Introduction to web site design & marketing

.::Top Ten Reasons

So why put your business online ? There is a mountain of reasons for putting your business online. Here are some.

.::To Establish A Web Presence
Some kind of web presence is essential these days. Almost 44% of people using the internet in 1999 had purchased at least one product over the Internet.

.::To Sell your product or service
Reach a global market with the Internet. With the WWW you are now able to display your products or services to a wider and bigger audience, hence more sales.

.::Provide customer support
Cost effective customer support can be provided for your products or services via email. Email support reduces the overhead of providing Long Distance/STD phone calls to your clients. In 1998, Cisco Systems made over 70% of its worldwide sales over the internet therefore eliminating over half a million phone calls and saving more than $40 million a month.

.::Interest your customers
Even if you don't have the facility to sell your products it is still a good form of exposure to showcase your products or services on the WWW. This form of advertising can be just as effective as a brochure or ad as long as your potential customers know you are there.

.::Cost effective Business Solution
Overheads are dramatically lower when running an ecommerce enabled business. Fewer storefronts,leases or rates to pay.

.::Convenience for Customers
Why make customers come to your store and carry their purchase home when it can all be done over the Internet? Customers can shop at their convenience and are not limited to business trading hours. This is especially important for business customers who purchase consumables on a regular basis and don't have the time to shop from store to store.

.::Eliminate Write-Offs
No need to worry about demonstration models of your products being damaged or products being stolen. Theft & write-offs are virtually eliminated on the Internet. You can find out if a credit card is illegitimate before you send the product to the customer.

.::Open 24/7
The internet never stops trading. More trading hours means more sales opportunities.

.::Everyone is Equal
Whether you a large retail chain or a small business nobody will ever know any better. You can now trade competitively against the big companies and claim part of their market share for your own.

.::Eliminate the Middleperson
Lower prices means more revenue. Need we say more?

.::Tools of the Trade

We have listed a few programs here to get you started. Please note that you are subject to each programs license and Fijihosting is not liable for any damage, misuse etc that this software may cause.

.::FTP
You will need an FTP program at some point in time to upload your website onto a server. Both

products have similar capabilities.
CuteFTP
wsFTP

.::Graphics
Graphics are an essential part of every web page design. Listed are two of the most common packages available.
Paint Shop Pro
Adobe Photoshop

.::Editors
Two popular HTML Editors both have their perks but we'll leave that up to you.
UltraEdit
CoffeeCup HTML Editor

.::Browsers
Netscape Navigator
Microsoft Internet Explorer

.::Other
Macromedia Flash - Create rich bandwidth effective animations
Huey - RGB to HTML hex color convertor

.::Design Tips

When designing graphics for the web make sure you have optimized your graphics before you publish them to the web. Large graphics will take a long time to download. For Adobe Photoshop 5.x & Above when you go to save your file go to 'save for web' under the 'file' drop down menu. You will able to optimize you image there.

.::Use the right image format
Using the right image format can have a severe difference in the quality of you image. Use JPG's (JPEG) for photos & scanned images and use gifs for icons, diagrams & other pieces of graphic art.

GIF(Graphics Interchange   JPG(Joint Photographic
         Format)   Experts Group)

.::Cut your images up
If you cut large images up into smaller pieces you website will load more efficiently and have more chance of the customer hanging around. Try to keep a single image below 200x200 pixels.

.::Transparent Images
When creating transparent images design them in on the same colour background as your webpage. The antialiasing around the edges of your images can look quite ugly if it does not match the background.

Transparent image created
on a white background

Transparent image created
on a black background

.::Keep graphic sizes down
Big graphics can take a while to download. If a customer has to wait too long for your site to display they may lose interest

.::Ecommerce

For those who don't know, eCommerce is the electronic process of exchanging products or services and money over the internet. Typically a customer will come to a company's website and browse through their product catalog and select goods to purchase. These will usually be paid for via credit card. The credit card details would then be securely transferred over the internet. Once the details have been verified the company debits the amount sent and the products are dispatched to the customer.

.::Set up Shop
To use Fijihosting's ecommerce facility you will require the Premium Account at minimum. To create a new store go to the www.fijihosting.com/members/merchants/ section. If this is your first time in the Merchant Services you will have to enter your Store Details.

.::7 Cardinal Sin of Ecommerce

by Frank Fiore the Author of Complete Idiot's Guide to Starting an Online Business

I was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition. I have fond memories of the Catholic grammar school I attended while I was a kid. And on these occasions I recall Sister Mary Theresa. I remember her clearly for her quick wit in class and hard ruler across the knuckles. She also taught one of my first religion classes that all good Catholic boys and girls were required to take.

And like all good Catholic children, we were taught to avoid the seven cardinal sins of Vanity, Greed, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Wrath, and Sloth.

Now that I'm an Internet professional, I can see a strong resemblance between the seven cardinal sins taught to me as a child and the seven cardinal sins of e-commerce.

So, here they are, along with some ways to avoid them.

.::Vanity: Going It Alone
There's a saying that goes, "You can do anything on the Internet-but you can't do it alone." In the world of e-commerce, outsourcing is not an evil word. Many new web stores fail to succeed due to a lack of professional design and programming know-how.

The biggest challenge to a new e-business is not so much the technical aspects--although they're important--but how best to execute your business plan.

Too few businesses on the Net use the resources available to take orders, clear credit cards, host sites, build stores, and so on. You can spend valuable time and resources building a site, hiring

professionals to do the necessary programming, buying software and hardware, and paying advertising agencies. Instead, partner with companies on the Net that supply free or nearly-free resources to set up and run your business.

Sure, having a store on Yahoo! or selling other merchants' products through an affiliate program is not as glamorous as having your own custom online business. But if you're just starting out in the world of e-commerce or have limited funds, partnering with other sites on the web is a smart thing to do.

Even if you have the wherewithal to build a custom, one-of-a-kind web store, you can still partner with other sites to save time and money. You can include information content and community elements on your site by partnering with content and community providers that syndicate their programs to sites free of charge. For example, don't want to go through the hassle of setting up a merchant account to clear credit cards? Partner with one of the web-based credit card solution providers such as iBill or CCBill.

But you can't do it alone. There is a lot of help out there in cyberspace. Learn to use it by partnering with other web companies.

.::Greed: Forcing a Square Peg into a Round Hole

Your product sells well in the real world. It should sell just as well online, right? Wrong! Just because a particular product sells well in retail stores, that doesn't mean that it will sell well online. Take a hard look at the products or even services you want to sell over the Net, and ask yourself these questions:

Can my product or service be pictured and clearly understood through electronic means only? Until virtual reality becomes a reality, viewing a product through cyberspace will never replace the hands-on experience of the real world. So, pick a product to sell that doesn't require the shopper to physically handle before he or she can purchase it. If your product or service requires a personal sales touch, you might have problems selling it online.

Is my product heavy or bulky? Will it cost an exorbitant amount to ship the product to a customer? Selling refrigerators, washing machines, and wide-screen TVs (and 50-pound bags of dog food--remember Pets.com?) might be a good idea, but think of the shipping costs to the customer and actually handling these items in your warehouse.

Do my products carry a high product liability? Handled improperly, some products can cause physical injury or property damage. Make sure that your products or services are covered by liability insurance. Find out who's responsible if someone is injured using your product or if your service doesn't deliver as promised.

Be sure you have all these questions answered before you set out to sell your product or service to the public. And before offering anything on the Net, evaluate its suitability for online sales.

.::Envy: Keeping Up with the Nerds

When a potential customer hits your site, is the first thing he or she sees a straight offer to buy, or a song-and-dance routine of Java applets, animated icons, Flash presentations, or other special effects that waste time--and delay the sale--for your visitor?

People don't care to be entertained with the equivalent of elevator music when they're looking to take action. Who cares if your competitor's web site won "Cool Site of the Day" awards? What counts in business is making sales. Don't force potential customers to sit through a flashy, long splash page before getting to the site's home page, or wait for a variety of images to appear, move around, and disappear from the screen before the home page loads. You can be sure that they'll be gone before your flashy animations are done.

Finally, be sensitive to customers with older systems (or limited time). If your site has a lot of flashy graphics, offer a text-only option for viewing your site.

.::Gluttony: Is It Bigger Than 60KB?

That pretty graphic on your home page that takes several minutes to load? Get rid of it. People

want simplicity over cool graphics. Faster loading is better than eye candy. If your total page size is more than 60KB, put it on a diet. In fact, most designers agree that a page should not be more than 48KB--and that includes graphics.

If you're selling products on your web site, there's no getting around the need for product shots. If you need to place a lot of product shots on a page, use thumbnails (miniature pictures). If the shopper wants to see a larger version of the product, he or she can click the small version and be sent to a web page that contains only that product, along with a detailed description and buy button.

Get this: To create a good customer experience, use graphics only when they serve the customer's goals.

.::Sloth: Neglecting Security and Customer Convenience
Visitors need to be comfortable while they're shopping on your site. You achieve that goal by making your site easy to do business with, and offering a safe and secure way for shoppers to buy with their credit cards at your site.

People are concerned about sending their credit card numbers over the Net. Sure, they're getting more comfortable with the idea every day, but you still need to soothe the fears of your visitors by telling them--and I mean tell them--that your site is secure and that they can safely send credit card numbers to you over the Net.

Tell customers up front--on your home page--that their credit card purchases are secure. Direct them to a page on your site that explains how credit card numbers are protected when used on your site. To make them customers more secure, promise to pay the $50 liability that the shopper would incur from his or her bank if the card number happened to be stolen while used on your site.

Make it easy for customers to shop around your store by adding an online shopping cart. Think about this. You just selected a product to buy at your neighborhood store. To get another one, you need to pay for the first one, leave the store, and enter again. Sounds silly, right? Well, without a shopping cart on your site, that's exactly what you're asking your customers to do.

Here's another problem. If you really want to drive customers away from your site, make it hard to navigate. According to a research paper by Creative Good, Inc., "Thirty-nine percent of test shoppers failed in their buying attempts because sites were too difficult to navigate." Make your site navigation simple--not cute. Use labels such as Contact Us, About Us, Our Catalog, Services We Offer, or Shop Now. Forget naming sections Joy Ride, Buzz the Bean, or Cool Stuff.

Don't be lazy with security and convenience. Place your web store on a secure server and provide an easy-to-use shopping cart and site navigation system for your customers.

.::Lust: You Gotta Love Those Plug-Ins
Get this. You walk into your favorite retailer and at the door you're stopped and told to go down the block and get a special pass before you can enter the store. You comply, right? In their dreams! Or how about this one? You're at the checkout counter, ready to pay, but you're told to go across the street and buy a special wallet to complete the purchase.

Well, that's what you ask a visitor to your site to do when you tell them that they need a plug-in to view your site or a special e-wallet to make a purchase. People don't want to have to download anything to view your site or buy from you. Don't lust after some cool way to display the goods and content of your site, or offer a convenience that's inconvenient to get.

But suppose shoppers must download a plug-in to experience your products. For example, you have an online music store selling CDs. You want to give shoppers the opportunity to hear some sample tracks from a CD before they buy. They'll most certainly have to download an audio player plug-in such as RealPlayer if they don't already have it installed. If you say your site needs RealPlayer to listen to the sample CD tracks, make sure you provide a link to the download page on the RealPlayer web site.

If you keep it simple, you won't give your customer a reason to click his way over to a competitor.

.::Wrath: Do You Hate Your Customer?
Want to really drive customers from your site? Use frames, require registration, provide no site search engine, and ignore international customers.

Let's take these one at a time.

Framed sites are bad news. Most search engines can't find your site because the frames hide your real content from the search engine. Visitors can't bookmark the page they're actually interested in--only the framed page they're on. Also, customers can easily get lost navigating your site through frames. Oh, and don't throw in a lot of small pop-up windows giving a pitch after each mouse click--that really drives shoppers nuts.

If you want to irritate visitors and measure their time on your site in milliseconds, force them to register before using your site. How would you like to visit your local convenience store and, before you can enter the front door, you have to fill out a registration form? How much time would it take before you're on your way down the block to a competitor? The same goes for web sites. Ask visitors to register after they have purchased from you.

No search engine on your site? You might be saying goodbye to half your sales. Unless you're selling a highly customized item or service, remember that potential customers can get it elsewhere. If you don't help the customer find what he's looking for--and quickly--it's easy for him to hop to another site that will.

Don't forget that the first W in World Wide Web (www) stands for World. Think globally. Remember that users from other countries can easily access your site. If you want your e-business to be truly global, respect other cultures and keep in mind that they might not be familiar with American expressions or respond to American advertising.

Finally, be considerate of your shoppers. Tell them which web browsers to use to best view your site ("This page is best viewed by Netscape 3.0 and above"). And though techno-speak might be familiar to you, many newbies to the Net might not understand it. Don't confuse shoppers new to the Net by using techno-jargon.

Introduction to Marketing

Marketing is an important practice in any area of business including any web based business. The first thing you will want to do is get people to your website, so submit your website to all major search engines. Search engines will take anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks to include your submission in their indexes. This is covered futher in the Search Engines section.

.::GoTo.com
Search engines do not cost anything to submit to. Although some like GoTo.com charge you a per click rate to have your website listed in the top rankings of the search term you select. Depending on how popular the search term is, the price per click can reach $6.00 . This is considerably expensive if you do not get any return on the investment.

.::Budget your marketing
Even if you do not have thousands of dollars to spend on marketing per month, you can produce an effective marketing campaign for under $500. Research costs and shop around for special offers before commencing a campaign.

.::Search Engines

Search Engines are something of an enigma these days. Search Engines will often change their

algorithm for indexing and catagorizing web pages so it makes the process of having your page listed in the top ten results very difficult. If you do however, it will be done with sheer luck. There are a few things you can do to your web page to raise the rankings of your site.

.::Keep it Clear and Concise
Narrow down on the most likely search terms customers will use to find your products or services. Keep the content on your web site contained around these main terms. (More general content will rank lower if it is not related to the search term)

.::Alt Tags
Insert comments in all of your 'ALT=""' tags for your images, Information relating to your product or service.

.::Get Linked
Referring Links. I can not stress this point hard enough. The more links you have from other websites to yours will increase the popularity of the page. Submitting your site to FFA (free for all) lists will help your site rank higher in the search engines.

.::Use relevant Content
Some search engines will penalize a site that looks like they are trying to spam their way up the rankings. This is done by putting excessive keywords in the body and description tags. As long as your content is relevant to your product or industry you should rank well.

.::Get listed on Yahoo!
Out of all search engines make sure you submit your site to Yahoo! Although not a search engine Yahoo! is a human organized web directory and one of the most popular globally. Yahoo! will guarantee a sizeable amount of quality traffic to your site.

.::Honest Keywords
Keep your META tags short, relevant and concise. Too long a description and too many keywords could be detrimental to your site's ranking.

.::More is Better
Submit your website to all of the common seach engines and directories no matter how obscure. Don't forget to submit to foreign and regional search engines.

.::Marketing Tips

We've compiled a few tips mostly for banner advertising. Hopefully these will give you some guidence.

.::Click Here
For maximum results make sure you have a 'call to action' on your banner eg.**click here!** or something similar flagging their subconscience to click your banner and visit your site. This may sound a little silly but people have to be told to click your banner.

.::Don't lose your customer
If you are advertising a product on your banner make sure the product is featured on your main page so the customer can find it straight away. Do not let the customer go astray.

.::No Heavy Banners
Keep your banner down in size. Most banners will never be put into rotation if over 12 - 15k. Remember that you do want your banner to be loaded in time before the visitor leaves the page.

.::Placement
If you can pick the placement of your banner always go for the top of the page. This will cost a little more per CPM but worth the results.

.::Be Persistant
Do not expect results straight away. Most banners will only have a clickthrough rate (conversions

of people clicking on your banner and visiting your site) of about .7% to 1.2% which does not sound like very much. Allocate a monthy budget to your online advertising and include promotions. If necessary, chop and change your sales pitch, layout, color scheme in order to evaluate maximum potential.

.::Keep Track of Banners
Use some kind of banner tracking software on your website that will track & analyze your visitors trends - find out what they're doing, how long they read a page for, what your most common pages are and more. Use this information and make adjustments to your website accordingly.

.::Know your Target
Advertising your site can be tricky. Make sure to research your target market carefully. If you do plan to advertise on a website using banner ads, (the most popular method) find a list of common websites that your market would frequent. For example, if you were selling camping equipment you would not necessarily advertise on a 'Caring for your Newborn Baby' site. On the other hand target websites such as 4WD and Fishing/Hunting sites, where you will find that the traffic (naturally) will be more orientated towards your camping products.

.::Pay per click
Banner Advertising will be considerably expensive depending on which site/s you decide on. Banner advertising is most commonly charged by units of 1000 impressions (page views that contain your ad) some sites will require a minimum purchase of 50000 impressions before they commence your campaign. At US$20 to US$60 per thousand impressions this can be particularly expensive.

.::Read the Demographics
Most popular websites will have demographics which have been compiled from customer surveys. Don't be afraid to send an email requesting this information. Demographics can be invaluable when it comes to making decisions about advertising on a website and will contain information such as age, income, occupation, favorite color etc. If the data doesn't match up with the market you're targeting, try looking elsewhere.

.::Combine Forces
Print advertising when used in conjunction with web advertising can be quite effective. If you are advertising on a website and the website has an accompanying magazine or vice versa try placing an ad in the magazine as well. This will obviously increase your exposure to customers who view both. Don't position your ad just anywhere either. Find out what articles are in the upcoming issues. If an article is on hiking boots, then place an ad of your showcase of hiking boots on the same page or opposite. This may cost more but it will produce results that will be well worth it. Also, don't forget to include the URL for your website on the advertisement.

.::Persistence
Always remember that selling to your audience requires persistence. Try variations of a common theme to your approach over a mature period of time. It is very seldom on the internet that you will have instant success with your advertising campaigns. It is important to maintain a continual effort to keep potential customers informed, so back up your advertising by asking them to join a mailing list. As long as you have consent to use their email address, you've still got a second chance to sell them. Try sending them a catalogue or update from time to time.

Take your time when designing banners, as these are ambassadors for your website.

.::Customer Care

Customer Care is an important factor on the internet. The sales approach on the internet is fairly different to conventional brick and mortar stores. The sales person is virtually absent, its not possible to read the back of the packaging and so forth. Be meticulous about the information you provide about the product. Size, weight, capacity etc. Offer variations of the same product they are looking at. The difference between a sale and a bruised ego may be the lack of mentioning on the website that the product also comes in red.

.::Customer Inquiries

If a customer sends you a sales inquiry alway remember to be prompt, polite and offer them more than what they asked for. If their inquiry does not match up to what they need they might take up an alternative but don't force it down their throat.

.::Follow Up

Don't leave it at that after the product has been sold.Don't watch them walk into the sunset. Most of your customers will be repeat customers having already done business with you and they will feel more comfortable in spending more money with you. So if they say 'yes' keep them updated with promotional material. Follow them up to see if the product is up to scratch and if not offer solutions, offer alternatives to make them happy. Human touches go a long way with the benefit of loyal return customers.

.::The Human Touch

More so the lack of. Treat you customers the same way you would as if you were face to face. Considering the Internet is a fairly new medium, people are fairly weary of putting their credit card information over the web. The slightest thing could put off a possible customer so be courteous, honest and polite.