The Chat Room

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Internet Strategy

I began my career with a dot.com (as they are now called) in 1996. What a journey it has been since then. The Internet has changed dramatically over the last five years, but the majority of the principles from which the Internet was created have remained focused.

The pioneers of the Internet (not Al Gore) had a goal in mind. This goal was to make the sharing of information easier and more organized across the globe. The strategy used was to connect computers from universities throughout the world to share information in all areas of technology—from medical to industrial.

Goals Are Different
Today, because of this technology, many jobshops and suppliers have developed websites that have been created with different objectives in mind. Each company has its own idea of what it wants its website to accomplish. For some companies, the objective is to simply use the site as an expanded phone book listing or an on-line brochure to increase the number of inquiries about their products or services. Another Internet objective for some companies is to create better relationships with their customers by developing their web presence to provide a technical database (MSDS sheets/detailed product information) and complete contact information.

Whatever the objectives determined by your company for your Internet presence, the strategy is vital. The ongoing strategy to achieve these objectives should be reviewed regularly to keep up with the rapid growth of Internet technology. Here are a couple of suggestions on how to keep your Internet strategy on track.

Emphasize Teamwork
Develop an Internet team at your company. This team should consist of several key individuals who are responsible for your company's image in the marketplace. In addition to the president and/or owner, this team should consist of key individuals in the areas of sales (outside and inside if applicable), marketing, customer service (technical and financial), information systems and plant management. By developing this group, you will get accurate perspectives from all areas of your company and should be able to maintain a proper Internet strategy.

Communicate
Your Internet team should meet on a regular basis. In doing so, the company will be able to properly monitor and stay focused on your web presence. It is easy for a website to become outdated, both in technology and in the material presented on the site. This monthly or quarterly meeting will enable your website to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Nothing is worse than an out-of-date Internet site with old phone numbers and two-year-old news.

Choose Service Carefully
Choose an Internet Service Provider (ISP) carefully. Even if your company has had a website for several years, evaluate your company's ISP. Your choice of an ISP can be the difference between an effective web presence and an ongoing expense that doesn't generate the right results. Feel free to contact me if you need guidance with this choice.

Have a Good Plan
Create a strong Internet marketing plan. In this day and age, the old adage of "build it and they will come" definitely does not apply. There are specific programming techniques used in the development of websites with which your ISP should be able to help. Remember, even the best prepared website does not ensure traffic. Develop unique and inexpensive ways to market your site directly to potential customers. This can be accomplished through a number of combined marketing efforts, including direct mail pieces, trade publication advertising, e-mail marketing and telemarketing. In addition, your website can be linked from any number of industry specific sites, such as aesf.org, CoatingDepot.com, Manufinish.com, Finishing.com, SurfaceFinishing.com, and a few others. This advertising from established, finishing-specific, websites can give your site a better traffic potential.

Whatever your strategy, it is important that you follow it and continually focus on the objectives at hand. A website without a plan is not worth being on the Internet. *P&SF*