

# Building Your Online Business

By Barb Tomlin, Online Communications & Content Specialist

## Contents

### [About the Author](#)

### [Introduction](#)

- [Why Go Online For Business](#)
- [Who is Online Today](#)
- [Why Register a Domain](#)

### [First Things First — Planning Your Web Launch](#)

- [Brainstorm With Co-Workers and Clients](#)
- [Research Your Competition](#)
- [Define Your Mission](#)
- [Establish Realistic Goals](#)
- [Learn to Communicate Online](#)
- [Assess and Train Your People](#)
- [Minimize Your Risks](#)

### [Presentation and Production](#)

- [Name Your Site](#)
- [Brand Your Presence](#)
- [Inform and Entertain](#)
- [Encourage Interaction](#)
- [Make Information Access and Storage Fast, Easy and Transportable](#)
- [Focus on Compelling Content](#)
- [Prepare Your Content For Web Publication](#)
  - [Choose Effective Page Titles](#)
  - [Add a Tag Line to Each Page](#)
  - [Offer Appropriate Language Translation Options](#)
  - [Provide Text in Easy-to Use Formats](#)
  - [Use Graphics Consistently and Sparingly](#)
- [Keep Information Fresh — Update Your Web Often](#)

### [Promoting and Maintaining Your Online Presence](#)

- [Let the World Know About Your Web](#)
- [Include Your Internet Presence in Traditional Promotional Materials](#)
- [Announce Your Web Site in Your E-Mail](#)
- [Promote Your Site on the Web](#)
  - [Use Keywords to Describe Your Site](#)
  - [Think Smart But Don't Play Tricks](#)

- [Be Careful in Using Automated Registration Tools](#)
- [Get Listed in Printed Web Directories](#)
- [Trade Links with Related or Strategically Cooperative Sites](#)
- [Answer E-Mail Right Away](#)
- [Check Out Internet Newsgroups and Web Discussion Groups](#)
- [Issue Frequent Newsworthy Press Releases](#)
- [Swap or Buy Strategic Web Advertising Space](#)
- [Include Promotion and Maintenance in Your Budget](#)
- [Avoid Bad Publicity — Prevent Unpleasant Surprises](#)
- [Evaluate Your Presence Regularly — Be Patient But Persistent](#)
  - [Check Your Internet Visibility Rankings Quarterly](#)
  - [Stay in Touch with What is Happening Online](#)
- [Get Faster, Reliable Results — Seek Professional Assistance](#)

## **Appendix**

## **Copyrights, Credits and Disclaimers**

PLEASE NOTE: WHEN YOU PRINT THIS PUBLICATION ON PAPER, EACH TOPIC LISTED IN THE CONTENTS WILL APPEAR UNDERLINED. EACH UNDERLINED TOPIC IS ACTUALLY A HYPERLINK TO THAT SECTION WITHIN THE PUBLICATION.

## **About the Author**

Barb Tomlin, a nationally-recognized pioneer in online information and communication technologies, has been helping companies and non-profit organizations benefit from their online excursions since 1986.

Since 1991 she has concentrated her efforts on the burgeoning online marketplace. As a regular contributor on the subject to the small business forums of the Prodigy Network® and others, her sage advice caught the attention of many professional writers who consulted her on their book projects. Her commentary has appeared in several books on the subjects of marketing online, doing business on the Internet, building online community, telecommuting and operating a business from home.

Today much of Barb's work revolves around the tourism and travel industries. She has gained International acclaim for New Mexico as the site developer and Webmaster for the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta®, the state's largest annual tourist draw and the world's largest ballooning event.

Barb serves as president of Westward Connections Inc., a leading online communications technologies and electronic publishing company based in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her detailed professional profile may be retrieved directly from the Westward Connections corporate Web site at <http://www.westward.com/people/barbt.htm>. She may be contacted via e-mail by writing to [barbt@westward.net](mailto:barbt@westward.net).

# Introduction

Some of this material is a derivative of work I originally published on the Prodigy Network from 1991 through 1996. The first version of this publication was produced in 1994. Because the subject matter is constantly evolving, I have chosen to continue its legacy as a virtual publication. While current versions of this white paper are distributed during my presentations, you will always find the most current version in HTML format online at <http://www.westward.com/byob/>. For those of you who prefer "meat only", you can download the latest Word version of this publication at <http://www.westward.com/byob/byob.doc>. If you are reading this as a Word document, you will notice references to the table of contents at the end of each section. The intent is to make it easier for you to navigate your way through the content should you be reading it from your computer screen versus from a paper printout. You may also note that many of the hyperlinks are highlighted in blue. If you happen to be connected to the Internet while reviewing this paper, you should be able to click on the hyperlink, causing your Web browser to open and retrieve the referenced document from the Web.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Why Go Online For Business***

When you hear "Information Superhighway", do you find yourself tuning into your mental radio station, WIIFM (What's In It For Me), only to experience static interference? Well, if you do, I've got some good news — You're not alone. The primary reason people use a product or a service is because it saves them time, money, or in some other way enhances their lives. Determining what participating in the online world can do for your business is no different. After assessing my own business situation and that of several clients, I concluded the online venue could best be used for business in:

- (1) **Making valuable business connections** I most likely wouldn't through more traditional means.
- (2) **Expanding business opportunities** into new geographic markets by having access to far more people from different areas than I could economically reach in one business day through other avenues.
- (3) **Improving productivity** from brainstorming sessions by exchanging ideas with people in similar businesses from across the country.
- (4) **Increasing awareness** of marketing trends and innovative ways to reach new markets.
- (5) **Finding information, product or service resources faster** than through other alternatives.
- (6) **Gaining a competitive edge** by being able to collect information before competitors could get to it, allowing me to take swifter actions for the customer's or client's benefit and business growth.
- (7) **Increasing work efficiency** as more and more of the substance from the communications could be stored on disk rather than paper.
- (8) **Combating emotional isolation** that comes with the territory of being a business owner and often creates a stumbling block in daily productivity.
- (9) **Enhancing customer/client relations** through more frequent contacts facilitated by online communications.
- (10) **Saving time and money** by not only having resources available that under other venues would cost significantly more, might not be available at all, and would not be promptly accessible.

What are the problems for someone starting an online business or launching a start-up company on the Internet?

- (1) Problems often arise from not conducting enough or the right kind of research before starting their endeavor.
- (2) Many do not bother with learning how to use online communication tools properly beforehand. Most common errors include e-mailing file attachments that are too large and reading mail headers incorrectly causing them to respond to the wrong addressee.
- (3) According to statistics provided by such organizations as the Small Business Administration and National Federation of Small Business Owners, 80 percent continue to start out before constructing a viable business plan or securing adequate start-up funding.
- (4) Many start with a great idea but few with vision or enough fortitude for follow-through. They come into the online world expecting to become the next Amazon.com without having done the research to determine whether their mission can withstand the odds of viability.

Following are some Web resources to guide you further in evaluating whether it is time for you to start or take your business online:

- Attitude Influences Success by Barb Tomlin  
<http://www.westward.com/library/attitude.htm>
- Funding Your Business Dream by Barb Tomlin  
<http://www.westward.com/library/money.htm>
- Funding Resources on the Web by Barb Tomin - (includes links to books, clubs, SBA and other government resources)  
<http://www.westward.com/library/cashWebs.htm>
- Business Know-How; a book, AOL online small business community and Web site by Janet Attard  
<http://www.businessknowhow.com>

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Who is Online Today***

The reason businesses go online may vary but one certainty is that they are flocking to the Internet in droves. On November 29, 1999 CyberAtlas, the Web marketer's Guide to Online Facts, reported that there were **over 27.7 million American adults online**, this number up from the 9.4 million reported in early 1997.

In a 1998 study the National Federation of Independent Business found that 75 percent of small businesses in America have computers and 40 percent are connected to the Internet or a major proprietary online service. A May 1997 survey conducted by The Emerging Technologies Research Group of FIND/SVP revealed over twenty million people in the United States were Internet users, 9.9 million whom are female. Half of all regular Web visitors and 60 percent of e-mail users were going online at least once every day. According to the Internet InfoSnapshot of Commercial Domains on January 5, 1996, there were 170,892 commercial domains registered with InterNIC<sup>1</sup>, compared to around 29,000 registered as of December 31, 1994. From December 22, 1995 through January 5, 1996, the number of new domain names increased by 8,840. In March 1997 the one-millionth domain, a .com address, was registered with InterNIC. At that time an average of 120,000 new domain names were being processed every month and the majority were commercial. In 1999 the next domain leap occurred. The number of domains registered increased from 4 million to 5 million in only three months. New registrations have continued to set monthly records since.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Why Register a Domain***

Time is running out. The best domain names are becoming scarce. Have you registered your domain? Should you register another domain to protect your corporate identity or next global marketing promotion?

Domains can be registered and used without constructing a Web site. Some companies and individuals are securing commercial domain names now in planning for a future presence on the World Wide Web while others simply want to establish their own identity for e-mail correspondence. Where do you stand?

If you're not connected to the Internet, today is a good day to begin your education. If you've already registered your domain but have waited to develop a Web site, do you realize the opportunities lost in delaying it further? It's time to start *building your online business*. Following are some of my tips to help you in establishing a lasting, successful presence on the World Wide Web.

# First Things First — Planning Your Web Launch

## ***Brainstorm with Co-Workers and Clients (or Customers)***

A lot of time, energy and dollars can be easily wasted if your staff and clients are not receptive to the idea of your business becoming another address on the Information Highway. If you are not being pressured by the presence of your competition to get online, take the time to survey your co-workers and your clients. Find out how many are online now or are planning to be soon. If they are online find out what type of access they have (direct dial or through a proprietary online services provider) and the highest modem speed at which they can access the World Wide Web. People who are online and especially those who have been online for any length of time are excited about the commercialization of the Internet and are eager to share the address they call "home" on the World Wide Web.

One of the most important brainstorming exercises to complete is selecting a couple choices for your Web site domain name (i.e., <http://www.yourcompany.com>) and your online address for mail (i.e., [yourname@yourcompany.com](mailto:yourname@yourcompany.com)). You will need this information at the time you decide to establish an online presence.

To help stimulate your brainstorming and get a fairly current picture of domain name availability, visit <http://www.Websearch.com/> and conduct searches on keywords with which your Web project or company is most often identified. Be prepared to wait a while for the results to appear as the service at Websearch.com scours multiple databases containing domain registrations from the entire world.



If you find that your domain name choice has already been taken or that you are fresh out of ideas, we recommend that you read **The Domain Name Handbook — High Stakes and Strategies in Cyberspace**. If you are online when you are reading this and don't have the book yet, you can order it from Amazon.com without leaving your chair by going to <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0879305150/westwardconnectiA/>. Packed with over 600 pages of meaty facts, it also comes with a valuable CD-ROM to add to your Internet collection.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

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<sup>1</sup>InterNIC is a joint effort of General Atomics, AT&T, and NSI that began full operation April 1, 1993. It was a five-year National Science Foundation project designed to deliver network information services to the Internet community.

## ***Research Your Competition***

In the early days, you didn't have to be concerned much about competition on the Web, but now the Web is populated by all types of businesses. The numbers are growing dramatically every day. You need to know if your competition has a Web site, whether it is an active publication and what they are publishing on their site.

Some books I recommend reading to help you in conducting your research online are:



### **Researching Online For Dummies**

by Reva Basch  
© July 1998  
ISBN: 0764503820

Amazon.Com Online Order Link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0764503820/westwardconnecti/>



### **Extreme Searcher's Guide to Web Search Engines: A Handbook for the Serious Searcher**

by Randolph Hock  
© April 1999  
ISBN: 0910965269

Amazon.Com Online Order Link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0910965269/westwardconnecti/>



### **Searching Smart on the World Wide Web: Tools and Techniques for Getting Quality Results**

by Cheryl Gould  
© January 1998  
ISBN: 1882208285

Amazon.Com Online Order Link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1882208285/westwardconnecti/>



## **Find It Online: The Complete Guide to Online Research**

by Alan M. Schlein

© April 1999

ISBN: 1889150061

Amazon.Com Online Order Link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1889150061/westwardconnectiA/>

If you do not have time to research your competition, give the assignment to a professional rather than ignoring it all together. We invite you to visit the Westward Connections Online Research Center at <http://www.westward.com/research/> for tips and resources on how you can do the research yourself or where to find professional help.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

### ***Define Your Mission***

To leave your mark on every visitor to your home page, it is extremely critical that they are clear on who you are and why you are online with them. Your online mission should convey a “what’s in it for you, the visitor” message as well as confirm your identity.

### ***Establish Realistic Goals***

More often than not, businesses decide to publish their first Web because "everyone else is doing it" but the fact is those who launch Webs without setting goals typically fall by the way. For you to maintain an effective Web presence, your entire company must embrace Internet technology. Define specific tactics to support your mission, discuss them with your people and assign responsibility for their implementation. Also be aware that the national average per page price for professional assistance in publishing your Web site is over \$100. If you don't have at least between \$1,500 and \$2,000 set aside (more for an online store) for production work on the first generation of your site, you will need to determine whether you can accomplish the task satisfactorily in-house. The more sophisticated your site becomes, the higher production costs will climb.

## ***Learn to Communicate Online***

To this day, electronic mail (e-mail) is still the number one method of communicating online. At a minimum all sales personnel and management should have an Internet access account with e-mail privileges. They should know how to use e-mail software as well as how to communicate online, and exercise a concerted effort to use this medium.

### ***Contributing Effective Messages***

In the online communications environment you can transmit messages privately or publicly. If you intend for your message to be available for the entire online community to read, you would write a note to be posted to a public message board or a few lines in one of the public CHAT areas. If you want your message to only be able to be viewed privately by the correspondents you've addressed it to, then you would send the message via electronic mail, commonly referred to as e-mail. Try to keep your messages short and to the point. Statistically, the average online reader rarely makes it beyond reading 75 words before their attention begins to fade.

### ***Pick the Right Salutation***

As far as salutations go, I've found that the name followed by a comma or semi-colon is preferred over using a colon. I've also found that most men choose to use semicolons unless they know you personally or would like to get to know you personally while most women use commas. I personally use a comma.

### ***Sign Off with Impact***

As mentioned earlier, here we tend to forego the formalities used in normal external business correspondence. The way you sign off on your messages is matter of personal preference but it also often tends to send a subliminal communication signal to readers, especially those who don't know you. In your online business correspondence, it is to your benefit to sign off with at least your name, your company name, and geographic area of your business.

### ***Develop a Casual Writing Style***

You will find that communicating online tends to be on a more personal level, even in your business communications. It is not uncommon for business executives of well-known national corporations to be at their home computers in the hours before dawn, composing their online messages while sitting in their bathrobes or less and enjoying their first cup of coffee for the day. They tend to be a lot less formal in their communication styles at that time of day. With the right e-mail addresses, you can get through to folks who otherwise have reputations for being impossible to reach.

As you begin to participate in public online discussion boards, you are likely to develop a writing style and language unique to the online environment. We tend to use cyber jargon, abbreviations and acronyms to save time. In fact, many of the brief messages are composed directly on line; therefore, we not only use shortcuts but are more forgiving of typos and spelling errors we tend not to tolerate in our offline communications.

The one area you will want to be particularly careful with your spelling is in creating subject lines for messages you enter on any of the public discussion boards. Since that is the first introduction another member may have to you and it is highly visible to all members, whether or not they choose to participate in discussions under your subject line, you will no doubt want to put your best image up front.

### ***Watch Your Keystrokes***

One of the most common errors new online communicators make is writing messages with their keyboard caps lock key depressed. In the online community, a note written in ALL CAPS is translated as a shouted message. If you should have a handicap that keeps you from switching between upper and lower case, leave the Caps Lock key off. No one gets upset because you don't capitalize the first letter and more of your messages will get read. You see, among computer users, you will find another handicap quite common -- "lazy eye". Anyone who suffers from it can tell you that trying to decipher an ALL CAP message is a challenge at best. I regularly pass by ALL CAP messages, myself. Instead, use caps sparingly to emphasize a word or short group of words. When you want to emphasize a group of words, use asterisks, quotes, or apostrophe marks at the beginning and ending.

### ***Use Online Shorthand***

There is something about seeing words on a computer screen that evokes immediate feelings from not only their writers but their readers. As a result viewers have developed a unique computer "shorthand" to quickly communicate their emotions while they are online. The usage of online shorthand has grown so popular that David Sanderson and Dale Dougherty recently wrote a book about it titled \*Smileys\* (ISBN 1-56592-041-4). I highly encourage anyone wanting to become an online shorthand expert to get the book.

Shortly after I started using public electronic discussion boards regularly in 1991, I began to maintain my own list of emoticons, acronyms and abbreviations I ran across regularly online. When chat was added, I discovered even more had been introduced. For your convenience, I've included my collection in the [Appendix](#) of this publication. In addition, I publish them online at <http://www.westward.net/archives/emoticons.htm>.

### ***Match Messages to Venues***

There are four types of business messages I've observed being posted to the public discussion boards. They are either (1) conversational, (2) promotional, (3) informational, or (4) a combination of two or all of those previously mentioned.

### **Stimulating Conversation**

***Conversational messages*** are the type you write if you need information about a specific subject or just want to talk to other business owners about your industry or general business issues. These are the messages you should purposely keep short and to the point. To stimulate conversation from the messages you post, be sure to provide a tidbit of informative insight at the beginning of your note and follow through by asking a thought-provoking question or two on the subject.

Writing conversational messages gives you a unique opportunity to play the role of an *Oprah Winfrey, Geraldo Rivera, Phil Donahue, Barbara Walters* or *Connie Chung*. By asking the *who, what, when, where, when, why* and *how* questions, you not only will help members gather valuable information and solve their problems but pick up a large devoted readership.

**A WORD OF CAUTION:** I've found that when I ask more than two questions in any one note, I'm still most likely to get no more than two answers in any one response. You'll get more and better responses if you post your queries as separate messages.

### **Sharing Information**

Content of ***informational messages*** is very much like what could be found in the research reports you once wrote for school, or an article you would contribute to a credible business publication. If your note is primarily being posted to inform others of resources or techniques, you'll want to think seriously about the content before dropping it to the board. Try to list resources you personally know something about or recommend. Otherwise, indicate that you have not verified their accuracy or content. If you don't, readers will automatically assume the resources you offer carry your sanction.

**A WORD OF CAUTION:** If you are sharing step-by-step techniques, be careful not to leave out any steps. If you do, be prepared for your readers to share their frustrations publicly when they find out. Remember, too, that most information posted on the discussion boards falls into public domain and you may not have the legal protection you think over certain information if you share it in a public note.

### **Promoting Yourself**

Promotional messages most often read like news releases, business or individual professional profiles or calling cards, but direct solicitations (advertisements) fall into this category as well. Be sure to read the e-mail discussion list or electronic bulletin

board posting guidelines before posting these types of messages. Posting solicitations in prohibited areas does more than stir up unnecessary controversy. If you intend to build any credibility for yourself with the resident online community, you will avoid this type of activity.

### **Attracting Attention**

As mentioned earlier, your subject line is one of the most important steps in entering a new note. If you want to originate a discussion thread, first check to insure your topic is not already under discussion, perhaps disguised by another subject line. You can come up with all kinds of great subject lines by browsing the article or chapter titles of business publications and headlines of newspapers. The secret to success is to pick key words related to the content of the note you are writing. People shouldn't have to read a note to be able to figure out what the subject line is about. It should be the converse. And, please don't start subject lines with unnecessary symbols (!, \$, #, etc.) or letters (such as the article "A"). For the most part, members consider using them as rude.

### **Responding to Messages**

**If You Are Seeking Information or Advice** - Before posting any responses to an existing note, ALWAYS look on the computer screen and verify the name in the FROM field of the note to which you are posting a response is the person you want to address. Often times, folks post responses to the wrong respondent causing misunderstandings or their response to be missed by the intended recipient altogether.

Start your note by introducing yourself in a general descriptive sentence. You might try something like "Hi, I run a cleaning service. I'm just getting started. I've sent out flyers to homeowners and placed an ad in the local paper. What else should I be doing right now to bring in customers?"

It's important to disclose what type of information or advice you are seeking and why. Avoid getting real specific with names, numbers and dollar amounts. You won't want to accidentally leak something to the media or competitors in your target market.

Also keep in mind that certain professionals such as attorneys and certified public accountants have subscribed to a code of ethics within their industries and have agreed to abide by the state laws governing their professions that bar them from getting too specific on some issues. When it comes to personal consultations, turn to qualified legal and accounting professionals who are not only knowledgeable of your type of business but licensed to practice in the states applicable to the matters at hand. Turn to other qualified consultants who are able to provide services to match your specific needs as well.

By all means, when the information provider has helped you, send an e-mail thank you note. If the person was exceptionally helpful, you might even go so far as sending a thank-you letter to his or her business address. One close I've seen quite often online in an information request is "thanks in advance". While everyone wants to save time, I find it disheartening when someone expects an information provider to help to him or her for free but at the cost of the provider's time. More often than not, personal thank you messages are a small price to pay in exchange for the value of the information provided.

**If You Offer Services or Products** - One of the best practices to follow in responding to a note from someone you suspect could benefit from what your business offers is to introduce yourself in one *general* descriptive sentence. Next, provide general, helpful information on the subject of discussion for at least the first 55 words. Then, you might either conclude by asking them a qualifying question or by inviting them to your Web site. In no instance should your sharing of personal promotional data represent more text than that which is purely informational.

Handling the situation the ways I've just described ends up providing other benefits. It builds online integrity and further supports your credibility. Knowing your profile and introductory conversations are posted in this online environment for the world to see also challenges you to fine tune your presentation and keep up with your competition.

## ***Assess and Train Your People***

As quickly and often as possible, assess your people for online and computer technology skills and train them on the subjects pertinent to your business. At a minimum, everyone should know how to:

- Operate the computer system which they will be using to access the Internet or other online venues
- Select an Internet access provider
- Make an Internet connection
- Conduct effective e-mail communications
- Participate in online discussion groups
- Use the AOL chat client (AIM)
- Translate online jargon
- Browse the World Wide Web for business purposes
- Exchange files with clients and coworkers across the Internet
- Safeguard your information
- Stay out of trouble

Whether you are a one-person business or the CEO of a large corporation, you would be wise to invest in some Internet skills training. Worthwhile training does not

have to be expensive. Check with your local community college or university. Many are offering a variety of Internet courses as part of their regular academic or continuing education programs. If you are fortunate enough to have a CompUSA Training Center in your area, you will find they offer all-day hands-on courses in the \$200 or less range. Once you know enough to get your Web browser open and enter a Web (URL) address, you can also get the education you need through a variety of reliable resources directly through their Web sites while you are online. Web-based training is one of the fastest growing online activities. We try to keep a current list of resources on our corporate Web at <http://www.westward.com/training.htm>.

## ***Minimize Your Risks***

While participating in online communication environments can bring great rewards much faster than communicating through traditional channels, some precautionary measures should be taken to insure your company and you do not become victims of foul play or unscrupulous legal entanglements.

### **Establish Policies and Procedures**

You as well as your business and employees can be held liable for your online actions. In some instances, you could even be held accountable for actions of visitors to your Web site. Establish policies for online communications and information gathering. Review and rate the content you publish on your Web site. In particular, be sure to get a content rating for your site because many employers restrict their employees from surfing Web sites containing objectionable material. If you are going to posting adult-rated material, be aware that you could face civil and governmental liabilities for any under age individuals who attempt to view or retrieve it from your Web (consult legal counsel before taking action).

### **Protect and Respect Privacy**

Keeping information confidential is almost impossible when transmitting it across telephone wires and airwaves. One of the first Web documents you should read is the [Top Ten Ways to Protect Your Privacy](http://www.cdt.org/privacy/guide/basic/topten.html) (<http://www.cdt.org/privacy/guide/basic/topten.html>) published by the Center for Democracy and Technology. It's especially difficult with Internet communications but you can reduce the element of risk by encrypting your e-mail and instituting privacy policies on your Web site.

Find out how employee e-mail was used as court evidence and learn about guarding your privacy by reading Valerie Potter's article, [How to Protect Your Email With Encryption](http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Howto/Encryption/index.html), at <http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Howto/Encryption/index.html>. You should be concerned about protecting the information your Web visitors provide. They have a right to their privacy, too. You can instill Web visitor confidence by:

1. Posting privacy policies prominently on your Web site. Policies should not be too vague or they will not be taken seriously and they should not be too verbose or they will go unread. If you need help in coming up with a privacy statement to publish on your Web site, try the Free Privacy Statement Wizard at <http://www.truste.org/wizard>.
2. Whenever you are asking your visitors for information, get their permission by providing opt-in and opt-out choices for further communications you would like to send them.
3. Provide secure transaction options. It is not necessary to have your own secure server certificate; a third party certificate is commonly used.

## **Make Sure the Right People Can Access Your Web**

Make sure your intended audience can get access to your Web. Some people and companies restrict Internet access to particular types of sites or content. Many computers are blocked from going to sites that aren't registered with an independent Web content rating service that indicates there is no sexual or violent content on the site. Also, some corporations and government facilities specifically block access to sites with Java and ActiveX on them to prevent certain security problems. Use caution in placing these applications on your site. You don't want to turn away customers unnecessarily.

To make sure the majority of your home page visitors will be allowed to access your site, it is best to have your Web developer register it with the two most popular rating systems, RASCI (<http://www.rsac.org>) and SafeSurf (<http://www.classify.org/safesurf>).

If you are going to be conducting sales transactions from your Web, you will should also check into the services of:

- The Better Business Bureau (<http://www.bbb.com>)
- Verisign (<http://www.verisign.com>)

### **IMPORTANT REMINDER:**

The time to consult with your attorney on these matters is BEFORE you publish your Web site.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

# Presentation and Production

## ***Name Your Site***

Your domain name is often used for ranking your Web site in Internet directories and search engine listings. Pick a name wisely. If your business name indicates what you and the first word of it begins with "A", you have a distinct advantage in securing top visibility with these information search tools. Remember, too, that when hunting for content on the Web, people tend to search by key words or specific names. Until December 1999 the InterNIC had been able to impose an arbitrary domain name registration of up to 26 characters long (including the top-level domain name, i.e., .com, .org, .net, .edu, etc.). Since then the registration limit has been expanded to 67 characters (including the top level domain name). In some instances, it can work to your advantage to have a longer domain name but in most, it will be better to concentrate on keeping a name short and memorable. If at all possible, keep the total number of characters to the right of the @ sign below 12. Make sure the choices you select will look appealing and fit nicely on your calling cards and other promotional materials. Sound out the domain names you are considering. The one you select must be easy for a broadcaster to repeat on air or someone to say over the phone so the listening audience can clearly hear and understand your message.

In addition to longer name registration capabilities under the .com, net and .org domains options, new top level domains such as .Web and .firm are expected. There may be more before all is said and done. While some businesses may find it necessary to register names under these new top level domains to protect their trademarks, resist using a new one in lieu of a .com address unless you have a substantial marketing budget. It will take a lot longer to make addresses ending in those new domains memorable. If you are hoping to attract the burgeoning Internet television consumer audience, bear in mind that the Internet television device manufacturers have programmed the browser to default searches on .com followed by .net domains. This means if a person subscribing to WebTV®, searched on the word **company**, the WebTV® browser would automatically search for company.com. If no active domain could be found, then it would search for company.net. Industry veterans such as myself predict it will take past the Year 2000 for any new top level domains to become more popular than the .com address.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Brand Your Presence***

Your identity must be easy to recognize and memorable, regardless of the size of your enterprise. A 1999 survey conducted by Cyber Dialogue<sup>2</sup> concluded that more than 40 percent (24.3 million) of the adults online have changed their attitudes toward certain brands based on what they have read online, up significantly from 1998 - <http://www.cyberdialogue.com>.

According to the survey, for online shoppers, cars are the product most likely to have brand names influenced by the Internet (21%), with 24% of online car shoppers stating that online information led them to the purchase of a different brand of vehicle than they might have otherwise chosen.

According to Cyber Dialogue, changes in brand preference were cited for airlines (20%), investments (13%) and household items (12%) as well. Manufacturer sites and comparison-shopping sites are the most commonly cited reasons a brand impression changed (70% and 69%, respectively).

In building an online presence it is not only possible to strengthen a recognized brand identity but also quite possible to quickly create a new one for a one-person shop, new product or service. To brand<sup>3</sup> your identity through your Web, make sure the headers, footers, and graphics on your pages bear a consistent theme. For example, aim at using the same accent colors and image sizes (by type) on all pages. Carry that theme through in any other relevant online or broadcast presentations as well as any printed marketing materials you produce for offline distribution.

## ***Inform and Entertain***

People do business with people. Visitors to your online locations should be focused on as people, even more personally than when you would meet them face to face. Why? One of the most appealing features of communicating and transacting business in the online world is that it can be done in the most private areas and times *at the convenience of the communicator* from anywhere there is a phone line and proper communications equipment.

Successful Webs not only inform but also entertain their readers. They must make the reader feel comfortable in taking the first steps toward contacting you. Successful Webs must include content that will help people in making better purchasing or lifestyle decisions and give them a reason for returning to visit often. (In the electronic

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<sup>2</sup> Cyber Dialogue (<http://www.cyberdialogue.com>, an Internet customer relationship management company, is internationally recognized for its periodic studies of interest to the Internet consumer and business communities. The Cyber Dialogue Web site features valuable statistical information for free as well as in-depth analyses available through fee-based sponsorships.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the importance of branding, read TechnoBrands by Chuck Pettis, a principal of Floathe Johnson Advertising Agency (<http://www.floathe.com>).

communications industry providing content in such a way is more commonly known as infotainment). Online visitors should be able to pick up on the personalities of your people when they come to your Web. This can be accomplished through photographs and illustrations in addition to carefully crafted words.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Encourage Interaction***

A static Web is one containing information that rarely changes. Often when companies first launch on the Internet, they publish content taken from existing print brochures. The only aspect of their Web that may be interactive is their hyper linked e-mail address. These instances seem to come up most often when a business is concerned about being first in its industry or geographic area to establish a Web. While some Internet wizards look down on this type of content, it is known to work well as a short-term solution. If you find yourself in this position, move quickly to create more interactive opportunities within your first three months after launching your Web site. New visitors will continue to come to your Web if you have it properly indexed with the various databases used for searching addresses on the Net but return visits will quickly dwindle if your Web does not encourage some type of interaction.

The best Webs provide opportunities for visitors to interact with you or fellow visitors. Some of the more general features to include on your Web to create interaction are:

- **Hypertext e-mail links** (e-mail window will appear for visitors to write directly to the addressee from the Web)
- **Guest books** for visitors to sign (goal should be to eventually offer an incentive for visitors to register, such as entry in a drawing)
- **Surveys** that publish results to the Web upon entry completion (Visitors are more likely to participate if they can see the results of their efforts right away.)
- **Forms** to complete (forms that make visitor want to think and respond, with an incentive for participation) that will elicit a fast response. These forms can be downloadable or served for completion on the Web. If it is necessary to use longer forms, you should choose the downloadable option as it is quite normal for long forms to time-out in server side processing and for the person completing the form to become impatient and skip completing the form all together.
- **Web discussion forums** (similar to those available on the major commercial online services and electronic bulletin board services)

If your business produces a print catalog or sells products, a more sophisticated but costly approach to creating interaction is to publish a catalog as part of your Web

and give people options to order from that catalog online. The catalog should provide ways for visitors to look up specific information from its contents and the best ones (also most expensive) provide up-to-the minute information on pricing and product availability.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Make Information Access and Storage Fast, Easy and Transportable***

In some respects you can compare building your Web to writing a book or telling a story. Depending on the nature of your business, you could also compare the first stage of building it to developing a printed brochure that tells its readers who your business is, what it does, what products and/or services are offered and concludes with a call to action.

The first page of your site serves as the door to your home on the Web. Just as they do in coming to your office or home, visitors should feel comfortable and welcome when they open your Web door. The first page is typically called the home page and labeled index.htm or index.html. Readers should be able to find their way to all other first level pages (chapters) from the index page. The total levels of information accessible to the public should never be deeper than three. The rule of thumb in structuring levels is to make sure the visitor can get the information and view it from their Web browser with all the graphics visible within two minutes from the slowest acceptable Internet connection speed. Each page of your site should take no longer than 60 seconds to load at the 14.4 modem baud rate. A modem connected at 14.4 baud usually loads 1 KB (or 1000 bytes) per second, thus text and graphics for one page should be no more than 60 KB combined. (A typical page without graphics or hypertext coded tables is 1000 bytes).

If you anticipate a hypertext document will be retrieved from the Web, printed on paper and shared with others, be sure to print it out on paper before launching it on the Web. Avoid including so much content in one HTML file that the printed document will not fit on one standard letter size sheet of paper. People often forget to wait for a second sheet to print out and other times, printers fail to print out more than one or two sheets of a file due to computer and printer random-access memory (RAM) limitations. We also recommend including URL addresses on each page as visitors may not have their browsers set up properly or their printer fails to print the URL as a header or footer due to its RAM limitations.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Focus on Compelling Content***

When determining what content to include, step into your customer's frame of mind. What does that customer ask about your business, its services or products most often? Your content should satisfy their curiosities. Most often people are seeking solutions to their problems. The content on your site should outline not only how you can help but also provide insightful information that helps to establish your credibility in helping. From your Web publication, your target audience should be able to discern who you are, what services or products you offer, and why they should do business with you.

You should be able to gather much of the information you need to present on your Web from your promotional materials, customers and co-workers. However, if you find you need more or different information to attract your target audience to your Web site, you should know that there are several resources on the World Wide Web that will allow you to republish their content, either for free or for a small fee. Three content resources I often recommend are:

1. **The Consumer Information Center**, a Web site published by the United States General Services Administration. Much of the content on this government Web site falls into the public domain and reprint permission for that which is not is often easily obtainable. The Consumer Information Center is on the Web at <http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov>.
2. The **ARA** (Article Resource Association) has gained a reputation for top quality content that gets picked up by over 16,000 publishers worldwide. They accept articles of 500 to 1500 words and offer editing services to insure your article stands a better chance of being published more often. While they are well-known to the print publishing community, in 1998 they began promoting copy through their Web site at [aracopy.com](http://www.aracopy.com). In monitoring their progress, I have noticed a significant, steady increase in online media publishers subscribing to their service since they opened their Web site at <http://www.aracopy.com>.
3. **iSyndicate** at <http://www.isyndicate.com> syndicates content for a wide variety of publishers, from large enterprises such as CNN to small businesses and independent journalists. Through its iSyndicate Express service, you can get free, dynamic, automatically-updated content for your Web site, including headline links to the latest news, financial information, the day's most compelling photographs, weather forecasts, daily horoscopes, and much more. Examples of how I use their free service can be found at <http://www.westward.com/news/> and <http://www.westward.com/romance/>.
4. **Moreover.Com** at <http://www.moreover.com> compares to iSyndicate, with the exception that you do not have to include any of their branding in your publication featuring their free Web news feeds. They gather headlines from over 1,500 Web sites and sort them into 200 interest categories.

Regardless of which resources you use, you will need to review the content for Web publication and in most cases, do some editing or rewriting to address your target audience. Why? First, you should consider that due to the nature of delivery medium itself, a computer screen, reading takes 25 percent longer. Second, industry statistics indicate that Web visitors generally do not read a Web publication like they would read a print publication. Instead, they tend to scan the pages for content relative to the subject of their search. Most often, if they sense any marketing hype or sales gimmicks they will skip over the content or leave the site.

To gain more insight on how Web visitors digest the information you print on your Web, please review the white paper, Concise, SCANNABLE, and Objective: How to Write for the Web, published in 1997, published on the Web at <http://www.useit.com/papers/Webwriting/writing.html>. Also read Applying Writing Guidelines to Web Pages, at <http://www.useit.com/papers/Webwriting/rewriting.html>, published in 1998. Both white papers were written by John Morkes and Jakob Nielsen, writers of the Sun Microsystems Web pages, as a result of exhaustive studies of their Web visitors. I also recommend reading the book, [Web Style Guide : Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites](#), by Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton. Published in March 1999, this book is the evolution of content originally published on the Web in 1997 by the authors at <http://www.info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/>. It contains over 160 pages of valuable instruction on preparing your copy for Web publication.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Prepare Your Content for Web Publication***

Once you have gathered the information, you can prepare it for Web publication in two ways. If you want to keep costs down, you should write the first draft of copy using your favorite word-processing program and ask your online consultant for assistance in editing and HTML coding (Web authoring). Or, you could take the information you have gathered and ask your consultant to write the copy, convert it to HTML for you and launch it on the World Wide Web.

## **Choose Effective Page Titles**

One of the most important points to remember in constructing a Web site is that **every HTML document must have a TITLE**. According to Tim Berners-Lee, [father of the World Wide Web](#), every title should be no more than 64 characters long. If this step is neglected, you not only make it difficult for your regular visitors to find information but also the average netizen searching the Web for specific content through popular search engines and Internet directories. If you have selected one of our packages, you will note that a basic relative title is automatically generated for each page. You may change the

content of any title but, for other than the home page, we caution to keep it short (i.e. one to three words) enough to fit on the graphic navigational buttons designed for your site. If you choose to be more descriptive, insert a second "tag line" instead.

### **Add a Tag Line to Each Web Page**

This is your opportunity to add an important descriptive summary of the content viewers will find on a particular page. While you can provide this information in the first line of the first paragraph of your content, often times more attention is aroused by highlighting it as a separate heading, immediately following the title of your page.

### **Offer Appropriate Language Translation Options**

Whether or not your target market is International in scope, if your site is available for general public viewing it will be read by an International audience. There are several language translation software companies offering limited free options on the Web in an effort to get consumers to purchase their software. Take advantage of these options by including links to their sites. Following are some translation services worth checking:

- <http://babelfish.altavista.com/>
- <http://dictionary.com/translate/>
- <http://translator.go.com/>
- <http://www.voila.com/Services/Translate/>

### **Provide Text in Easy-to-Use Formats**

To save yourself some time and money, we recommend that you use the latest version of Microsoft Word for your Web copy writing. If you do, you will have the option to include hyperlinks in your documents and you can be sure that what you want bolded or italicized will appear the same to your Web publication. You will also be able to save your document in HTML format. This will translate to less work for your Web developer and thus, lower cost for you. If you don't use MS Word, you can still save some time for everyone involved by saving your document in a rich text format (.rtf file extension).

Bear in mind that any fonts you use in your documents must also be resident on the computer of the visitor who is browsing your Web publication. Certain fonts are also more legible through Web browsers than others. The fonts most common are: Times Roman, Arial, and fixed (Courier typewriter style). Microsoft has introduced several new fonts designed specifically for the Web and made them freely available for computer users to download. To save yourself some time, check now to see if any of these fonts are already installed on your computer system. The font names are as follows:

- Andale Mono (formerly monotype.com)

- Webdings
- Trebuchet MS (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)
- Georgia (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)
- Verdana (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)
- Comic Sans MS (bold and normal)
- Arial® Black
- Impact™
- Arial® (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)
- Times New Roman (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)
- Courier™ (bold, italic, bold italic and normal)

The most popular of these font families are Verdana and Georgia. You can download these fonts from the Microsoft Web site at <http://www.microsoft.com/typography/fontpack/>. Microsoft has also created a Web embedding fonts tool (WEFT) to assist you in including other fonts in your Web publication for viewing by those who do not have the fonts installed on their systems. You can learn about and get WEFT by going to <http://www.microsoft.com/typography/Web/embedding/weft/>.

For further information regarding issues that may crop up when selecting type for Web publications, read Microsoft's **Typography on the Web** at <http://www.microsoft.com/typography/Web/default.htm>.

### ***Use Graphics Consistently and Sparingly***

Including photos or illustrations on your Web pages can attract or discourage visitors, depending not only on the subject matter but the size and format of the graphic. While graphics are used in traditional communication media primarily to attract attention, when they appear in online venues, they should be used to impart information.

If you have existing graphic files you want to incorporate in your Web pages, they need to be in .gif or .jpg format for viewing online. Photos should not be rendered in millions of colors but rather 256 colors to facilitate faster loading by Web browsers and to accommodate users who view graphics from lower resolution monitors. Line drawings and clip art appear sharper in .gif format and photos in .jpg format for online viewing.

If you need additional graphics, you may not need to run down to your software store or call in a professional photographer. You can find many resources on the Web. Just be sure before using any third party graphics that you have the right to use them in your publication. One of the best ways to find stock photography is by visiting the specialty search engine at <http://www.1stopstock.com/> and entering a keyword. You could also subscribe for free to the Time Magazine Web feature, "100 Years of the Best

Photojournalism" at <http://www.thepicturecollection.com/> and shop for historical photographs to include. Once you have made a selection, you will be able to obtain a quote for the licensing to use it in various types of publications. One source I recommend subscribing to is ArtToday at <http://www.arttoday.com>. ArtToday contains not only images but fonts, sound and video clips.

Keeping the sizes of your graphic images down, both in pixel count and kilobytes is essential not only to speed up browser page loading but also to printing the pages on paper. Be sure to test the time it takes to print your pages out offline as well as online. There are two free Web tools you can use to test your graphics, <http://www.jpegcruncher.com/> and <http://www.gifcruncher.com>. Both allow you to shave off excess weight without sacrificing a lot of quality. JPEGCruncher can automatically decode and crunch many common image types to JPEG, including GIF, JPEG, BMP, PNG, PSD, PICT, PCX, and TIFF.

Warn visitors when larger graphics are forthcoming on the page and if at all possible, prepare a smaller version (thumbnail) of the graphic to display on the page, giving visitors the option to view the larger one at their convenience.

Remember to use graphics only as a secondary communications tool. Not all visitors to your Web pages will be able or have the time to view your graphic images. Test your pages to be sure there is enough written content to grab their attention and if necessary, encourage these visitors to view an alternative all-text page of the entire content expressed in your graphic representation.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Assure Your Visitors of Their Safety and Privacy***

Unfortunately, the biggest fear of Web surfers today is that their personal information is being guarded from misuse and abuse. You can ward off a substantial portion of their fear by establishing and publishing a privacy policy for your publication. For help in determining what to include and in generating your privacy policy, check out the Free Privacy Statement Wizard at <http://www.truste.org/wizard>.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## ***Keep Information Fresh — Update Your Web Often***

To keep track of the vast number of home pages on the World Wide Web, programmers have developed software programs that conduct automated searches and updates of page locations and contents. You should check your Web pages for expired hyperlinks and other stale information at least twice a month. Even if you are

only opening an existing file and resaving it, taking these steps will insure your home page stays in the databases of the more popular Internet search engines.

While most browsers on the market since April 1995 have a way of indicating the latest archive date of the Web page being viewed, it is advisable to enter the date of the latest revision on the home page, itself. It is better to hide your revision dates within the HTML code comments and publish the current date publicly on your Web. This can be achieved easily with a small amount of JavaScript programming and one additional line of code in your HTML documents. Ask your Web developer about this option.

# Promoting and Maintaining Your Online Presence

## ***Let The World Know About Your Web***

Publishing a Web does not insure its success. After you have set your site live, you need to let the world know where you can be found online. **Be prepared to invest at least 40 hours of your time in announcing your initial launch or to pay a professional to assist you in your efforts.**

Announce your site not only through traditional promotional venues but by registering your Web site address with as many of the free popular online indices that will allow its publication. The way you submit information to these indices will have an impact on how your site is categorized and ranked within a category. It could mean the difference between seeing your address often or not seeing it all.

Promotion plays such an important role in the development and success of your Web site that we have dedicated an entire section of the Westward Connections Web site to the subject. Please visit our special promotion section on the Web at <http://www.westward.com/promoteit/> for in-depth coverage. To give you a jump start on your Web promotion, I've summarized some of the more critical points in this publication:

- [Include Your Internet Presence in Traditional Promotional Materials](#)
- [Announce Your Web Site in Your E-Mail](#)
- [Promote Your Site on the Web](#)
  - [Use Keywords to Describe Your Site](#)
  - [Think Smart But Don't Play Tricks](#)
  - [Be Careful in Using Automated Registration Tools](#)
- [Get Listed in Printed Web Directories](#)
- [Be Patient But Persistent](#)
- [Trade Links with Related or Strategically Cooperative Sites](#)
- [Answer E-Mail Right Away](#)
- [Check Out Internet Newsgroups and Web Discussion Groups](#)
- [Issue Frequent Newsworthy Press Releases](#)
- [Swap or Buy Strategic Web Advertising Space](#)
- [Include Promotion and Maintenance in Your Budget](#)
- [Avoid Bad Publicity — Prevent Unpleasant Surprises](#)
- [Evaluate Your Presence Regularly — Be Patient But Persistent](#)
  - [Check Your Search Engine Rankings Quarterly](#)
  - [Stay in Touch with What is Happening Online](#)
- [Get Faster, Reliable Results — Seek Professional Assistance](#)

## ***Include Your Internet Presence in Traditional Promotional Materials***

As soon as your domain name has been approved or you have established a Web site address within someone else's domain, add the information to your traditional promotional materials, including but not limited to:

- Facsimile cover sheets or page footers
- Stationery
- Business cards
- Brochures
- Purchase orders
- Invoices and billing inserts
- Newspaper, magazine, coupon advertisements
- Specialty advertising objects such as company shirts, pens, caps, license plate frames, water bottles and coffee mugs

It is amazing how many companies spend a lot of money on producing a Web site and yet do not put the URL and any email addresses on the promotional materials they already use with success. In most instances adding their Internet presence information would have cost little more than a few minutes time.

## ***Announce Your Web Site in Your E-Mail Messages***

All external e-mail should include a signature block with the company's Web site and the writer's email address as well as standard contact information. The trick behind successful signature blocks is keeping them short enough to be interesting and easy for the reader to capture for their contact management program. Most importantly, the signature block must not outweigh your message. Following is an example of one of my signature blocks:

```
Barb T., New Mexico USA - (barbt@westward.net)
President, Westward Connections Inc
Online Technology Specialists Since 1986
Consulting - Web Development - Hosting Services
Orders: 800.260.3094 - Admin: 505.292.3094
```

Each line of your signature block should be limited to the equivalent of 60 mono spaced characters. The best way to test your line length is to set your signature block in 10 point Courier type. You should include a tag line in your signature block. A tag line is a statement people would relate to when identifying you. For instance, the tag line in my signature block example is "Online Technology Specialists Since 1986". Your tag line could be a compelling offer or favorite quotation. You will find that implementing a tag line strategy that includes frequent changes attracts more attention but also requires much more maintenance.

## ***Promote Your Site on the Web***

The easiest and fastest way to promote your site on the Web is getting it listed in the popular search engines and Web directories. Most companies complaining about not getting results from their site have done little or nothing to promote it. Publishing a site without promoting it is equivalent to opening a business without listing it in the phone book — the only way prospects will find you is if you tell them. You won't be open to the world for business because they would have a clue your business exists. Just as people look in the phone book to find businesses that have what they need, they use online search tools to locate sites that offer the information they are seeking. Most often the search tools they use are the popular search engines such as AltaVista and Web directories such as Yahoo! and InfoSeek.

Make sure your site is in a relatively finished state before promoting it the first time. If the search engine and directory services publishers suspect your Web is still under construction, they may choose to exclude it from their listings all together. Certainly, these publishers do not have time to visit every site and personally examine each page. All you need to do to keep them at bay so to speak is make sure the content you do include on each page is complete within itself. Here are a few tips to insuring your publication will be found in search engine or Web directory search results:

- [Use Keywords to Describe Your Site](#)
- [Think Smart by Don't Play Tricks](#)
- [Be Careful in Using Automated Registration Tools](#)

## **Use Keywords to Describe Your Site**

Your site will not be ready for promotion until you have included strategic descriptive wording in your Web pages. Commonly known as keywords and the site description, this strategic wording should include the words and descriptions your customers and prospects would use to locate you in your local telephone directory or an industry specific or product directory. Browse the keyword rankings at SearchTerms.Com at <http://www.searchterms.com/> to see if any of the top 20 keywords listed there fit into the context of your publication. If so, be sure to include relative keywords in your collection.

Company decision-makers should be involved in selecting and approving the keywords and description. Do not leave this task to your Web developer or site promotion specialist. Instead, help them help you. They might know the commonly accepted principles but nobody knows your business better than you do. In particular, someone who knows your industry very well should be responsible for selecting the proper placement for your site in Yahoo's hierarchical directory.

You will need to have your Web developer include your keywords and site description as meta tags within your home page or other key pages containing information you think your audience will most likely be seeking. Using meta tags typically helps your site come up earlier and more often in a search engine or directory.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## Think Smart But Don't Play Tricks

In browsing your phone directory you may have noticed a lot of business listings beginning with the letter "A". Obviously, they are at the top of the list within an alphabetical category. If your company name doesn't begin with "A", you can legitimately title your Web site with keywords to raise your site's ranking. But don't try to trick the search engine and directory service providers by starting your site title with A followed by a space or AAA. Most of these services have routines in their programs to flag such entries and if they suspect you are trying to trick them, they will boycott your listing all together.

There is no standard listing policy among search engine and directory services providers. However, most of them use search mechanisms that rank by relevancy. In short, the more times keywords pertain to content on the pages of your site without being redundant, the higher the relevancy ranking with these search tools.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## Be Careful in Using Automated Registration Tools

No doubt shortly after your domain is registered or your Web site is live, you will begin to receive e-mail solicitations to automatically register your Web site. Every Web site should register with the seven largest and best-known Web search engines and directories\* (these are what direct most Web users to sites), but the other directories with which it is best to register vary based on the focus and mission of your site. A promotional tool that registers a site in 100 or more places may well miss many of the best places to connect your site with the audience you are trying to reach. The time, effort, and money required to do registrations which have no chance of ever bringing any useful traffic to a particular site, can be better spent finding specific directories aimed at the particular subject matter your site is about and arranging link trades with related sites.

In many instances it might be useful to register more than just your home page address. Important ancillary pages may be listed with different descriptions and thus multiply the chance of your site address coming up early when requests are made for information your site offers.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## Get Listed in Printed Web Directories

Printed Web directories (some of which come out quarterly and can be found in magazine racks) can be useful places to register your Web address. At a minimum, I recommend paying for a bold listing in **WebBound Magazine**. While this publication simply lists links, it is the top selling publication of its kind and is distributed in major computer and bookstore retail chains as well as Wal-Mart stores throughout America.

Another popular American source to get listed in print is [Web Guide Magazine](#). To be included, your site must appear in the Web Site Reviews feature, or you must purchase ad space. Editors evaluate and rank sites based on their content, design, navigability, and hyperlinks to external Web pages.

Remember to check with any associations or industry groups you have joined for opportunities to list your Web site address in their directories. Many associations and industry groups also publish magazines, newsletters or other periodicals where your site listing would be welcomed.

Always be on the look out for listing opportunities. New magazines, newspapers, search engines, and categorized Internet directories are launched often.

### ***Trade Links with Related or Strategically Cooperative Sites***

For many sites the best way to attract traffic is through reciprocal links with other related sites. Doing this productively, however, takes some serious and time-consuming research. This research could be done by in house, but if your people are not thoroughly familiar with the Web, their efforts are often wasted. Most successful sites turn this job over to Web promotion specialists. However, this does not mean your people are to be left out. If anyone in your company knows of other related Web sites, especially non-competitive sites with whom they have relationships, they should certainly arrange link trades if possible, or pass on relevant information on the related company and its site to whoever is doing the promotion. One of the most important points to remember in arranging link trades, is to monitor them after the trade to insure they were initially published and are still active.

### ***Answer E-Mail Quickly***

Your people must commit to answering the e-mail directed to the site without delay. Internet culture promotes immediate feedback and users are notoriously impatient. A responsive company keeps people coming back to its site and often establishes open lines of continual communication, cultivating relationships that result in increased revenue.

### ***Check Out Internet Newsgroups and Web Discussion Groups***

Once your people have embraced the online communications environment, encourage them to join newsgroups and e-mail discussion groups (like listservs and majordomos) on subjects related to their roles with your company. In most instances

they will not only have an opportunity to gain exposure for your company but also to learn more about what they do or should be doing to enhance their job performance. Although most of the newsgroups discourage outright promotional messages, they almost always allow URLs in signature lines and allow their members to mention a company and the company's site. It is easy to get away with talking about your Web site if it contains useful information.

Joining such discussion groups also allows company personnel to keep up with the concerns of potential or actual customers who use or are interested in products or services your company provides.

### **Issue Frequent Newsworthy Press Releases**

Another important aspect of promoting many sites is to send press releases to publications which cover the field the site relates to, the particular region of the country the company is part of, or, sometimes, those which cover the Web itself. The editorial staff of any publication that might include an article connected to what your company does or to information provided on the site should be informed about your presence on the Web. The editors will look for related information in their files before they write articles. Many businesses have lost money when their competitors were mentioned in publications and they weren't.

Since most companies know the print publications in their fields, information on those publications should be passed on to whoever is promoting the site, or, alternatively, the company can, of course, put out its own press releases. Any place in which the company ever buys advertising should definitely be sent press releases on the site. And don't forget to add the URL to your release!

There are also a growing number of digital publications to which press releases should be sent. Some of these are connected to print or other media and some of them are independent. Check with your Web promotion specialist for the latest developments in this category or visit our new online news release distribution service, the ABQ News Bureau, at <http://www.abqnews.com>.

### ***Swap or Buy Strategic Web Advertising Space***

Most of the promotional strategies described previously cost only the time of the Web promotional expert. You will also have opportunities to purchase or trade advertising space on the Internet. Usually in the form of banner ads, this type of space costs anywhere from free to \$35 per thousand impressions. While the per thousand rate seems inexpensive when compared to traditional advertising, they can be fairly

expensive since the volume on some of the most popular sites are in the hundreds of thousands if not millions per day.

Alternatively, a company may offer and sponsor its own content and eventually sell banner ads on its site. To do this right requires the investment of time and money, and one should not expect this strategy to produce an "overnight success."

Some directories also sell link listings or preferred positions. The price ranges from nominal to thousands of dollars depending on where you want to be listed. One particular positioning option worth paying for is RealNames. RealNames addresses are recognized by such search services as Alta Vista, LookSmart, Inktomi and the GO Network. You purchase rights to identifying your company name or brand name as the first listing appearing in the search results. Each subscription costs \$100 per name per year, which represents a management fee for checking and approving RealNames subscriptions, and maintaining the quality of the service and the integrity of the namespace. Go to <https://customer.realnames.com/GetYourRealNames/Subscribe/FirstRealName.asp> to become a RealNames subscriber. (Visa, MasterCard, AmericanExpress, Diner's Club are accepted).

Another way to advertise your site is the Internet Link Exchange: a free service where your banner is shown on other sites in exchange for a banner on your site. This tends to work best for sites that have a potentially broad audience since you have little control of where your banner shows up. And, although, no "adult content" or broadly objectionable sites are allowed, site owners have little or no control over what shows up in banners displayed on their site. An inappropriate banner could drive visitors away from your site for good. Decide whether or not you might include banners as part of your marketing program before you build your site. That way, you can establish standard sizing and allow space for them in your site design. Whether or not you ever decide to participate in a banner exchange program, you can use the space set aside to promote content within your own site.

## ***Include Promotion and Maintenance in Your Budget***

The success of your site will depend largely on your promotional efforts. Aside from integrating your site's presence into your traditional promotional campaigns, you should budget a minimum of \$500 for labor to enter your Web site URL properly in the search engine and Internet directory databases. A good rule to follow is to budget at least as much for promotion as you did for your site development. I suggest to my clients that they prepare a strategic promotional plan and budget a minimum of \$2,500 for their first year on the Web.

You've got to maintain your site as well. Maintenance typically involves checking your pages for link rot, changing keywords and phrases, removing and revising content. Some developers also include special pricing in their maintenance packages for adding new content, functionality or features to your site. I recommend budgeting anywhere from \$150 to \$300 per month for small business sites. Another way to estimate annual maintenance costs that has proven reliable on larger sites is to add \$10 per page per month. On larger sites, developers will usually quote an hourly rate with a monthly minimum.

## ***Avoid Bad Publicity — Prevent Unpleasant Surprises***

Never publish a page substituting an "Under Construction" notice for relevant content. The veteran Web visitor will view such a page as an attack on his or her intelligence. Why? Because the World Wide Web is always under construction. By its nature, it is a virtual publication.

### **Check for site rot regularly**

Verify the accuracy of links and make necessary changes quickly. Make sure your content is still relevant. You do not want to leave your Web visitors with the impression that you are not visiting your own site or the other places you are pointing out to them.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## **Evaluate Your Presence Regularly — Be Patient But Persistent**

Keeping up with your site's presence and promotion will protect your investment. While we recommend that you hire professional assistance, there are some free and low cost alternatives you can manage yourself.

### ***Check Your Internet Visibility Rankings Quarterly***

You will need to monitor your status in the search engines and directories at least quarterly. Most of the companies complaining about not getting results from their site have skimmed on promoting it. Putting up a site without promoting it is equivalent to opening a business without listing it in the phone book — there may be some walk-in traffic but hardly enough to provide a profit. Just as people look in the phone book to find businesses that have what they need, they use online search tools to locate sites that offer the information they are seeking.

Submissions often fall through the cracks and never make it into a directory. Mistakes are sometimes made in listing a site or the listing information may never reach its destination. Remember that your message must travel through people, equipment and plain old telephone system (POTS) or other unstable communication lines to get from the person submitting the information to the person who is responsible for adding the link to your site.

Checking on submissions is often a time consuming and expensive process and many companies try to skimp by not hiring someone with expertise to do it. If employees of the company have the time, they can use the submission report (links or URLs should be included) to do this checking themselves to find out where, when, and if the site comes up in each search engine. Some search engines will also find the site listings in directories they monitor — but the search engines rarely look at the directories more often than once every three months so it could be awhile before the directory listing comes up in the search engine. In addition, if a company is willing to wait several months, the search capabilities of Alta Vista, InfoSeek and HotBot can be used to search for the sites that link to your company's site. However, for the most reliable results, you will benefit from using software specifically published for that purpose.

While some search engines will index your site automatically within minutes, others take between six and eight weeks if not longer. Remember, too, that the hardest place to get your site listed is in Yahoo. You may find that your Yahoo category selection was not to the liking of Yahoo's editorial staff and got bumped all together. That's why it is critical to spend some time browsing Yahoo to determine the most applicable category before submitting your site information.

The person responsible for your site submissions must keep accurate and complete records. Those records should include when the site is registered, where it can be found, any passwords or IDs needed for changes, and any special comments noted during the submission process. These same records will be needed if major changes or additions are ever made to the site.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

### ***Stay in Touch with What's Happening Online***

Stay in touch with what's happening in the online world at all times. You may find you will need to change your home page more often to address changes of the demographics of your online audience and target markets within it. You may need to focus on reaching a new audience. The landscape of the online world changes by the minute. To be successful over the long haul, you must respond to changes just as fast!

Routinely visit sites that produce or publish Internet statistics. A few of my favorite sites to pick up statistics from are:

- **CyberAtlas**

URL: <http://www.cyberatlas.internet.com>

Description: This CMP Web publication is billed as the Web Marketer's Guide to Online Facts. It is loaded with all kinds of helpful statistics in preparing your online business and promotional plans.

- **Georgia Tech Research Corporation's Internet User Surveys**

URL: [http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user\\_surveys/](http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/)

Description: The Georgia Tech Research Corporation was established to conduct research and generate revenue for Georgia Institute of Technology, based in Atlanta, Georgia. Since 1995 the Georgia Tech Graphic, Visualization & Usability Center (GVU) has been conducting online surveys to determine the way Internet users are benefiting from their online experiences.

- **Nua Internet Surveys**

URL: <http://www.nua.ie/surveys/>

Description: Nua Internet Surveys is published by Nua Ltd. of Dublin, Ireland. It is a fully searchable database of information gathered since 1996. Each week, Nua publishes summaries of its database contents in a newsletter distributed on their Web site as well as by subscription e-mail.

- **Robert Seidman's Online Insider**

URL: <http://www.onlineinsider.com>

Description: In 1994 Robert Seidman began publishing his insider tips to some Internet newsgroups I was monitoring (alt.online-services and alt.internet.services). Back then he titled his publication "In, Around and Online". I have continued to follow Robert's online adventures over the years, partly because whether or not I agree with him, he does his homework and mostly because his pithy commentary challenges some of my own thoughts and makes me a better player. Robert Seidman's Online Insider is published on his Web site and is also available via e-mail subscription.

- **Ralph Wilson's Web Marketing Today**

URL: <http://www.Webmarketingtoday.com>

Description: Published by Ralph Wilson, a Ph.D. and veteran writer, has been publishing Web Marketing Today as an email subscription newsletter since 1995. Focused on Internet marketing and doing business on the Web, It is still available for free and is distributed to over 60,000 subscribers twice each month. In February 1998 Wilson opened a Web site to complement the e-mail publication. There you will find back issues as well as instructions on how to subscribe to the newsletter.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## **Get Faster, Reliable Results — Seek Professional Assistance**

To determine the best moves to make in fulfilling your online mission, work closely with a consultant or consulting team who specializes in online communications and marketing. Be careful in your selection. There are a great number of individuals and organizations hanging out Internet marketing shingles. However, you will quickly find there are only a few who have actually experienced the thousands of hours of online research and communications to develop the skills necessary to pull off successful online campaigns that produce more than thousands of meaningless hits to a site.

Following is a list of questions you should ask to determine if the person or firm you are soliciting is capable of producing professional results:

- 1. What is your background in promoting businesses or people in general?**

Weed out the clerical types and inexperienced with this one — It is important to know if they understand the basic principles of marketing and specifically promotion. It's even more important that they have direct experience. Often times full-time students and computer consultants will take on Web site promotion as a quick revenue generator with the premise that all Web promotion involves is entering your site URL and name in a form at a search engine or Web directory publisher's site.

- 2. What is the URL for your Web site?**

This information will reveal a lot about the party you are considering. For instance, if they do not have a Web site under their own domain name, they have failed at one of the most important steps in building their own online presence. If they do have a Web site, you should look up the InterNIC records to help you determine how long they have been online. You should also view the HTML source code of their home page in your Web browser. By doing so, you will be able to see whether or not they have optimized their own site for the search engine databases and Web directories. Following the basic Web site publishing principles I shared earlier in this publication, review the content on their Web site to see how their site compares.

- 3. How long have you been promoting Web sites?**

If their answer is longer than the date their Web site was first published under their own domain name, find out the reason behind the discrepancy. They may have used a different domain name previously or you may have uncovered a sound reason for not pursuing their services further.

**4. What type of media contacts do you have?**

They should be able to provide a summary of both traditional and new media contacts, including some specifics. If the information they give you does not include media resources you are familiar with, such as the Internet Wire, Internet News Bureau, Business Wire or PR Newswire, you may not get the expansive coverage you should have to reach the majority of your target audience.

**5. How will you use your media contacts in promoting our Web site?**

Distributing your news releases and pitching ideas about covering your site through appropriate media channels is labor intensive. You need to know how and what they are prepared to do for you and whether you can afford any or all of the related costs in getting the job done right.

**6. What strategies will you use to promote our Web site?**

If the answer is "We will submit your site to over 400 search engines", with no qualifiers, comments about your goals or additional suggestions, your caution flag should be whipping in the wind. As I've detailed in this publication, there is much more to the successful promotion of your site than submitting your URL to the search engines.

**7. What tools do you use to promote our site?**

There are Web sites and software available to assist professionals in promoting your Web site. Depending on the tools they use, you may be able to pay for instruction or licensing to use these same tools in maintaining your site's visibility long after the professional's job is done. For instance, my company uses Web Position Gold™ and Site Promoter™ software to assist us in our work. For a moderate fee we can provide the files we generated to those clients who have purchased either software packages from us or one of our vendor partners. We also provide training on these products so our clients can learn how to use them effectively in the ongoing promotion of their sites.

**8. How will we know you did the work you agreed to do for us?**

While there are no guarantees that any search engine or Web directory service will include your site in their publication, you are entitled to some assurance that the work you paid for has been done. Reputable specialists will provide a report of where they submitted your site's URL, distributed news releases or posted announcements about your site. It is also quite common for these types of reports to be e-mailed to you or to be published in a secure area on the Web for your online review.

**9. How will we be able to update any information you provided to others in promoting our site?**

You need to know whether the promoter set up special passwords or User IDs for any of the places accepting your site submission or information. You also need to know whether what the promoter has done will require his or her assistance to update in the future and if so, what the anticipated charges will be. My company considers Web promotion an ongoing process. That is one of the reasons why we are advocates of using software whenever possible to assist in our work.

**10. How do you expect to be paid for the work you do for us?**

Some specialists will provide certain services for a lump sum or set fee per item. Others will charge strictly by the hour. Almost everyone will expect partial payment to begin work and all of the payment before you are provided with any detailed reports. I mentioned previously that you should expect to devote a minimum of 40 hours in promoting your site launch. Professionals will spend no less time but will be able to do a thorough job because that is the focus of their work. Given the industry average for Web site promotion is over \$75 per hour, you would need to budget at least \$3,000 to get a professional to perform top quality work for you. If your budget is less than that, you need to let the professionals know up front and let them determine the highest priority items in bringing you results in the shortest amount of time. Whether you pay set fees or by the hour, you need to set a ceiling for the promoters, then let them tell you what can be done within that ceiling. Web promotion expenses can easily run into the five-figure range, depending on your goals, the size and subject matter of your site. If you take the time to set realistic goals and expectations and share them with your prospective promoters, the results will be much more cost-effective.

Please remember that my company, [Westward Connections](#), is a full-service Internet communications and marketing firm. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss your goals with you — any time. Drop me an email addressed to [barbt@westward.net](mailto:barbt@westward.net) and I'll personally see that you get the attention you deserve.

[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## **When It's Time to Go, Bow Out Gracefully**

For centuries print media publishers have experienced highs and lows in the demand for their publications. Only the more popular, well-managed, and adequately financed ones remain. Circumstances change on the Web just as they have done in other mediums. Computer-based technologies tend to change faster than any other technology, however, and not everyone adapts to change well. If you find your reasons for having a Web publication changing to the point you are considering ceasing publication or selling it, there are some steps you should take to insure that what you have done does not follow you to your next adventure. It is even possible that what you see in your Web publication as "junk" could be another publisher's "golden treasure".

### ***Evaluate Your Current Position Online***

You need to know who is currently linking or talking about your Web in their online publications. If the search results in all the popular search engines, Web directories and portal sites reveal that no one is mentioning you, changing ownership or closing your publication will have little ramification on the rest of the world. However, if your publication has been served to the Web for more than 18 months, you are likely to find something in or about your publication is mentioned elsewhere on the Web.

### ***Let the World Know When Ownership Changes***

If you decide to sell your Web publication or use of the domain serving it to the world, send out a news release, publish an HTML document announcing the change on your Web site. In preparing that document, make sure you have included the appropriate meta description and document expiration declaration for the search engine robots to catch on their next round.

### ***Alert Search Engine, Web Directory and Portal Publishers***

If you are ceasing publication, inform other Web publishers linking to your site to remove their links by the date you will be pulling your publication offline. Ideally, they should remove their links right away so any search engine robots refreshing databases shortly before or after you close will be sure to make their revisions promptly. You should also take the time to inform the more popular search engines and Web directories featuring links to your publication.

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[\[Back to Contents\]](#)

## Appendix

If you have received Building Your Online Business in Portable Document Format (PDF) on diskette, your disk should also include the following documents as PDF files. To determine whether or not you have the PDF versions, click on the PDF link for each item. If you do not, you can always download the current versions from the Westward Connections Web site.

- [Qualification Worksheet](#) — What Westward Connections uses in helping prospective clients determine the appropriate steps in bringing their businesses online or improving results from their current online presence. Use this worksheet to audit what you are doing now and what you could and possibly should be doing to market your business. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Communicating in Online Lingo](#) — Charts of shortcuts and abbreviations used often in online communications. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Basic Small Business Identity Site Infrastructure Guide](#) — Designed to help small businesses and sole practitioners in publishing their first-generation Web site. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Web Site Search Engine Registration Worksheet](#) — Use this worksheet to prepare to register your site with search engine and web directory services. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Web Site Administration Book](#)<sup>4</sup> — Barb Tomlin's guide to keeping your Web site production organized by setting up your own site administration notebook in a three-ring binder, using the Avery® indexing system. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Barb's Virtual Web Glossary](#)<sup>5</sup> — Barb Tomlin's list of technical and marketing terms commonly encountered in building a successful online business presence. [\[PDF\]](#)
- [Barb's Web Promotion Glossary](#)<sup>6</sup> — Barb Tomlin's list of terms commonly used in promoting a Web presence online or through traditional media channels. (Some of these terms also appear in her virtual Web glossary cited above). [\[PDF\]](#)

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<sup>4</sup> Web Site Administration Book URL - <http://www.westward.com/Webwork/sitebook/>

<sup>5</sup> Barb's Virtual Web Glossary URL - <http://www.westward.com/byob/byobglossary.doc>

<sup>6</sup> Barb's Web Promotion Glossary URL - <http://www.westward.com/promoteit/prglossary.doc>

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