

# Working The Web

**A** presence on the Internet can serve as a mighty marketing tool for the independent manufacturers' representative. For many reps, this presence is not only valuable, but an absolute necessity in order to compete in today's market. Despite the obvious trend to establish an Internet presence, it's interesting to note that not all reps have followed suit on the conception, construction and maintenance of a web site. Several reps we contacted indicated that while they see the need for such an effort, their feeling is that the time they spend in the field is much more valuable to them right now, rather than diverting efforts to something that might not bear fruit immediately.

To illustrate that point, one rep volunteered the following thoughts: "I've already done some preliminary planning to get our web page done, but just haven't completed everything yet. I've got too much to do right now taking care of my existing principals and customers. My ultimate goal, however, is to make myself and everyone else at the agency even more accessible to principals and customers. At the same time, I'm looking to enhance my communication with both constituencies."

Among those reps we spoke with who are already up to speed and operating with updated rep web sites, the following are the primary reasons they cite for doing so:

- Everyone else seems to have one.
- Pressure from principals to construct a site and make use of links to their locations. One rep in particular mentioned the pressure he received from some of his principals to have a web site. To his credit, once the principals voiced an opinion on the matter, it was a scant two months before he had one up and running.
- The need to communicate with the marketplace in a timely, accurate and relatively inexpensive manner.

What follows are some of the thoughts from reps we contacted on this subject.



***"We're in the business of selling our service, and I think that's the job our web site does for us."***

Dan Davis

Vehicle Equipment Co., Inc. - Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: <http://www.davis-veco.com>

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Vehicle Equipment Co., Inc.  
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***“I’m looking to promote my principals more than I am my own agency.”***

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**Emphasizing the Rep Advantage**

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The joint goals of presenting a more professional image while attracting prospective principals were the reasons Dan Davis, Vehicle Equipment Company, Inc., Dallas, Texas, constructed a web site for his agency (www.davis-veco.com). “What we’ve done isn’t so much for customers, rather it’s to allow principals to learn more about us,” he explains. “We’re in the business of selling our service, and I think that’s the job our web site does for us.”

Davis admits the site hasn’t been updated recently, but that update appears high on his “to do” list.

While visitors to the site will find the typical information concerning agency history, products, links and sales staff, there’s an additional bit of information that is very interesting. Under the heading “The Man-Rep Advantage,” there is a detailed description of how and why the relationship between manufacturers and Davis’ agency works so well.



**Ron Hopkins**

***“I felt it was important for our agency to have a presence on the Internet more than anything else. And, what it does for us not only maintains that presence in our industry, it also tells our agency story to prospective principals.”***

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## Promoting Principals

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"I'm looking to promote my principals more than I am my own agency," explains Robert McKnight, R.A.M. Associates, Lawrenceville, Georgia, when he describes his plan for an agency web site ([www.ramassociates.net](http://www.ramassociates.net)). As of publication, the site was not up and running, but McKnight says his plans call for a Word document that will link visitors to brief descriptions of the principals he represents. "I mainly sell engineered components to customers — nothing out of catalogs. I low-key the rep concept and concentrate more on what my principals provide customers."

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## Creating the Needed Presence

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Visitors to [www.georgeomillerco.com](http://www.georgeomillerco.com) will learn all they need to know about the Syracuse, New York-based George O. Miller Company. The rep and distributor of instrumentation and industrial controls specializing in temperature, pressure, flow, humidity and gas monitoring products, put the site up about four years ago, according to Ron Hopkins.

Hopkins' rationale for putting up the web page comes down to, "I felt it was important for our agency to have a presence on the Internet more than anything else. And, what it does for us not only maintains that presence in our industry, it also tells our agency story to prospective principals. If someone is looking for a rep firm, for instance, I can immediately refer them to it. What they'll find there is a brief description of my business philosophy and what goals we've established for the agency."

While agency personnel basically designed the page, they did turn to an outside firm to actually construct it.

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## Selling to Manufacturers

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"I developed a marketing strategy from the day I started in the rep business," explains Bob Gerrard, Gerrard & Associates, Mooresville, North Carolina. "Marketing is a matter of survival for the independent manufacturers' representative. I became aware of that simply from the perspective of the safety and security of my business. We're operating under the terms of 30-day cancellation agreements with many



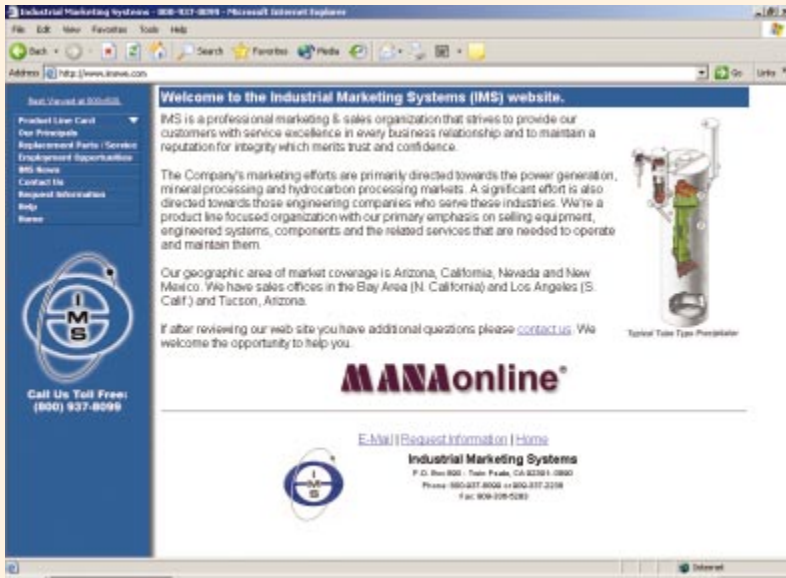
***"Your marketing efforts help establish your agency's identity. It tells principals and customers what you do. It is those efforts that create the phone calls that we are so dependent upon."***



of our principals. As a result, we've got to be constantly selling ourselves, knowing that at any time we'll have to replace lost business. And, when I say selling ourselves, I mean selling to manufacturers is every bit as important as selling to customers."

When he speaks of that importance, Gerrard emphasizes the goal that the marketing process sets for the rep. "In general terms, your marketing efforts help establish your agency's identity. It tells principals and customers what you do. It is those efforts that create the phone calls that we are so dependent upon."

With that as background, the question is posed,



Sharon Kilborn

***“We got into it [the Web] early and found out over the years how easy it is to put our information on it, and communicate it to people.”***

Why a web site for Gerrard & Associates? “The first reason I’d cite,” explains Gerrard, “is that everyone else has one. I have to go beyond that reason, however. It’s a little like a rep trying to operate his agency two decades ago without a fax machine. You simply can’t do it. If you don’t have the proper tools, you’re out of date and soon will be out of business.”

He continues that the agency’s first web effort was one that was put together by a non-pro, a college student who did it on the cheap, “simply so we could have one” premise.

Gerrard emphasizes that he didn’t expect to make any money from that initial effort, but since then it’s been redone (www.gerrardassociates.com) by a pro and now includes sections covering the background of the agency, manufacturers and applications, as well as several articles that have been published concerning the firm. “We’ve also begun a program,” he says, “where instead of sending line lists to people, we refer them to our web site. The whole idea is that all they have to do is click on the Gerrard web site and there they’ll find all they need to know about us.”

The bottom line, Gerrard maintains, is that a well-put-together web site is one of the ingredients that a rep needs for his long-term survival. “It sets the rep apart from the rest and creates an impression of professionalism for visitors. It shows others that we know what we’re doing, we’re up to date, and it conveys a level of competency on our part.”

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### Giving Principals What They Need

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Sharon Kilborn Keeney, Industrial Marketing Systems (IMS), Twin Peaks, California (www.imswe.com), explains that via the agency’s web site, “We discovered early on how easy it was for us to differentiate ourselves from other rep firms. We got into it early and found out over the years how easy it is to put our information on it and communicate it to people.”

One of the reasons she cites for the ease of fitting into this electronic means of communication is that she and husband, Mike, both come from successful careers in manufacturing. “We didn’t start our careers as reps, we began by managing reps. As a result, we had a feel for what principals would like from their reps and we started our business that way.” Part of that start, which she explains entailed pre-planning for more than 18 months, included the professional creation of a web site.

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