The Chat Room

Travis Stirewalt, Vice President • CoatingDepot.com
5001 Trailwater Drive • Nashville, TN 37013 • 615/641-7988
E-mail: travis@coatingdepot.com

Location, Location, Location

For many years, my grandmother and her twin sister owned a thriving fabric store in Dallas, TX. They attributed much of the store's success to hard work and an in-depth knowledge of basic and exotic fabrics, as well as their combined expertise in the art of sewing. But another factor that both of them are quick to point out was that their store had a fabulous location with lots of drive-by traffic, as well as its proximity to large neighborhoods of middle-class families who, in the 1960s, depended on the art of sewing for much of their family clothing.

When I mentioned to my grandmother over a year ago that I was starting a company, she rapidly responded with, "Travis, remember the fabric store. Location, location, location." While I was quick to point out that my company, CoatingDepot.com, was an Internet company and we would not need a location to place our business, I quickly caught myself. She was still correct. Customers still need to be able to find Internet companies, and every website needs traffic.

I have thought about this story many times over the past year, while speaking to different companies and groups about their websites' locations on the Internet. The same theory of "Location, location, location" still applies to on-line companies. Some ill-fated Internet companies follow the premise of "Build it and they will come." This theory has been proved disastrous.

There are several ways to improve the location of your website. Location of your site either refers to the actual website address—such as http://www.yourcompanyname.com—or a place on the Internet, such as directories, RFQ-based sites, search engines, advertising sites, or e-commerce sites that your company utilizes to sell or market your products and services.

Let's start by addressing your company's website address location. Let's face it, the old adage of "Keep It Simple Stupid" (or "KISS") makes perfect sense here. The way the majority of Internet users find websites is by simply typing a website address directly into a browser. We all know that the majority of websites begin with "http://www." and end in ".com" or ".net." (There are other endings such as ".org," ".edu" and a few others, but ".com" and ".net" are most commonly used for businesses.) Most Internet users simply type in "http://www." and then type in what they are looking for, followed by the ".com." Let's use the example of a company I know well. Anoplate Corporation is a large jobshop in Syracuse, NY. Let's say that one of their customers needs to find their website. Typically, the easiest thing for the customer to do is to type in the "http://www.", follow it with the name "anoplate" and end with ".com." This process would take a couple of seconds. Once completed, the customer hits "enter" on their keyboard and within a few seconds, is directed to Anoplate's website. If your company has a website address that is not easy to piece together, or leaves a customer guessing, you may want to rethink and purchase an additional website address that is easier to find.

Another way to develop a better location on the Internet is to make sure your website does not have a shared address, or forward-slash address. Many companies, wanting to save money on Internet marking, have used the services of Internet Service Providers (ISP) that allow them to share their web space. Let's create an imaginary ISP and call them http://www.websitesgalore.com. Let's say a small plating shop in Florida (we'll call them Florida Plating) decides they want to save a few hundred dollars by sharing space with http://www.websitesgalore.com and has their web site placed at http://www.websitesgalore.com/floridaplating. In all honesty, the potential for traffic from customers or potential business has just taken a major nosedive. No one would be able to guess this address the way the Anoplate customer did. I think you get the point.

With more than 60-percent of Americans now on line, it is becoming even more important to assure that your site is easy to find. In addition to the above-mentioned address example, your company should also look at other on-line marketplaces or directories that may have incredible potential to reach your target audience. Let them advertise and find traffic for you. Other on-line locations that your site needs to be listed in are the search engines. Sites such as www.yahoo.com and www.hotbot.com are a couple of examples. There are hundreds of these on the Internet. While I wouldn't recommend search engines as your sole-source of Internet marketing, it is very important to submit your website to them on a somewhat regular basis to ensure at least some type of listing.

If you have any topics you would like to see specifically covered in this column, please do not hesitate to e-mail me at travis@coatingdepot.com or call at 615/641-7988. *P&SF*