Doing Business on the Internet

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When the Internet was started, businesses had almost nothing to do with it. In fact, businesses were originally prohibited from advertising on it in any form. Gradually, during the ’80s, large high tech companies adopted the Internet as a way to communicate and transfer data between far-flung sites.

Now, with the evolution of the World Wide Web as a consumer-driven phenomenon, businesses of all sizes are using the Internet as a way to communicate directly with consumers.

This informal talk will:

- provide a very brief overview of the way businesses used the Internet in the past.
- discuss how businesses use the Internet today.
- review some of the ethical issues of doing business on the Internet.
- cover the basics of starting a small Internet-related business.
- describe some excellent business-related sites.

I. The Way the Future Was: Businesses on the Internet During the ’80s and Early ´90s

ARPANET - The Department of Defense funds a project to build a robust network.

Data was shipped around. Code. E-mail. Net discussions emerged. Check Brad Templeton’s history of the net at http://www.clari.net/index.html

Eventually, more and more colleges link up. Businesses, especially high tech businesses, link up. Some people prefer E-mail to FAX.

There have been many technical changes to the Internet over the years. But there other changes that have had a huge impact on the way the Internet works:

- proliferation of home PCs
- proliferation of national commercial networks (CompuServe, AmericaOnline) and local Internet Service Providers
- improved ease of use
- the World Wide Web

II. How Businesses Use the Internet Today

Marketing and Advertising

Businesses can tailor Web sites to specific audiences. Each site may only get a few hundred or few thousand visitors a day, but if people like what they see, they'll stop back to see what's been added. AND maybe they'll spend some money!

Distribution

Taking orders from the Internet can provide a useful additional distribution channel.

Sharing Intra-Corporate Information

Soliciting Customer Feedback

III. Beyond Spam: Some of the Ethical Issues of Doing Business on the Internet

Internet users have a huge range of reaction to online advertising, from "anathema" to "it's an unregulated frontier and we can do whatever we want." Advertisers would be wise to take this range of reaction to heart.

Focus your marketing on your Web site.
Use newsgroup postings VERY judiciously.
Don't send out junk E-mail.
Don't overwhelm low-traffic mailing lists with
information about your company.

IV. Creating Your Own Virtual Company 101

The following types of skills seem to be in high demand:
- o Perl & C programming (and search engine-creating)
- o Computerized graphic design

Once you decide what you want to try, register your new business with the Internet indexing sites (Yahoo (http://www.yahoo.com) and Lycos (http://www.lycos.com)). Avoid spam and junk E-mail. Create a Web site that shows the variety of things you can do.

V. Excellent Business-Related Sites

What's a good commercial site?
- o A site that goes beyond screaming "BUY MY PRODUCT!"
- o A site that balances good graphic design and useful information.
- o A site that is updated periodically and corrects mistakes.
- o A site that doesn't rely on "gee-whiz" graphics too much

Here are some examples of good commercial sites and what makes them good commercial sites:

http://mineral.galleries.com/AGI.htm   Amethyst Galleries
http://www.arion.com/mstrcook.html   MasterCook Home Page
http://www.goodyear.com   Goodyear Tire & Rubber
http://www.mcp.com/index.html   Macmillan Information SuperLibrary(tm)
http://www.info.apple.com   Apple Support & Information
http://www.novell.com/   Novell World Wide Web
http://www.sgi.com/ss.home.page.html   Silicon Graphics Silicon Surf
http://worcester.lm.com/lmann/hot/book.html   Many book companies

Online Business Resources

http://nmq.com/   Net Marquee (Small Business)
http://www.thomasregister.com/   Thomas Register
http://www.hoovers.com/   Hoovers Business Handbook Online
http://www.cbbb.org/cbbb/   Better Business Bureau