

TECHNOLOGY: What The Future Holds For You



by TERRY BROCK

The changing and morphing of the Internet is in full swing. The industry has gone past “brochureware” and static web sites. Interactivity and customer service are the words heard today more often than anything. There are several major trends that will affect you and your business. You can use them to your advantage if you know what is coming and how to profit from it. Some of these trends include:

Fast Is Not Only Good, but Also Necessary

Your customers want answers fast. Ironworks is a product from Ironside (www.ironside.com) that is a B2B (Business to Business) web site for manufacturers and distributors. They have adopted technology to follow their “eight second rule.” Customers visiting their web site must receive response within eight seconds, even at slow, 24K modem speeds. You have to build technology that allows screen responses to be fast and help to answer questions

quickly. Try it for yourself and notice the speed and potential at their site.

Let the Customer Drive

This is a double win. Your customers should be able to check your products, place orders, follow up on those orders and process questions on their own at their own time. In today’s consumer-driven market your customers are used to getting what they want when they want it. If you don’t provide it, they are only a three-second click away from your competition. Build the technology and infrastructure so that they can handle it on their own. Let customers be self-sufficient where they desire that. Let them place orders and track orders. The double win is that they get what they want and you’ll save money as well as keep customers happier. This is called customer retention!

Follow the Work Flow

Q-link Technologies from

Tampa, Florida, goes beyond merely placing orders. This company provides software for companies to track the workflow of a customer. This technology focuses on interaction with customers in the form of phone, e-mail and web-based support. You can use the program to track customer service, process returns, manage orders, replacements, logistics and restocking. Q-Link focuses on customer needs using the Internet in a way that solves customer problems and helps to add to your bottom line (www.qlinktech.com).

Customer Experience Is the Brand

I wish I had come up with that quote. Instead it was said by Fred Snow, chairman of Wholetree.com, a web-based service that enables multilingual and multicultural global business transactions over the Internet. They want their brand to be top-of-mind and highly favorable with their customers. They incorporate both



This is a regular series of articles on technology that appears monthly in *Agency Sales*. If there are any subjects that you feel should be explored, or if you have any comments about this subject, please contact the Tech For Reps editor at: alaplante@MANAonline.org.

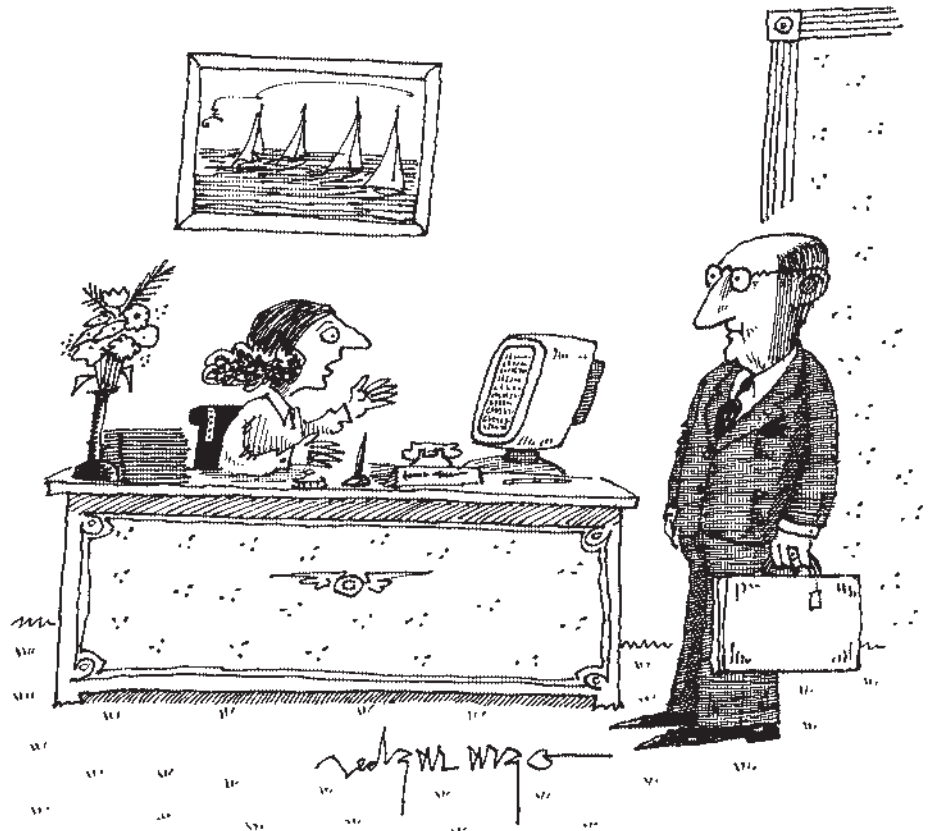
technology and the human sides to make sure orders received in various languages are processed quickly (within 24-48 hours). Most of the world doesn't speak English. Although most web sites today are in English (estimates of about 75-80%), this is changing rapidly as Spanish and Chinese speaking people come online rapidly. Are you ready for the orders that your customers place in other languages? It's also not just a matter of having some words on a static web site in their language. Can you respond quickly in their language with their idioms and expressions? Wholetree has technology that handles standard questions in French, Japanese, Spanish, Italian, German and other languages with aplomb. They also have a network of translators around the world who can help with the more difficult assignments. They take both the high-tech and the high-touch approach to insure that their customers' experiences are very favorable and, therefore, have a strong brand image. The future belongs to those who can consistently provide a favorable experience for customers.

Tedious Tasks Made Easy

The future will have many time-saving devices. Scott Cook

with Intuit did this years ago with Quicken. They made something that is dreadful (paying bills) easy to do. Today services are springing up on the Net to address these tedious tasks. One example is www.mybeancounter.com, which

allows accountants, lawyers and others who sell their services by the clock to keep track of hours and expenses. The web site has a voice-enabled time and expense tracking system that marries the web and a plain telephone. An ac-



"Due to a computer glitch, you have 376 appointments this morning."



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countant can read their hours into a telephone and the words are translated into text via their technology. There is no need to learn special codes or procedures. This makes entering time sheets easier and faster. Think about how you can make tasks that are tedious, but necessary, a lot easier for your customers. Use mybeancounter.com as an example and learn from them.

Wireless Rules

The wireless web-enabled devices are a big part of your future. Companies like Wysdom (www.wysdom.com) provide wireless access to the web so you can be notified of specific e-mail messages through your web-enabled cell phone. A real estate agent

could have the system programmed to receive just the e-mail messages from the key buyer, seller or mortgage agent. Rather than getting a lot of unnecessary e-mail, the real estate agent would get only those messages that they have determined in advance are important. Travelers can receive weather updates for select cities and notification of plane delays. In the future wireless is going to replace many of the land-based services we now use. Think now about how you can serve your customers better through web-enabled wireless connections.

The future is very bright for those prepared for it. These technologies and others like them provide a glimpse of what is coming for your future. Are you ready for the future?

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