

Lost Sales Found Here



communications as a minimum. But there are other ways to drive traffic to your website as well, such as e-mail marketing (think e-mail newsletters), direct mail, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), and online ads, among the options.

Toler works hand in hand with Whereoware and their suite of marketing tools to aggressively market to his customers. "We collected e-mail addresses before we were developing our site," Toler says. "That allowed us a head start to market to them when we were ready." www.MyEvergreen.com is promoted in print through catalogs and mailers, through word of mouth by their territory managers and online through online programs and e-mail newsletters. The response from their customers has only been positive.

"There are two types of qualified Web traffic—new customers and existing customers," Dean says. "What's critical is to make proactive marketing a company initiative, build it into the overall marketing plan and the consistently execute it."

OverCoffee Productions offers several marketing opportunities for their clients, from e-mail newsletters to housing a Catalog Library of manufacturer-provided images for retailers to upload to their own sites quickly and easily.

It's All in the Details

Both OverCoffee Productions and

Whereoware regularly launch new software and programs to better meet the needs of their customers. For example, OverCoffee Productions launched their Personalized Imaging rendering software which allows end consumers to design their own personalized items such as bracelets with a loved one's name.

"Ninety percent of our customers use our personalization feature," says Gudai. "It has been indispensable for our product, as customers want to see the product with their information before placing the order."

Recently, Whereoware consolidated their three main Web solutions—website/e-commerce development, Active Merchandiser, and Web marketing, into affordable packages that can truly solve the problem of how to sell online. "These offerings do more than provide a website for our clients," says Dean. "They give them the foundation and plan for success online. A systematic, high quality site with superb product presentation and integrated e-mail campaigns, competitively priced, creates a road map for that success."

Active Merchandiser provides a flexible online catalog service that allows a manufacturer to put their catalog online and even create targeted and niche catalogs easily. Also, a retailer can get more information about a product by placing their computer mouse over the product and reading the pop-up that appears.

And, as mentioned earlier,

OverCoffee Productions offers its Catalog Library for manufacturers to upload their high-resolution images and product information for retailers' easy access. "Many retailers with a website presence know first hand the frustration of not having good quality product shots or up-to-date products on their site," Walters says. "When an item sells out quickly on their site and the retailer wants to update it with a new product, the process can take hours and days. They usually call their representatives or manufacturers for new images or try to shoot it themselves. The Catalog Library gives the control of accessing images to the retailer so the retailer doesn't have to go on a hunt for good images—the retailer can access a product and upload it to their website within minutes."

Looking forward, the next stage in websites is to provide more personalized information to customers, Walters adds. "As a website owner begins collecting customer preferences, then more targeted information can be made available—via a website or e-mail. This personalized information can take the form of product specials, new product announcements, sales tracking notification—that is geared specifically to a customer. This is a big change from sending announcements to your entire customer base. Personalization and customer segmentation allows your customer to only hear about the things that are of most interest to them."

Having a partner like OverCoffee Productions or Whereoware working with you can become a true partnership as your success is dependent on having the latest information and technology available for your customers.

It Never Ends

And yet all of the people we spoke with agree—it never ends. As our experts say, having a website is like having another business. It evolves and it gets better every time you work on it.

www.StorkieExpress.com has gone through many generations. The first generation took three months and the second took more than double that at seven months. It is currently working on its third generation and that is scheduled to take about four months.

www.CollectorsGallery.com, too, is working on another phase. As is www.WorldFinds.com. The Internet is just another method to reach out to your customers. Once you discover the benefits and success of maximizing your website's capabilities, you'll wonder why you didn't do it sooner. ❧

Megy Karydes, former marketing executive for the Chicago Merchandise Mart, is a writer and president of marketing/pr consulting firm Karydes Consulting. She enjoys writing magazine articles and working with her gift and home accessories clients—all of whom have active websites! Check in with her by e-mailing megy@KarydesConsulting.com.

Still thinking about adding a website to your business mix?

Here's just a dozen compelling reasons to make this a 2008 resolution:

Oftentimes, the biggest mistake you can make is to build a website that doesn't do anything for you. In case you needed some solid reasons to take the next step, here are just a dozen good reasons to build one:

- Your business will be open 24 hours a day and seven days a week.
- More and more homes have one or more computers in their homes and high speed internet access is affordable. Safety precautions are becoming stronger. With this access, more people are becoming comfortable ordering from the Web.
- Anytime someone wants to know your hours, location, directions or any other details about your company, they can get it with a quick click of a button.
- Low staffing costs—when you have a website, you can offer your products or services without hiring extra employees.
- Gain new customers—since anyone can see your website, you can gain customers from other states

and countries—and expand your selling reach.

- Create an image of a well-established company. Promote your brand identity and reinforce your image. No matter how small your business is, with the right website design, you can make your company look great on the Web.
- Save on postage and printing costs. Consider how many postcards and mailings you send out to your customers to let them know about upcoming events or sales. Much of that can be eliminated by putting that information on your website and inviting your customers to visit it. You can collect your customers' e-mail addresses and keep in touch with them regularly!
- Improve communication by posting new information on your website. Changes happen often and quickly—make sure your staff, teams, sales associates and customers know by including a section on your website.
- Customer service—in an age where we need information NOW, a website can include a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page where

your customers can visit for quick answers.

- Online presence—in line with your competitors. It's true, if you're not there, your competitors are. Don't lose your hard-earned customers by showing them to the "door" of your competitor. If people can't find your company on the Web, you might as well not exist.
- Get those cranky and busy customers, too. Many people don't like to shop in stores or just don't have the time. And, for those parents with little children, the website is often the easiest way for them to shop for their families and for gifts. By putting your products online, you satisfy the needs of such customers and therefore succeed in one more niche.
- Showcase your work. Regardless of your company, you can always showcase your work. Interior designers add finished projects or current projects on their website. Reps add their lines and product images. Manufacturers can add their showroom location and rep contact information.