

Why the Web?

Internet viewership at the end of 1998 was calculated today at 100 million with the estimated World Wide Web audience in 2002 to be 320 million¹...The percentage of World Wide Web users making purchases on the net in 1997 was 26% with a projected increase to 40% by the end of 2002²...Internet e-commerce resulted in 2.6 billion dollars in 1996 and is expected to top 400 billion by 2002³...

We have all seen these Internet statistics on the news and have witnessed the unprecedented rise in the stock market that has been attributed to the "Internet Stocks." These numbers are very impressive and sound good but when you sit down and want to become part of the future of retail sales what does it all mean and more importantly how does one stay focused and not get caught up in all of the hype.

The Internet is evolving from a group of adults that have been raised in a world focused the ways that technology can increase the quality of life. It is this group of people that will become the main stay of e-commerce. The professionals that do not have the time to run across town to the specialty stores, or the parents that are working 8 to 5 and would like to get home to their children and some semblance of family life instead of fighting lines at the local mall. These people will sit down at their computers for 20 minutes before they go to bed and order all of the items that did not fit into their day and have them sitting on their door step 2 days later when it is convenient for them.

In the case of your business, the Internet could be the next bright feather in your cap. There are a lot of companies out there in the retail world that are running around like chickens with their heads cut off trying to get on the net and not putting a great deal of thought into how or why they are doing it. Unfortunately for a great many of these shortsighted businessmen the culmination of this process is unnecessary expense and an excessive, unfocused catalog. This is one of the greatest reasons for the toppling dot coms of late. The two schools of thought emanating from this frenzy are: Go Big and Go Small. The companies that go big are positioning themselves for the game of the millennium thinking that once on top always on top no matter what the cost. The other side of the coin is pinching pennies so tightly that features are eliminated that would make their web sites highly successful, such as point-click-buy shopping cart systems and secure credit card transactions, are looked upon as luxuries that are unnecessary because "we just want to be on the web and if they really want my product they will put the effort in to call when I'm available". It is somewhere in between these schools that ICOSA Inc. places it's trust.

What makes a successful web site? Style, simplicity and ease of use. Nothing should be complicated! If you cannot sit down, find what you want, click a button, enter your credit card number and logoff there is a strong possibility that your new found customer will surf away just as quickly as they washed in. Yes price is important but so is a company you can trust. The way in which to convey that trust is through a well-kept store front or in this case a virtual storefront. The means by which ICOSA Inc. could accomplish this task for your company are outlined below:

1. Don't go overboard at the start. ICOSA Inc. believes in a modular web site concept. Design an appealing home page and basic catalog structure with the items that have an Internet niche. This allows for the store name to build some recognition on the World Wide Web and at the same time recoup the initial startup costs. As your client base builds add the more common items that would not necessarily support a catalog by themselves but will become convenience purchases to save on a shipping charge or a trip to the local pet store. All of the ICOSA Inc. web pages are designed with this future in mind. The way in which the code is written is such that none of the original work needs to be thrown away when it is time for the next module to be added.

¹ International Data Corporation

² International Data Corporation

³ International Data Corporation

2. Shopping cart programs and secure transaction servers are a must. If it cannot be ordered at 3:00 am in Alaska there is probably some other site on which it can be. Remember simplicity and ease of ordering. If it is difficult, another retailer is just a mouse click away.
3. Keep the Home Page dynamic. "Internet Specials" and "What's New" areas are very important. . Getting a customer to a site the first time isn't always the hard part. Keeping that customer coming back again and again takes careful planning in content, pricing schedules and points of interest.
4. The expertise of the sales staff should be used as both a means of increasing traffic and promoting sales directly. A "How To" section that would explain how to do some thing the correct way could be coupled with a "Special Package" page that would allow the customer to purchase everything to complete that project with a single click of the mouse perhaps at a discounted price.
5. Auto-response e-mail should be used to keep a database of the store's Internet customers and remind them when the page changes to stop by and see what is new.

Hopefully ICOSA Inc. has been able to make it clear why we believe in the Internet and how we believe your company can be successful on the Internet. Thank you for your time in this manner and if you have any questions please feel free to e-mail us at information@icosa.com or call toll free at 877.WEB.FIRM