE TO REGISTER WITH THE TOP SEARCH ENGINES**

There are several sites that will broadcast your site listing free to the top search engines. Most of these sites also have programs available that will list you with more search engines for a fee. Here are a few examples.

[www.addme.com](http://www.addme.com) will list your Web site free with 34 of the top search engines for six months. You will be prompted for your domain name and business classification. You can then select search engines and categories for your site. Some search engines require detailed information for submissions, but the entire process is very easy. The site is free, but you will be requested to place a link to their site. This is well worth doing.
If you go to www.register-it.com, they will list you free on 11 search engines. This is very quick and you only need to complete your site registration once for all the search engines listed.

Add-it Free can be accessed at http://businessWeb.com and will direct you to many possible methods of submitting your URL to search engines. Some are free but others are not, so review their programs carefully prior to making your submission.

Pronet is a search engine that has many programs available to assist businesses by directing Web traffic to their sites. One of their services is SubmitPlus at http://submitplus.ca/pronet where you can register your domain name with 100 search engines free. You will also have the option of paying for more submissions. They will register with these 100 search engines on your behalf for a small fee. This is worth considering, since the submission process can be time consuming.

QuickSubmit is another site that allows free registration. They market themselves as “the lazy Web site promoter,” and I must admit the submission to 20 search engines is quick and painless. Access them at http://QuickSubmit.net.

**PAY FOR A LISTING WITH UP TO 400 SEARCH ENGINES**
There are other places where you can obtain similar services. Generally, volume discounts are available if you have more than one domain name.
For an annual charge of $59, \textit{www.submit-it.com} will list your site for a year. Make certain you identify your proper business classification. If you wish to have more than one classification listed, each one costs $59. Alternatively, you can pay $12.99 a month if you wish. This site will also permit a free limited trial.

In addition to the 11 free listings they offer, \textit{www.register-it.com} will distribute your site listing to hundreds of search engines for a charge of $39.99 per year for one site, or $59.99 for 2 sites.

\textit{Ultimate Promotions} has a more comprehensive program for your URL submissions. You will find this company’s Web site at \textit{www.ultimatepromotions.com} and they will submit your site to approximately 900 search engines for about $70. This fee also includes adding links to some popular pages. They also have a banner program.

How to improve search engine access is the number one issue for all business Web site owners. But, once your site is registered with search engines, your work has only just begun. Your goal is to have your site located by prospective customers when they search for topics, or key words on any particular search engine. Here are some suggested procedures and resources.

Construct your Web site with search engine access in mind. There are certain methods of site construction that will match the techniques used by search engines when they process search requests for Web sites.

The rapid electronic search techniques used by search engines are called spiders, which seek matching key words in response to queries. The use of META tags in your Web site page headings will dramatically increase your percentage of hits by search engines. Your Web designer should place the letters “META” in the proper place when constructing your page headings.

Search engine spiders seek these META tags for keyword and description matches, and proper placement will yield dramatic results. If your Web designer doesn’t use META tags properly on every page of your site, you will be disappointed at the number of hits you get from search engines queries.

There are also software programs available to assist in attracting search engine spiders, as well as companies that specialize in raising the number of search engine hits on Web sites. \textit{Dot-Dot.com Web Solutions} has been very successful in this area. You can find them at \textit{www.dot-dot.com}. This company uses many techniques, including the software program.
Web Position. This program creates unique Web pages that match search engine queries. There are other similar software programs available.

Web Position has identified 13 search engines that respond to their program: Yahoo, Alta Vista, Lycos, HotBot, AOL Netfind, Magellan Excite, Web Crawler, Infoseek, MSN, Linkstar, Planet Search, What-u-seek.

If your Web designer isn’t familiar with methods to attract search engines, or does not offer those kinds of services, I suggest you seek out a company similar to Dot-Dot.com Web Solutions in your area.

In addition to META tags and positioning software, there are other important ways in which you can modify your site, or your submission to search engines, that can improve good match results:

- Web sites should consist of at least 5 pages. Most search engines will not accept submissions from sites with less than five pages.

- Page titles should be 15 words or less.

- Limit your business description to 200 characters when you submit your site to search engines.
• Imbed key words in headings on each page.

Now that you have prepared your site for search engine matches, let’s move on to other ways to attract viewers.

**CATEGORY 2: LISTS**

Once your site is submitted, and ready to accept search engine queries, list utilization should be your next step. There are many ways in which you can use your list of customers and prospects, but first, you must create a list.

There are many services on the Internet that will assist with the creation and management of your list. Many of these are free, so there is no reason to hesitate. Shop around and select as soon as your site is operational.

These list servers will place a name entry box on your site so viewers can enter their e-mail address and join your e-mail list. You must create a link somewhere on your home page that encourages viewers to join your e-mail list. Offer something to encourage enrollment - monthly newsletters, product updates, or special sale notices are just a few examples.

This list will be monitored and maintained by the list service that you selected. You will receive a password to access your list, and most services will allow you options of different formats and management reports to sort your list.

Once you have an e-mail list of interested viewer names, use them wisely. Send useful and interesting information periodically. Your viewers can always unsubscribe so it’s your job to deliver information that encourages their continued participation. You will find many references in this book to utilizing your e-mail database. I recommend that you use them.

One of the most popular list locations is ListBot, which can be accessed at www.listbot.com. This site does an excellent job of list management. They are a division of Link Exchange, a company I have referenced elsewhere in this book. Their list management service is free, but you can upgrade for a fee to obtain other more specific management reports, or other services related to your list.

This “gold” classification also prevents the display of banner ads during your use of your list management reports. Most small businesses will find their free service adequate, and I suggest you start with this type of service to try out the management reports and judge their value.
You may also opt to purchase software to manage your lists internally within your business. Some of the most popular programs are Majordomo, Smartlist, ListProcessor, and Listserv. These may be purchased at major software retailers, and many locations online.

Still another list option is to pay for a company to manage your lists and direct your e-mail. These companies vary greatly in the services they provide. Some will provide a link to your Web page by embedding a URL in an e-mail. This is another form of permission marketing which avoids the danger of your spamming anyone. Also, these companies will charge you a fee to have a page about their list services pop up on various search engines in an effort to attract more subscribers for you.

If you want more detail on lists, I suggest you access www.listtool.com where you will find more information.

**CATEGORY 3: LINKS**

Links are directed communications from one Web site to another. A link can be recognized on a Web page when a Web address appears in a different color of print and is underlined. When a viewer clicks on that Web address, they are immediately connected to that site. Take advantage of links whenever possible. They will increase the number of viewers to your site and tell you where viewers are coming from. This data can then be used for target marketing
to create links with similar sites, or modify portions of your Web site to appeal more to a particular group of viewers. For example, if you were receiving links from a site that is sports related, you might consider sports related trivia contests, game ticket giveaways, or other promotions.

Discuss your Web site with businesses that you work with regularly. Here’s another example: If you’re a mortgage broker, encourage any realty office that frequently uses your services to build a link to your site.

By doing this, you will set up a chain of links: Realtors link to Chambers of Commerce; Chambers link to popular tourist locations which then link to nearby places of lodging, and so forth. Think about the businesses that may possibly benefit from linking with your site. Suppliers are also good sources to consider.

Trade Links are exactly what the name suggests. Discuss trading links on your site with businesses that compliment yours. Trade links are particularly useful if you publish an electronic newsletter from your site. You can then supplement comments or recommendations with links to relevant sites.

Many small business owners participate in sales groups that share referrals or leads among their members. These sales groups traditionally meet weekly, or at least on a regular basis. These referral groups may consider creating a Web site specifically for their group, and sharing the expense of advertising that site.
At the very least, members in the group who have Web sites should create free links and referenced recommendations to others in the group. I suggest you take a look at the site shown on the previous page as an example: www.gwinnettbizconnection.com.

**CATEGORY 4: BANNER ADS**

Banner Ads are electronic billboards displayed on Web sites. Click on them and you will be connected to those sites. They work much the same as links, but you design a banner ad to the appearance and theme of your choice. Banner ads are normally 468 x 60 pixels in size (a pixel is similar to a dot of light on a television monitor).

Banner ad display space can be purchased or acquired through various forms of trading referred to as banner exchanges. This form of billboard advertising has really taken off on the Internet.

I suggest you search for the program cost and target area that is most appropriate and beneficial for your business. You can access any of the major search engines and enter the keywords “banner exchange” or “banner ads” to obtain a list of available programs. Some are regional or sorted by business category, while others are nonspecific. Here’s an overview of purchased and traded banner advertising.

**BANNER EXCHANGE**

Your banner ad will be displayed on other Web sites based on a ratio of ads displayed on your own site. There are many sites that will place your banner ad and manage and monitor the usage.

You can’t select the specific sites that will display your ad, nor may you select which banner ads will be displayed on your site. However, many have category selections so you can target classifications that are appropriate for your business. Here are just a few examples of banner exchange programs:

**LINK EXCHANGE AT WWW.LINKEXCHANGE.COM**

This site has a 1:2 ratio program. Your banner ad is displayed on one site for every two banner ads that you agree to allow on your site.

*Net-on at www.net-on.com* starts at a ratio of 1:2. They do have slightly more favorable ratios dependent upon the number of banner ads you display on your site and the number of times they are accessed.
**Linkbuddies at www.linkbuddies.com** promises 3:4 ratios if you allow banner ads displayed at the top of your page. You also receive 500 free displays of your banner ad when you agree to participate in their program. Many others are available, including www.banner-mania.com and www.exchange-it.com. Browse the search engines for the best banner exchange program for you.

**PURCHASE BANNER AD DISPLAYS**

You may also opt to pay to display your banner ad. The cost is variable so I suggest you review various sites to determine which are the most cost-effective for you. Many sites charge minimum rates so the purchase of banner ads isn’t for you if you have only a slim advertising budget. You will pay by the number of click-throughs that your banner ad receives.

Some sites charge flat fees per click while others have tiered pricing. Some also allow you to select the business or regional classifications where your banner ad will be displayed. A word of caution: most sites require contracts so I suggest you hire an advertising representative or Web broker to review the contract before signing. There are numerous locations from which to choose, but here are some starting points:

**Yahoo at www.yahoo.com** has been the top search engine on the Internet since its emergence from the pack several years ago. However, many others, such as Lycos, are snapping at its heels. Yahoo charges a minimum of $1,000 per month but will guarantee 1,000 click-throughs per month.
Lycos at www.lycos.com charges a $500 per month minimum.

Imall at www.imall.com isn’t a search engine but an electronic shopping mall. They have many retail categories and advertising opportunities beyond banner ads.

Purchase Links: Link-O-Matic offers a program that will provide links to site categories and regional areas that you select. Access them at www.linkomatic.com. They charge for their program, but the cost seems reasonable relative to hit rate.

I don’t suggest you enroll in this program in the first phase of marketing your site, but you may consider it to increase your traffic after you have established your site and can afford to budget more generously.

**CATEGORY 5: WEB RINGS**

Electronic Leads Groups are series of Web sites that have grouped themselves by specific classifications. Anyone may join a group, or start their own group dedicated to a new category. Members participate by e-mailing questions and responses to other participants, or answering queries from anyone making them. You aren’t required to join the group to participate.

Web Rings: Access www.Webring.org and you will discover a network of businesses searching for opportunities. Some are very narrow in their specialty. Here’s an example of how they can work for you:
At the beginning of 1982, video games were very much in their infancy. Those were the days of the height of popularity for games like Asteroids and Pac Man in arcades and bars. Jerry Buckner and Gary Garcia, two Atlanta-based songwriters and musicians produced the single Pac Man Fever, which quickly rose to the top of the charts and earned them a gold record.

Seventeen years later, Buckner and Garcia were thinking about a re-release of the recording. They located and e-mailed two Web rings dedicated to video games - Classic Gaming Syndicate and Pac Land.. Within 24 hours, they not only received confirmation of interest, but also got requests for over 500 copies of the soon-to-be released CD. A few days later, their upcoming CD was also mentioned on ZDTV, with a reference to their site, www.bucknergarcia.com.

Another similar example is sports related. The 1998 Atlanta Falcons were on their way to their first conference championship. Whenever players scored, they would launch into a victory dance that became known as the “Dirty Bird.”

The musical group Radio Music Network composed a “Dirty Bird” song to feed the fan frenzy and posted it on a member’s Web site. They located a Falcons Fans Club on a Web Ring and e-mailed a sound file of their song (which they first copyrighted!) Several days later, the song played on the radio and received mention in sports pages and talk shows. Orders began to pour in.
I’m not suggesting that Web rings are the only answer to your search for customers, but you should blend Web ring activity into your marketing plan to increase your chances of success. And don’t forget. If you can’t locate a Web ring that accurately represents the nature of your business interests, you can easily create one.

Time for a short commercial break.

This is my Web site.
I hope you’ll visit it.
I also hope you find all the principles expounded in this book put into practice there!
Having examined the three most effective ways of achieving low cost marketing, let’s look at how you can spread your net even wider with other activities. Some of these are low cost, while others will require investment in a marketing budget.

**PLACE YOUR URL EVERYWHERE POSSIBLE.**

I’ve created Web sites for many companies that build an excellent marketing plan, but overlook the most obvious step.

**PRINTED MATERIAL**

All printed material that carries your business name should include your domain name. Put your domain name on all business stationery, such as letterhead, business cards, invoices, order forms, fax headers, etc.

**BUSINESS SIGNS**

The sign outside your business premises should include your URL. If the cost of making a new sign is prohibitive, consider placing a sign in the window with your URL.

**VEHICLE SIGNS**

You don’t have to spend a fortune painting your vehicle. Magnetic signs are reasonably priced and present a professional appearance. Don’t just list your URL. List a description or reason to browse your site. Here are two examples.

Save $$$ every month at [www.mortgagegeorgia.com](http://www.mortgagegeorgia.com)
Get the best concert seats affordably at [www.richfloyd.com](http://www.richfloyd.com)
ADVERTISE CURRENT AND FORMER CUSTOMERS
Most business already have some form of customer database. Advise those customers of your new URL and offer them an incentive to visit your site. (I will discuss incentives in more detail later.) One of the best and cheapest methods to inform customers is to send a postcard.

POSTCARDS
Color print your home page and scan it into a format that will print as a postcard. Most printers can do this for you easily. Bulk mailing postcards is inexpensive. They present a colorful image of your site and an overview of your business. Send them to all former, current, and prospective customers.

www.directexpressatlanta.com used postcards to great effect. Their regional Web site was experiencing slow growth until they distributed postcards to their client list. Web orders increased significantly and helped convince their corporate office to run their own promotion.

Home page postcards can also be used as a “Thank You for Your Business” note. You may choose to deliver these to your customers if you visit them personally, or include them in an informational packet. Also, place a batch of postcards in your reception area.
**EASEL STANDS**
Many businesses don’t have the ability to post signs outside their premises, particularly those with office building suites.

If you’re in this position, place an easel stand in your reception area with your URL and a teaser to make people want to visit your site. You may also consider displaying an enlargement of your home page.

**PRINT MAILINGS**
Many businesses still send flyers or newsletters to clients via snail mail. Boldly display your Web address in your print mailing and encourage them to provide their e-mail address when they visit the site.

In time, you will be able to reduce or eliminate this mailing and printing cost altogether, because you will be able to e-mail your newsletters or promotional messages for no cost at all.

**ADVERTISING**
If you currently advertise in the Yellow Pages, newspapers or magazines, or similar printed media, include a clear visual reference to your URL.

**CATALOGS**
Most companies that produce catalogs of merchandise have a Web site. I’m amazed at how many of these catalogs don’t include constant references and encouragement to use the company’s Web site. Most order forms in catalogs will include a toll free number to call or fax, and a snail mail envelope. But you have to search their catalog for their Web address.

List your URL on every page of your catalog. Display it boldly on your order form. Eventually, you will save money and time spent answering telephone calls, faxes, and in trying to decipher handwritten order forms.

**EXTRA! EXTRA!**
If you have a product or service that is particularly newsworthy, consider using the news media to spread the word.

There are services available that will submit information about your site in the form of a press release to hundreds of communications media and industry advocates. This service can be very beneficial, particularly if there is a newsworthy aspect to your site. The media is focusing more on the Internet so demand has increased for interesting Internet topics. If you
believe your site qualifies, the investment could pay off in a big way. Register-it.com will send your press release to media and industries that you select for about $100. Access them at www.register-it.com.

Web site Garage has many services available to promote your site in addition to press releases. At www.Websitegarage.com they charge a $100 fee and will write your press release for you for additional cost.

You will find useful online press release services at www.onlinereleases.com. This company also has a flat rate available around $.20 per submission dependent upon the number that you select from their industry and media lists.

Promoting your site at little or no cost isn’t difficult. All it takes is a time commitment and the will to do it.

**TARGET E-MAIL MARKETING**

If you’ve experienced previous successes with responses from snail mailing of flyers or advertisements, you may wish to explore e-mail target marketing. There are many sites that sell lists of e-mail addresses at variable costs. But if you decide to market via e-mail in this
manner, beware of SPAM. This is the name given to unsolicited e-mails that are annoying, unwanted, and now illegal in some states.

Even if spamming isn’t illegal in a state, you will receive horrendously bad publicity on the Web if you’re accused of it. Be certain the lists you receive have been gathered with a pre-qualified interest in your business category.

These target e-mail lists are available from a number of reputable vendors. They compile their lists from consumers who have expressed interest in particular business categories. These prospects have stated via e-mail that they are willing to receive offers and information from companies in those categories. Your percentage of responses will vary greatly with target e-mail marketing, but it’s another avenue to consider in your marketing plan. Here are a few places to begin:

Both of these sites seem to have similar programs, but the cost does vary slightly. www.postmasterdirect.com and www.register-it.com have e-mail lists by business categories, both of which prohibit the use of SPAM. If you wish, you may also enroll in their lists. I recommend this participation since it will allow you to experience the registration process to become eligible for e-mails. You might even find out something about your competitors.

**CAPTURE YOUR VIEWERS**

Every business wants viewers to visit its site, become attracted, and return to browse again. We’ve reviewed several ways to attract new viewers. Now let’s look at methods to convince them to return. *The golden rule is to be creative.*

**SPECIAL PROMOTIONS**

A concert promotion company ran a very simple promotion shortly after the introduction of their Web site. www.richfloyd.com wanted to create a list of clients to e-mail new concert announcements.

One month after the launch of their Web site, they possessed only a meager list of seven names. They were attracting viewers, but few were joining the e-mail list, so they decided to run a promotion. They posted an announcement of the promotion on their home page. It read: “Join our e-mail list and have an opportunity to purchase seats in the first 5 rows of an upcoming concert.”

The details explained that the first 100 viewers that enrolled would be able to purchase up to 4 tickets in the first 5 rows of the concert. Within 24 hours, they had over 150 new names on
their e-mail list at no cost! They were going to sell the tickets anyway. The bonus was that they also began to build their customer mailing list for future announcements.

**COUPONS**

Saving money through the use of coupons remains very popular, and the use of coupons on the Web is no exception. There are at least three ways to use coupons in your marketing plan:

1. **Coupons on your site.**
   Perhaps the most popular is a $$ off coupon for your viewer’s first order. This allows them to try your service or products with a first time discount. You then get their name on your customer list, and may solicit future business from them.

2. **Coupon sites on the Internet.**
   A mortgage broker I know purchased coupon space from a regional coupon Web site at www.theadsheet.com. He offered a $100 discount on an appraisal connected to a loan application. He received his first application the next morning! Coupon Web sites are growing rapidly, so search for sites that may be most effective for you.

3. **Coupons with linked sites.**
   If you create a link to a site that is reciprocal to your business, discuss listing coupons for each other’s sites as well. This can apply to many businesses. If you rent trucks and have a link with a retail company that refers clients to you, post a coupon for $20 off truck rental on their site. If you’re a massage therapist that often refers clients to a chiropractor, you and the chiropractor can post a $20 coupon on each other’s site for a first-visit discount.

**REGIONAL SPECIALS**

Direct Express is a freight brokerage based in Chicago. Their regional office in Atlanta created a Web site as a trial for the national headquarters. The site, www.directexpressatlanta.com, offered a shipping discount on all shipments to the “State of the Month”. The site and the program did so well that the corporate office rapidly expanded the program nationally.

**GUEST BOOKS**

Retail stores often maintain a register at their checkout for customers to add their names and be included in future mailings. A simple “Sign Our Guest Book” link on your site will have the same results.

The biggest advantage of guest books is the comment section. Few people feel comfortable about complaining and those willing to give you compliments are even more rare. However,
when you ask people to sign a guest book, you will receive both. Their comments may also help you to improve your products and services, and increase sales.

**LIST SERVERS**
You need to build a customer database in the form of a comprehensive list of e-mail addresses. This will enable you to create an list of customers who want to hear from you about specials, news, information, or whatever else you want to provide.

It’s paramount that you do this. Collect e-mail addresses by whatever means possible. Ask for them personally. Advertise in traditional media and give them an incentive to join your list, such as a contest, discounts to members, and free stuff.

For example, to obtain a free download of Real Player, you have to give them your e-mail address. Somewhere on your home page, place a prominent invitation to join and offer all the kinds of incentives listed above.

**SCAVENGER HUNTS**
Sound like fun? They can be but, more importantly, they will attract viewers, which is the whole idea. Place a funny character, symbol, or image somewhere on your site and provide a prize to those that identify and e-mail the correct location.

You don’t necessarily need to offer a giveaway. The offer could take the form of discounts redeemable on your site. Consider an image that flashes only periodically. This will make the hunt more challenging and your viewers will browse through your site longer while trying to locate it.

**CONTESTS**
A shopping mall posted a contest on their Web site that offered $50 gift certificates for different stores in the mall if you located your license plate on their Web site. They would photograph a license plate in their mall parking lot each day and post the photo on the site the following day. The shopper could claim the license plate and receive the $50 gift certificate.

The mall posted signs at each entrance announcing the contest and referring shoppers to their Web site. The parking lot filled up. Many shoppers lingered in the stores, hoping to increase their chances to win the prize. While they lingered, they shopped. Contests don’t require major expense. Change them frequently to find the ones that work the best for your business.
**POLLS**
Many people enjoy participating in opinion polls. You may select national or regional topics, or topics related to your own business. You may opt to poll your viewers about their interest in new products, services, or possible changes.

You may be surprised that your opinion poll could convince viewers to return, but it will. And your poll may yield useful information to help you shape your business.

**REGIONAL ADVERTISING**
Many small business are regional only, either because of their licensing limitations, or simply because it’s their desire. You may wish to target specific advertising to regional sites only, in order to insure that the number of viewers that request your services stay within your capabilities.

For example, [www.affordablehealthplan.com](http://www.affordablehealthplan.com) is licensed to sell health and life insurance only in the state of Georgia. Nationwide or worldwide banner ads would be a waste of their advertising investment. So they placed a banner ad on a regional network that serves the southeast only, with emphasis on Georgia. They now average 150 contacts a week from this $100 per month investment. As a result, they sell about nine health or life plans a week from this source.

Their success has been perfectly geared to their current capability. Now, they can decide if they should advertise more and expand their staff. That’s a great situation to be in and one for which every business owner wishes.

**SHARED RESOURCES**
There is currently a trend on the Internet for businesses to combine their advertising resources. There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. If you believe you don’t have the time, experience, or desire to market your own Web site, then shared resources may be an option to consider.

However, shared resources Web sites don’t divide the business as well as they divide the advertising budget. You will end up taking your chances that your particular products or services will sell as well as the other participant.

This is much the same approach as a shopping mall. And of course, the shared resource managers must make some money for themselves. That’s business. I prefer that businesses learn to market their Web site on their own. When they grow to become major businesses, this type of shared resource becomes a better option. Right now, these shared resource locations
focus primarily on retail, real estate and auto sales, but the concept is growing so it’s worth watching.

**RETAIL SHARED RESOURCES**

If you sell retail products, you’re among the fastest growing group of businesses on the Internet. But, small businesses that sell one product, or target a particular niche of shoppers, are a small dot in the Internet world. You must work hard to attract viewers with such major competitive numbers.

There are some sites that now have many small business linked together to form a kind of online shopping mall. I can give you two such examples, but since this type of site is growing, we suggest you search a bit to locate others.

I mentioned Imall at [www.imall.com](http://www.imall.com) previously in the banner ad section, but their real emphasis is on a vast mall of retail merchants who have linked on this site, for a fee, to sell their products. The Imall approach is excellent for small businesses that sell retail products, because part of your monthly fee for leasing space in their electronic mall goes toward advertising. As electronic commerce grows, electronic shopping malls and similar sites, will provide an excellent source for shoppers and retailers.

Choicemall at [www.choicemall.com](http://www.choicemall.com) has the same concept, but they give the impression that they contain primarily larger retailers. Mallpark at [www.mallpark.com](http://www.mallpark.com) is actually a search engine for retail merchants. You may submit your Web site for inclusion in their database free of charge, and they will place you in an area they refer to as “Tent City”. If you wish, you may upgrade your status for a fee.

**MESSAGE BOARDS**

These can be located on most search engines. I classify these as business chat rooms devoted to a particular topic. You can usually access the message boards from the search engine home page and then select the business topic that is closest to your area of expertise.

You will find prior histories of posted messages with questions and replies from anyone that registers onto the message board for that topic. This isn’t a surefire way to increase business, since you’re strictly forbidden to advertise yourself on most message boards.

However, you can register on the message board and announce that you’re there to answer particular questions concerning your profession. This is just another method of getting your name to a wider audience and also helps you to learn the frequently asked questions and concerns of potential customers.
If you elect to participate in message boards or similar groups, please remember that you should only participate as a resource. Any attempts at advertising in these type forums will likely result in your being prohibited from future participation, with the result that your reputation is marred.

This is exactly the type of press that you wish prevent at all costs. So, while the temptation to advertise is strong, consider yourself to be offering a service that will enhance your reputation and have an indirect effect on your bottom line.

**CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING**
These are available on every search engine and in many online publications. The rates vary greatly, depending on your target area, size of ad, and the length of time for which you commit to advertise.

If you’ve successfully advertised in your local newspaper in the past, this is probably a viable option for you to consider. However, I strongly urge you to target your ad as exactly as possible to a geographic area, or consumer group, where you will be more likely to receive a payoff from this investment.

**AFFILIATE PROGRAMS**
There are software systems that enable you to participate in affiliate programs whereby you pay other Web sites when they send visitors to your site. The software will track visits and make payments automatically. You just select Web sites that are not competitors and offer
them the opportunity to earn money by referring visitors to you. They do this by displaying a
banner ad on their site. When visitors click on this banner ad they go directly to your site.
These programs will either pay affiliates for each visitor they refer to you or pay a commission
from sales that result from a referred visitor.

**www.ClickTrade.com** is an easy to implement system that handles all the logistics of signing
up, tracking and paying affiliates that advertise your site’s products and services. There are
many other systems available, but they all enable you to perform the same function for your
affiliates.

**E-CARDS FROM YOUR SITE**
This is a free promotion tool that allows anyone to send a greetings postcard from your site to
anyone on the Internet, via email. You can create electronic postcards that are fun and contain
a serious marketing message that people will send to their friends and associates.

I have a restaurant client who had us create e-cards that were redeemable for a free cup of
coffee. The recipient just printed out the card and took it to the restaurant to claim their
coffee. The client advertised this offer on his Web site with the slogan, “Send a friend a
virtual cup of E-coffee.” People enjoyed receiving these cards. They cost little to produce
and they encouraged customers to come in and do business with the restaurant.

**MP3 AUDIO**
MP3 is an audio format that allows digitized CD quality audio to be distributed via the
Internet. Due to its quality and small file size, the possibilities MP3 offers are growing every
day with new applications for all types of businesses. You can learn everything you would ever want to know about this technology at www.mp3.com.

Applications that would be beneficial to small business owners are downloadable audio programs that educate, train or explain your products or services. These programs can play from your Web site via streaming media technologies such as the Real Player from www.real.com or the Windows Media from Microsoft at www.microsoft.com/windowsmedia.

There is even a free Web site that enables you to broadcast as an, automated, Internet radio station using MP3 content. It is called www.live365.com. If you wish to broadcast audio to hundreds of listeners simultaneously on the Internet, you can do it for free from this Web site. Although it’s preferable to link programming material to your business, your radio show doesn’t have to be based on business expertise. For example, you could run a show on gardening or automotive repair.

Who knows where this capability could lead? Check it out.
Throughout this book, I have put the emphasis on attracting and capturing viewers. Unfortunately, viewers will sign off and watch another channel unless you give them a powerful reason for coming back. So now it’s time to look at what you need to do to maintain your site and retain your viewers.

If they enjoyed visiting your site, learned from it, were entertained by it, or were pleased with your products or services, first-time viewers may have book-marked your site with the intention of returning. But Web customers can be fickle. If they do return, only to find that nothing has changed, they will quickly depart. And they’ll probably never come back.

This fact of life makes Web site maintenance just as important as initial construction and marketing. Lack of proper maintenance is the reason why many sites deteriorate and begin to counteract their own marketing efforts. Avoid this pitfall by developing a maintenance strategy as part of your marketing plan.

Maintenance need not be expensive, but it will demand your commitment and time as the business owner. As I mentioned earlier, either you or your Webmaster can carry out site updates. The depth of your technological skills, budget, work priorities, and creativity, should guide your decision.

You can teach yourself with manuals and software, but I suggest you ask your Webmaster for instruction. Your Webmaster will know you and your site and can train accordingly. Most offer this service as part of their maintenance program, or at an additional charge. Here are some suggestions and guidelines to include in your site maintenance program.

**FRESHEN YOUR SITE REGULARLY. PLACE A LAST UPDATE SIGN ON THE HOME PAGE**
You wouldn’t read yesterday’s newspapers over and over again. Likewise, many viewers switch the channel when a home page reads: “Last Update 2/29/98”. They won’t waste their
time watching reruns they’ve already seen. You don’t need to completely redesign your site. Any addition or modification tells your viewers you spend time monitoring your site and adds to your appearance of professionalism.

**REFER TO TIME DATED ITEMS**
If you have a monthly special, highlight the month’s name and update accordingly. Your June special should be posted promptly on the first of June, and replaced accordingly on July 1. Sounds obvious, but it’s easy to forget.

**SEASONAL GREETINGS**
These are inviting to your viewers and offer another sign of professionalism. There are many ways to update your page with a simple or animated seasonal greeting. Once you learn how to do this, you can greet your viewers with any seasonal or holiday message. The major holidays of Xmas and Easter are always traditional, but you can celebrate as many holidays as you wish. This can be accomplished at little or no cost.

**ANIMATION**
Movement attracts the curious and is easy to install. Often, animations can be obtained free. Access www.gifworks.com for an example of a site that offers free animation, as well as text enhancements.

**SPECIALS**
Special offers should be changed frequently. You should also change the kind of special you offer, dependent upon the nature of your business. If you routinely offer a monthly special, try switching to a seasonal offering, or to discounts for customers who bring in new business through referrals, or other innovative ideas. Don’t allow your site to become boring and predictable.

**BUSINESS PROFILES**
These should cite new business activity. Use this section to advise your viewers of business changes. Even small changes like welcoming new employees can add flair to your business profile page.

**“THANK YOU FOR YOUR BUSINESS”**
A personal thank you is always appreciated and can be included on your site. You may wish to consider if this type of personalized thank you alerts your competition, but usually they already know if you have taken a customer from them. A simple thank you on your Web site will make some customers feel special enough never to leave. It will help to create that bond of loyalty that is so rare in today’s business world.
**COMING ATTRACTIONS**

These provide a great teaser for your next special, new product, or another page on your site. Coming attractions are simple to create and, once created, they can be used again and again with only minor modifications. This has been a relatively short chapter, because effective maintenance isn’t that difficult to achieve. Get friends and associates to visit your site regularly and give you an objective view on how you can continue to freshen it. And remember the golden rule: MAINTAIN TO RETAIN.
E-commerce is an expression that is currently in vogue. It simply means selling products and services via your Web site and making money as a result of your Internet presence. Building an e-store has more options than I can cover in this book, so I will cover one scenario. These are the things an E-store must do:

- Display products or services in a professional manner. That means having a Web site that is clean, easy-to-navigate; has fast-loading pages; allows visitors or viewers to make a purchasing decision based on the information presented.

- Track the purchases of e-commerce customers while they are shopping, through the use of shopping cart software. The software stores transaction information for you to access. It will then automatically contact all concerned parties through e-mail, i.e. you, the merchant, the fulfillment house, and the customer, to confirm a successful e-purchase.

- Authorize and process sales revenue electronically and securely, so the merchant can be paid.

It doesn’t matter if you’re Amazon.com or Joe’s Discount Widgets, your e-store must perform those basic functions or you won’t be in business on the Web for long. Anything less than that will create a stumbling block between you and potential customers. And stumbling blocks kill sales.

Marketing will get viewers to your store. Content and creativity will have them return and refer you store to others. An effective e-commerce solution will enable them to follow their buying impulse and complete the sale.

So how do you create a professional e-commerce store? Here’s how:
SELL PRODUCTS THAT WORK ON THE WEB

Don’t sell something customers can already find on the Web at well-established stores. For example, it’s no good selling books that people can find easily on Amazon.com. On the other hand, you could sell a book that you wrote which isn’t available anywhere in the world except from you. Unique, one-of-a-kind products or services have much more e-commerce potential.

One of my clients had more than 1000 Malaysian Recipes and knew how to get the rare spices to cook the dishes. He built a Web site that gave away the free recipes and then had an online catalog from which he offered the spices for sale.

USE SHOPPING CART SOFTWARE

These are Web software programs that allow a visitor to your Web site to click on the items they wish to order and continue shopping until they are ready to check out and pay. This type of software tracks what viewers order while they are shopping at your Web page, calculates the total like a cash register, and records the shipping information. Then, the software must contact, via email or database, the merchant, or other responsible party, who will ship the items purchased.

If the product or service you’re selling is digital, such as e-books, audiobooks, or software, then the shipment process may not be necessary. Customers can download such products direct from your site to their computer hard drive. In these cases, the credit card transaction has to be confirmed before the download can commence.
For shopping cart software I use Cart Manager on my site. You can find them at www.cartmanager.net.

I chose Cart Manager because it’s flexible, easy to use, and a good, solid product. However, there are other popular software packages such as Shopcart, PDG, Merchantec, and Shopzone. You would probably need to discuss these with a Web design professional to make the right choice for your needs.

**CREDIT CARD AUTHORIZING AND A MERCHANT ACCOUNT**

This is the cash register on your e-commerce site. It’s how you collect your money. If you don’t take credit cards online, you will struggle to build a worthwhile business. This is the only part that needs to done securely and every authorizing process I’m aware of uses SSL 32 bit encryption. This is actually safer than using your credit card in the real world.

Many times, I’ve heard people say that they won’t put their credit card details out on the Internet. Why not? Is it because they fear that someone will hack into the encryption, discover their credit card number and purchase something with it? If so, they should realize that the chances of fraud are even greater in the non-digital world.

The servers at the restaurant at which they dined recently could have written down their card information, then made a catalog phone call to purchase anything they wanted, posing as the cardholder.

An online authorizing system has to be able to match all the information, or it won’t authorize. Even if something did happen, you can dispute the charge. If the transaction proves to be fraudulent, you will only be liable for a relatively small proportion of it.

Shopping on the Internet is safe and highly secure. That is what secure credit card authorizing is all about. The system collects the credit card or personal check information, confirms that it has been accepted, and starts the process that puts the money into your virtual cash register (you business checking account). When you have a credit card merchant account, the deposits are made automatically. The next question is, how to do I get this all set up?

**E-COMMERCE SOLUTION COMPANIES**

There are companies knowing that is a need to make all of this simple for people wanting to have online sales. That is why they organize all that is needed into a package of services. Soundpages.com is an authorized agent for all of the services and software needed to do online small business e-commerce.
Here is an outline of what **Soundpages** provides to start an online store: This is not the only option, but what we recommend as a state of the art small business e-store.

1. **Online real time credit card authorizing and virtual terminal**
   - Authorize.net authorizing software - Web based credit card terminal.
   - $299 set up fee. (One time fee).
   - $15 monthly gateway fee billed to merchant’s checking account.
   - .07 cents per transactions fee billed to merchant’s checking account.

2. **Shopping Cart Software**
   - Cart Manager $399 setup plus $100 per year Shopping Cart software hosted on their servers (unlimited products and transactions, free software updates. Can cancel anytime)

3. **Credit Card Processing from First Merchants Bankcard Services**
   - $250 application fee.
   - $10 per month statement fee billed to merchant checking account.
   - Visa/Mastercard discount charge 2.49% of the charge plus $0.30 per transaction (deducted from charges).
   - AMEX discount fee is 3.25% - 3.50% of the charge plus $0.30 per transaction (deducted from charges).
   - Discover discount fee is 2% + of the charge plus $0.00- $0.30 per transaction charge (deducted from charges).

Details of how to contact me for further information appear on page 55.
If you remember nothing else from this book, please remember this:

“SUCCESSFUL INTERNET ENTREPRENEURS PURSUE NEW METHODS TO MARKET THEIR SITES WITH AGGRESSIVE FERVOR”
I have suggested many activities to increase the success of your business Web site. You may feel a bit overwhelmed with the amount of time and work that is required to build your business through the Internet, but don’t be discouraged. Marketing on the Internet can be the only kind that is actually fun to experience.

That is the feeling I have tried to present in this book. I have also tried to be as thorough and accurate as possible in my recommendations and suggestions, but the Internet is changing so rapidly that it’s difficult to remain wholly up-to-date for long. New marketing concepts are introduced every day, which result in more revenue opportunities for businesses of all sizes.

Successful Internet entrepreneurs pursue new methods to market their sites with aggressive fervor. I believe that your creativity and commitment is the key to making Net profits. However, you don’t necessarily need an equal balance of these two characteristics. If you aren’t strong in creativity, increased commitment can compensate, especially if someone else can be creative for you.

I want you to succeed and welcome you to share your experiences with me. Give me your input at my Web site or e-mail us. I may be able to include your comments in the next edition of this book and include a reference to your site.

Above all, I hope you enjoy the experience of marketing your business on the Internet. I wish you much success.
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mike Stewart is a Web graphic and sound designer who has assisted businesses of all sizes with their site development and marketing. His background includes many years as a producer and artist in the music industry, where his talents expanded first into sound design for businesses before he became an Internet marketing consultant.

Mike approaches the Internet as a broadcast medium and not as a mere network of computers. His many Web projects include the production of a new music CD, and the design of an interactive training Web site for a large corporation with hundreds of retail locations. He also conducts seminars for small businesses to improve their marketing on the Internet.

Mike and his wife, Susan, live in the Atlanta area with their three children. They are actively searching for new Internet marketing ideas for businesses like yours.

Marty Aftewicz is a full time mortgage broker who manages his own small business, and maintains a successful Web site for his company. Prior to starting out on his own, he had more than 25 years of marketing and sales management experience with Fortune 500 companies. He credits much of his recent success to the marketing ideas described in this book.

Originally from Erie, PA, Marty is married and has made the Atlanta suburbs his home since 1985.

You can reach Mike Stewart at:

SOUNDPAGES.COM
Streaming Audio and Video production for the Internet. Your one stop for Internet Web hosting, design and audio/video production solutions!
Web Design Portfolio at http://soundpages.com/website/
Streaming Media Examples at http://www.soundpages.com/realaudiodemos/default.htm
Home page at http://www.soundpages.com
Email: mike@soundpages.com

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Phone: (770) 932-9567 Fax and E-Voice Mail: (208) 293-3018
Cell and Cellular Voice Mail: (770) 826-3662 x
Mike Stewart wrote this book because he saw a lack of understanding in the marketplace of how to use a Web site to achieve sound business goals. Most businesses, whether large or small, understand the need to have a presence on the Web, but few know how to promote their sites effectively once they have created them.

Mike has built a successful consulting and Web design business showing customers and prospects nontechnical concepts that make the Web work for their business or organization. He has developed a glossary that works for prospects with little or no knowledge of computers or the Internet.

In this hugely informative and entertaining book, he shares ideas that have proven effective for his customers. He does it in typical no nonsense style.

Mike’s success is based on a simple but dramatically effective analogy: Treat the Internet as if it is broadcast television.

Regard your URL domain name as a TV channel. See your computer monitor as a TV set. Treat your Web site as a TV Station and potential customers as your viewing audience. The hits you get are people tuning in and your content is programming material that shows what’s on right now.

In *Sound Ideas for Business Web Sites*, Mike shows how to apply this analogy so that the investment you make in your Web site gives you a handsome return. This book is not just a must for anyone contemplating the creation of a Web site. It will also benefit businesses that already have a site and want to get even more out of it.