

# Really Cool Ways To Blow It On The Internet



by TERRY BROCK

Every business today needs an online presence, but blowing it on the internet is easier than you think if you have the wrong assumptions about what a good web site is. Perhaps we can learn what to do by looking at what not to do. Here are some ideas that will help a company to go out of business on the Internet fast.

Really cool ways to blow it online:

- Have a really slow web site that has lots and lots of graphics showing what you think is really cool. After all, you tried it on your really fast T3 or T1 line at the office and it loaded fast. Why don't those pesky customers just upgrade their crummy ole' 28K modems to what is really "cool"? Just who do they think they are — the ones who pay the bills?
- Don't leave any contact information on your web site to avoid the remote possibility that customers could contact a live human being with a real question. You get to avoid all the calls and inquiries from customers if you carefully hide any reference to where you are and your phone number. This is a really neat strategy that lots of software compa-

nies followed just before they went out of business. It is also really aggravating to customers. And if any of them ever happen to get through to you on the phone, just remember the classic, customer-endearing acronym used by support personnel: RFM or "Read the Freakin' Manual." Customers will really remember that! After all, if they have a question, they should be the one to answer it.

- Realize that the Internet changes everything, so the only thing that matters is the Internet. Live in your own world and ignore everything else. Don't listen to their feedback. Instead, go ahead and make your plans regardless of what others say or do. After all, if you're in technology you already know everything that needs to be done, right?
- If things look bad in the

economy, assume that the Internet is finished and cease all your efforts online. The Internet must have just been a blip on the screen, right?

You don't have to blow it online. By rethinking some of the hype that occurred in recent years and focusing on sound business principles, you can succeed online today and in the future.

In his new book, *Capturing Customers.com*, George Colombo says that the Internet should be part of the solution. The old ways of reaching customers are still valid. We have to look at the Internet as another channel by which we reach customers. It is another technology like phones, fax, radio or TV. Actually, the Internet has lots of features from each of those communication tools. Remember that the Internet doesn't change the way people

***Remember that the Internet doesn't change the way people want human care and interaction.***

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want human care and interaction. The Internet is simply another way to reach customers. It is a very important tool and should be used properly.

You can use the technology of your web site to get feedback from people. Use forms. Call them on the phone. I remember Scott Cook, formerly with Intuit, which makes Quicken, told me that he would make it a regular practice to get on the phone personally and talk to customers every week. He'd ask them what they like and don't like about the product. The power of Quicken and its place in the market came about as a result of this and other sound business principles. No matter what your business, don't forget the importance of that personal contact via phone or in person with real, live customers.

This is the time to grow in today's economy. Economic cycles have been with us throughout history. Think of them like the change of seasons. We are entering a wintertime now, but springtime is just around the corner. Prepare now for the great opportunities. Think back long ago when things were going strong (you remember, about a year ago). We heard about the dramatic growth in companies and how their stock prices had done so well. Then we wished that we had invested in those companies years ago. Well, today is the "years ago" time to invest in the future! Look for value and sound principles. A

dose of reality: Just as the dot-coms learned that you can't build a business on stock price and hype alone, the market should learn now that doom and gloom aren't reality either.

Wisdom from the ages has often said to not keep all your eggs in one basket. Andrew Carnegie modified that by saying, "Keep all your eggs in one basket. Then watch that basket very closely." I think what the great industrialist meant was to focus. He had many "baskets" going during his life, focusing on one thing at a time and making each enormously successful. Focus with laser-beam intensity on one project at a time and complete that successfully. Then move on to other projects. You'll also do better on the subsequent projects as you gain from a better knowledge base, experience and confidence level from past successes.

There are enormous opportunities now. It is a time for rethinking the strategic role that technology will play in your business future.

It is actually very good that the river of venture capital cash has slowed. Now the cash has to come from serving customers — that means from sales. Now, there's a concept! I think that in the long run most of us will be better off if we have to figure out early on how to serve customers and not worry about having someone fund huge amounts of venture money.

Think bootstrapping. This builds lots of critical skills. It is too easy to get fat and happy when cash is sloshing around too easily.

So we don't have to blow it online or offline. Instead, now is the time to marshal your forces and move forward. □