



The Chat Room

Travis Stirewalt, Vice President • CoatingDepot.com

5001 Trailwater Drive Nashville, TN 37015 615/611-7788
E-mail: travis@coatingdepot.com

Protecting Your Brand Online

The Internet is truly incredible. It transcends the world and transfers information at a remarkable speed. In recent years, we have seen this power utilized for countless purposes. Business-to-business (B2B) uses have become one of the most widely developed areas on the Internet. A number of Internet sites have been established in recent years to serve the B2B needs specific to the metal finishing industry.

How do you take advantage of the variety of Internet sites offering to help your business? There are many factors that must be considered to fully answer this question. In this article, I want to focus on one consideration—how to protect your brand name online.

Maintaining Your Company Identity

A brand name is an important resource to your company. A brand name may represent a reputation, quality, service, or other features you want buyers and potential buyers to recognize. We all know these famous brand phrases: "Campbell's is mmm, mmm good," "GE, we bring good things to life," and "You're in good hands with Allstate." Each of these, and countless other brands, have relied on strong market position and hard work for decades.

If you sell a generic commodity, you may not care so much about maintaining a brand name identity. That is why there are successful Internet sites where companies can buy basic commodities in bulk, such as raw chemicals and metals. The sellers on these sites do not care to promote a specific brand name, or even the name of their company. The buying in these situations is based essentially on price, terms, and availability.

This is not the case for most metal

finishing chemical and equipment suppliers. All steel cleaners may not be created equal. There are likely to be differences between plating baths that the suppliers need to convey to potential buyers. One key difference between products of different suppliers is the name of the suppliers themselves. If the name of your company represents the quality you want to convey to buyers, make sure the Internet venue in which you offer your products has a system that maintains the identity of your company and product name. Potential buyers certainly want to know from whom they are receiving a quote.

Not All Products Are Created Equal

One of the fatal flaws of many websites that have failed in the past years is the incorrect notion that all products or services can be "commoditized." Not only does this model fail to sell products for which the buyer wants to know the identity of the supplier, it can do irreparable harm to the companies who have spent years working to establish a reputation.

The venue in which your brands are sold has a significant influence on how they are perceived. Do you want your proprietary products sold in a retail mall? Online, or not, is this how you want your product perceived, with no reference to your company or product brand name?

If your company participates in a website to sell your products, and if your reputation is a potential advantage, make sure the venue promotes your company name and gives you the freedom to promote your brand. From the buyer's perspective, the identification of company and product names is critical information that they will require before making a final decision.

This is another vital reason why participation in a site that hides your identity is not appropriate. Such sites with flawed structures will simply not survive, as will those websites with structures that benefit all parties involved.

When your company is properly represented and your proprietary product brands are protected, you will be able to grow and take advantage of the sensational power of the Internet. *P&SF*