



# PUT YOUR COMPANY ON THE WEB

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*This publication covers initial questions that businesses or organizations should ask when considering a Web site. It provides basic guidelines for setting up a company Web site. These are introductory considerations and are meant to give you unbiased information so that you can make good choices and get your Web site on the right track.*

## CONTENTS

Who needs a World Wide Web site? . . . . .	Page 1
Who buys from the Internet? Who are your customers? . . . . .	1
What is your competition doing? . . . . .	2
Is your company prepared to handle increased customer contacts and/or sales? . . . . .	2
So you've decided you want a Web presence . . . . .	2
Develop your image . . . . .	2
Brainstorm your domain name . . . . .	2
How big should your Web site be? . . . . .	3
Should you develop your own Web site? . . . . .	3
Questions to ask when interviewing a Web site developer . . . . .	4
Have you thought about customer service? . . . . .	5
You can make these Web site design elements work for you . . . . .	5
Federal Trade Commission guidelines . . . . .	6
Promote and advertise your Web site . . . . .	7
Register with search engines . . . . .	7
Legal issues . . . . .	7
Summary . . . . .	8
Glossary of Web terms . . . . .	9

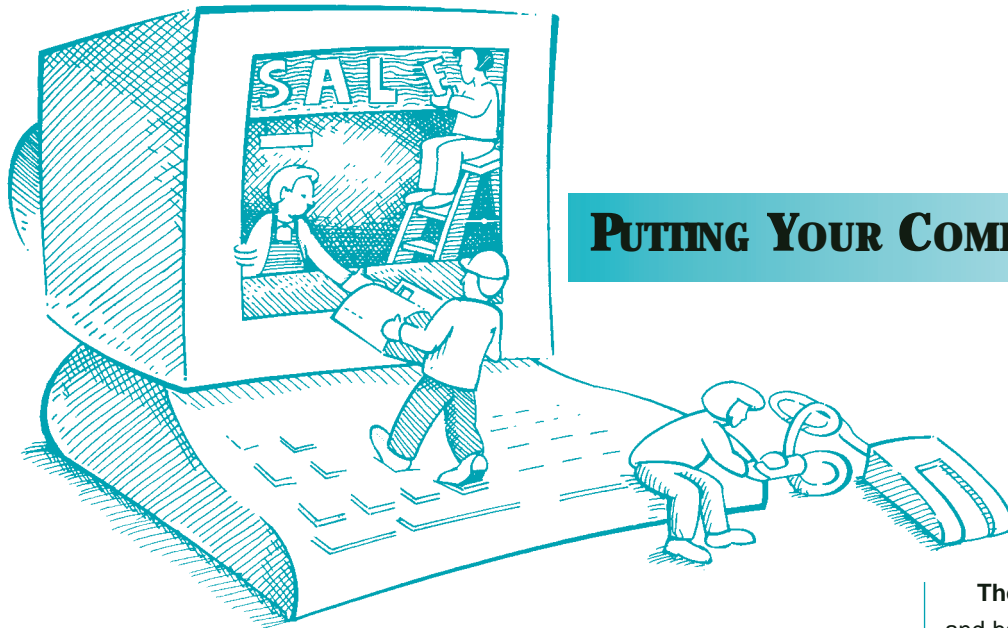


**Developed by the Missouri Textile and Apparel Center University of Missouri-Columbia, MU Extension  
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## PUTTING YOUR COMPANY ON THE WEB

### Who needs a World Wide Web site?

Every business, especially those selling to consumers, needs some kind of World Wide Web presence, even if it is as minor as an electronic directory listing. The Web is increasingly replacing the phone book as the place where people look for a company's address, phone number and other key information. And, it has the advantage of not being limited to a particular city. In addition, organizations and institutions that want to reach members and collaborators can have an immediate wide-reaching presence.

### Different purposes for Web sites

- Information only
- Advertising and marketing
- Catalog (sometimes called "brochure ware")
- Full sales or financial transactions

### Who buys from the Internet? Who are your customers?

#### Business to consumer (B2C)

Young, affluent, educated, working Americans, equally divided between males and females, appear to be the driving force of U.S. Internet commerce (E-commerce). Over time, Web consumers are becoming older, the income level is going down, and women and minorities are increasing their percent of presence. Internet shoppers value convenience and want as much information and choice as possible. They have faith in technology, and tend to use the Internet to fulfill an inner need.

**Three main groups** were there first and are making electronic commerce work.

**The first group** is made up generally of white-collar workers, well educated, with a high income, often in dual-income families. They are the leading online buyers of every product and the first to adopt technologies such as cell phones, electronic calendars and hand-held Internet access devices. They view the use of technology as a way to get ahead. They are more interested in convenience than in price.

**The second group** is family oriented and has an above average income.

They use the Internet to enhance their connections to others. This group is the backbone of the electronic consumer market.

**The third group** is made up of entertainment seekers. They use technology because it is fun. This group generally lives in one- or two-person households with no children, has a fairly high-income level and buys on impulse.

If your product appeals to one or more of these groups, you need to seriously consider having a Web site. It should be designed with these major markets in mind.

#### Business to business (B2B)

Your Web site is an opportunity to reach other businesses. Retailers might be interested in selling your product. Other businesses might use your products as raw materials for their products or services. Or, your service might be just what another company needs.

Many large manufacturers conduct business over the Web by using auctions and/or B2B exchanges. Exchanges let a company post its supply needs where potential suppliers can respond by posting what they have and the selling price. The manufacturer can then select a supplier, based on cost,





past experience, reputation, availability and other factors. These exchanges limit the need for a lot of the paperwork, faxing and telephone time that purchasing has required in the past. They also make it possible for buyers and sellers to reach an agreement much faster. The difficulty is that both buyer and seller must be members of a given exchange and have the software to access it. For small companies, the cost can sometimes be prohibitive.

Small companies can use the Internet to find potential suppliers by doing searches on a product. They can contact the potential supplier by email — saving both time and money (no “phone tag,” no phone bill). If you find several potential suppliers, you can compare their responses before making your buying decision. Some of these suppliers may also have the option for you to purchase online. Another possibility might be for you to cooperate with other small business to buy your supplies together, and take advantage of volume discounts.

It is also possible that you could find potential buyers for your product or service by doing Internet searches. If you find a company that sells your product, they are potential buyers of your product.

### **What is your competition doing?**

**Go “surfing.”** Search for the competition’s Web sites using both names and categories. What kinds of Web sites do your competitors have? Think like a customer. How do your competitor’s pages appear to you? Would you spend time there? Can you find what you are looking for there? Would you go back a second and third time? What type and amount of information do they include? How do they handle orders?

### **Is your company prepared to handle increased customer contacts and/or orders and sales?**

**What will you do if your Web site is a success?** Do you have or can you make/acquire enough product to fill many orders in a timely manner? Are your fulfillment procedures in place or do you want to hire a fulfillment company? Do you have a return policy and what will you do with returned product? (There are now companies who specialize in handling returns for companies. Also, UPS and FedEx are partnering with companies to facilitate returns.)

So you’ve decided you want a Web presence...

### **Develop your image.**

If your company already has a recognizable image, adapt it for your Web pages. Remember that print materials must be simplified for use on the Web. Decide on your colors and limit the number of colors you use (unless your customers are children or teen-agers).

This is an area where professional expertise could be a valuable investment. Attention to image will give customers the appropriate impression about your company and will help establish your credibility and value in their minds. Once established, your image will speak volumes for you and about you.

### **Brainstorm your domain name (the Web address). Register it.**

Don’t procrastinate. Registration is inexpensive (\$35 per year is reasonable) and easy. As soon as you think you’re headed for a Web site, put everybody in the company on the task of coming up with the perfect name for

your company's site. Your domain name is your identity. If people know your company by its name, then use it! It should be something that people can easily associate with your company and can remember. Don't make it too "cute." Also consider your image and any brands when you select a domain name.

Check to be sure that it hasn't already been taken, and then register it. You can register more than one name — if you're not sure what you want to use and/or if you want to own variations on your chosen name. Register any and all names that you can afford, so you don't take a chance that someone else will come along and register the name you have chosen. Registration can be done on the Internet through various sites that specialize in this process — simply do a search under "domain name registration." *Checkdomain.com* is a Web site that allows users to find out whether a domain name is registered or still available.

## How big should your Web site be?

Decide how much you want to do at the beginning and make a plan for enhancing your Web site over time. Your site can develop from an information center telling about your company and your product, to a catalog with telephone and fax ordering, to a full selling site taking credit card payments. You can look at this process as a series of phases that often overlap.

### Phase 1: Connecting to the Internet

In Phase 1, a company connects to the internet, and

its employees have e-mail and access to the World Wide Web. In this phase, businesses may source and purchase supplies over the Internet. The company may also have a simple Web site showing some of their products and giving contact information.

### Phase 2: Maintaining an active and purposeful Web site

In Phase 2, the company maintains an active Web site. Customers can view pictures and descriptions of the company products. The site includes some interactive customer support such as an e-mail link and is regularly updated. An FAQ (frequently asked questions) page might fit into this phase. Phone or fax ordering could also be added.

### Phase 3: Buying and/or selling on the Internet

Somewhere between phases 2 and 3, the company should have a full catalog of product offerings and mechanisms for customers to order merchandise on line. More sophisticated Web sites include such features as

instant feedback on out of stock items, instant feedback on orders received, e-mail notification of shipping and estimated arrival times. This Web site might also have interactive customer support such as e-mail with immediate responses, online telephone connection, and other types of customer support, such as newsletters, mailing lists, etc.

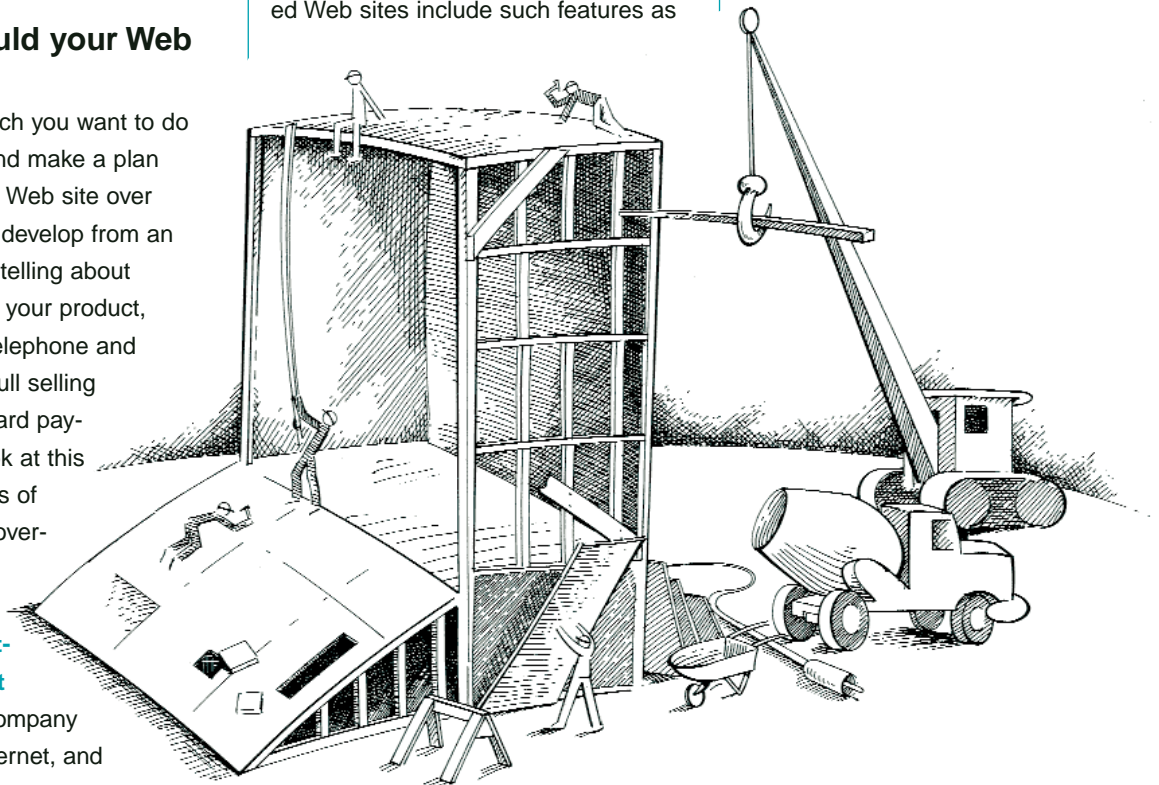
### Phase 4: Integrating your core business operations with the Internet

Phase 4 includes full customer relationship management and back-end integration. Everything related to buying and selling is computer managed.

## Should you develop your own Web site? Hire it out? Use a combination?

Consider your company's resources for developing a Web site in terms of:

- Time
- Expertise
- Maintenance and updates
- Cost



# Questions to ask when you are interviewing a Web site developer

## 1. What services do they provide:

Image development, design, hosting, other?

## 2. What about maintenance?

Can you do your own updating or do you have to go back to the company? Are there additional charges for upgrades? Who will own the Web site when it is completed? Who will own the domain name?

## 3. What are the hourly rates?

Normal rates are about \$60 to \$150 per hour. Rates may vary greatly between rural and metropolitan areas.

## 4. Look at the developer's Web site.

Does it provide useful information? Is it attractive? Is it easy to navigate? Do you like it?

## 5. Ask about the people in the company.

Who is on the staff? What is their expertise? Who does what? Is the staff stable and consistent? Is the owner available to you? If much of the staff is part time, are they there on a permanent basis? If there is a lot of turnover among staff members, you may end up with more than one person working on your Web site.

## 6. Ask for references from current and former customers.

Get the names of former customers and find out from them if they had a positive experience. Would they recommend the company? Would they go back to the company? Look at their Web sites. Do you like them?

## 7. Ask how much your Web site development will cost. Is the initial consultation free?

This consultation should begin with a dialog about what you want your Web site to do and what features you will want. If they give you an estimate without knowing what you want, they are probably not taking your needs into consideration. If they just say, "It depends," they can charge you anything they want.

## 8. Does the developer question you about your customers?

Does the developer ask you what your customers need and expect? Is he or she interested in how your products/services are currently marketed or sold? A good Web developer knows your Web site must be personal to your company and work for your customers.

## 9. Who will provide the content and graphics for your site?

Will the company help you with wording (if you want help) and develop original art for you? Is there an additional cost for this?

## 10. Will the developer help you test your Web site and make corrections?

## 11. Can the developer host the site if you want them to?

How much will hosting the site cost? Ask them about other options for hosting the site.

## 12. Will the developer help you with gathering statistics on visits to your Web site?

Will they help you to understand what the statistics mean? Are there additional charges for these services?

## 13. What will happen to your Web site if the developer goes out of business?

## 14. If you decide to use this developer, what are the next steps?

## 15. Can you get advice from the developer about legal issues?

*Thanks to J. Michael Roach, of IDP Group ([www.idpgroup.com](http://www.idpgroup.com)), and Linda Carlton, of Effectual Web Design ([www.effectualweb.com](http://www.effectualweb.com)), for their input.*



Decide whether doing your own Web site is an efficient use of your time or that of your staff. Is there someone on your staff who is experienced enough to design and/or put up your Web site quickly and accurately? Web site development and maintenance involves technical expertise and is an art. You may find that it costs less than you think to hire an experienced firm to develop your Web site for you. Remember, your Web site will be the first impression for many potential customers. You don't want to risk turning them off just to save a few dimes.

Think about what you want your site to do before visiting a developer. Interview potential Web site developers to be sure they will do the job that you want done. See the checklist of questions to ask a potential Web site developer, on page 4. If you have specific needs, be sure to discuss them with the Web site developers you interview. No matter how good they are, no matter how well recommended they come, if they can't or won't do what you want, they are not right for you.

## Have you thought about customer service?

On-line customers like to have it all. They have high expectations about how your Web site should work and look, as well as what they can find there. Can you provide them with the service they expect?

Gear your Web site to your customers' needs. Start small and work your way up to more advanced functions.

There are many customer service options. Check out other Web sites (especially your competition) to see what they include and how they work. Do the features they offer add value to the site?

Some of these options are compli-

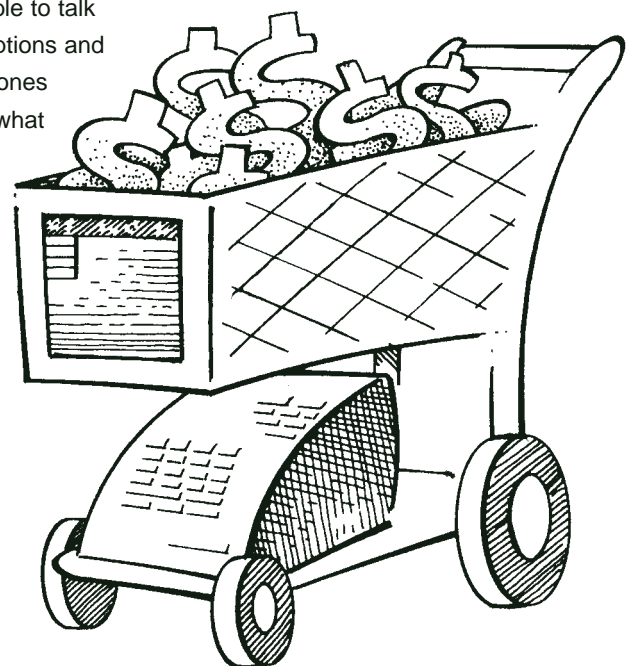
## Customer service possibilities

- Clear and detailed product information (descriptions, photos, sizes, prices, quantities, etc.)
- Quick and easy-to-follow navigation
- E-mail (answered within 24 hours)
- Free or reduced-rate shipping
- Returns to store accepted and /or free return postage
- Clear security and privacy policies that protect the customer
- Store location directory
- Product availability information
- Order tracking
- Personal greeter
- Product/trend advice
- Internet telephone capability
- Auxiliary related information
- FAQ (frequently asked questions)
- Wish list
- Call center
- Gifts with purchase, online coupons and incentives
- Mass customization
- 3D modeling

cated and probably not for beginners. The person or company that develops your Web site will be able to talk with you about these options and help you decide which ones you want immediately, what can wait, and which are necessary to meet the goals of your Web site.

## You can make these Web site design elements work for you.

- Begin with a great, strong home page that will draw viewers in.
- Each page should have a title that tells what is on it.
- Repeat your brand image (logo) on every page and always in the same place and color.
- Put links on your pages so that customers can go directly where they want to go. No information should be farther than three clicks away. Always put the links in the same place and in the same order. Graphic links should be repeated in text form.
- Include your telephone number, an e-mail link, and your e-mail address, spelled out — and make them easy to find.
- Update your pages regularly, just as you would a storefront window. You can train your customers to look for updates on a regular basis — e.g., weekly or on the 1st and 15th of the month. Offer an incentive for them to return and check out your updates — a new featured product, a sale



# Federal Trade Commission guidelines

*The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has developed a series of reports, guidelines and model codes that represent “widely-accepted principles concerning fair information practices.” (FTC Web site).*

The five core principles of privacy protection are:

- (1) notice/awareness;
- (2) choice/consent;
- (3) access/participation;
- (4) integrity/security; and
- (5) enforcement/redress.

There is extensive information about this and other consumer privacy issues posted on their Web site ([www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)). What follows is a very brief summary of these five principles.

## 1. Notice/awareness

Consumers should be given notice of what a given Web site intends to do about collecting information including:

- (a) who is collecting the data;
- (b) how the data will be used;
- (c) potential recipients of the data;
- (d) the kind of data that are collected;
- (e) the means by which it will be collected;
- (f) whether providing the data is voluntary or required; and
- (g) the steps being taken to ensure confidentiality.

## 2. Choice/consent

Consumers should be given options about how their personal information will be used

beyond the need to complete the intended transaction. The two traditional types of choice are opt-in and opt-out. With the opt-in option, consumers give permission for the collection and/or use of their data. With the opt-out option, consumers must take steps to prevent the collection and/or use of their data. The difference is which option is the default.

## 3. Access/participation

The consumer should have the ability to access the data about him or herself (that is, view the files) and to contest the accuracy and completeness of that data.

## 4. Integrity/security

The data must be accurate and secure. Data collectors must take reasonable steps to insure that it is.

## 5. Enforcement/redress

To be effective, there must be a mechanism in place to enforce these principles. Among the alternative enforcement approaches are industry self-regulation; legislation that would enable consumers to sue; and/or government regulation making violation of privacy codes a civil and/or criminal action.

The topic of consumer rights-to-privacy vs. commercial collection of information for such uses as targeted advertising is hotly debated at all levels of internet use. Only time will tell whether the industry will be able to self-regulate to the satisfaction of those concerned or regulating agencies will have to pass laws and impose sanctions.



special or a perk (free or reduced price shipping, a gift, a coupon, etc.) each time.

- Be sure that all your information is relevant, accurate and complete. Be absolutely sure that there are no typos or grammatical errors.
- Be sure that everything on your Web site works. Web site customers are frustrated easily and don't like dead ends or confusion. Remember, the competition is just a click away! When customers go to sites that take too long to load, or are too complicated, i.e. unclear ordering instructions, lack of details, or rejection of credit cards, they tend to abandon your site. (Your Web site traffic report can help you determine if this is a problem on your site.)
- Include a feedback section (possibly with a survey). Provide a place for name and e-mail address, but don't require it.
- Make the text large enough to read on normal computer settings.
- Use good contrast between the background and the text. Remember that black backgrounds will not print from all computers and that some computers will read colors differently from the way you designed them.
- Background patterns can clutter your site, or can even make people dizzy.
- Include a "text only" option for computers that cannot load graphics or are very slow.
- Design your pages with lots of "white," or open space.
- Print all your pages to be sure that they print. Then print them from a computer at your public library or a public school. Have your kids or the neighborhood kids and their friends explore your site and report back to you.

## Promote and advertise your Web site

Promote your Web site on ALL your print materials, including your stationery, business cards and print advertising.

- Trade links with non-competing related Web sites.
- Use Web-banner advertising sparingly.
- If you can afford it, use magazine ads or a newsletter to reach your target market.
- E-mail known, interested customers. Do NOT send spam e-mail. Always include a way for e-mail recipients to be removed from your list ("opt out") and honor all such requests.

## Register with search engines

Search engines respond to key words entered by the user and provide a list of Web sites with that word appearing in the area that the search engine looks in. There are three types of search engines. The first is a directory that provides a listing of Web pages by category. To be listed with these types of search engines, you must register with them. They may allow you to give the description and keywords as you want them to appear.

**True search engines** automatically index your site using indexing software or "robots." Every search engine has different criteria for returning search results. If you know what their criteria are, you can influence how your site will be ranked in the search results.

**Meta search engines** look through multiple search engines simultaneously and a ranking for your keywords results from how many times it encounters the keyword in the search engines it uses.

The individual Web sites of the search engines will give you information about their requirements and your Web

site developer should be able to give you further tips on submitting your URL and your keywords. A marketing Web site that has useful information on this and other topics is:

[www.marketingtips.com/](http://www.marketingtips.com/)

## Legal issues

There are several legal issues that you should be aware of when you sell products or services over the Internet. One issue of great concern to many consumers is Privacy and Security.

Consumers continue to express concern for their personal information on the Internet. A large number of customers will not purchase anything from the Web because they are afraid that their credit card numbers or other personal information will be stolen. While this rarely happens, there have been well-publicized instances of this happening, and their fears cannot be simply dismissed. Check some existing Web sites and see how they address the security and privacy issue.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) regulation on Privacy and Security is discussed briefly on the previous page. In addition, when you begin selling over the Internet, the security of credit card numbers and other personal information becomes even more of a concern. Your web developer should be able to help you make your website secure and safe for your customers.

Other issues include copyrights, your obligation to fill and ship orders in a timely manner, chargebacks resulting from customers using bad or stolen credit cards, handling returns and refunds, electronic signatures, smart cards and sales tax. Because the Internet as a business vehicle is still relatively new, Congress is debating ways to deal with many of these issues. It might be a good idea to consult an

attorney to review potential problems prior to launching your Web site.

## Summary

Essentially every business needs a Web presence. How complex your Web site will be depends on your purpose for having a Web site and the resources you can and are willing to devote to your Web site.

If your intention is to provide a directory listing for your current and potential customers and/or your resources are very limited, a Web site giving your company information, including address, phone number and e-mail address may be all that you can begin with.

A deeper commitment of resources could allow you to provide pictures and descriptions of some, most or all of your products.

The next level of commitment is to sell products/services from your Web site. This will require you to accept credit cards and/or consider electronic signatures, gift cards, participation in electronic shopping malls and other methods for exchanging money through the Web. You must also be prepared with fulfillment capability for fast and efficient delivery of items purchased,

and methods for handling returns and refunds.

Some companies that sell through major retail establishments do not want to do direct sales on line because their retailers consider this to be direct competition with their sales. In this case, you would want to put an up-to-date store location directory on your Web site.

Whatever level of Web site you start with, look to upgrading as soon and as often as possible. Keep your information up to date and change it often so that customers have a reason to keep coming back.

Get feedback from your friends and customers about your Web site. If they tell you that it is hard to navigate or read, then you and/or your site developer have work to do.

Marketing your Web site is key to your success. Put your Web address on everything that is associated with your business — your cards, stationery, brochures, and in all your advertising.

Make your Web site an integral part of your business plan, not something separate and apart. Whenever you have a promotion or launch a new product, your Web site should be a part of the campaign.

# Glossary of Web terms

The Web has created a whole new vocabulary that can be very confusing. One of several Web sites that give definitions of Web-related terms is: <http://www.Webopedia.com>

A few common terms and some that are used in this publication are listed below.

## Affiliate programs —

an agreement between two or more companies to promote each other's related, but not competing, products or services. Each company places a link on its page to the affiliate's page and usually gets a percentage of sales resulting from cross-hits.

## Banner advertising —

the boxes that appear (usually at the top of a Web page) advertising a company. When the advertising is targeted, the banners refer to a related (but not competing) product or service, e.g., a company that sells golf equipment might put a banner ad on a page from a company that sells golf clothing or a golf resort page. Targeted advertising appears to be effective, while random banner ads are seen by consumers as mostly annoying. In some cases, banner advertising is the way a Web site is paid for.

## Browser —

software programs, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape, that retrieve, display, and print information and HTML documents through the WWW.

## B2B (Business to business) —

transactions conducted between businesses.

## B2C (Business to consumer) —

transactions conducted between businesses and individual consumers.

## Clicks and mortar —

a retail business operating a physical store (mortar) and an Internet Web site (clicks). Also: **clicks and bricks.**

## Domain name —

the unique name that identifies the internet site. (See also, URL)

## EC (Electronic or e-commerce) —

involving use of a computer and the Internet to conduct business.

## EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) —

the exchange of documents, such as purchase orders and invoices, between businesses, electronically, in a standardized format.

## E-mail (Electronic mail) —

messages sent from one person to another or a group via the computer.

## Encryption —

a coding system used to ensure the security of information on the Internet. A decoding system is required to read the information.



Hit —

a single request from a Web browser for a single item (file) from a Web server. A counter would register four hits to display a page with three graphics — one for the page and one for each graphic.

Internet —

a collection of interconnected computer networks around the world. The vehicle through which e-mail and the World Wide Web operate.

Intranet —

an internal network of computers accessible only to selected users. Many companies have an intranet available only to employees.

ISP (Internet service provider) —

a company that provides connections to the Internet for a fee, e.g., AT&T @home, AOL, Socket.

Pure play —

a company using the Internet as its only channel to conduct business (no physical stores or paper catalogs).

Server —

A computer or device on a network that manages network resources. For example, a *file server* is a computer and storage device dedicated to storing files. Any user on the network can store files on the server. A *print server* is a computer that manages one or more printers, and a *network server* is a computer that manages network traffic. A *database server* is a computer system that processes database queries.

Site —

the virtual location on the WWW, usually made up of a home page and several Web pages, designated by a unique URL. (See also, Web site.)

Spam —

junk e-mail, usually advertising, sent via e-mail, without the permission of the recipient.

Surfing —

to move from place to place on the Internet searching for topics of interest. Generally used to describe a rather undirected type of Web browsing in which the user jumps from page to page rather whimsically, as opposed to specifically searching for specific information.

URL (Uniform resource locator) —

internet address or web address. An address, consisting of a prefix, domain and suffix. The main level is the type/country designator and is on the right (.com; .org; .edu; net; gov); the second level is on the left and designates a specific computer network (www); the sub domain is the individual name of the Web site and is in the middle (abc). For example: [www.abc.com](http://www.abc.com)

Web site —

a site (location) on the World Wide Web.. Each Web site contains a home page, which is the first document users see when they enter the site. The site might also contain additional documents and files. Each site is owned and managed by an individual, company or organization.

WWW (World Wide Web, or Web) —

a utility on the Internet, made up of home pages with links to other pages.

