The Internet for Finishers

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The Internet is becoming a necessary tool for the finishing Industry. More finishers are learning about the benefits of being hooked onto the superhighway. From having your own web site to communications (e-mail) to shopping for supplies, the Internet is a must in today's world. Benefits and innovations will be explored that are on the horizon in making the decision an easy one to be of the Internet.

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The history of the Internet:

The Internet began back in 1969 when it was first created for the U.S. Department of Defense, when it had a concern with the question of how different governmental services would be able to communicate in the event of a nuclear war. The Rand Corporation, under research sponsored by the United States Air Force and known as Project RAND, grappled with this problem and eventually conceived of a network of computers designed to function despite the loss of a substantial part of the system. In short, each computer or node would be capable of sending, routing and receiving information by taking messages and breaking them into different parts and sending them along separate routes to their eventual destination. This concept was being funded and tested by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPANET), primarily so that researchers and scientists could communicate and transfer data. Within two years, instead of long-distance research and development, the Internet was being used for personal communications. Eventually, ARPANET gave way to what we know today as the Internet. The Internet is basically a global network of computers connected through a system of modems, satellites, and telephone wires. The Internet is in more than 150 countries being used by millions of users. Today, one-third of all households has Internet access. By 2003 that number should climb to two-thirds of all households. On any given day, between 27 million and 50 million people browse the web daily, considering back in 1993 there were only a little over 100 sites on the World Wide Web.

The Internet in general can be used for practically everything. My children use if for school projects, to check out the weather, and of course to e-mail their father. I make my travel arrangements as well as shop over the Internet. No matter what your business is, get ready to do it electronically. You may already find many of your competitors on the Internet. At this point, the question should be no longer being **if**, but **when** and **how** your business will adapt to the new challenge. The Internet puts your business in direct contact with a multitude of competitive suppliers and services, as well as millions of customers. From raw material to employee health plans, it is all instantly available over the Internet.

In connecting to the Internet, you first have to choose an ISP (Internet Service Provider). There are now approximately 3800 ISP's and that number continues to grow. It can be either local or national. If you are unsure or do not want to commit to an ISP right away, then look for one that offers a free trial. There are now even free ones available as well as offering a free computer along with a three-year commitment to a certain ISP's. The choice is clearly yours and there are many deals to choose from. The future of the Internet will bring us Virtual ISP's, that are well branded companies who will work with ISP's to offer Internet access to existing customers. The virtual ISP will use its name to promote the service, and a wholesale ISP will take care of the details as far as servers dial-up numbers, technical support, and other detail. Also, more ISP's are getting into the Web Hosting business and selling packages that are becoming appealing to less serious Webmasters. As you can see there is a lot of future for the Internet. Once you get on the Internet, then you are ready to receive and send mail (email).

Terms to know:

- Broadband - a form of data transmission in which several data streams are sent simultaneously over communications lines. Such as telephone or cable wires.

- Cable modems - a type of broadband transmission offered by cable companies that let users access the Internet over the lines that bring them cable television.

- Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) - various types of this broadband transmission, offered by telephone companies and other providers, use digital coding to squeeze information through the common copper telephone wire system.

- Domain name registration - the process of buying rights to a Web Address.

- Web hosting - a service, often provided by Internet service providers, that allows homes or businesses to have a Web site without maintaining a Web server.

E-mail

E-mail is rapidly becoming the way we do business. In years past it was simply an alternate way. Today, there are about 100 million e-mail users according to the Electronic Messaging Association. There are 270 million e-mail boxes in the United States or about 2.5 per user according to Messaging online. The average person has an e-mail account at work, one on a web mail service, such as Hotmail, or one on their ISP. Electronic communication or otherwise e-mail is different from paper based communication because of its speed and broadcasting ability. Whoever has Internet access, I am sure that e-mail is flowing in every day. E-mail can be messages from family and friends, colleagues, business clients, and of course Internet mailings or otherwise free mail. Free mail as the name indicates, is an advertiser E-mail service that you typically access using a Web browser and your existing Internet connection. Overwhelmingly web based free e-mail is very hot. In exchange of viewing a few ad messages, you get to access your e-mail

from any computer with Internet access and a Web browser. To send or receive email, you just go to that browser and enter your username and password. It is a welcome solution to the traveler and it enables people who do not own a computer to have their own e-mail accounts that they can access from a library or café. Besides the free mail, you also can receive news digests, notices about software updates and messages from mailing lists. Being able to receive faxes in your e-mail and even send faxes through a web browser. People can access their calendars and even send greeting cards on line. Web based calendars are very popular now, much more than their software counterpart. Calendars will soon be part of the wireless technology. An E-mail newsletter is another form of e-mail that you can broadcast your company news to all. On your cell phones, you can even receive e-mail. Your ordinary kitchen appliance will also soon be an outlet to send and receive e-mails as well. E-mail is here to stay, and soon approaching to be the number one means of communication for the future.

Terms to know:

- Attachment - word processing documents, spreadsheets, graphics and other files that are attached to an e-mail message.

- Hypertext markup language (HTML) - language used to create electronic documents, especially pages on the Web that contain hyperlinks, which allows users to jump from one document to another by clicking a phrase or icon.

- Post office protocol (POP) - a format for storing and retrieving E-mail messages used by mail servers and clients.

- Spam - unsolicited junk e-mail

- Web-based e-mail - e-mail accounts that can be accessed from any computer or devise that can connect to the Internet.

- Discussion lists - e-mail messages and replies sent to a group of people.

Web Page

There are millions of web pages out there on the Internet, so why should I have one as a business owner? According to Prodigy Communications, approximately one-third of all small businesses in the United States are online. Additionally, 40 percent of small businesses without web sites, about 2.1 million expect to be on the Internet within the average of the next eight months. According to a study done by the International Communications Research, small businesses polled said that their primary use of the Internet was:

- promoting new prospects

- e-commerce

- providing better customer service

- competing with other businesses

- communicating with employees

Among those polled 25 percent of companies with less than 10 employees have an Internet presence, while 50 percent exists for companies with more than 10 employees.

To put this in a better perspective:

- 800 million - Estimated total web pages on the Internet.

- 200 million - Largest index of web pages in the world.

- 38 - The number of web pages that are created every second.

- 19 - Average number of clicks between two randomly selected web pages.

- 7 - Average number per web site of links to other sites.

Having a web site on the Internet you will receive the following:

- Access to millions of potential customers worldwide.

- No matter what size of a company you are, there is a level playing field for all. You have the same opportunity to reach and influence prospects.

- 24-hour access expands your business without ever having to add extra staff.

- Full color graphics of products and services.

- Prospects can review your information at their own pace.

- Easily updated; good for time sensitive material.

- Cost effective way to advertise compared to hard copy material. And don't forget about the postage cost.

- Links from other sites creating more traffic flow to your web site.

The bottom line here is that with a small investment, you can compete with companies many times your size.

E-commerce

If you have watched this year's past Super bowl, then you probably already know something about E-commerce. Dot, dot, dot, COM, com, com. That is right: dot.com. Petsmart.com, amazon.com and e-bay.com are just what I am talking about. It is having the opportunity to stay in front of computer either at home or at work and just shop. According to International Data Corp (IDC), global Internet spending reached $111 billion in 1999 (more than doubling the $50 billion spent in 1998). And estimates put that figure as high as $1.3 trillion by the year

2003, representing over 9 percent of all U.S. sales.

Hard Facts about E-commerce:

- 1.5 billion square feet - Retail floor space being saved by e-commerce.

- 2 billion square feet - The amount of office space saved, which is the equivalent of 450 Sears Towers.

- 53 billion-kilowatt hours - Annual operations and maintenance energy savings, equal to the output of 21 power plants.

- 35 million metric tons - Amount of greenhouses gases that are not released into the atmosphere.

  E-commerce is just not for consumer shopping. It is also about using the latest technology to streamline your business practices by creating an increase in both efficiency and savings and by reducing inventories. Businesses are using e-commerce for business to business connections that make purchasing easier. With an e-commerce site, supplier sales should increase as they reach a new customer base locally, nationally, and internationally while buyers can enjoy the benefits of sitting in front of their computers and making buying decisions. Simply put, e-commerce is about promoting products and services through an on-line medium. Businesses, both large and small, are present on the Internet, making it easy to shop 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

  As I mentioned earlier, Amazon.com is really the innovator of e-commerce. In September 1997, they introduced its 1-click technology, which streamlines the online ordering process. Specifically, 1-click stores customers'

billing and shipping information and allows them to purchase items with just a click of a button instead of having to enter their shipping and billing information every time.

Online auctions, such as e-bay.com is also becoming the way of the future on how we dispose of our items. People love the thrill of bidding on that one of a kind item. Along with e-bay, there is a lot of person to person auction sites. Person to person auctions are being hosted by virtual houses that never actually own merchandise or deal with shipping or fulfillment; this is unlike merchant auctions which run on a surplus model. Online auctions simply link buyers with sellers.

E-commerce is very simple to get started in. A business can create a web page with a picture of a product on it along with a price. A customer sees it, orders that product with some form of payment and an e-commerce transaction has just commenced. The biggest fear that consumers have with e-commerce is Internet security. Most analysts, however, believe that transactions performed over the Internet are more secure than if you were to make a credit card purchase at your neighborhood store. E-commerce sites use Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption. What that does is simple. The information that you send is garbled (encrypted) in a certain way that only the recipients on the other side are able to understand. The secured server keeps the information encrypted so no one else can access the information. On the other hand, most e-mail servers are not generally secured, so you probably don't want to send any important information, like your credit card by e-mail.

While most businesses can benefit by having their own Web site, e-commerce is not for every business. E-commerce is good for businesses that are willing to promote their goods and services at a discount. The e-tailer needs to make the consumer feel that they have gained something by buying on-line instead of the traditional way. Consumers and businesses that shop on-line would first use a portal or affiliate to find a product. Portals are your search engines such as Yahoo or Excite. Affiliates are small web sites that perform niche advertising and get a commission for sending leads to e-tailers. There are probably about 1 million affiliates out on the Web.

Another variation of the e-commerce sites is the malls. Malls are just like your neighborhood malls back home, where you could go into the mall to shop for various items. This same concept holds true for the e-commerce malls. The finishing industry now has a mall on the Internet where they go to buy their goods and services. It is a one-stop shop. Just thing about it: going to a mall 24 hours a day, 7 days week, 365 days a year.

Terms to know:

- E-business - Often used interchangeable with e-commerce, e-business refers not only to buying and selling goods online, but also to use the Web to service customers and collaborate with business partners.

- E-tailing - The selling of retail goods on the Internet.

- Click and mortar - A term used for stores that retail in the physical world and the online world. An example would be Barnes and Nobel, as opposed to amazon.com, which is an Internet store only.

Summary

The Internet for the Finisher

Computer technology is here to stay. I realize that shops have existed for many years with out ever having a computer, but the times are changing. People say that they are afraid to touch a keyboard on a computer for the fear of striking the wrong key. It is very hard to crash a computer by touching the wrong key. There are many books, schools, and seminars that are geared for the first time user. And the price of hardware has dropped so much that the retailer is virtually giving away computers.

A computer in your shop will save your people time and make you more efficient, and by being hooked up on the Internet you have the future possibilities to do:

- Account Status - customers being able to go onto your web site and check the status of their orders.

- Invoicing - being able to invoice directly over the net.

- Quoting - being able to quote jobs.

- E-mail - send e-mails to your customers. Also being able to send newsletters directly to your customers. Customers being able to request further information about your company.

- Job posting - being able to post current job openings on several industry related sites.

- Discussion forums - many of the industry associations offer discussion boards on common problems and issues related to the industry.

- Trade Associations - being able to check out the AESF or NAMF web sites

for important information or future events.

- Customer support - many software companies offer support through the Internet via e-mail or online support.

- Trade Periodicals - being able to read your favorite trade journals over the Internet.

- E-commerce - being able to shop for your parts, equipment, everyday supplies, and more over the Internet.

- Goal - the ultimate goal is to eliminate paper and to improve communication.

The list is endless and so is computer technology and the Internet for Finishers.