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101 Ways to Promote Your Web site

Fifth Edition

Filled with Proven Internet Marketing Tips, Tools, Techniques, and Resources to Increase Your Web Site Traffic

Susan Sweeney
Publisher: Jim Hoskins
Manager of Finance/Administration: Joyce Reedy
Production Manager: Gina Cooke
Cover Designer: Lauren Smith
Copyeditor: Mark Goodin
Proofreader: Jacquie Wallace
Indexer: Susan Olason
Printer: P.A. Hutchison

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Introduction

Over the past few years there has been literally a tidal wave of companies building Web sites. This phenomenal boom in Web site creation and online traffic has intensified the battle for the consumer’s time and attention. A secondary component or required follow-on to Web site design involves developing comprehensive online marketing strategies to capture online market share. The need for information and advice on developing Internet marketing strategies is tremendous.

Building a Web site, however, is just the first step. Driving business to your site takes knowledge, planning, time, and effort. If you are intent on maintaining a competitive advantage, then you need to build the traffic to your site by implementing an effective Internet marketing strategy.

Whether you are an experienced marketing professional or are just dreaming of starting your own Internet business, you will benefit from the information contained in this timely book. 101 Ways to Promote Your Web Site offers comprehensive, hands-on, step-by-step advice for building Web site traffic using hundreds of proven tips, tools, and techniques to achieve optimal results. You will find out how to:

- Make your site unique
- Attract new visitors and keep them coming back
- Prepare and submit to hundreds of search engines and directories to be listed in the top search results
- Maximize your Web site promotion using meta-indexes
- Pull traffic to your site by implementing a personalized, targeted e-mail campaign
- Develop an effective banner ad campaign to draw the right customers to your site
• Use newsgroups and mailing lists to communicate with your target market and build your reputation

• Hype your company in the media for increased exposure through interactive press releases

• Increase company and brand awareness with webcasting and rich media

• Use one of the most effective Internet marketing tools—\textit{links}

• Find and use free promotion tools available on the Internet

• Develop your own affiliate or associate program

• Use permission and viral marketing effectively.

You will be provided with a wealth of information on how to use specific promotion, marketing, and advertising strategies to increase the traffic to your site. Entrepreneurs, corporate marketing managers, small-business owners, and consultants will be given a proven method to turn their commercial Web site into an online success.

\textbf{Your “Members Only” Web Site}

The Internet world changes every day. That’s why there is a companion Web site associated with this book. On this site you will find updates to the book and other Web site promotion resources of interest. However, you have to be a member of the “101 Ways Insiders Club” to gain access to this site.

When you purchased this book, you automatically became a member (in fact, that’s the only way to join), so you now have full privileges. To get into the “Members Only” section of the companion Web site, go to the Maximum Press Web site located at \texttt{www.maxpress.com} and follow the links to the “101 Ways” area. From there you will see a link to the “101 Ways Insiders Club” section. When you try to enter, you will be asked for a user ID and password. Type in the following:
For your user ID, enter: 101ways5e

For your password, enter: storm

You will then be granted full access to the “Members Only” area. Visit the site often and enjoy the updates and resources with our compliments—and thanks again for buying the book. We ask that you not share the user ID and password for this site with anyone else.

Susan Sweeney’s Internet Marketing Mail List

You are also invited to join Susan Sweeney’s Internet Marketing Bi-weekly Internet Marketing Tips, Tools, Techniques, and Resources Newsletter at www.susansweeney.com.
With millions of Web sites competing for viewers, how do you get the results you’re looking for? When asked if they are marketing on the Internet, many people say, “Yes, we have a Web site.” However, having a Web site and marketing on the Internet are two very different things. Yes, usually you need a Web site to market on the Internet. However, a Web site is simply a collection of documents, images, and other electronic files that are publicly accessible across the Internet. Your site should be designed to meet your online objectives and should be developed with your target market in mind. Internet marketing encompasses all the steps you take to reach your target market online, attract visitors to your Web site, encourage them to buy your products or services, and make them want to come back for more.

Having a Web site is great, but it is meaningless if nobody knows about it. Just like having a brilliantly designed product brochure does you little good if it sits in your sales manager’s desk drawer, a Web site does you little good if your target market isn’t visiting it. It is the goal of this book to help you take your Web site out of the desk drawer, into the spotlight, and into the hands of your target market. You will learn how to formulate an Internet marketing strategy in keeping with your objectives, your product or service, and your target market. This chapter provides you with an overview of this book and introduces the importance of:
• Defining your online objectives

• Defining your target market and developing your Web site and online marketing strategy with them in mind

• Developing the Internet marketing strategy that is appropriate for your product or service.

The Fundamentals—Objectives, Target Markets, and Products and Services

Things have changed dramatically over the past several years in terms of Web site design and development methodology. Back in the olden days—a couple years ago in Internet years—it was quite acceptable and the norm for an organization to pack up all their brochures, ads, direct mail pieces, news releases, and other marketing materials in a box, drop it off at the Web developer, and after a short conversation ask when they might expect their Web site to be “done.” By going through this process, organizations ended up with “brochureware.” Brochureware is no longer acceptable on the Web if you want to be successful. Sites that are successful today are ones that are designed around the

• Objectives of the organization

• Needs, wants, and expectations of the target markets

• Products and services that are being offered.

Everything related to Internet marketing revolves around these three things—objectives, target markets, and products and services. It is critically important to define these things appropriately and discuss them with your Web developer. It is your responsibility to define these things, not your Web developer’s. You know, or should know, what your objectives are more clearly than your Web developer. If you don’t articulate these objectives and discuss them with your Web developer, it is impossible for him or her to build a site to achieve your objectives!
You know your target market better than your Web developer. You know what your buyers want, what they base their buying decisions on, and what their expectations are better than your Web developer. You need to provide this information so that your Web developer can build a Web site that meets the needs and expectations of your target market.

Let’s spend the remainder of the chapter on these fundamentals—objectives, target markets, and products and services—so you can be better prepared for the planning process for your Web site.

**Common Objectives**

Before you even start to create your Web site, you must clearly define your online objectives. What is the purpose of your site? Brainstorm with all parts of your organization, from the frontline clerks, to marketing and sales personnel, to customer support, to order fulfillment and administration. Generate a list of primary and secondary objectives. Every element of your site should relate back to your objectives. When you decide to update, add, or change any elements on your Web site, examine how these changes relate to the primary and secondary objectives you have identified. If there is not a clear match between your objectives and your intended changes, you might want to reconsider the changes. It’s amazing how many Web sites have been developed without adequate planning or without ensuring the Web site ties in with the corporate objectives.

Some of the most common primary objectives include:

- Advertising your product or service
- Selling your product or service
- Providing customer service and product support
- Providing product or corporate information
- Creating and establishing company identity or brand awareness.
Advertising Your Products or Services On-Line

The objective of some sites is simply to advertise but not directly sell an event, product, or service. A prime example of this is a movie studio that develops a Web site to promote a “soon-to-be-released” movie. The objective is to create awareness or a “buzz” about the movie, generate interest in the film, and, ultimately, have a large number of people attend the movie when it is released. This type of site might include multimedia clips of the movie, pictures and stories of the actors in the movie, viral marketing (“Tell a friend about this movie”) elements to encourage word-of-mouth marketing, an intriguing story about the film, press releases for entertainment writers, and other elements to help them achieve their objective with their target market in mind.

Selling Your Products or Services On-Line

Selling products or services online is a common objective. The Internet provides a broad geographic reach and a huge demographic reach. Often businesses combine the objectives of advertising their products or services with trying to sell them through their Web site. This works well because visitors are not only given information about your products and services, but they are given the option of easily ordering and purchasing online. The easier you make it for people to make a purchase from your company, the more likely they will be to buy. You will have to provide detailed information on your products and services, your return policies, guarantees and warranties, and shipping options. If you are planning to sell directly from the site, you also need to address security issues.

Providing Online Customer Service or Support

You might decide that the main reason for your business to have an online presence is to provide more comprehensive customer service and support. A great benefit of a Web site is that you can provide customer assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. If your company develops software, it is a good idea to include downloadable upgrades as well as an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) section where
you can provide solutions to common problems. By providing an easy way for your customers to solve their problems, you increase customer loyalty. You also increase the likelihood that they will return to your company when they need to improve their computer system. Include the appropriate contact information for customers who have more complicated problems and need to talk to a human.

Providing Product or Corporate Information

Some organizations simply wish to provide information on their products or services to a particular target market. Others might want to provide corporate information to potential investors. Information-driven Web sites tend to be text oriented, with graphics used only to accentuate the points being made and provide visual examples. These types of sites usually have an FAQ section that provides useful and pertinent information on the company and its products or services. If the organization courts the media, it might include a Media Center, which can include all its press releases, corporate background, information on key company officials, articles that have been written about the company, and a gallery of relevant pictures that the media can use, as well as a direct link to the company’s media person.

Creating and Establishing Company Identity or Brand Awareness

Another objective might be to create and establish company identity or brand awareness. To “brand” your product, a memorable name and an eye-appealing product logo are necessities. Also, the graphics developed for your Web site must be top-notch and reflect the colors associated with the product logo. A catchy slogan further promotes brand identity. The same branding techniques are also applicable to establishing corporate identity. If building and reinforcing corporate and brand identity are important to you, your Web site must have a consistent look and feel. Likewise, all offline promotional campaigns and materials must be consistent with your online presence.

Based on the success of companies such as America Online, Yahoo!, Travelocity, Amazon.com, and eBay, it is apparent that branding a company or product on the Web can occur swiftly. It is amazing how quickly
these relative newcomers to the business world have achieved megabrand status. Although they all had significant financial resources, each company used a combination of online and offline advertising to meet their objectives. Each of their sites features a prominent logo, consistent imagery, and a consistent color scheme. Check out the sites of these upstarts that have become big online players if branding is your goal. There is a lot we can learn from them.

**Other Primary Objectives**

Brainstorm with all the stakeholders in your organization to come up with other primary objectives for your organization. This process is critical to the organization’s online success. Everything else revolves around your objectives—the elements included on your site and the Internet marketing techniques you use. If you were building a new office, you would want to include the input of all people working in your office to ensure that their needs were taken into consideration and the office was designed appropriately. The same is true when building a Web site—everyone must be included in the brainstorming session.

As much time should be spent in the planning stage as in the construction phase. By going through this process, you will be able to develop the best blueprint for your proposed Web site.

**Other Things to Consider Up Front**

Although setting your primary objectives is vital, it is just as important to identify your secondary objectives. By setting appropriate secondary objectives, you will be more prepared to achieve all your online goals. Many companies identify only primary objectives for their Web site and completely neglect secondary objectives that can help them succeed online. Following are some common secondary objectives for online businesses to consider:

- The site should be designed to be search engine friendly.
- The site should be designed to encourage repeat traffic.
• The site should have viral marketing elements that encourage visitors to recommend your products or services to others.

• The site should include elements to leverage its sales force.

• The site should incorporate permission marketing, where visitors are encouraged to give you permission to send them e-mail on a regular basis.

• The site should be designed to encourage customer loyalty.

• The site should incorporate stickiness, encouraging visitors to stay a while and visit many areas of the site.

Designing Your Site to Be Search Engine Friendly

Creating a site that is search engine friendly should be an objective of every company that wants to do business on the Internet. Search engines are the most common way for Internet surfers to search for something on the Net. In fact, 85 percent of all people who use the Internet use search engines as their primary way to look for information. By using keywords relating to your company in appropriate places on your site, you can improve how search engines rank you. You want these chosen keywords in the keyword meta-tags as well as in each page’s description meta-tag. Some of the other places where you want to have these keywords are your domain name if possible, your page titles and page text, your Alt tags for graphics, and your page headers. Many search engines place a lot of emphasis on the number and quality of links to a site to determine its ranking. This means that the more Web sites you can get to link to your site, the higher your site is shown in search engine results. (See Chapter 6 for more information on designing your site for high search engine ranking.)

Including Repeat Traffic Generators on Your Site

Every Web site should be designed to entice its site visitors to return again and again. No matter if the primary objective of your Web site is
to sell your products and services or to create brand awareness, generating repeat traffic to your Web site helps you achieve these goals. Generating repeat traffic to your site is a key element of your online success and can be accomplished in numerous ways. Using contests and competitions, as well as games, advice columns, and many more techniques, can increase your Web traffic. Chapter 3 describes many of these repeat traffic generators in much more detail.

Getting Visitors to Recommend Your Site

The best exposure your Web site can get is to be recommended by a friend or unbiased third party. It is critical that you try to have elements of your Web site recommended as often as possible; therefore, you should have a way for people to easily tell someone about your site and its contents. The best way to encourage people to recommend your site is to include viral marketing techniques such as a “Tell a Friend” button on your site. You might want to include some variations on this as well. Under articles or press releases, you can have an “E-mail this article to a friend” button for people to refer their friends and associates to your site. Virtual postcards are also a good way to get people to send more people to your Web site. There are many ways to encourage viral marketing. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

Leveraging Your Sales Force

If your objectives include trying to sell your products, you might want to leverage your sales force by making use of an affiliate or associate program. Affiliate programs once again use the advantage of having your site recommended to create traffic to your site. The difference is that an affiliate program is more formal than just having your site recommended by site visitors. Most affiliate programs involve having a contractual agreement, having specific links placed on the affiliate’s site to yours, and having software to track where your traffic is coming from so that you can compute and send referral fees to your affiliates as they are earned. The contract usually states the compensation you will pay to your affiliates for the sales they produce. This is one more way to have other people working to build traffic to your Web site. (See Chapter 17 for details on affiliate or associate programs.)
Using Permission Marketing

You always want your company to be seen as upholding the highest ethical standards and being in compliance with anti-spam legislation, so it is important not to send out unsolicited e-mail—or spam—promoting your company or its products. This is why it’s important to develop a mailing list of people who have given you permission to send them messages, including company news and promotions. When you’re developing your Web site, an objective should be to get as many visitors to your site as possible to give you their e-mail address and permission to be included in your mailings. You can do this by having numerous ways for your visitors to sign up to receive newsletters, notices of changes to your Web site, coupons, or new giveaways. Chapter 3 has many examples of ways to encourage visitors to request to be added to your e-mail list.

Creating Loyalty among Visitors

The way to create loyalty among visitors is to provide them with some incentives for joining your online community and provide them with proof that you really appreciate their business. You can do this by having a members-only section of your Web site that has special offers for them as well as discounts or freebies. When people sign up to join your members-only section, you can ask for their permission and their e-mail address to send them e-mails regarding company or product promotions and news. People like to do business with people who appreciate their business. We are seeing a real growth in loyalty programs online.

Including “Stickiness” Elements

To get your visitors to visit your site often and have them visit a number of pages every time they visit, you need to provide interesting, interactive, and relevant content. You want to have your site visitors feel as if they are part of your online community and to want to make your site one of the sites they visit every day. You create “stickiness” by including many elements that keep your visitors’ attention. Your site can have a daily advice column, descriptions of your many products, a discussion forum with constantly changing interesting conversations relative to your
products, a news section that is updated daily, as well as a weekly contest that site visitors can enter. The combination of these elements makes a site sticky. You want your site to be a resource people return to often and not a one-time event.

A Final Word on Objectives

Setting your Web site’s objectives before you begin building your site is essential so that you can convey to your Web developer what you want your Web site to achieve. You obviously want to create a number of different objectives for your site, but many of the objectives you set can work together to make your Web site complete.

Whatever your objectives might be, you must carefully consider how best to incorporate elements in your Web site and your Internet marketing strategy to help you achieve them. Successful marketing on the Web is not a simple undertaking. Before you begin to brainstorm over the objectives of your Web site, be certain you have read and studied all the information that is pertinent to the market you are attempting to enter. Read everything you can find, and examine the findings of industry experts.

Your Web site objectives form a critical element in your Web site design and development, as you will see in the next chapter on Web site design and development methodology.

Target Markets

It is important to define every one of your target markets. Your Web site is designed for them! For each and every one of your target markets, you need to determine

- Their needs
- Their wants
- Their expectations.
For each and every one of your target markets, you should also try to determine an appropriate “WOW” factor. What can you provide for them on your Web site that will WOW them? Your objective should be to exceed the target market’s expectations.

Your main target market might be your potential customer, but other target markets might include existing customers, or the media, or those who influence the buying decision for your potential customers, associates, or affiliates.

When you look at—really look at—potential customers versus existing customers, you realize that what these two groups want and need from your Web site are probably different. Someone who is an existing customer knows your company. Your products, your business practices, and the like are not a priority for them on your site. A potential customer needs these things before giving you their first order. “Customer” is such a huge target market; it needs to be broken down into segments. Every business is different. If you were a hotel, for example, your customer target market might be broken down further into:

- Business travelers
- Vacation travelers
- Family travelers
- Meeting planners
- Handicapped travelers
- Tour operators
- Groups.

You get the idea. You need to segment your customer target market and then, for each segment, you need to do an analysis of needs, wants, and expectations. If the media is part of your target market, make sure you plan to have a media center or if you want to reach potential investors, make sure you have an investor relations page.

If you intend to market children’s products, your Web site should be colorful and the text simple and easy to understand in keeping with
what appeals to your target market. Chances are, fun-looking graphics will be used extensively on your site to draw children further into it (see Figure 1.1). If you market financial services, your Web site requires a more professional approach. Your graphics must convey a clean appearance, and the text should be informative and written in a business-like fashion (see Figure 1.2). As this example demonstrates, the content and tone of your site must be tailored to your target market. After all, this is the best way to attract the attention of the people who are interested in purchasing your product or service.

Another aspect to consider when designing your Web site is your target market’s propensity to utilize the latest technologies and the configuration they are likely to be using. An online business that markets custom, streaming multimedia presentations expects its clientele to be technically inclined. These clients are more likely to have the latest software, advanced Web browser technologies, and faster machines.

On the other hand, clients of a vendor who sells gardening supplies online might be less likely to have fully embraced the latest technolo-

Figure 1.1. Web sites designed to appeal to children include fun, colorful images.
gies. Most people looking for these products are connecting from home rather than from their workplace. They might have a slow dial-up connection to the Internet, slower machines, and older software. They might still be using the Web browser that was originally installed on their system, simply because they are uncomfortable downloading the latest version of the browser, are unaware of the more recent version, or are uninterested in downloading a large file. If your target market includes this demographic, be careful with your use of Java, Flash, and large graphic files.

What does this mean for developing and designing your Web site? Well, streaming multimedia developers can design their Web sites with more graphics and dynamic multimedia effects because their clients expect to be impressed when they visit the developer’s site. If vendors of gardening supplies designed their sites similarly, many of their clients might be alienated because the site would be too slow to load. They might take their business elsewhere. The gardening supplies site requires

Figure 1.2. A business-oriented site incorporates informative text and a clean, magazine style layout.
a more basic design with less concentration on large graphics and multimedia effects and more focus on presenting information.

**Products and Services**

It is important to define the products and services you want to promote on-line. Sometimes the products and services you offer off-line in your physical store are the same as in your online store, but quite often there are differences.

Business owners who have a bricks-and-mortar location sometimes assume that their online storefront is an extension of their offline storefront and that they will provide exactly the same products and services online as offline. In some cases, fewer products are offered on-line than in the physical store. This is often the case if you are test marketing, but also if some of the products you sell in your physical location are not appropriate for online sales because of competitive pricing or shipping logistics.

In other cases, your online store might offer more products or services than the bricks-and-mortar location. For example, your offline bookstore might not offer shipping or gift wrapping. If your online bookstore does not offer these services, you will lose a lot of business to your online competition. When a site’s product offerings include items that are appropriate for gift giving, it is essential to also offer wrapping, customized cards, shipping to multiple addresses, and shipping options. The consumer is “king” and is very demanding. You have to meet and beat your consumers’ expectations online to garner market share. People shopping for gifts online are looking for convenience, and the site that provides the greatest convenience and the greatest products at the lowest prices will be the winner.

Web sites and Internet marketing strategies differ depending on the product or service being sold. A company that markets toys has to develop a fun and interactive Web site that is attractive to children. The Web site should also give children a way to tell their friends about the site as well as a reason to return to the site. The toy company might want to offer an electronic postcard service whereby children can send a colorful and musical message to their friends and tell them about the site.
Another idea is to provide a “wish list” service. Children can make a list of the toys they want, and this list is sent to the parents via e-mail. The parents can then make better informed purchasing decisions and might become loyal to the toy company’s site. Likewise, some toy companies offer reminder services that send an e-mail message to visitors who have registered and completed the appropriate questionnaire to remind them of a child’s birthday and to offer suggestions for gift ideas. Once again, this promotes sales and repeat traffic and increases customer loyalty.

In another example, a software development company might want to provide downloadable demo versions of its software products and allow people to review its products for a specified period of time before they make a purchasing decision. When consumers decide to buy the software, a robust e-commerce system needs to be in place to handle the orders.

A travel agency’s Web site might include features such as an opt-in mailing list to send people information on weekly vacation specials or a page on the site detailing the latest specials. The travel agency’s site might also want to include downloadable or streaming video tours of vacation resorts to entice visitors to buy resort vacation packages. Another idea is to have a system in place to help customers book vacations, rent cars, and check for available flights. The travel agency might also want to store customer profiles so they can track where particular customers like to sit on the plane, the type of hotel room they usually book, and their credit card information to make bookings more efficient for the customer and the agency.

If you are marketing a service online, it is difficult to visually depict what your service is all about. Visitors to your site need some reassurance that the service you are selling them is legitimate and valuable. Therefore, you might wish to include a page on your site that lists testimonials from well-known customers. This gives prospective customers more confidence about purchasing your service.

**The Fundamentals**

Once you have clearly defined your online objectives, your target markets, and the products and/or services you want to promote online, you
are ready to move on to the next phase of planning your Web site—
doing your competitive analysis.

**Using Competitor Sites to Your Advantage**

One of your Web site’s objectives is to always meet and beat the competition in terms of search engine rankings and Web site content. To do so, you must understand exactly what it is your competition is doing. Take the time to research competitors and compare them on an element-by-element basis.

There are a number of ways you can identify your competition online. You can find your competition by conducting searches with the appropriate keywords, seeing which competing Web sites rank highly in the major search engines and directories. Similarly, there are many other resources online you can use to research your competition, including industry-specific Web portals and directories.

Once you have gathered a list of competing Web sites, analyze them element by element to determine which Web elements your competitors include on their sites and how their sites compare to one another. You want to look at what types of content they are providing to your target market. Other components you should analyze include the visual appeal of your competitors’ sites, content, ease of navigation, search engine friendliness, interactivity, and Web site stickiness, or what they do to keep people on their site. This information can provide you with details on what you need to incorporate into your site to meet and beat the competition.

You have to realize that your online competition is different from your offline competition. Online you are competing with all organizations that have an online presence and sell the same products and services you do. When doing your competitive analysis online, you want to select the “best of breed”—those fantastic Web sites of organizations selling the same products and/or services you do—no matter where they are physically located.

When we do competitive analysis for clients, we reverse engineer or dissect the competing Web site from a number of different perspectives. Generally, you will choose five or six of the absolute best competing Web sites. Then you start to build a database using Excel or a table in Word.
Start with the first competing Web site and from your review start to add database elements to the first column. Note any types of content, target markets defined, repeat traffic techniques used, viral marketing techniques used, search engine friendliness features used (you’ll get these in Chapter 6), download time for different types of Internet connections, cross-platform compatibility, cross-browser compatibility, innovative elements, etc. When you have dissected the first competing Web site and have noted appropriate database elements for comparative purposes, move on to the second competing Web site. Go through the same process, but adding only different or new elements to what you already have in your database. Continue building the first column of your database by continuing through all the sites you want to include in your competitive analysis.

The next step is to develop a column for each of the sites you want to include in the competitive analysis. Add two more columns—one for your existing Web site to see how your site stacks against the competition and the second for future planning purposes.

The next step is to go back and compare each site against the criteria for column one, noting appropriate comments. For content information you want to note whether the particular site has the specific content and how well it was presented. For download speeds note specific minute and seconds for each type of connection. Tools to help you with this element can be found at:

- BizLand Download Time Checker (http://www.bizland.com/product/sitedoctor.html)
- Calculate Download Times (http://www.sercomm.net/download.htm).

For each repeat traffic generator, you may choose to include details or just Yes/No. Continue with this process until you have completed the database, including your own existing site.

By this time you should have a good feel for the users’ experience when they visit your competitors’ sites. Now you are ready to do your planning. In the last column of your database, review each of the elements in the first column, review your notes in your competitive analysis, and where appropriate, complete the last column by categorizing each of the elements as one of the following:
Now you have done your competitive analysis. Having completed your identification of your objectives, target markets, products and services, and your competitive analysis, you are ready to develop your storyboard or architectural plan or blueprint for your site.

**Storyboarding Your Web Site**

Next you are ready to visualize and plan your Web site—integrate your objectives, your target market information, the findings of the competitive analysis, and your own ideas as well as those of others. This is done through the process of storyboarding. The storyboard is the foundation of your Web site. Consider it the architectural plan or blueprint of your site. It should show you, on paper, the first draft of the content and layout of your site. It gives you the chance to review the layout and make changes before development begins.

**Figure 1.3.** A sample layout of a home page and the main site components.
A Web site storyboard can be thought of much like a hierarchical organizational chart in a business. In a typical business structure, the executives sit on top, followed by their subordinates, and so on. Figures 1.3 and 1.4 are examples of two modified sections of a storyboard layout developed by our office for a client prior to building a Web site. Think of your Web site storyboard like this: You begin with your main page or home page at the top. Under the main page you have your central navigation bar. Each of the navigation options should be available on each page, regardless of where the user is on your site. Within each of the sections listed on your main navigation bar, you’re going to have subsections, and so on.

The storyboard can be created with a software program, with sheets of paper, or with any other mechanism. Quite often when we are starting out we’ll start with yellow sticky notes on a wall. Very low tech, but it works! It is very easy to get a visual of the navigation structure and easy to fill in the content pages (one per sticky note) in the appropriate

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Figure 1.4. A sample layout of a subsection and the details included within.
places. It is also very easy to edit—simply move a sticky from one section to another or add another sticky note for a new page.

Once your first draft is done, you need to go back and review the proposed Web site against each and every one of your objectives, each and every one of your target markets (needs, wants, expectations, WOW factor), and each and every one of your products and services. You need to review the proposed Web site from the competitive analysis viewpoint. Have you included all the must-haves and left an opportunity for the elements that fit into the would-be-nice category? Will the proposed Web site beat the competition? Review the proposed site with your stakeholders and a few members of your target market. Get feedback from your various target markets and fine-tune the blueprint until you’ve got it right. It is easy (and cheap) at this stage to add new content and change the layout.

When developing your storyboard, remember to keep the layout of your site simple and logical, as this is how it will be laid out for users once the site is completed. Do not move forward with the Web development process until you have finalized the layout of the storyboard, ensuring that the site will be easy for your target audience to use and that it provides all the elements you need to achieve your objectives. Review your storyboard to ensure that all of the target markets have been addressed. If you want to address the media, be sure to include a Media Center. If you want to attract potential investors, be sure to include a comprehensive Investor Relations section. Give consideration to viral and permission marketing elements that can be included on your site and where they can best be positioned. We discuss these elements in depth in later chapters.

Once you have the completed and approved storyboard, it becomes the blueprint for construction of your site. You are now ready to move on to the actual construction. The next chapter discusses some of the content and design elements of your site.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 1**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding planning your Web site. For additional resources on this and a variety of other Internet marketing topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.
Planning Your Web Site

Creating a Link Storyboard for Your Site
http://www.prowebsitemanagement.com/articles/linkstoryboard.html
Some helpful ideas to use when brainstorming about your storyboard, as well as some tools to assist you in its creation.

Designing Your Web Site from a Storyboard
http://www.grokdotcom.com/storyboard.htm
An article on Web site creation based on storyboards; it is a 2000 article but still very relevant.

SmartDraw
http://www.smartdraw.com
A software program to assist you in creating your storyboard; a free demo is provided so you can try before you buy.

Target Market Analyst
http://www.virtualtechnocrats.com/selfhelp/businessbook/marketing/targetmarket.html
A handy checklist to help you define your target market.
Your storyboard is the blueprint for your site, but there are many steps to take before you can start construction. In Web development, the majority of the time should be spent in the planning. In this chapter we cover:

- Detailed planning of your site before a line of code is ever written
- Content guidelines
- Text guidelines
- Color guidelines
- Navigation guidelines
- Graphics guidelines
- Visual guidelines
- Other guidelines.
**Detailed Web Site Planning**

In the previous chapter you learned how to develop your storyboard. The storyboard is your blueprint for the site, but now you need to think about construction. For each page of your site, you need to develop the content—the text and the graphics.

Generally you (yes, you) will develop the first draft of the text for each page. You know your target market best—you know what makes them buy, you know what they want, you know the buzz words for your industry far better than your Web developer.

The next step is to have this text reviewed and edited by an online copywriter. Online copywriters usually have a background in advertising, where they learn to get the message across in as few words as possible. They know how to grab the reader’s attention. Internet users don’t want to read pages and pages—they want to get what they’re looking for quickly. The text should be short, to the point, and written so it can be easily scanned.

Once the online copywriter has done his magic, you will review and approve. You want to make sure that only the form—not the substance—has been changed.

The next step is to have the content reviewed and edited by an Internet marketer—someone who has expertise in search engines and their ranking criteria as well as repeat traffic generators and viral and permission marketing. The Internet marketer will review and edit the text and graphics, again making sure that the keywords are used in the appropriate places for high search engine ranking. There is a real science to this. The keyword assigned to a particular page should be used appropriately in the page title, the text throughout the page, the meta-tags for keyword and description, the headers, the Alt tags, and the comments tags.

The Internet marketer usually develops the content for these tags, titles, and headers at this point. Sometimes the Internet marketing is handled by your Web developer’s team and sometimes it is a separate outsourced activity. You’ll learn more about designing your site to be search engine friendly in Chapter 6.

The Internet marketer also ensures that you have used the appropriate repeat traffic generators (see Chapter 3), appropriate permission marketing techniques (see Chapter 5), and appropriate viral marketing techniques (see Chapter 4). Again, you need to review and approve the changes to make sure your message is still presented appropriately for your target market.
The next step is graphic design. Sometimes the graphic designer is part of your Web development team and sometimes this activity is outsourced. The graphic designer develops the “look and feel” for your site—the navigation bar, the background, and the separator bars. The graphic designer knows that your online and offline corporate identity should be consistent. Again, you review and approve the graphic design.

Once all this is done, and everything has been reviewed and approved, you are ready for the programming to start.

**Content Notes**

Make your contact information readily available. Consider including contact information on every page. This includes your address, phone and fax numbers, and especially your e-mail address. Make it easy for people to get in touch with you.

Avoid “Under Construction” pages on your site; they are of no value to the visitor. When you have information, post it. Until then, don’t mention it. “Under Construction” can actually hinder your search engine placement with some of the popular search engines and directories.

Include security information. Explain to your customers when transactions or exchanges of information on your Web site are secure. This is important if your site will be accepting credit card orders.

Include your privacy policy. Tell people how their personal information (e.g., their name, e-mail address, etc.) will and will not be used. This makes visitors more comfortable submitting inquiries to your site or joining your mail list.

Minimize use of background sounds and autoplay sounds. Some people surf the Web from their office at work and wish to discreetly go from one site to the next. Background sounds and sounds that load automatically can compromise their discreetness. Give your visitors the option of listening to a sound, but do not force it upon them.

**Text Notes**

The tone of your text and the design of your graphics conveys your intended image. When determining the text content of your site, be mind-
ful of the fact that your own biases may preclude you from placing information on your site that is second nature to you, but important for your visitors. Review all text content on your site to ensure that you have not omitted anything crucial.

Also, keep text brief. Almost 80 percent of Web users scan text online as opposed to actually reading it. Therefore, make your key points quickly and succinctly, and use lots of bulleted lists, headers, and horizontal rules to create visual breaks in the content. This keeps visitors interested enough to read the information on your site. If they are faced with huge blocks of text, most visitors are overwhelmed by the quantity of the information and are too intimidated to read your message. Write for scannability.

Don’t set your text size too small, as this is too hard to read. But don’t set it too large, as this looks like you are shouting. Also, avoid using ALL CAPS, WHICH ALSO COMES ACROSS AS SHOUTING.

Color Notes

Keep your online and offline image consistent. Be consistent with your use of logos, corporate colors, and other marketing collateral associated with your company.

Choose your background and font colors carefully. Using backgrounds that are too busy obscure your text and do not provide a pleasant viewing experience for your visitors. Only certain colors show up properly on certain backgrounds. A light background with dark text is easiest on the eyes.

White text displays best on black backgrounds, and black text is most readable on white backgrounds. Of course, you can use other color schemes, but choose your scheme carefully, as mentioned. There is nothing worse than a Web site that is unreadable. Also, be mindful that some people might print pages from your site. If you incorporate a large amount of your text into the actual graphics on your site, the text might be difficult to read when printed. Also, graphic-intensive sites load more slowly. If you have to incorporate text content into your graphics, be sure that it is sensible to do so.

Use the default colors for links whenever possible. Blue text usually indicates an unvisited link. Purple, maroon, or darker blue usually represents a link you have visited, and red is the color of an active link. It should not be difficult for visitors to identify your links. If you decide
not to use the default colors, your links should be emphasized in a consistent manner through font size, font style, or underlines.

**Navigation Notes**

Ease of navigation is very important to your site. Provide a navigation bar at a consistent location on every page that links to all of the major pages of your site. Make it easy to get from one page to any other. Search engines can index any page from your site, so your home page might not be the first page visitors come to. Never have dead ends where viewers scroll down a screen or two of information only to find that they must scroll all the way back to the top to move on (because you have no links at the bottom of the page). A consistent-looking and well-positioned navigation bar with functioning links is the key to efficient site navigation.

Your visitors should be able to get anywhere they want to go on your site in three clicks or fewer. Develop an effective navigation bar as previously described. For very large sites (i.e., sites consisting of more than eight to ten major sections), it is a good idea to include a site map that users can access from any page in your site. Site maps, as shown in Figures 2.1 and 2.2, are usually text-based lists that name all of the site’s pages and their content. Site maps make it easy for users to access the information they are looking for without causing them much frustration. Include a link from your main navigation bar to the site map for the easiest possible reference. Site maps are great for submission to the search engines as they provide links to every page of your Web site ensuring, as much as possible, that every page of your site gets included in the search engines’ database.

An additional feature you might wish to include is an internal search tool. This allows users to enter their query and have all relevant matches returned, based on their query. This is a particularly useful feature if you sell many products directly on your Web site or if your site contains many pages of content. It allows the user to quickly search for the desired item or information using the product’s name or a relevant keyword. Intel, the computer chip manufacturer, operates multiple sites and offers many products and services. To help users locate the information they’re looking for, Intel has integrated a useful search tool.
**Figure 2.1.** Montreal International Airport’s site map.

**Figure 2.2.** Disney’s site map.
Keep the design of your site consistent. Font types, headers, footers, navigational bars, buttons, bullets, colors, and so on, should be consistent throughout the site to maintain a polished, professional look.

**Graphics Notes**

Graphics that take too much time to download can cause visitors to leave your site before they get a chance to see it. The combined size of the text and graphics on any Web page should not exceed 50 KB.

Some people turn graphics off in their browsers to save time, so you should provide all of your information in text as well as graphics. Use descriptive **Alt attributes** in your image tags. The Alt text will load in place of the images when the graphic does not display for any reason. Visitors who choose not to browse with graphics turned on will have an easier time navigating your site. Also, Alt text is spidered and indexed by many of the major search engines. Using keywords in your Alt text in your image tags will improve your ranking in search engines and will provide a description of the images in the event that they are not loaded. If you use any large files for graphics, audio, or video, warn your visitors by providing some text stating the size of the files.

Use thumbnail graphics where applicable. When you have a page with a lot of large images (e.g., an online photo collection), create small “thumbnail” versions of each image and give visitors the option of clicking through to the larger versions. This is far superior to making your visitors wait for a series of large images to load.

You should be careful with your use of image maps as well. Image maps are large graphics with clickable “hot spots.” Image maps typically are used for navigation and usually have text embedded in the graphic. Search engines cannot read text embedded in a graphic, so from the standpoint of search engine friendliness, if you use image maps always ensure that you provide your appropriate text and Alt tags for the search engine.

Very often, when a large graphic is used for an image map, visitors must wait for the entire image to load before it is apparent where they must click to begin navigating a site. Instead of using a large image
map, break the image into smaller images so that visitors receive faster feedback from your site without having to wait for a huge graphic to load. Also, always provide an alternate text link navigation system to assist people who surf with their graphics turned off.

**Visual Notes**

Check your site using different browsers. What viewers see when your site is downloaded depends on what browser they are using. Different browsers display the same Web site differently. Before you post your site on-line, check your site with the most popular browsers:

- Netscape Navigator 7.x
- Netscape Navigator 6.x
- Netscape Navigator 4.x
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.x
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.x
- Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.x
- America Online 9.x
- America Online 8.x.

Also make sure that you review your site on both a Mac and a PC as sometimes your Web site looks different depending on the platform.

Design your site for various screen widths. Try to accommodate visitors regardless of the screen resolution they use. Some Web users still run their systems at 640 pixels by 480 pixels; keep this in mind when designing your site. Use your Web traffic analysis software to determine the screen resolution preferences of your visitors. See Chapter 27 for more information on Web traffic analysis software and the reports you can access.
Your Web site should steer clear of scrolling marquee text. Scrolling marquees are difficult to read and are not compatible with all browsers. Simply post text directly on your pages if you have something important to say.

**Other Notes**

*Home page*

The main page of a Web site.

Your **home page** should be 50 KB or less and should be displayed on no more than one or two screens. Studies have shown that visitors rarely wait beyond 15 seconds to download a site. Test the download time of your site using different connection speeds to ensure that it is reasonable for all users.

Also avoid dead links. These are links that don’t go anywhere and the viewer usually receives a “404—File not Found” error message from the Web server after clicking on a dead link. Verify periodically that all your links are still active.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 2**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding designing your Web site. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**REVIEW YOUR SITE**

**NetMechanic**

http://www.netmechanic.com

A number of tools to improve your site’s mechanics, including HTML code validation and GIF optimization.

**BizLand, SiteDoctor**

http://www.bizland.com/product/sitedoctor.html

When was the last time your site had a checkup? Is it loading fast enough? Are all your links working? Find out with BizLand SiteDoctor.
REFERENCES

CNET Builder.com
http://www.builder.com
An outstanding resource and how-to for all things related to Web site development.

Color Matters
http://www.colormatters.com/entercolormatters.html
Explores the use of color and the effects color combinations have on your design.

Eyewire
http://www.eyewire.com/tips/design
A great list of articles on Web design.

Web Monkey
http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey
The Web developer’s resource.

Whatis.com
http://www.whatis.com
Whatis.com is “definition” paradise; it defines any computer-related word you ever wondered about.

The World Wide Web Consortium
http://www.w3c.org
“The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) develops interoperable technologies (specifications, guidelines, software, and tools) to lead the Web to its full potential as a forum for information, commerce, communication, and collective understanding”—description quoted from site.

GRAPHICS

gif.com
http://www.gif.com
An extensive resource for Web graphic design.

Graphics 101
A series of tutorials covering Web graphics: preparing images for the Web, color depth, transparencies, techniques, and more.
There are many little things that will spice up your Web site to “keep ’em coming back.” Learn the tips, tools, and techniques to get visitors to return to your site again and again. In this chapter, we cover:

- Attractive Web site content
- How to have your own What’s New page, Tip of the Day, and Awards page
- Hosting online seminars
- Ensuring that you are bookmarked
- Cartoons, contests, jokes, and trivia
- Calendar of events and reminder services
- Interesting bulletin boards
- Online chat sessions, workshops, and discussion groups
• Special guests or celebrity appearances
• Giveaways, awards, and surveys
• Offline tactics for promotion.

**Encourage Repeat Visits**

Just as you would want customers to visit your place of business frequently, so too in cyberspace you want customers and potential customers to visit often. The more often people visit your site, the more likely they are to purchase something. You want to ensure that the techniques you use to get repeat traffic are appropriate for your target market. For example, if you were having a contest on your site targeted toward children, you would not want to give away a bread-maker as the prize. That would be fine, however, if your target market is families or homemakers. You want to offer something of interest to the market you are targeting. If your target is business professionals, then something along the lines of the latest pocket PC that they could use in their everyday business would be appropriate. If your target market is skiers, then a weekend in Vail might work. You should always remember your objectives when doing any form of online marketing, because you don’t want to do something inappropriate that might drive your target audience away from your site.

I am a big proponent of leveraging everything you do for maximum marketing results. Almost every repeat traffic generator provides an opportunity for permission marketing and also for viral marketing. Make sure you review the repeat traffic generators you use on your site and incorporate the right permission and viral marketing elements.

**Use a What’s New Page for Repeat Visits**

A What’s New page can mean different things to different sites. For some, this page updates users with the summaries of the most recent product or service offerings, as in Figure 3.1. Your What’s New page should be accessible from your home page so that when people visit
your site they do not have to search through your entire site to find out what is new. If visitors repeatedly find interesting additions in the What’s New section, they will come back to your site on a regular basis to check out what’s new. Without this, they might visit and search through your site and find that nothing is new and they just wasted 20 minutes looking for anything new. Here you can leverage this repeat-traffic generator with permission marketing by asking if visitors would like to be notified via e-mail when you’ve added something to the What’s New section. It’s all about getting their permission to send them e-mail and therefore include them in your community.

Another approach is for the What’s New page to cover What’s New in your industry or What’s New in your product line. Whatever it is, you should always make sure that it is of interest to your target market. Again, you can ask your visitors if they would like to be notified when updates are made to this section of your Web site. This once again gives you permission to e-mail them and present them with new information that might make them want to come back to your site again.

**Figure 3.1.** You can use a What’s New page to tell visitors about updates to your company’s products or services.
Free Stuff—Everyone Loves It

Giving things away is a great way to increase traffic—everybody likes a freebie. If you give something different away each week, you are sure to have a steady stream of repeat traffic. When you have freebies or giveaways on your site, your pages can also be listed and linked from the many sites on the Internet that list places where people can receive free stuff. To find these listings of free stuff, simply go to a search engine and do a search on “Free Stuff Index” or “Free Stuff Links.” You will be amazed at how many people are giving things away online.

You don’t have to give something away to everyone. You could simply have a drawing every week. You could then ask entrants if they would like you to notify them of the winner, which again gives you permission to e-mail them. An example of a site that has a featured contest is Redken (see Figure 3.2).

If you want to bring only people from your target market to your site, then don’t give away mainstream items as screen savers, shareware games, utilities, and so on. Try to give away something that only people interested in your industry would want. If you don’t care what traffic

Figure 3.2. Redken has a featured contest and a weekly giveaway.
comes your way, and any traffic is good traffic, then give away useful things that everybody needs. Try to have your logo and URL displayed on the item. For example, a neat screen saver can be made that displays your logo and URL. When this is made available as a download, there is no handling or shipping charges associated with it. If your freebie is something that has your URL on it and is something that is generally kept around a computer, it reminds and encourages people to visit your site. A mouse pad displaying your URL is a good example.

You should change your freebie often and let your site visitors know how often you do this. Something like “We change our free offer every single week! Keep checking back” or “Click here to be notified by e-mail when we update” also works well.

Freebies provide ideal viral marketing opportunities as well. Have a “Tell a friend about this” button near the freebie so site visitors can quickly and easily tell their friends.

**Give a Taste of Your Product with Sample Giveaways**

Use a traditional marketing approach and give away free samples of your product from your Web site. After giving away the samples, follow up with an e-mail. Ask the people who received a sample what they thought of it, if they had any problems, and if they have any questions. Direct the samplers back to your Web site for more information and discounts on purchasing the regular version of the product. If you have a number of products, you might consider alternating your free samples. Ask if visitors would like to be notified by e-mail when you change your free sample. This gives you permission to e-mail the visitors on a regular basis to remind them about the sample. You also get to update them with new information regarding your Web site, your products, or your company. This can entice them to visit your site again. Make sure you include your signature file in your e-mail message.

Free samples also provide a great viral marketing opportunity.

**Everyone Wants the Best Price—Coupons and Discounts**

Offer coupons and discount vouchers that can be printed from your site. You can change the coupon daily or weekly to encourage repeat
visits. People will come back to your site again and again if they know they can find good deals there. This is a great strategy to use in conjunction with a free sample giveaway. If people liked the sample, give them a coupon to purchase the regular version at a discount. If they like the regular version, they may purchase it again at full price or recommend the product to a friend. You can also ask people if they want to be notified by e-mail when you update the coupons on your Web site. This once again gives you the opportunity to present them with new information about your business. Offering coupons is a great idea if you have a physical location as well as a Web site. These can be your loss leader to get customers to come into your store.

You can develop a coupon banner ad that links to your site, where the coupon can be printed. The banner ads should be placed on sites frequented by your target market. You can trade coupons with noncompeting sites that target the same market you do. Your coupon on their site links to your site, and their coupon on your site links to their site.

By offering coupons from your Web site, you also cut down your overhead cost because people are printing the coupons on their own printers, thus not using your paper. Remember that you should have terms and conditions on the coupons that are available for printing. For example, you should have an expiration date. Someone could print a coupon, then visit your store in a year and try to use it. You should try to have the expiration date close to the release of the coupon. This will entice the visitor to use the coupon more quickly and then come back for more coupons.

We are seeing an increase in the number of coupon-related sites that are appearing on the Internet. CoolSavings.com (http://www.coolsavings.com) is an online coupon network where businesses can advertise and place coupons for their products and services, as seen in Figure 3.3. Sites like this are a good way to promote your business, for they receive a high amount of traffic. Another benefit is that the traffic is already in a buying mood. CoolSavings.com has been a household name since it launched its national advertising campaign in the late 1990s. If you offer coupons from your site, it benefits you to be listed on these types of sites. If you are not aiming for a national appeal, you should search to find out if there are coupon networks in the geographic location that you are targeting (see Figure 3.4). Other coupon sites are listed in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter. There are meta-indexes to sites with coupons or discounts from which you can be linked for greater exposure.
Figure 3.3. CoolSavings.com offers coupons from businesses to people all over the United States.

Figure 3.4. The Coupon Network offers coupons and deals for specific geographic regions.
Coupons provide ideal viral marketing opportunities—for example, “Send this coupon to a friend.”

**Specials and Promotions**

Everyone likes to get a deal. You might consider having a special promotions section on your Web site. You’ll want to change your promotion fairly frequently and let your site visitors know: “We change our specials every week. Bookmark our site and keep checking back!”

You might employ permission marketing here as well: “We change our specials every week. [Click here](#) if you’d like to be notified when we update” or “[Click here](#) to receive our e-specials weekly.” If you send e-specials via e-mail, make sure you give them a reason to visit your site and provide the appropriate hypertext links in the e-mail.

Make it easy to have your site visitors tell their friends about your specials. Have a “Tell a friend about this special” button placed next to each one of your special promotions. You can leverage the viral marketing with an incentive: “Tell three friends about our special and be included in a drawing for (something appropriate for your target market).”

**A Calendar of Events Keeps Visitors Informed**

A comprehensive, current calendar of events related to your company or your industry can encourage repeat visits. A sample calendar is shown in Figure 3.5. Your calendar should always be kept up to date and be of value to your readers. A calendar of events for a band might show their scheduled appearances. A calendar of events of what is going on in your business community is very appropriate for a Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade site. This can encourage a lot of repeat traffic as long as the calendar is kept current and complete. Calendars of events are also appropriate on community sites, because residents access these calendars often to stay current. Again, you can ask people if they’d like to be notified via e-mail when you update your calendar of events.

If you have a great calendar of events, you can encourage others to use it by providing a link to it from their Web site. This offer works well
because you are providing them with great content that is kept current and they are providing you with traffic.

If you don’t have the time or inclination to develop your own calendar of events but one would be great content for your site, you might provide a link from your Web site to a calendar you consider top-notch. If you do this, make sure your link opens a new browser window rather than takes the visitor from your site to the referred site.

**Figure 3.5.** You can use a Calendar of Events to keep your audience informed of what’s coming up.

Contests and competitions are great traffic builders. Some sites hold regular contests on a weekly or monthly basis to generate repeat visitors. Holding contests is also a great way to find out about your target market by requesting information on the entry form.

What type of contest you hold depends upon your Internet marketing objectives. If you want to attract as many people as possible to your site regardless of who they are, then offer items such as money, trips, cars, computers, and so on, as in Figures 3.6 and 3.7. If you want to
Figure 3.6. Contests are a great way to encourage repeat traffic.

Figure 3.7. Roadrunner offers visitors a chance to win great new products every week.
attract potential customers from your target market, then give away something that relates to your products and industry.

You can simply request that people fill out an electronic ballot to enter the contest. If you want to find out something about the people entering, ask them to answer an appropriate question or two. If you want to do some market research, again, ask a question or two. Make it easy and unobtrusive. The more fields they have to fill out the fewer people will enter your contest. Be selective with the questions you ask.

If the prize is one of your products, consider asking entrants to write a short note outlining why they would like to have the product you are giving away. You can award the winner(s) with the product and follow up with the other entrants. These people might be in a position to buy your products, and you will have gained some valuable knowledge from the notes submitted.

If your product is appropriate for a prize that would be of interest to many different types of people, consider finding contest sites that are willing to offer your product as the prize on their site. This can generate brand awareness for your product. You can have the site show a picture of your product with a link to your site. The contest site should be more than happy to do this because you are offering to give something for free that adds value to that site.

You can turn a contest into a competition. If your Web site relates to cooking or baking, ask entrants to submit their best recipe using your food product. People will visit your site to see the winning recipes, and you might get some ideas for future marketing efforts. Other competitions might include things such as best photo with product X, best short story about product X, best drawing of product X, and so on. This creates better brand awareness and reinforces sales of your product. The closer the contest relates to your product, the better. Instead of offering just one prize, offer a number of smaller prizes as well. This makes the odds look better and people feel they have a better chance of winning.

You might have contestants answer three questions relating to your product or service on the entry form. Of course, to find the answers to the questions, the visitor has to visit a number of pages on your site, and the three questions are marketing related.

You can have the contest one where you get information about your target market. When contestants enter the contest, have them rank what
influences their buying decision. The information you request can also provide you with demographic or psychographic information.

Allow site visitors one contest entry per day—you’re happy to have visitors return to your site often. You might consider changing the information on the contest Web page around the entry form on a regular basis. Provide links to other repeat-traffic generators such as your coupons or your e-specials.

Whatever type of contest you determine best meets your marketing objectives, be sure you encourage permission marketing (“Click here to be notified when we have a new contest”) and viral marketing (“Tell a friend about this great contest”). Leverage, leverage, leverage: “Tell five friends and receive an extra ballot for yourself.”

Make your contest conditional: “Sign up to receive our weekly e-specials and be included in our drawing for (something of interest to your target market).”

Before you go ahead with holding any kind of contest, find out if any legal issues concern you. There may be restrictions that you are not aware of (e.g., you might be required to purchase a legal permit to hold lotteries). You should also remember to ask the entrants the e-mail address at which they want to be notified of the winner. This, again, grants you permission to e-mail them to tell them who the winner was, and also to inform them of the specials that you might have at your site that month.

You want to promote your contest through public and private mail list postings, newsgroup postings, your e-mail signature file, press releases, and links from contest sites. Some popular contest sites you might want to be listed from include:

- Contest Guide (http://www.contestguide.com)
- Contest Hound (http://www.contesthound.com)
- About Contests (http://contests.about.com)
- Red Hot Sweeps Sites (http://www.redhotsweeps.com)
- Contests and Sweepstakes Directory (http://www.sweepstakes-contests.com)
- Winning Ways Online Sweeps (http://www.onlinesweeps.com).
Using Employment Opportunities to Increase Visitors

People involved in a job search or interested in new job opportunities will revisit your site occasionally to see your list of available positions. See Figure 3.8 for a sample employment page.

Creating Useful Links from Your Site

Provide visitors with links to other sites similar to yours or a meta-index of links that would be of interest to your target market (see Figure 3.9). Do not put outbound links on your home page. Place them down a level or two after the visitors have seen all the information you want them to see before you provide the links away from your site. Links can be incorporated in two ways. The first is where clicking the link loads the new page in the same browser window. (It replaces the content of your page with the content of the linked page.) The second and preferred method is to have the link open a new browser window. (Your page stays where it is and the content from the linked page opens up in the new browser window.) This is preferred because once visitors are

Figure 3.8. Google provides information on employment opportunities from its Web site.
finished with the new page, they can close the new browser window and your page is still there in the “old” browser window. Try exchanging links with others so you receive a link from their site to your site. As long as the links are of value to your visitors, people will come back to see if you have found any new and interesting sites for them to visit.

You might consider asking visitors if they are interested in being notified when you update your list of links or just make updates to your site in general. By offering this, if they choose to do so, you have the opportunity to send people an e-mail message and remind them about your site while presenting them with new information about what might be going on with your site.

**Figure 3.9.** The Travel Industry Association of America provides useful links for travel industry professionals from its site.

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**Investing in Online Chat Sessions**

Chat rooms are very popular and, to some, even addictive. If you have a chat forum on your site, make sure that the topic relates to your business and that participants are likely to be your target market. To encourage repeat visitors, you could change the topic from day to day or week to week. You could also have celebrity appearances in your chat
sessions. These sessions should be regularly scheduled, and the upcoming events should be posted on your site so that your visitors will know what is going on when, and will not miss the session if it is of importance to them. They could be on Sunday from 3 to 5 p.m., or on Tuesday from 7 to 9 p.m. Also remember to have the information in your signature file and do some postings through your appropriate mail lists and newsgroups to promote the event.

You should try to post the topics of the discussions at least a week in advance so that your visitors will remember to come for the entire session if they are interested in the topic. You would be surprised how many people schedule time so that they can chat with someone special or knowledgeable in an area that interests them. You might also think of asking your visitors if they would be interested in being notified of upcoming chat sessions or celebrities who might be visiting your site to chat. This again gives you the opportunity to e-mail people, at their request, and present them with information that can entice them to visit your site again. You can also ask your community whom they’d like to see as a guest or what topics they would like to have discussed.

Providing a Tip of the Day to Encourage Repeat Visits

Have a section that offers cool tips that relate to your business, your products or services, or your target market, as in Figure 3.10. These tips can be from one sentence to one paragraph long. If visitors find your advice helpful, they will return repeatedly to see what interesting piece of information you have displayed that day. Ask your visitors if they would be interested in receiving the tip via e-mail or if they would like to be notified when the tip has been updated so they can then visit your Web site. Encourage people to send the tip to a friend. You can also encourage others to use your tip on their Web site as long as they provide a link back to your site as the source.

Ensuring Your Site Gets Bookmarked

Encourage visitors to add you to their bookmark list. At appropriate parts of your site, display the call to action “Bookmark me now!”
Figure 3.10. Tips of the day can encourage repeat visitors.

(see Figure 3.11). A call to action is often effective. Make sure the title of the page that has the “Bookmark me now!” clearly identifies your site and its contents in an enticing way, because the title is what appears in the bookmark file as a description. Whenever I see “Bookmark this site now!” I always consider it. Sometimes I do and sometimes I don’t, but I always consider it. Often, when the call to action is not presented, I don’t think about it and don’t bookmark it. Then, days later when I want to go back there, I wish I had remembered to bookmark it.

World Interaction with Bulletin Boards

It can be very satisfying to see people join in from all over the world just to interact with each other on a topic that relates to your Web site, as shown in Figure 3.12. Beware, you will have to keep an eye on the messages and may even have to play referee occasionally.
Figure 3.11. When you see a “Bookmark this site now!” or “Bookmark Us!” call to action, nine times out of ten you will at least consider it.

Figure 3.12. The Speaker Café is a great bulletin board where people can request info about professional speakers for conferences and trade shows.
Inviting Visitors to Contribute with Surveys

Performing surveys is a way to increase the traffic to your site. For people to want to fill out the survey and see the results, the survey topic must be interesting. To encourage input, consider having the survey results available to participants only. Your survey could be on a topic concerning current events or something pertaining to your industry. The more controversial or debatable the topic of the survey, the more people will visit to contribute or see the results. If you want to draw a very targeted audience, pick a topic that is of interest to that market alone.

In performing these surveys, you are building repeat traffic and you are gathering valuable information on your market. If you hold an interesting survey every week or every month, then you will retain a loyal audience of repeat visitors. If your surveys are newsworthy, then you can send out press releases to publicize the results and gain publicity for your site.

Your surveys should be short and to the point. Let people know why you are asking them to do the survey and when the deadline is. Make your questions clear and concise. The responses should be Yes/No or multiple choice. When reporting the results, don’t just put them on your Web page; post the results to newsgroups and mailing lists that would be interested. Don’t forget to add your signature file. If you are holding weekly or monthly surveys, let people know via your signature file what the next survey topic will be and that there is more information on your Web site.

Again, ask people if they’d like to be notified of survey results, either by e-mail or by prior notification as to when the results will be posted on the site. You might also ask if they’d like to be notified when you are conducting a new survey.

Encourage Repeat Visits with Your Site of the Day

Having your own Site of the Day (see Figure 3.13) or Site of the Week (see Figure 3.14) listing means a great deal of work, searching the Internet for a cool site to add or looking through all the submissions. However, if your picks are interesting to your audience, you might find that avid Internet users come back every day to see what great
Figure 3.13. The Political Site of the Day focuses on a variety of politically related Web sites and offers an e-mail notification service to inform its visitors of the new Site of the Day.

Figure 3.14. Cool Lego Site of the Week showcases Lego fans around the world and their works of art.
new site is listed. Remember that this must be updated on schedule; displaying a week-old Site of the Day reflects poorly on your site and your company. For more information, see Chapter 18 about hosting your own award site.

Keep Them Happy with Cartoons

Displaying relevant cartoons keeps your site dynamic and fun. You do not necessarily have to create all of the content and features yourself. If you update this weekly, ask if visitors would like to be notified via e-mail when you update your Web site. A good example of a site that uses cartoons is the Myke Ashley-Cooper Cartoons4Fun site (http://www.cartoons4fun.com/c4f.shtml), which continuously provides humor to its viewers (see Figure 3.15). Cartoons provide a great viral marketing opportunity.

Figure 3.15. The Comics4fun site offers amusing cartoons to its viewers and has an e-mail list that informs visitors when a new cartoon is put on its site.
Benefiting from Humor with Jokes and Trivia

“Laughter is the best medicine” and could prove to be a popular feature of your Web page (see Figure 3.16). People enjoy trivia, or a Thought of the Day (see Figure 3.17), and there are many sources for you to draw from. Be sure to update regularly. Again, this gives you the opportunity to ask if your visitors would like to be notified when you update this section of your Web site and offers a viral marketing opportunity as well. Always make sure that whatever you include as content on your Web site is appropriate given your objectives and target market.

Who Doesn’t Love Games?

More and more sites are featuring fun activities and games. Again, your content must be appropriate given your objectives and target markets. (A sample game site is shown in Figure 3.18.) Just about anything goes here. You can host anything from a Star Wars trivia contest to having guests play an interactive game with other visitors. Allow visitors an easy way to “Tell a friend” about your game.
Figure 3.17. The Daily Motivator allows you to sign up to receive your daily motivation via e-mail and also encourages others to put the Daily Motivator on their sites.

Figure 3.18. Sony Online has many games for its users to enjoy.
Keep Customers in Touch with Update Reminders

Ask visitors to your site if they would like to be notified when there are updates or content changes to your pages. This is similar to a mailing list except that you write to the “list” only when changes have been made. This is effective when you have a newsletter or a frequently visited calendar of events on your site.

Special Events Reminder Services

People can sign up to be reminded of something via e-mail on specified dates (see Figure 3.19). This feature was originally thought of by a florist to remind people about important dates. You can remind people about any number of things relating to your business. If you own a site that sells fishing and hunting gear, you could get visitors to sign up to be reminded when certain fishing or hunting seasons start. You should try to develop a reminder service that relates to something that you sell.

Figure 3.19. FindGift.com has a reminder service where you can register to receive e-mail reminders for those special dates.
from your site. In your reminder you can include suggestions about what fishing fly works best at this time of the year.

Reminder services are becoming very popular with e-commerce sites. Their services are very much appreciated by busy people who are not good with remembering dates. This has saved me on more than one occasion and made it very easy to purchase from the site that provided the reminder. I have five nieces and nephews across the country. I have registered their birthdays with a site that also asked for some details about the reminder—things like what the date is, the relationship that I have with the person, their ages, things they enjoy, and how far ahead of time I want to be notified. Like clockwork, ten days prior to Ryan’s birthday, I got this e-mail: “Susan, your nephew Ryan’s birthday is in 10 days. He will be 12 years old. Ryan likes PlayStation video games. We happen to have several that might be appropriate as a gift for Ryan. Click here for more details.”

I am then able to choose the gift that I want to purchase, the paper I want it wrapped with, and the text that I want on the card that will be attached to the gift. Then I simply provide the address I want it sent to and give them my credit card number, and they send it off. Everyone is happy, especially me.

**Establish Yourself as an Expert with Advice Columns**

Some Web sites are incorporating advice columns, as in Figure 3.20. People will return again and again to read the e-mails asking for advice and to see the responses that are given. This also helps perpetuate an image of your company as an expert in your given field.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 3**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding repeat-traffic generators. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.
You shouldn’t just work to get visitors to your site; you should work to keep them coming back time and time again. This site gives you some tips on how to do just that.

An article on how you can use e-zines to create repeat traffic.

Some great ideas for encouraging repeat visitors.

An article about using bookmarks to increase the likelihood of repeat traffic.

This article provides good tips about how to generate repeat traffic.
Have you ever visited a Web site and found an article, a coupon, a special, or something else that impressed you so much that you immediately sent an e-mail to your friends about it? If you have, you’ve already been bitten by the viral marketing bug! Viral marketing, which is often referred to as “word-of-mouse” marketing, is a low-cost, highly effective way to market your product or service using the Internet. Just like a flu virus in humans, viral marketing replicates and propagates itself online. Viral marketing enables you to capitalize on referrals from an unbiased third party—the consumer! The power that peers and reference groups have over the purchasing decision is phenomenal. Similar to how a positive testimonial from a reliable source can add credibility to a product or service, the opinions of friends, business associates, and family can also help influence a consumer’s purchasing decision. By implementing various viral marketing techniques on your Web site, you are provided with a dynamite opportunity to leverage the opinions of the consumers’ reference groups. In this chapter, we will cover:

- How you can use viral marketing to increase traffic
  - Word-of-mouth viral marketing
Pass-it-on viral marketing

Tell a Friend scripts

- Various ways to leverage your viral marketing campaigns
- Incentives to encourage viral marketing.

**Capitalizing on Viral Marketing Opportunities**

Viral marketing can be one of your most powerful online marketing techniques, using the power of associations to spread the word. Viral marketing is still evolving, but today we see three common forms being used:

1. Word of mouth, such as “Tell a friend,” “Send this coupon to a friend,” or “Recommend this to a friend”

2. Pass it on, when we receive an e-book, cool tool, or funny video, and then forward it to friends

3. Product or service based, when a free tool is used online and that tool includes an embedded marketing message, such as Hotmail.

**Word of Mouth**

You can use viral marketing techniques in a number of different ways throughout your Web site. By placing a “Tell a friend about this product” or “Share this page with a friend” button on your site, you enable users to quickly and easily spread the word about your site and your products. Visitors can click on the button, provide appropriate information in the “To” and “From” fields (including name and e-mail address of both the recipient and the sender), and a brief message. Although the message is personalized, your business can include additional information about the product, including features, benefits, the price, and a link directly to the page where the recipient can purchase the item. Because the message is
personalized from a friend, the recipient is more apt to visit the site to find out more about the product than he or she would be if the e-mail came from a traditional corporate e-mail campaign.

Amazon.com (see Figure 4.1) is a prime example of a company that has implemented viral marketing features throughout its site. When visitors browse through Amazon.com’s 3 million plus product listings, they are always presented with the opportunity to “Tell a friend about this product.” Providing this feature leverages the effectiveness of the Amazon.com Web site and ultimately results in increased sales for the company.

In addition to the aforementioned techniques, there are many different ways that you can implement viral marketing techniques on your Web site. If you have a newsletter on your site, you can add a “Tell a friend about this newsletter” button on the site. You can also incorporate a message in the body of your e-mail newsletter encouraging readers to forward a copy to friends they think would benefit from the information included in the newsletter. You should also include information in the message on how to subscribe to the newsletter. The recipi-

Figure 4.1. Amazon.com leverages the opinions of its customers by incorporating an “E-mail a friend about this item!” option for all of the products on its Web site.
ents will then be able to send a copy of the newsletter to their friends, who will in turn be presented with the opportunity to subscribe and regularly receive the newsletter (see Figure 4.2). The opportunities for viral marketing are endless.

A good word-of-mouth viral marketing strategy enables a visitor to your site or a recipient of your e-mail to share your site or e-mail content with others with just one click of a button or link. The design and placement of that link or button is critical to the success of the campaign.

First of all, you should look to every repeat-traffic generator you have on your site for viral marketing opportunities. Repeat-traffic generators like coupons, newsletters, e-specials, and contests all provide ideal opportunities for “Tell a friend” or “Send a copy to a friend” links and buttons. Once you have determined the viral marketing techniques you are going to use, you want to make it easy for the site visitor or e-mail recipient to spread the word.

To be effective, you have to make it obvious what you want your visitors to do. Use a call to action to get them to do it. A button with “Send this coupon to a friend” or “Tell a friend about this e-special” works well. Don’t assume that people will take the time to open their e-mail program and send an e-mail to a friend about your

**Figure 4.2.** Including a “Tell a friend” button on your newsletter can encourage readers to forward a copy to their friends.
e-special or coupon or include the URL to the page on your Web site just because you have a great offer—it doesn’t happen! You have to make it easy.

Here are some tips to make your word-of-mouth campaign effective:

- Have a fantastic button or graphic that grabs their attention.
- Provide a call to action telling the visitors what you want them to do.
- Place the button in the appropriate place away from clutter.
- Have the button link to an easy-to-use “Tell a friend” script. The “Tell a friend” script accepts the name and e-mail address(es) of the friend(s) and the name and e-mail address of your site visitor that is sending the message to a friend. You need to provide a section for a message. You might provide clickable options for this, such as “Thought this might be of interest” or “Knew you’d be interested in this.”
- Give clear instructions on how to participate; make it simple, intuitive, and easy.
- Offer an incentive to encourage them to do what you want them to do: “Tell a friend and be included in a drawing for (something of interest to the target market).”
- Leverage, leverage, leverage: “Tell five friends and be included in a drawing for (something of interest to the target market).”
- Avoid using attachments in the message you want spread. This will avoid any potential technical problems with the attachments being opened as well as allaying any fears related to viruses.
- Have your privacy policy posted. If the user is going to pass along a friend’s e-mail address, she wants to be assured that you will not abuse the contact information.

Viral marketing will only be successful if the content is good enough or valuable enough to be passed along.
Pass-It-On Viral Marketing

When we find a great resource, a funny video, or a cool game, we usually forward it to our colleagues or friends who we know will be interested in it. This old “they tell two friends and they in turn tell two friends” formula works very effectively on-line to enable you (with the right content) to reach a tremendous number of your target market.

For this type of viral marketing to be successful, you have to start with great content that recipients will want to share with others. It can take many forms:

- E-books
- Small utility programs
- Fun videos
- Digital games
- Checklists
- A sound bite or audiozine

Audiozine
A magazine in audio format.

The pass-it-on viral marketing methodology works best using small files that can easily be spread around.

E-Books

E-books are very big these days. If you have great content that clearly shows your depth of knowledge on a particular topic, an e-book can do wonders to create great exposure for you, your site, and your products and/or services. Ensure that you have clear references to you and links to your Web site that provide a reason for people to click through. You might provide additional resources on your site or encourage people to visit for copies of other e-books you have developed. Then market, market, market that e-book. Encourage e-zine and newsletter providers to send a copy to their subscribers, and promote it through your sig file, in newsgroups, and in publicly accessible mail lists.
Spreading the Word with Viral Marketing

You can provide a shareware or freeware program that might be of interest to your target market. Of course, you want to ensure that you reference your site throughout the program and give them a reason to visit.

Small Utility Programs

You can offer small utility programs for your target market which include your logo. For example, if you own a speaker bureau you can offer a small program that helps speakers organize their speaking engagement dates. If you are a car dealer you can offer a small program that reminds car owners of safety inspections, license renewals, and scheduled tune ups. If you are a real estate agent you can offer a program that allows the user to calculate amortization on a mortgage. Think of your target market and what might be handy and helpful for them.

Fun Videos

Nothing seems to spread faster on the Web than funny video clips. We’ve all seen the enraged employee attacking his computer and the bear taking salmon from the fisherman. Sometimes these video clips are cartoons, seen one slide at a time with embedded audio, and other times they seem to be full-scale productions.

Digital Games

If your organization can develop a digital game or you have access to the rights to use a game, incorporate your logo and link back to your Web site within the game. A good game spreads very quickly.

Checklists

If you have a checklist that others might find useful, why not include links to your site in it and then provide it to your target market for use? For example, you might have a great checklist for making your site search engine friendly, or if you are a travel agent you might provide a handy checklist for travel planning. Think about your target market and what they might find useful. Always remember to encourage them to pass it on through viral marketing.
Sound Byte or Audiozine

New technology can send sound bytes. As long as the sound byte is relevant, pertinent, and of value to your target market or people in the industry you serve, people will pass it on.

Articles

Writing articles that can be distributed as content for newsletters or e-zines is another form of viral marketing. These articles can also be distributed to be used as Web site content as well. Just make sure that you have clearly stated that others are free to use your article as long as they include it in its entirety verbatim and include the Source box. The article should contain links to your site. The Source box should include information on you, your company, and your Web site.

You should track your viral marketing rate of infection. You want to know what is working and how fast it is working. You can always include a graphic in the article or e-book or digital game that is accessed from your site. Then you can use your Web traffic analysis to find information on the effectiveness of your pass-it-on viral marketing campaigns.

Product- or Service-Based Viral Marketing

Two of the most prominent service-based viral marketing campaigns are Hotmail and Blue Mountain.

The Hotmail Example

MSN.com (http://www.msn.com) has capitalized on viral marketing to the fullest extent with its Hotmail service. Hotmail is a free e-mail service that is provided by MSN.com and is used by millions of people around the world. Why is a free e-mail account a viral marketing technique? Because whenever a message is sent from a Hotmail account, a tagline is automatically inserted into the body of the e-mail message that tells the user about Hotmail’s e-mail service. The message reads as follows:

Join the world’s largest e-mail service with MSN Hotmail
This small message results in hundreds of new e-mail accounts being opened daily on the Hotmail Web site. Although Hotmail doesn’t provide any commercial services (i.e., they don’t sell anything), this viral marketing technique creates mass exposure for the MSN.com Web site. Visitors typically log in to their Hotmail account on the MSN.com Web site, which creates exposure for the other product and service offerings available on MSN.com (see Figure 4.3).

Blue Mountain—Taking Viral Marketing to the Next Level

Blue Mountain (see Figure 4.4), is a site that is synonymous with electronic greeting cards or e-cards. Initially Blue Mountain received thousands of visitors daily who all sent free electronic greeting cards to friends all over the world. Today Blue Mountain still offers this service to the public, although a nominal annual fee is now charged if you want to be a member.

Initially when you visit the Blue Mountain Web site, you are presented with an array of different options such as e-cards, gifts, paper

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**Figure 4.3.** Thousands of people access their Hotmail account through the MSN.com Web site every day, thus creating exposure for MSN.com’s other product and service offerings.
greeting cards, and downloadable screensavers. When you decide to send a friend an electronic greeting card and finally select a greeting card from the thousands of cards available on the site, you are asked to fill out the contact information for the individual who will be receiving the card. This process is illustrated in Figure 4.5.

Blue Mountain encourages the recipient to visit the Blue Mountain Web site to reply to the sender with another electronic greeting card. This again provides Blue Mountain with the opportunity to sell a membership. Through viral marketing, Blue Mountain is able to spread the word about its business quickly and in a cost-effective manner.

**Virtual Postcards**

Today a large number of businesses, especially those that are tourism oriented, are increasing traffic to their sites by offering virtual postcards on their Web site, which enables them to capitalize on viral marketing opportunities. Visitors can send virtual postcards to their family and friends. The postcard should not actually be sent as an attachment, but rather, an e-mail notice is sent saying that a postcard is waiting for the
recipient at a particular Web address. By clicking on the Web address, the recipient is sent to the Web site to view the personalized postcard.

An example of this is Carlson Wagonlit Travel (http://www.carlsonwagonlit.ca), a site that gives visitors the opportunity to send their friends colorful postcards via e-mail from different locations around the world (see Figure 4.6). When you send a postcard to your friend, he or she receives an e-mail containing a link to the page where the postcard can be viewed. When your friend clicks through to view the postcard, there is also a Carlson Wagonlit Travel logo and links to other sections of the Web site. Offering electronic postcards is a great way to generate repeat visitors to your site and to spread the word about your site through the use of viral marketing.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 4**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding viral marketing. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/
resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

Recommend-It.com
http://www.recommend-it.com
A network that helps you drive traffic to your Web site through referrals; it offers incentives for visitors to tell a friend and affiliate opportunities for site owners.

Viral Marketing Techniques the Typical Business Web Site Can Deploy
http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-deploy.htm
Dr. Ralph F. Wilson, E-Commerce Consultant, gives readers some ideas for viral marketing on their Web sites.

Refer-A-Buddy.com
http://refer-a-buddy.com
A tool that allows you to incorporate a “Tell a friend” script into your Web site; a year’s subscription to the service is US$15.
Tips for Optimizing Viral Marketing Campaigns
http://www.clickz.com/em_mkt/opt/article.php/837511
A great article on viral marketing and some tips to follow to create an effective campaign.

Tell a Friend Scripts
http://www.toolz.com/scripts DESCRIPTIONS.asp?a=3

Viral Marketing Case Studies
http://www.viralmarketer.com/vmcases.html
This extensive list of viral marketing case studies provides an in-depth look at many successful online businesses that are leveraging viral marketing opportunities on their Web site.

When Viral Marketing and Householding Intersect
http://www.ecrmguide.com/article.php/2105441
An article that compares householding and viral marketing.

Viral Marketing Tips
http://www.emage-emarketing.com/viral-marketing.htm
Dr. Ralph Wilson provides some valuable information and tips on how to leverage viral marketing on your Web site.
Permission marketing is an important aspect of Internet marketing. When you put forth the additional effort to proactively ask your target market to do something, you receive a much better response than if you just sit back and “hope they do it.” Similarly, if you ask people for their permission to send them materials on a specific topic, and they accept, you do not risk intruding on their privacy. Companies that force content on individuals through the Net hold little credibility in the eyes of their target market—and bad news spreads quickly. New legislation further imposes restrictions on what you can and cannot send via e-mail. When you play your cards right, permission marketing can be a valuable asset to any marketing campaign. In this chapter we discuss permission marketing and its uses to provide you with a greater understanding of this topic.

Permission Marketing Explained

Permission boils down to asking your target market and Web site visitors for the authority to perform a specific action—for their permission to do, or send them, something. Many businesses and advertisers com-
pete for the attention of their target market on a daily basis, but it is very difficult to break through all of the advertising clutter. The key to permission marketing is to get your target market to willingly volunteer to participate in the process. In order to do this, whatever it is you are proposing must be of value to your target market—you have to make it clear to the user by answering the question “What’s in it for me?” If your target market sees no benefit in participating, then they will not participate—it’s that simple.

Chapter 3 discusses many ways to encourage repeat visits to your Web site. Almost every repeat-traffic generator provides an opportunity for permission marketing. Examples include:

- “We change our coupons every week! Click here to join our mail list to be notified as soon as we update.”

- “Click here to join our mail list and receive our biweekly Internet marketing tips, tools, techniques, and resources newsletter.”

- “We have new specials on a regular basis. Click here to be notified by e-mail when we post our new specials.”

- “We have a new contest every three weeks. Keep checking back or Click here if you’d like to be notified by e-mail every time we begin a new contest.”

- “We constantly update our Calendar of Events. Keep checking back or Click here if you’d like to be notified by e-mail every time we update.”

What makes permission marketing so effective? Permission marketing is not intrusive. Your target market volunteered to receive the information you’re sending because it is of interest to them, and as a result they expect to receive it. This significantly increases the likelihood of your target market’s viewing the material sent to them and their being receptive to it. When implemented correctly, permission marketing can be a valuable asset in acquiring new customers and maintaining relationships with existing ones. We discuss some of the ways in which you can use permission marketing to increase your online marketing success in the next section.
Uses of Permission Marketing

Permission marketing techniques can be integrated with many Internet marketing tools, including newsletters, surveys, contests, and so on. Chapter 3 covers many repeat-traffic and customer loyalty-building tools that you can use on your Web site. Permission marketing is an excellent way to enhance the use of those tools—a few of which are covered in depth in this chapter.

Newsletters are one of the most popular resources for permission marketing. You can ask visitors if they would like to receive notification of new products, updates to your site, relevant tips, advice, industry news, and so on—whatever might be of interest to your target market. People who sign up to receive your newsletter do so because they have a clear interest in what it is you have to say. In your newsletter you can integrate strategic promotional opportunities to encourage users to come back to your site or to take some other course of action. If your newsletter is about recent happenings in your business or new product updates, encourage users to “follow this link” to see the updates or additional details and then, when they do, transport them to your Web site. A newsletter keeps you in front of your target market and constantly reminds them of your presence. Permission marketing opens the door for communication with your target market; this is an important step in building a long-lasting and profitable relationship with them.

Warranty registrations offer you an opportunity to capitalize on permission marketing. On the warranty registration card or online registration form for your product, you can include a section encouraging the consumer to sign up to receive additional information on your products and services. Many software vendors integrate the warranty or user registration process into their software and allow the user to submit it via the Internet once it’s completed. On the registration form, the software vendor usually asks consumers if they would like to be notified of upgrades to their product or if they would like to receive additional information on new products being released. The consumer can then click “Yes” to receive additional information or “No” to not receive any additional information. Users usually click “Yes” because they want to be notified when updates become available. Along with the information they requested, you can include relevant promotional opportunities. The simple act of posing the question increases your chances of capturing your consumers because you have put the idea into their head—something that might not even have crossed their mind.
Contests and sweepstakes represent another ideal opportunity to put permission marketing to work. In this case, the contest is the primary motivator to encourage people to sign up. The e-mail notification sent out to notify each contestant of the winner can also include promotional material and can encourage people to visit your Web site. In order for people to sign up for your contest, it must be of significant interest to them.

Say, for instance, that you are an online electronics retailer. When consumers visit your site, they could immediately be presented with the opportunity to enter a daily contest to win electronic-related merchandise such as a Rio MP3 player. There is a direct correlation with the prize being given, the target market, and the purpose of the site, and as a result of the strategic fit, you would likely receive many entrants into the contests.

Once users enter the contest, they should be sent an e-mail confirmation stating that the entry was received. Also include in the e-mail a viral marketing call to action to tell others about the contest as well as a call to action for the user to visit the site and shop around. Referring back to the contest window, directly under the e-mail address entry field should be the option for the visitor to sign up to receive details on the latest hot deals at your site. This is an excellent example of how to combine contests, newsletters, and permission marketing and maximize the opportunity. Not only is the target market encouraged to enter the contest, but they are also encouraged to sign up for the hot deals newsletter while their interest is piqued.

Legislation Regarding Permission-Based Marketing

Recently, there have been major changes in the privacy and anti-spam legislation in Canada and the United States. This legislation affects every business that does outbound e-mail marketing. Everyone has to be in compliance with the new privacy and anti-spam legislation. If you do not know what the terms of the legislation are, then you might unknowingly be breaking the law and subject to penalty.

The current Canadian legislation revolves around privacy and rights of an individual to the protection of their private information. Canada’s legislation, Privacy Law – Personal Information Protection and Electronics Document Act (PIPEDA for short), came into effect January 1, 2004,
for commercial businesses. The latest information on this legislation can be found at the Web site of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (http://www.privcom.gc.ca/legislation/02_06_01_01_e.asp).

The current U.S. legislation revolves around spam and pornography. The U.S. legislation, Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act (CAN-SPAM for short) came into effect January 1, 2004, for commercial e-mail. The latest information on this legislation can be found at (http://www.spamlaws.com/federal/).

**Privacy Concerns**

When used correctly, permission marketing can be a very rewarding and cost-effective means of promotion; however, if you make ill use of this technique, you can do more harm than good. In order to avoid this pitfall, remember that you should never send your target market anything that they did not ask to receive, and you should never use their personal information for anything other than what they were told they were signing up for.

If you send your target market information they did not ask for, they will consider it spam. If you use their personal information for anything other than what your visitors expect, you could find yourself in bad public light as well as in significant legal trouble. Misuse of permission marketing also damages your relationship with your target market because you have violated their trust. This can also lead to bad publicity as the target market is very likely to turn around and tell many of their friends and associates about their bad experience with your company, ultimately resulting in lost business for you.

Companies that are successful in their permission marketing endeavors tend to leverage their campaign by prominently displaying their privacy and security policies. People like to know how their personal information is handled and are very reluctant to hand over their details to a company or organization that does not explain how their information is used. Privacy and security policies help in building trust and confidence with your target market. These days, people are inundated with junk e-mail and are reluctant at the best of times to provide their e-mail address. You miss out on a lot of permission marketing opportunities if you don’t prominently display and clearly state your privacy policy.
Again, make sure you stay current with privacy and anti-spam legislation. Always provide the opportunity for any e-mail recipient to opt out of future mailings.

**Personalization**

When asking permission to communicate with your target market, you want to make it easy. Don’t have visitors complete a long form on which they have to provide all kinds of information. At this point, less is better. Have a simple form on which they provide their e-mail address and their first name. You want the first name so that you can personalize your communication. Most mail list software programs these days allow you to easily personalize the text in the body of the message you are sending and also the text in the subject line. You want to use a software program that manages all the permissions—the unsubscribes as well as the subscribes. See Chapter 14 on private mail list marketing for details.

**Sell the Benefits**

When you are asking permission to communicate with someone on an ongoing basis, you need to sell the benefits. People are inundated with junk e-mail and need to be “sold” on why they should subscribe to or join your communication list. “Join our weekly newsletter” just doesn’t cut it. “Join our weekly newsletter to receive our Internet-only specials, coupons, and tips from our pro” will get you more subscribers. You have to know your target market well and know what is enticing enough to get their permission (see Figure 5.1).

**Data Mining**

Data mining is sorting through data to identify patterns and establish relationships. Over time, you might want to ask a question or two in an appropriate manner to learn more about your subscribers so that you can target your communication with them a little better (see Figure 5.2).
Figure 5.1. Time Warner Bookmark provides you with a list of reasons to sign up for its newsletter.

Figure 5.2. Beaver Run Resort asks subscribers questions so the resort can tailor its future communication.
Cooperative Permission Marketing

Cooperative marketing is starting to take hold on the Internet. Look for opportunities to form an alliance with other sites that are trying to reach the same target market you are, and then see how you can do some win–win marketing. For example, if you have a monthly newsletter, you can allow subscribers to sign up to receive alliance partners’ newsletters at the same time they sign up to receive yours. In return, your alliance partners do the same. The same can be done for many repeat-traffic generators like coupons, e-specials, e-zines, etc. Get innovative!

Incentive-Based Permission Marketing

To increase the response to any permission marketing opportunity, you might consider offering an incentive: “Sign up to receive our Internet-only e-specials and be included in a drawing for (something of interest to your target market).

You can also offer a free gift to new e-members or subscribers. It could be a sample of one of your products or an e-book on a topic of interest to your target market.

A Closing Comment on Permission Marketing

Permission marketing adds leverage to online marketing campaigns. Once you are in front of your target market, you want to take every opportunity to stay there and continue to communicate with them time and time again. Permission marketing helps you achieve this, but it is a game of give and take. You give them a reason to give you permission to send them e-mail—they provide you with the permission and their personal information—you provide them with valuable content. There is a trade-off and the cycle continues. Over time, you will gain more knowledge about your target market, which will empower you to provide them with a better overall experience in dealing with your company through better targeted promotions and better fulfillment of customer needs.

Why should you use permission marketing? To summarize, permission marketing can return a much higher response rate over intrusive
advertising; it can increase sales, build your brand, and help develop relationships with your target market; and it is cost effective.

Visit Chapter 14 for more tips, tools, techniques and resources related to permission marketing.

Internet Resources for Chapter 5

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding permission marketing. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Canadian Marketing Association**
http://www.the-cma.org
The Canadian Marketing Association represents information-based marketers—those who reach consumers through media such as the Internet, television, telephone, radio, and addressed advertising mail. CMA provides a voice for responsible marketers and has earned a reputation for leadership in the area of self-regulation with respect to consumer protection, privacy, electronic commerce, and marketing to children.

**ClickZ: Permission Marketing**
You should look at ClickZ’s section on permission marketing, updated weekly by Nick Usborne.

**Seth Godin’s Web Site**
http://www.sethgodin.com/sg/index.html
Seth Godin is author of four books that have been bestsellers around the world and have changed the way people think about marketing, change, and work. His book *Permission Marketing* was an Amazon.com Top 100 bestseller for a year and a *Fortune* Best Business Book, and it spent four months on the *Business Week* bestseller list. It also appeared on the *New York Times* business book bestseller list. Check out his site for lots of info on permission marketing.
The Direct Marketing Association
http://www.the-dma.org
This is the Web site of The Direct Marketing Association, the leading direct-marketing organization.

Mandating Permission Won’t Solve Spam
http://www.clickz.com/experts/brand/sense/article.php/2106781
This is an interesting article on permission marketing and spam.

Should You Opt in to Opt Out?
http://www.clickz.com/experts/brand/capital/article.php/1587521
An article about the benefits of opt-in permission e-mail marketing.

Top 12 Best Practices for Permission-Based E-Mail Marketing
http://www.dmreview.com/article_sub.cfm?articleID=4989
An article outlining best practices that should be followed when it comes to permission marketing.
Designing Your Site to Be Search Engine Friendly

When Internet users are looking for a particular product, service, subject, or information pertaining to an area of interest to them, how do they do it? The most common search tool used is the search engine. Because search engines can bring significant volumes of traffic to your site, you must understand how the major search engines work and how the design of your site can influence the indexing of your site by the search engines. When people conduct Internet searches, they rarely go beyond the first couple pages of results. If you want to be noticed, you need to appear in the top 10 or 20 search results. But before you submit to the search engines, you have to be sure your site has been designed to be search engine friendly. In this chapter, we cover:

- The methodology to make your site search engine friendly
- The key elements of Web site design to accommodate search engines
- How to use your competition and industry leaders as guidance
- The all-important content
The importance of keywords in all aspects of your Web site

Meta-tags and how to optimize them for search engine placement.

**Methodology to Make Your Site Search Engine Friendly**

To make your site search engine friendly you have to:

- Decide which search engines are critical for your success.
- Learn as much as you can about their ranking criteria and the weighting given to each criteria in their algorithm.

Then you must:

- Determine the keywords that your target market is using in the search engines to find what you have to offer.
- Assign those keywords to specific pages throughout your site, and then
- Populate the pages with the assigned keywords in the appropriate places given the ranking criteria for your targeted search engines.

The remainder of the chapter walks you step-by-step through this process.

**Understanding Search Engines**

Search engines use programs or intelligent agents, called bots, to actually search the Internet for pages, which they index using specific parameters as they read the content. The agent reads the information on every page of your site and then follows the links. For example, Google’s spider continually crawls the Internet for pages to index.
Web looking for sites to index and, of course, indexes sites upon their submission. Google is obviously very important in the search engine community, so be sure your site is easily accessible to its spider. A detailed discussion on submissions to search engines and directories can be found in Chapter 7.

Registering with search engines is fairly simple. In most cases, you simply have to submit your URL or Internet address on their submission form. Even if your URL is not registered with search engines, a number of the major search engines will eventually find you as their bots are continually roaming the Internet looking for new sites to index. Your odds of being indexed increase significantly if you have a well-developed links strategy. There are millions of sites out there, so I suggest that you be proactive and register your site to ensure a speedier listing. Once you are registered, some of the bots will periodically visit your site looking for changes and updates.

A common problem faced by Internet marketers is how to influence search engines to index their site appropriately and how to ensure that their site appears when people use relevant search criteria. Many of the interesting and creative sites on the Internet are impossible to find because they are not indexed with the major search engines. The majority (85 percent) of Internet users employ search engines or directories to find what they are looking for on the Web. They do this by typing in a keyword or phrase that represents what they are looking for. The following sections explore how to make your Web site more search engine friendly.

Many search engines and directories either partner with or license the use of another search engine or directory’s search technology. If you submit your site to a search engine that uses Google’s index, then the design of your site influences how you’re indexed in all search engines that rely on Google for their search results. For example, Google’s results can be found on AOL, Netscape, and even sites like CNN. Google’s paid advertising results appear on many other sites as well.

In a similar fashion, you often find other search engine and directory data intermixed or included in some form with another search engine’s or directory’s data. For example, with Ask Jeeves its primary search results come from Teoma while its paid listings originate from Google. To take this example further, some search engines are built on the premise of pooling the search results of many search providers and presenting the results to the end user—they do not maintain their own index, but rather manipulate the results of many other search engines
in hopes of providing a better search experience. This type of search tool is called a meta-search engine. Dogpile is an example of a meta-search engine.

When designing your site, you must always keep the search engines in mind. Something as simple as a DHTML drop-down menu on your site can cause problems with the search engines and the indexing of your site if implemented incorrectly. You want to do everything you can to ensure that your site is designed to meet the needs of your target audience while remaining completely search engine friendly. Search engines can produce a significant amount of traffic to your site if you can manage to be placed in the top search results.

Decide Which Search Engines Are Important

To start this process you want to decide which search engines you are going to be concerned about when taking steps necessary to rank high in their search results. You are going to limit your selection to those search engines that are not pay to play. Ranking high in the pay-to-play search engines is discussed in Chapter 8. You want to select a number of the most popular search engines for your concentration. You also want to be indexed in topic specific search engines for your industry.

You can find the most popular search engines by doing your research on-line through sites such as Search Engine Watch (http://www.searchenginewatch.com). You can keep up with what’s happening in the search engines by joining one of the discussion lists on the topic. I recommend MarketingVOX|Search (http://www.marketingwonk.com/discuss/search/); it is highly active and full of great discussion.

There has been much consolidation in the search engine industry lately. Yahoo! now owns Inktomi, AlltheWeb, and AltaVista. AlltheWeb and AltaVista now return results from Yahoo!’s ‘tweaked’ Inktomi engine. As it stands at the time of this writing, the remaining major players in the search engine industry are:

- Google (http://www.google.com/)
- Teoma (http://www.teoma.com/)
- Yahoo! Search (http://www.yahoo.com/)
• MSN Search (http://search.msn.com)—Their new search service will be launched later this year to compete with the likes of Google and Yahoo! Search.

Learn the Search Engine Ranking Criteria

Each search engine has its own unique ranking criteria and its own unique algorithm or formula giving different weighting to each criteria in its formula. For the search engines that you have decided to focus on from Step 1 you have to learn as much as you can about their ranking criteria and relative weighting.

The search engines are all fighting for market share. The more market share a search engine has the more valuable the company is. To gain market share a search engine has to provide better results than its competition. It is for this reason that the search engines are changing and improving their formulas on an ongoing basis. You have to keep up with changes in these formulas, tweak your site accordingly and resubmit when necessary.

The search engines use different databases for their search results. They have different algorithms or formulas for their ranking. They have different weighting for the various elements within their formula. They change their formulas over time and they change their ranking over time. Sound complicated?

It is not as daunting as it might sound because the major search engines tend to look at similar information, but weight the relevancy for particular items differently in their algorithms. That having been said, here are the most important areas on a Web page that you must address when performing organic search engine optimization:

• Title tags (page titles)

• Keywords meta-tags

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**Anchor text**
The descriptive text for a link that is visible to the Web site user.

• Description meta-tags

• Alt tags

• Hypertext links (e.g., anchor text)
• Domain names and file names

• Body text (beginning, middle, and end of page copy; headers)

• Between the “NOFRAMES” tag of framed Web sites.

Page titles and text-based page content are the most important of the noted placement areas. Keyword meta-tags are not as critical as they once were, but are still applicable for some engines.

Because Google is the favorite search engine for the time being, let’s take a closer look at how it ranks pages. Google uses the Open Directory database for its directory listings and its internal index for its primary search listings. Google has many other features as well, some of which include:

• An images search

• Usenet news data database

• A news search feature

• Froogle (a shopping search tool)

• A catalog search

• Advertising services through the Google AdWords programs.

The ranking formula for Google’s main search function looks for the keywords in the visible body text (not in the meta-tags), headers tags, title tags, hypertext links, Alt tags, and gives a very heavy weighting to the link popularity with extra points for quality of links and relevancy of text around the links.

More and more of the search engines are giving heavy weighting to link popularity—that is the number of links to your site from other sites on the Internet. The search engines are getting very sophisticated in the weighting of link popularity, with some search engines giving extra points for link relevancy—that is how high the site with the link to your site would rank for the same keyword. Other points are awarded based on the keywords around the link. For strategies on generating significant links to your site see Chapter 16.
Keywords Are Critical

A critical step in natural search engine optimization is to select the right keywords for your business, products/services (including descriptive words), and your target market. Understand who you are targeting and build your search engine optimization efforts around your audience.

Keywords are the terms and phrases that your target market uses when searching for the products and services you sell in the major search engines and directories. Your keywords are used in everything you do and are the key determining factor in how you rank in the search results among many of the major search engines.

You need to choose keyword phrases that are going to bring sustainable targeted traffic consisting of potential customers—not just anything and everything. What you may think is the perfect keyword phrase may not be used at all by your target market in their search queries, which is why it is so critical to research and validate your keywords.

Ideally, each page of your Web site is going to focus on a different set of keywords that are specific to the content at hand. If you were to focus on the same set of keywords on every page then you would only hit one small portion of your market potential because you are only going to hit those same keywords over and over again—it is self-defeating. As a general rule, you want to target somewhere between two and five keyword phrases per page.

First, you want to gather a master list of all possible keyword phrases. To make the data easier to manage you can create different keyword list profiles that represent individual topics as opposed to trying to cover all topics in a giant master list. For example, if you have two product lines then you can create a keyword list for each product line. Naturally, some keywords are shared across the lists, but it is important to understand that the people looking for one topic (e.g., “jobs”) are not necessarily the same people looking for another topic (e.g., “autos”), and as such they are going to use different keyword combinations in their searches.

How do you create your master keywords list? Here are four solid techniques for generating a list of potential keyword phrases:

1. Brainstorming, surveying, and reviewing promotional material
2. Review competing and industry leading Web sites
3. Assess your Web site traffic logs
4. **Keyword suggestion and evaluation tools.**

Be sure to record the keywords you gather in a text document in your word-processing program or in a spreadsheet. Including them in a spreadsheet or database of sorts makes them much easier to sort when it comes time to prioritize the keywords and weed out the junk.

As you work your way through the list of techniques you want to cycle back to some of the techniques because you will come across search terms that can expand the scope of your original efforts and open the door to new, more targeted phrases that you might have missed the first time around.

**Brainstorming, Surveying, and Reviewing Promotional Material**

At this stage, the idea is to gather all the keyword phrases you can, within reason. Sit down with a pen and paper and jot down all keywords that come to mind. Bring other members of your team in on this process to fuel ideas. There is nothing scientific or technical to be concerned with here—the sky’s the limit, but try to put yourself in your customer’s shoes.

Try to think as your target market would if they were to do a search for information on a topic contained within your site. Do not just think about what people would do to find your site, but what they would do if they didn’t know your company existed and were looking for the types of products and services you sell.

Here are several questions to help you with your brainstorming process:

1. **What industry are you in (e.g., travel)?**

2. **What is the focus of your Web site (e.g., a resource, a guide, a store)?** What would people search for if they were looking for a Web site like yours?

3. **If your customer were to take a guess at your Web address, what would it be?** Remember, they do not know who you are, but they know what kind of products or services they are looking for.

4. **What products and services do you sell?** What are some of the descriptive words or benefits of your products and/or services
that might be familiar to your target market? For example, if your site offers information on resort spas then one descriptive keyword you might choose could be massage. Also, include words that describe the benefits of these services or the service in more detail such as massage therapy and full body massage.

5. Are there any regional or geographic implications to consider? For example, there could be spelling differences to account for. In the United States the target market might look for color laser printer and in Canada the target market might look for colour laser printer. Depending on the audience you are trying to communicate with you need to tailor keyword phrases accordingly. Also, people typically blend a destination or major landmark with their keyword search. If you are going to Dallas you are going to look for Dallas hotels not just hotels.

Your current corporate materials, brochures, and other marketing collateral can be a valuable source of keyword phrases. Begin by indiscriminately highlighting any words that people might search for if they are looking for products or services your company has to offer.

To assist you in developing your keyword list consider asking your customers for their input. Ask what keywords they might use to find a site like yours. You can always turn to a thesaurus (e.g., http://www.dictionary.com/) for additional ideas if you get stumped.

**Review Competing and Industry Leading Web Sites**

Check out your online competition. The term “competition” is referenced quite loosely in that industry leaders with whom you may not directly compete are also included here. Look at the sites for which you have a record and look for sites in the major search engines using some of the keyword phrases you have gathered so far.

You want to see what sites are in the top 20 positions and understand them. By reviewing top ranking Web sites you can look for themes and patterns in the sites that give you a good indication of what they are going after and how they are doing it. You can then turn around and apply this new found knowledge to your own Web site.

When reviewing competing Web sites you should look at the same general areas you would optimize on your own Web site. As mentioned before, the most critical keyword placement areas include:
- Title tags (page titles)
- Keywords meta-tags
- Description meta-tags
- Alt tags
- Hypertext links (e.g., anchor text)
- Domain names and file names
- Body text (beginning, middle, and end of page copy; headers)
- Between the “NOFRAMES” tag of framed Web sites.

By searching for your most important keywords and observing what the top-ranking sites are using with respect to their page content, title tags, description meta-tags, keyword meta-tags, and so on, you can formulate a good plan of attack. Remember that if you don’t appear in the first two or three pages of search results, it is unlikely that prospective visitors will access your site through the search engine.

Check to see what meta-tags your competitors have. Not only can you learn from the sites that catch your eye, you can also learn from your competitors’ mistakes. After you have done a thorough job of this market research, you are in a good position to develop a description that is catchy and adequately describes your site.

To check your competition’s meta-tags in Microsoft Internet Explorer you simply go to their site, then click “View” on your menu bar and select “Source” from the drop-down menu. This brings up the source code for that respective page in whatever your default text browser is. For most people this is Notepad. Looking for the same information in Netscape is just as easy. On the menu bar click “View” and then select “Page Source” from the drop-down menu.

Pay special attention to the title tag of the top ranked Web sites. To get a little more specific you can narrow your search to keywords in a title tag. The reason for doing this is that optimizing a title tag is a given when it comes to search engine optimization, so it only makes sense to look at who else is doing it as well. On Google you can enter in “allintitle: keyword phrase,” without the quotes, to search for all pages with the noted keywords in their title tag. This approach is a little more focused
than simply looking for all pages with a certain set of keywords because the keywords might just be there in passing, as a part of an article, and not something the site is intentionally trying to target. If the keywords are found in the title tag then there is a better chance its reason for being there is intentional.

Not only can you learn from the sites that catch your eye, you can also learn from your competitors’ mistakes.

**Assess Your Web Site Traffic Logs**

Your Web site traffic logs can be a source of pertinent keyword information. You can view your traffic logs to see what search terms and search engines people are using to locate your Web site and to help you fine-tune future search engine optimization efforts.

If you are not sure whether or not you have access to a Web site traffic analysis program check with your current Web site host to see if they provide one to you. If not, there are plenty of tools available to you. See Chapter 27, “Web Site Traffic Analysis,” for helpful information.

Understand that the search terms displayed may not be the most relevant; they just happen to be the search terms people are executing to find your site during the selected time frame. Applying new search engine optimization techniques with relevant keywords changes how people find your Web site. The Web site traffic analysis package you use gives you the power to measure the impact of your optimization efforts.

Your traffic logs can be a source of inspiration for generating your master keyword list. Note the search terms people are currently using and add them to your list. For a more complete look at the search phrases reported on your Web site, expand the date range to cover a larger spread, say, over the period of a year.

When your site is optimized your Web traffic analysis tool will become your best friend in monitoring your success.

**Keyword Suggestion and Evaluation Tools**

There are a number of services available that can help you with selecting the most appropriate keywords for your site. These services base their suggestions on results from actual search queries. WordSpot (http://
www.wordspot.com/) and Wordtracker (http://www.wordtracker.com/) are two such examples.

Keyword research tools can help meet your current needs, whether you’re looking for a place to start, are plum out of ideas, or simply feel like you’re missing something. Here are the most common tools my team uses on a daily basis:

**WordTracker (http://www.wordtracker.com/)**—WordTracker is the most popular keyword research tool and is an absolute must for doing your research. WordTracker does have a fee associated with it. You can expect to pay approximately US$250 per year or $8 for a day.

WordTracker maintains a database of over 350 million keywords gathered from several meta-search engines. The tool is easy to use and provides a valuable source of information. When you run a search for a term it shows you related keywords, including misspellings, the plural and singular versions of the word or phrase, and references from its thesaurus if desired.

WordTracker allows you to build your list of keyword phrases through a process similar to adding items to a shopping cart. The tool enables you to drill down a bit further by selecting keyword phrases of particular interest that are related to the specific phrase with which you are concerned. Figure 6.1 shows WordTracker’s interface.

A nice feature of this tool is that it provides you with an indication of the popularity for your keywords as well as the predicted volume of competition for said keywords. This is a handy feature when trying to determine which keywords are worth going after and which are a waste of time.

**Overture’s Search Term Suggestion Tool (http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion)**—Overture’s Search Term Suggestion Tool is free. The tool enables you to enter keyword phrases and search for related keywords based on the previous month’s search data. Up to 100 results per query are displayed. The results are displayed in order of popularity and only search terms with a minimum of 25 queries during the previous month are displayed. An example of the tool in action can be seen in Figure 6.2.

The Overture tool does have some notable ways of doing things that you need to keep in mind. For one, it always converts the word
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**Figure 6.1.** WordTracker in action.

**Figure 6.2.** Overture’s Search Term Suggestion tool.
you are questioning from the plural to the singular so it is not possible to tell if someone is really searching for the plural or singular version of a word (e.g., stores versus store). Second, the Overture tool always displays the correct spelling of a word, but in some cases you may want to know what a common misspelling is along with how often it is searched for (e.g., accommodation versus accomodation). A final note is that the tool just shows results that include the exact phrase you searched for. If you search for the keyword cheap flights as done in Figure 6.2, all of the results will include cheap flight; it does not suggest discount flights, discount airlines, cheap airfare, and so on as alternatives. You have to enter more specific phrases to drill down.

Google AdWords: Keyword Suggestions (https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox)—Another useful free tool. You can use the Google AdWords: Keyword Suggestions tool to generate new keyword ideas and compare the results from the other tools. The Google tool also makes suggestions on related terms you should consider. An example can be seen in Figure 6.3.
WordTracker and Overture are essential keyword suggestion tools; however, the Google tool can offer some support and it can help generate new ideas. The Google tool’s primary purpose is for researching keywords for its AdWords program.

Related searches on search engines and directories—A lesser known technique is to run a query on a search engine and watch for the related search options it suggests. Some search engines such as AltaVista, Teoma, and Lycos make suggestions on related keyword phrases that you can use to refine your search. You can use these suggestions as a means of generating additional keywords or opening a new theme of search phrases you hadn’t previously considered. Figure 6.4 shows an example of search suggestions made by Teoma for a query on cheap flights.

Fine-Tuning Your Keyword Phrases

Now that you have your master keyword list, probably with a few hundred keyword phrases, you have to drill down and figure out which keywords you are going to target for each page of your Web site that you

Figure 6.4.  Teoma search suggestions.
want to optimize. Realistically, you can emphasize two to five keyword phrases on a single page, and maybe a few others as spillover. Keep in mind that each page you optimize should lean toward a different set of keywords. Why? What good is buying 100 lottery tickets for the next drawing if they all have the same number? It is the same idea here.

Your efforts should focus around those keyword phrases that bring in a fair volume of traffic and that are highly targeted. The ROI for such keywords will be much higher. When reviewing your keyword list you need to consider:

- Which keywords are vital to your objectives
- Which keywords are popular enough to generate reasonable, sustainable traffic
- Which keywords do not have so much competition that it would be counterproductive considering the time and effort necessary to target them.

For a hotel to have the keyword travel stand alone on the hotel’s Web site would prove a waste of effort. Travel is a vastly popular keyword, which is good, but it is too generic and too competitive to be worthwhile. You have to make judgment calls from time to time. In some cases a word is relevant and popular, but also competitive to the point of being intimidating. If this word is essential to your business, then go for it.

Organize your keywords according to their level of importance. When completed, you will have a refined master keyword list that you can refer to when optimizing your Web site. Also, different directories allow different numbers of keywords to be submitted. Because you have organized the list with the most important words first, you can simply include as many of your keywords as the directory allows.

You can begin editing the list by deleting words that either are too generic (for example, business) or are not appropriate for keyword purposes. Review each word and ask yourself, “Would people search using this word if they were looking for the products and services available through my Web site?”

For each page that you are optimizing take a copy of the comprehensive master list and delete words that are not appropriate for that particular page. Reprioritize the remaining keywords based on the con-
tent of the page you are indexing. This is the keyword list for that particular page. Repeat this procedure for every page you are optimizing. This is also a great procedure when you are developing the keyword meta-tag for each page of your site.

What I covered above is a very basic approach to organizing keywords. If you are up to the challenge you can take it further by adding weights and multipliers to your keyword list to further refine it. Review some of the resource Web sites provided at the end of this chapter to learn advanced techniques.

You can choose to keep it basic while you are learning the ropes, but as you become more familiar you might want to be more critical in selecting your keywords to boost your performance in the search engines. The more knowledge with which you are armed, the better prepared you are to optimize your Web site. Here are some additional tips to keep in mind when refining your keywords master list:

**Plural and singular keywords**—There is some debate about whether it is better to use only the plural version of a keyword or whether it is best to use both the plural and singular form of the keyword. Is your target market looking for both? As an example, some people might search for *game*, and others might search for *games*. Google matches exactly what the user searches for, so it is important to use both where possible.

**Using the names of your competitors**—There is often the question as to whether to include your competitor’s name in your keywords. The idea here is that if someone looks for your competitor they are going to find you as well. *Never* include a competitor’s name in your keywords. Because several search engines read only a small amount of content for keywords you lose valuable page real estate to irrelevant keywords when you use your competitor’s name. In addition, there have been recent legal battles regarding the use of competitors’ names within one’s keywords.

**Common misspellings of words**—There are many words that people misspell on a frequent basis. The question here is do you include those misspelled keywords in your site or not? My stance is “No.” Although people use them in their searches it hurts your credibility in that you come off as a company incapable of spellings its own products and services.
Case sensitivity—Some search engines are not case sensitive and others are. Regardless, most people search in lower case, and to keep the process simple, for now you should record your original keyword master list using lowercase. Once you begin finalizing your keyword list you might notice that people are actually searching for the proper spelling of a word, in which case you would reflect the changes in your keyword list.

Stop and filter words—Filter words are words search engines simply ignore during searches. Stop words are extremely common words that search engines use as triggers to stop grabbing content on a given page, such as “and,” “a,” and “the.” Some search engines view stop words and filter words as the same thing, but you need only remember one thing: search engines bypass these words to save time as these words are not considered to add any value to the search. It is best to try and avoid using stop words where possible in your keyword phrases. Here is a sample list of some of the more common stop words on record from a list compiled by Search Engine World (http://www.searchengineworld.com/spy/stopwords.htm):

```plaintext
a  ii  about  actually  above  according
across 39  after  afterwards  ad  adj
ae  af  ai  al
again  against  already  among
almost  alone  another  any
although  always  amongst
an  and  any
anyone  anything  ao  aq
ar  are  aren  aren’t
arpa  b  at  au
az  ba  bb
be  became  because  become
becoming  because  becomes
being  beforehand
beginning  behind
besides  between
bh  bi
bn  bo
bt  but
by  bz  c
can’t  cannot  caption  cc
```
| la | last | later | latter | lb |
| lc | least | less | let | let’s |
| li | like | likely | lk | ll |
| lr | ls | lt | ltd | lu |
| lv | make | makes | many | maybe |
| md | me | meantime | meanwhile | mc |
| mh | microsoft | might | mil | million |
| miss | mk | ml | mm | mn |
| mo | more | moreover | most | mostly |
| mp | mq | mr | mrs | ms |
| msie | mt | mu | much | must |
| mv | mw | mx | my | myself |
| mz | n | na | namely | nc |
| ne | neither | net | netscape | never |
| nevertheless | new | next | nf | ng |
| ni | nine | ninety | nl | no |
| nobody | none | nonetheless | noone | nor |
| not | nothing | now | nowhere | np |
| nr | nu | nz | o | of |
| off | often | om | on | once |
| one | one’s | only | onto | or |
| org | other | others | otherwise | our |
| ours | ourselves | out | over | overall |
| own | p | pa | page | pe |
| per | perhaps | pf | pg | ph |
| pk | pl | pm | pn | pr |
| pt | pw | py | q | qa |
| r | rather | re | recent | recently |
| reserved | ring | ro | ru | rw |
| s | sa | same | sb | sc |
| sd | se | seem | seemed | seeming |
| seems | seven | seventy | several | sg |
| sh | she | she’d | she’ll | she’s |
| should | shouldn’t | si | since | sk |
| site | six | sixty | sj | some |
| sl | sm | sn | so | stop |
| somewhat | someone | something | sometime | sometimes |
| somewhere | sr | st | still | stop |
| su | such | sv | sy | sz |
Modifiers—A modifier is a keyword you add to your primary keyword phrase to give it a boost. Who simply searches for a hotel at random? It doesn’t make sense. You look for a hotel in combination with a destination. In this case, the destination is the modifier. As a side note, local search is becoming increasingly popular, so if the
local market plays a significant role in the success of your business, be sure to use geographic modifiers accordingly.

**Multiple-word keyword phrases**—Two- or three-keyword phrases perform better than single keywords. According to OneStat.com ([http://www.onestat.com/](http://www.onestat.com/)) people tend to use 2- and 3-word phrases when performing a search online. Here is a list of the most popular number of words used in a search phrase:

- 2 words—32.58%
- 3 words—25.61%
- 1 word—19.02%
- 4 words—12.83%
- 5 words—5.64%
- 6 words—2.32%
- 7 words—0.98%

Not only are multiple keyword phrases used more often by searchers, but it also enables you to be more descriptive in your keyword phrases such as the modifiers.

**Assign Specific Keywords to Specific Pages**

The next step is to allocate specific keywords to specific pages of your site for search engine optimization. You then populate each page in the appropriate places with the assigned keyword. You do this because you want to ensure that no matter which keyword or keyword phrase your target market decides to search on, one of the pages on your site is likely to rank in the first couple of pages of search results.

Many sites populate all their pages with the same keywords in the hopes that one of their pages will rank high in the search results. They use the same meta-tags for every page on their site. Again, this is the
same as buying 100 tickets on the lottery but selecting the same numbers for every single ticket.

Some search engines rank sites by how early the keyword appears on the site. The earlier a keyword is mentioned on your site, the higher your site may be positioned in search results. And remember the points made earlier: though you don’t want to repeat a keyword hundreds of times (some search engines are on to this), you do want to repeat keywords a number of times on each page of your site.

When you have allocated your keywords to the various pages on your site, you will populate or include the keyword phrases assigned in the appropriate places for that particular page: Let’s take a closer look at all those appropriate places.

**Title Tags—Use Descriptive Page Titles**

It is extremely important that all Web pages have titles. Title tags are viewed as the most important element of search engine optimization when it comes to keyword placement. Each of the pages in your Web site should be given a title.

The title is inserted between the title tags in the header of an HTML document. `<HEAD>` indicates the beginning of the header, and the ending of the header is marked by `</HEAD>`. A simplified version might look like:

- `<url1>\<HTML>`
- `<url1>\<HEAD>`
- `<TITLE>Document Title Here</TITLE>`
- `<url1><META-NAME="keywords" CONTENT="keyword1, keyword2, keyword3">`
- `<url1><META-NAME="description" CONTENT="200-character site description goes here">`
- `<url1><META-NAME="robots" CONTENT="index, follow">`
- `<url1>\<!—Comments tag, repeat description here?>`
- `<url1>`
Title tag information identifies and describes your pages. Titles tell readers where the information contained on a page originated. Most Web browsers, such as Netscape, display a document’s title in the top line of the screen. When users print a page from your Web site, the title usually appears at the top of the page at the left. When someone bookmarks your site, the title appears as the description in his or her bookmark file. These are all reasons that it is important that a page’s title reflects an accurate description of the page. More importantly, the title tag is typically what the target market sees in search results in some of the major search engines. In Figure 6.5 you can see that a typical search result consists of the title tag as the link to the Web site, a brief description of the Web site, and the URL.

Every page of your Web site should have a unique title tag and each title tag should accurately describe the page content. Your target market should be able to read the title tag and understand what the page they are about to view contains.

Keep your title tags brief—in the realm of 5 to 10 words. The longer your title tag is the more diluted your keywords become and the more likely your title tag is to be truncated by a search engine. Notice in Figure 6.5 that the last search result’s title ends with an ellipsis (...). This occurs because Google only displays up to 66 characters. Yahoo!

Figure 6.5. The title tag of a Web site appears as the first line of information about a Web site.
on the other hand permits up to 120 characters for a title tag. Presently Google and Yahoo! are the two most important search engines; use their requirements as an approximation when designing your title tag.

My advice is to include your most important keyword phrases first, within Google’s 66 character range. Overspill, or less important keywords, can run into the excess space Yahoo! allows. By including your most important keywords first you secure their position for use by the search engines and for browser bookmarks.

The shorter and more accurate the title tag is, the higher the keyword density and relevancy for that title tag. Try to keep your use of a keyword phrase to a single instance if possible, unless the title tag truly warrants duplication. In the case of a hotel, the word hotel might appear twice in a title: once for the hotel’s proper company name and once in a descriptive term such as a targeted geographic area.

Match the keywords you use in your meta-tags with the words you use in your page titles. Search engines check page titles, meta-tags, and page content for keywords. For certain keywords, your pages will be more relevant, and therefore will place higher in the search engines, if these keywords appear in each of these three sections. Position your keywords near the beginning of your page titles to increase your keyword relevancy.

Some of the search engines retrieve your page, look at your title, and then look at the rest of your page for keywords that match those found in the title. Many search engines use title tags as one of the elements in their algorithm to determine search engine ranking. Pages that have keywords in the title are seen as more relevant than similar pages on the same subject that don’t, and may thus be ranked in a higher position by the search engines. However, don’t make your title a string of keywords such as cuisine, French cuisine, imported food, because this is often considered spam by the search engines and you end up worse off in the rankings or removed altogether. Also keep in mind that people will see that title in the search results, and they’re more likely to click on a site that has a title that flows and is descriptive—not a list.

**Keywords Meta-Tag**

As we noted earlier in this chapter, a common problem faced by Internet marketers is how to influence search engines to index their site ap-
appropriately and how to ensure that their site appears when people use relevant search criteria. The majority of Internet users employ search engines or directories to find Web sites, which they do by typing in a keyword or phrase that represents what they are looking for.

Retaining a certain measure of control over how search engines deal with your Web site is a major concern. Often Web sites do not take advantage of the techniques available to them to influence search engine listings. Most search engines evaluate the HTML meta-tags in conjunction with other variables to decide where to index Web pages based on particular keyword queries.

The Web Developer’s Virtual Library defines an HTML meta-tag as follows:

“The META element is used within the HEAD element to embed document meta-information not defined by other HTML elements. The META element can be used to identify properties of a document (e.g., author, expiration date, a list of key words, etc.) and assign values to those properties.”

An HTML tag is used in the HEAD area of a document to specify further information about the document, either for the local server or for a remote browser. The meta-element is used within the HEAD element to embed document meta-information not defined by other HTML elements. Such information can be extracted by servers/clients for use in identifying, indexing, and cataloging specialized document meta-information. In addition, HTTP servers can read the contents of the document HEAD to generate response headers corresponding to any elements defining a value for the attribute HTTP-EQUIV. This provides document authors with a mechanism for identifying information that should be included in the response headers of an HTTP request.

To summarize this lengthy definition, meta-information can be used in identifying, indexing, and cataloging. This means you can use these tags to guide the search engines in displaying your site as the result of a query. There are many meta-tags, including:
• Abstract
• Author
• Copyright
• Description
• Expires
• Keywords
• Language
• Refresh
• Revisit
• Robots.

Most of the above meta-tags are not useful for optimization purposes. The most recognized meta-tag is the keywords meta-tag.

<META-NAME=“keywords” CONTENT=“…”> tells search engines under which keywords to index your site. When a user types one of the words you listed here, your site should be displayed as a result. A space or comma can be used to separate the words. Do not frequently repeat the keyword, rather repeat the keyword about five times in different phrases. You do have the option of using more than 1,000 characters in your keywords meta-tag, but be wary of keyword dilution. You should create a keywords tag for each page of your site that lists the appropriate keywords for each separate page.

Description Meta-Tag

<META-NAME=“description” CONTENT=“…”> should be included on every page of your Web site. The description meta-tag is used to supply an accurate overview of the page to which it is attached. The
description meta-tag can influence the description in the search engines that support them.

It is best to keep the description meta-tag to somewhere in the realm of 200 to 250 characters in total. Be sure to use the same keywords applied elsewhere on the page being optimized in the description meta-tag for consistency and relevancy, however, do not duplicate your title tag in your description meta-tag or you may run the risk of being accused of keyword stacking. Also, it helps to include a call to action encouraging the target market to visit your Web site or some other action.

**Alt Tags**

Some search engines use the information within Alt tags when forming a description and determining the ranking for your site. Alt tags are used to display a description of the graphic they are associated with if the graphic cannot be displayed, such as in text-only browsers. Alt tags appear after an image tag and contain a phrase that is associated with the image.

Ensure that your Alt tags contain the keywords assigned to the particular page wherever you can. This gives your page a better chance of being ranked higher in the search engines. For example:

```html
<image src="images/logo.gif" height="50" width ="50"
alt="Games Nation – Computer Games Logo">
```

You do not want your Alt tags to look something like “Game Nation” or “Company Logo” because this does not include any keywords. Be sure you apply proper Alt tags to all images on your site to achieve best results. Keep in mind that users who browse with graphics disabled must be able to navigate your site, and proper use of Alt tags assists them in doing so.

**Hypertext Links**

A hypertext link consists of the description of a link placed in between anchor tags. Here is an example of an absolute link, where the link includes the total path to where the document can be found:
The text inside a hyperlink, or anchor text, is increasingly important for search engine optimization. The major search engines give weight to content in and around text links because Web sites typically link to other related Web sites that the target market is interested in so there is a strong relevancy pattern.

Good places to use links include the primary and subnavigation aspects of a Web site, as well as links to external resources from within the page copy. Likewise, if links on other Web sites pointing to your Web site include the same string of keywords, your site’s relevancy gets a boost. When you encourage other Web sites to link to yours, be sure to provide them with the link text they should use. Similarly, when you submit your Web site to directories and other link sources, provide the comparable link or title text.

**Domain Name and File names**

Use of keywords within your domain name and file names can help with search engine positioning. Some professionals argue that including dashes to separate keywords makes it easier for search engines to distinguish keywords, which can help boost your rankings. Personal experience leads me to believe that if it actually does make a difference, the difference is so small that you are better off spending your time optimizing your Web site in areas that really count. This also applies to file names.

Examples of domain names are:

1. `www.thisisadomainname.com`

2. `www.this-is-also-a-domain-name.com`

Examples of file names are:

1. `www.thisisadomainname.com/samplepage.html`

2. `www.thisisadomainname.com/samples-page.html`
It does not take much effort to give your images and file names meaningful names, so take the time to do it.

**Body Text—Header Tags and Page Copy**

The body text of a Web page consists of all the visible text between the `<body>` and `</body>` tag, such as headings and the page copy encased in paragraphs. Along with page titles, body text is the next important area on which to focus your search engine optimization efforts. Body text is where you want to spend the bulk of your time.

**Headings—<H1> Header Tags </H1>**

Use your HTML `<H1>` header tags effectively to indicate the subject and content of a particular page. Most people use them only as a method of creating large fonts. Some search engines, including Google, use the content included within the header text in their relevancy scoring. The H1 tag is the most important followed by H2. Include your most important keywords in your header tags. If you can, work a couple of H2 tags into your page to sort content and improve the relevancy of your page.

**Page Copy**

You want to ensure that the keyword you have assigned to a specific page appears in the first 200 characters on that page as close to the beginning as possible. The higher up on a page the greater the keyword prominence. Search engines tend to lend more weight to page content above the fold. The fold is where your browser window ends and where vertical scrolling begins, if necessary.

The assigned keyword should appear at the beginning of the text on the page, in the middle, and at the end. You want to build a theme on your page and to do so you have to spread your keywords throughout the page, not just focus on the first paragraph.

Always have a descriptive paragraph at the top of your Web page that describes what can be found on the page for your target market and for the major search engines. Search engines use this as their source for a site description and keywords on your site. In addition, search engines use the content found within the opening paragraph in influ-
encing the ranking of your site among search results. Again, be sure to use the most important keywords first, preferably within the first two or three sentences. This is enormously important. Make sure that the keywords you use flow naturally within the content of the opening paragraph and relate to the content and purpose of your site. You don’t want the search engines to think you’re trying to cram in words where they don’t fit.

As you can tell, textual HTML content is extremely important to the search engines, which brings me to my next point. Never create a page that is excessive in graphical content. For example, don’t display information that should be displayed in text as a graphic file. I’ve seen this done numerous times. A site may have the best opening statement in the world, but the search engines can’t use it because the information is presented in the form of a graphic. No matter how great it looks, the search engines can’t read your graphics for content.

Do not make your home page excessively lengthy. The longer your page is, the less relevant the information on the page becomes to the search engines. I recommend that you keep your home page short and to the point. A page consisting of between 250 and 800 words provides the major search engines with the information they need.

Little things such as how often you update your site can have an effect on how well your site places in search engine results. Spiders can determine how often a page is updated and revisit your site accordingly. This may lead to higher rankings in some of the major search engines. Fresh content is good for your target market and for search engine rankings. After all, who wants to view stale content?

As a final note, before you submit your site, be sure the content on the page you are submitting is complete. Yahoo!, for one, ignores your submission if you have an “under construction” or similar sign on your page.

Do not get too muddled down in the science of search engine optimization. No two search engines are identical so if you spend all of your time tailoring your site for just one engine you may have many missed opportunities on your hand. You generally will do just fine if your application of relevant keywords is related to your page at hand, tied together with the different optimization elements that make-up a Web page, and are used consistently and creatively enough to build a theme. A tool such as Web Position Gold (http://www.webposition.com/) can assist you in analyzing your pages for keyword density and relevancy.
Spamming

Search engines want to provide the most accurate and complete search results they can to their target market. After all, this is what drives all aspects of their business model. If people have no faith in a search engine, the traffic dries up and the search placement fees as well as advertising fees cease to exist.

Some Internet marketers try various techniques to trick the search engines into positioning their sites higher in search results. These tricks do not work with every search engine, and if it is discovered that you are trying to dupe the search engines, some may not list you at all. Search engines are programmed to detect some of these techniques, and you will be penalized in some way if you are discovered. A few of the search engine tricks pertaining to Web site design are as follows:

**Repeating keywords**—Some Web sites repeat the same keywords over and over again, by hiding them in the visible HTML, in invisible layers such as the `<NOFRAMES>` tag, and in your meta-tags. Repeating keywords over and over again by displaying them at the bottom of your document after a number of line breaks counts as well! For example:

...games, games, games, games, video games, games, games, board games, online games, games, games, games, games...

This ill-fated technique is called keyword stacking, and it is quite obvious when a site is doing this. Its not so obvious cousin is called keyword stuffing, and this is when you exercise the same stacking techniques to aspects of the Web site that should not be optimized, such as spacer images. A spacer image is used by Web developers for just that—properly spacing items on a page. It is not good practice to include descriptive text in an Alt tag for a spacer image.

**Jamming keywords**—If you are displaying keywords in your Web pages using a very small font, then you are jamming keywords. Why would you even do this unless you were specifically trying to manipulate search results? Don’t do it. This spam technique is called “tiny text.”
Hidden text and links—Avoid inserting hidden text and links in your Web site for the purpose of getting in more keywords. For example, you can hide keywords in your HTML document by making the text color the same as the background color. Another example is inserting keywords in areas not visible to the end user such as the hidden layers in style sheets.

Misleading title changes—Making frequent and regular title changes so that the bots think your site is a new site and list you again and again is misleading. In the case of directories, you could change the name of your site just by adding a space, an exclamation mark (!), or “A” as the first character so that you come up first in alphabetical lists.

Page Swapping—This practice involves showing one page to a search engine, but a different one to the end user. Quite often you find people hijack content from a top-ranking site, insert it on their page to achieve a top ranking, then replace that page with a completely different page when a desired ranking is achieved.

Content Duplication—Say you have one Web page and it is ranking pretty well. You decide it would be nice to improve your ranking, but hey, it would be good to keep your current position too. You decide to duplicate your page, fine-tune a few things, and call it something different. You then submit that page to the search engine. Your ranking improved and now you have two listings. Not bad! Why not do it again? And so on and so forth. If you are caught duplicating Web pages you will be penalized. Search engines want to provide unique content, not the same page over and over again.

Domain Spam (Mirrored Sites)—Closely related to content duplication, this is when an entire Web site is replicated (or slightly modified) and placed at a different URL. This is usually done to dominate search positions and to boost link popularity, but in the end all it does is hurt you when you get caught. You will get banned for practicing this technique.

Refresh Meta-tag—Have you ever visited a site and then been automatically transported to another page within the site? This is the result of a refresh meta-tag. This tag is an HTML document that is designed to automatically replace itself with another HTML docu-
ment after a certain specified period of time, as defined by the document author—it’s like automatic page swapping. Do not abuse this tag. Additionally, don’t use a redirect unless it is absolutely necessary. A permanent redirect (HTTP 301) can be used to tell the search engines that the page they are looking for has a new home; this tells them to go there to index it.

If you do use a refresh meta-tag to redirect users, then it is suggested that you set a delay of at least 15 seconds and provide a link on the new page back to the page they were taken from. Some businesses use refresh meta-tags to redirect users from a page that is obsolete or no longer there. Refresh meta-tags also may be used to give an automated slideshow or force a sequence of events as part of a design element.

Cloaking—This technique is similar to page swapping and using the refresh meta-tag in that the intent is to serve search engines one page while the end user is served another. Don’t do it.

Doorway pages—Doorway pages, also known as gateway pages and bridge pages, are pages that lead to your site but are not considered part of your site. Doorway pages are focused pages that lead to your Web site but are tuned to the specific requirements of the search engines. By having different doorway pages with different names (e.g., indexa.html for AltaVista or indexg.html for Google) for each search engine, you can optimize pages for individual engines.

Unfortunately, because of the need to be ranked high in search engine results and the enormous competition between sites that are trying to get such high listings, doorway pages have become increasingly more popular. Each search engine is different and has different elements in its ranking criteria. You can see the appeal of doorway pages because developing doorway pages allows you to tailor a page specifically for each search engine and thus achieve optimal results.

Search engines frown upon the use of doorway pages because the intent is obvious—to manipulate rankings in one site’s favor with no regard for quality content. Do not use them.

Cyber-squatting—This term means to steal traffic from legitimate Web sites. If someone were to operate a Web site called “Gooogle.com” with the extra “o” or “Yahhoo” with an extra “h,” that would be
considered cyerb-squatting. Domain squatting is when a company acquires the familiar domain of another company, either because the domain expired or the original company no longer exists. The new company then uses the familiar domain to promote completely unrelated content. Google, in particular, frowns on cyber-squatting.

**Links farms**—These are irrelevant linking schemes to boost rankings based on achieving better link popularity. Having thousands of irrelevant links pointing to your Web site does more damage than good if you get caught! For best results, only pursue links that relate to your Web site and are of interest to your target market.

How do you know if you are spamming a search engine? If the technique you are employing on your Web site does not offer value to your end user and is done solely for the intention of boosting your search engine rankings then you are probably guilty of spam.

Search engines post guidelines for what they consider acceptable practices. It is advised you read each search engine’s policy to ensure you conform to their guidelines. Here is Google’s policy ([http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html](http://www.google.com/webmasters/guidelines.html)) on quality:

**Quality Guidelines—Basic Principles:**

- Make pages for users, not for search engines. Don’t deceive your users, or present different content to search engines than you display to users.

- Avoid tricks intended to improve search engine rankings. A good rule of thumb is whether you’d feel comfortable explaining what you’ve done to a Web site that competes with you. Another useful test is to ask, “Does this help my users? Would I do this if search engines didn’t exist?”

- Don’t participate in link schemes designed to increase your site’s ranking or PageRank. In particular, avoid links to Web spammers or “bad neighborhoods” on the Web as your own ranking may be affected adversely by those links.
• Don’t use unauthorized computer programs to submit pages, check rankings, etc. Such programs consume computing resources and violate our terms of service. Google does not recommend the use of products such as WebPosition Gold™ that send automatic or programmatic queries to Google.

**Quality Guidelines—Specific Recommendations:**

• Avoid hidden text or hidden links.

• Don’t employ cloaking or sneaky redirects.

• Don’t send automated queries to Google.

• Don’t load pages with irrelevant words.

• Don’t create multiple pages, subdomains, or domains with substantially duplicate content.

• Avoid “doorway” pages created just for search engines, or other “cookie cutter” approaches such as affiliate programs with little or no original content.

These quality guidelines cover the most common forms of deceptive or manipulative behavior, but Google may respond negatively to other misleading practices not listed here (e.g. tricking users by registering misspellings of well-known Web sites). It’s not safe to assume that just because a specific deceptive technique isn’t included on this page, Google approves of it. Webmasters who spend their energies upholding the spirit of the basic principles listed above will provide a much better user experience and subsequently enjoy better ranking than those who spend their time looking for loopholes they can exploit.

If your Web site is mistakenly penalized for spam your best course of action is to contact the search engine and discuss remedies. If you are applying a technique that is considered spam, get rid of it. Know what is considered search engine spam and avoid it before it ever becomes a problem for you.
Other Important Design Factors

It is not always possible to have a Web site that meets all requirements of a search engine and your target market. Perhaps you are coming in on the tail end of a Web development project or simply want to make your Web site as search engine friendly as possible, without having to do a significant redesign. Here are some common issues and how you deal with them to improve the search engine friendliness of your Web site, whether you are building a new site or improving your current one:

- Frames
- Robots.txt, meta-robots tag
- Clean code is king
- Navigation techniques
- Revisit Meta-tag
- Cascading style sheets
- Dynamic pages and special characters
- Splash pages and the use of rich media
- Use of tables
- Custom error pages
- Image maps
- Optimization for search localization.

Frames

From a marketing perspective, you should avoid building a Web site entirely based on frames when developing your Web site. This is prob-
ably the most recognized hurdle when it comes to search engine optimization.

Frames may result in some search engines being unable to index pages within your site or they can result in improper pages being indexed. Also, many people simply prefer sites that do not use frames. Frames also cause problems when someone wants to bookmark or add to their favorites a particular page within a framed site. Usually only the home page address is shown.

What I mean by “improper pages being indexed” is that content pages will be indexed, and when the search engines direct users to these content pages, they will likely not be able to navigate your site because the navigation frame probably will not be visible. To prevent this one technique you can use is a robots meta-tag in the head section of your HTML that does not allow bots to proceed beyond your home page. As a result you can really submit only your home page which means you have less of a chance of receiving the high rankings you need on the major search engines. Alternatively, you should include textual links to all major sections within your site to accommodate those users who enter your site on a page other than a home page, and to assist the search engines with indexing your site.

Some search engines can only read information between the <NOFRAMES> tags within your master frame. The master frame identifies the other frames. All too often the individuals who apply frames ignore the <NOFRAMES> tags, which is a big no-no. If you do not have any text between the <NOFRAMES> tags, then the search engines that reference your site for information have nothing to look at. This results in your site being listed with little or no information in the indexes, or you are listed so far down in the rankings that no one will ever find you anyway. To remedy this situation, insert textual information containing your most important descriptive keywords between the <NOFRAMES> tags. This gives the search engines something they can see, and it also helps those users who are browsing with browsers that are not frame compatible.

Now that the search engines have found you, you still have a problem. They can’t go anywhere. Create a link within your <NOFRAMES> tags to allow search engines and users with browsers that aren’t frame compatible to get into your site. Frames are a headache when designing your site to be search engine friendly. To make your life easier and from a marketing perspective, it’s better to avoid them altogether.
Robots.txt, Meta-Robots Tag

<META-NAMESPACE="robots" CONTENT="""> tells certain bots to follow or not follow hypertext links. The W3 Consortium white paper on spidering (spiders are defined below) offers the following definition and discussion:

- <url1><META-NAMESPACE="ROBOTS" CONTENT="ALL | NONE | NOINDEX | NOFOLLOW"></url1>
- <url1>default = empty = “ALL” “NONE” = “NOINDEX, NOFOLLOW”</url1>
- <url1>The filler is a comma-separated list of terms:
  - <url1>ALL, NONE, INDEX, NOINDEX, FOLLOW, NOFOLLOW.</url1>

Note: This tag is meant to provide users who cannot control the robots.txt file at their sites. It provides a last chance to keep their content out of search services. It was decided not to add syntax to allow robot-specific permissions within the META-tag. INDEX means that robots are welcome to include this page in search services.

FOLLOW means that robots are welcome to follow links from this page to find other pages. A value of NOFOLLOW allows the page to be indexed, but no links from the page are explored. (This may be useful if the page is a free entry point into pay-per-view content, for example. A value of NONE tells the robot to ignore the page.)

The values of INDEX and FOLLOW should be added to every page unless there is a specific reason that you do not want your page to be indexed. This may be the case if the page is only temporary.

Clean Code Is King

Clean code is essential to search engine success. You want to ensure that you do not have stray tags, HTML errors, or bloated code. Problematic code is bad for the user experience and bad for search engine placement.
Navigation Techniques

JavaScript embedded in anchor tags, drop-down menus, and pull-down menus can cause many headaches for a Web site looking to be indexed by the major search engines. The rollover effect on navigation links is quite common and can add visual appeal to a Web site. A problem arises when JavaScript is encased within the anchor tag which can cause problems for the search engines.

The rollovers look good, so odds are if your site is using them you are not going to want to get rid of them. A quick and simple solution to ensure your site is indexed is to include text-based navigation along the bottom of your Web page as supportive navigation. This approach also gives you the opportunity to get in your keywords twice—once in the Alt tag for your main navigation and the second time around the anchor tag for the supportive text links. In addition, it is to your benefit to include all your JavaScript material in external files to keep the Web site code as clean as possible.

Drop-down menus (e.g., DHTML) and pull-down menus pose similar concerns because of the coding script necessary for them to execute. If you choose to use them be sure to have an alternative means of navigation available.

Revisit Meta-Tag

You cannot tell a search engine when to visit your Web site, though the theory behind the Revisit Meta-tag is that you can define how often you want a search engine to come back to your Web site. Use the Revisit Meta-tag if you like, but it is not needed.

Cascading Style Sheets

CSS is common practice in the Web development world. It gives developers more control over how they want their Web page to be laid out, plus it requires less coding. Less coding means less room for error and better site performance. Like JavaScript, CCS benefits from being stored in external files as opposed to being embedded in each page’s individual source code.
**Dynamic Pages and Special Characters**

Dynamic content has historically caused many problems for search engines because they do not like to be fed duplicate content and the query strings can cause spiders confusion. Times are getting better, but these elements can still cause some difficulties.

Dynamically driven content typically has a query string in the URL such as question marks (?), an ampersand (&), or the percent sign (%). The lengthy URL contains a number of calls to database information and to a template to put together the Web page you see in your browsers. Search engines struggle to figure out what exactly they are supposed to index because they have difficulty understanding what information is actually meaningful and how to present it.

There is no question that dynamically driven sites are common. Your challenge is to work around the needs of the search engines and include pure HTML-based information pages as a standard part of your Web site that the search engines can index. Likewise, there are methods of reducing the complexity of URLs into a form the search engines can process—Amazon.com has been very successful at this. Amazon.com has eliminated all stop symbols from its page URLs. Depending on the technology used to create your Web site, (e.g. ASP, CFP, PHP) tools exist to help you rewrite your URLs at the server level to make them more friendly for search engine indexing. This is the same logic applied behind services such as http://www.tinyurl.com/.

**Splash Pages and the Use of Rich Media**

A splash page is basically an opening page that leads into a site. Often splash pages consist of a Java or a Macromedia Flash intro that can be slow to load for some users and contain little meaningful content for search engines.

Some Web sites use splash screens that consist of an eye-pleasing image and an invitation to enter the site. Many splash pages implement techniques that automatically send you to the home page once you’ve seen the splash page, and others invite you to “Click here to enter” in some form or another. Why do people use splash pages on their sites? For one, they usually look nice. Another reason is to provide the user with something to look at while images or content for the home page loads in the background. Individuals also use splash pages as a means
of advertising. Splash pages are usually very attractive in appearance, but they often lack content relevant to search engines.

If you do use a splash page on your site, be sure you include the proper meta-tags within your HTML header. This is necessary for search engines that use meta-tags to access this information. This ultimately affects your ranking and how your site is displayed to users in the search results.

Include a paragraph or statement on your splash page that pertains to your site’s content. This can help boost your rankings on some of the major search engines that both do and do not use meta-tags. Some search engines will review your opening paragraph and use this information when developing a description for your site that is presented in their search results.

Lastly, include a link into your Web site for the target market and the search engines. Many splash pages exercise the Refresh meta-tag, and this should be avoided.

Use of Tables

Tables can pose indexing problems with some of the search engines. Tables are a common feature found on many Web sites to display information and position content, but if implemented incorrectly, they can cause the search engines some confusion. Also, by using tables close to the top of a page, you are potentially forcing the content you want search engines to see farther down on your page. Because some search engines look only so far, you might be hurting your chances of receiving a high ranking. If you are using tables, place any important information pertaining to the page content above the table if possible to help prevent any potential problems.

Here’s an interesting problem with some search engines. Assume you have a Web site, the main color of the background is white, and you have a table on the page with a dark background. If you were to use white text in the table, some of the major search engines would pick this up as using text that is the same color as the background and ignore your site’s submission because it is considered spam to search engines. Using tables is okay, many people do it—just be careful with your choice of colors.
**Custom Error Pages**

A custom 404 error (page not found) page should be created for your Web site. This page is displayed when a user attempts to access a page that does not exist. The custom error page should contain your company’s branding and contain links to all major pages of your Web site, similar to the site map.

If you redesign or rework your Web site then odds are pages are going to get moved or no longer exist. It is possible that people have pages of the old Web site bookmarked and those pages may no longer be a part of the new Web site. Also, search engines index select pages of the current Web site, and those pages may also no longer exist under the new design. The custom error page allows people and search engines to easily make updates to their references.

**Image Maps**

Image maps are single graphics that are split into “hot spots” or sensitive areas that when clicked lead you to different pages or resources within the Web site. The problem with image maps is they basically lock search engines out and prevent them from indexing your Web site properly.

If you do decide to implement image maps always include text hyperlinks so that the search engines trying to give you a more accurate index can use them. Another option is to include a site map, which is basically the entire layout of your Web site in the form of hypertext links. Submitting your site map to the search engines is also a good idea as it can assist the search engine in making sure it indexes all the pages within your Web site.

**Optimization for Search Localization**

A recent study by comScore Networks (http://www.comscore.com/) discovered that 60 percent of consumers search for local content. Much of the local searches surround such topics as restaurants, travel, hotels, and car rentals.

Search localization is simply when searchers add a geographic modifier to their query in order to get more accurate results from a search
If you want to go out to dinner then odds are you’re going to want to go to some place in your area. Common modifiers include:

- ZIP or postal code
- Street
- City or town, along with descriptive words “Northern,” “Central,” “East,” “West,” and “Southern”
- State or Province, entirely spelled out as well as the abbreviation
- Country, entirely spelled out as well as the abbreviation
- Area code and phone number
- Recognizable landmarks and destinations (e.g., right next door to…).

Search localization presents a good opportunity for companies optimizing their Web site. Naturally, any company looking to speak to a local market should be considering search localization when optimizing their Web site. You may not care where the book you ordered comes from but when you are looking for a house you want a real estate agent in the local area with knowledge of the area.

Optimizing your Web site to speak to the local market is no different from regular search optimization, it just requires a bit of creativity. The same optimization areas, such as page titles, page copy, and metatags are relevant to search localization. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Include geographic keywords in page headers and footers. For example, you can insert a copyright notice at the bottom of each page of your Web site that includes your location: “© 2004, Prince George Hotel, a Centennial Hotels Property. 1725 Market Street in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3R9. Hotel Reservations 1-800-565-1567 • tel 902-425-1986 • fax 902-429-6048.”

- Include geographic related keywords in your page titles. Instead of a Fine Italian Dining—il Mercato Restaurant you could
have *Fine Italian Dining in Downtown Halifax—il Mercato Restaurant*.

- Include geographic-related keywords in your page copy. For example, a paragraph can include a statement such as “Come visit us on the Halifax waterfront, right next door to Historic Properties” to capture high-profile local destinations. You could also have “Just south of Halifax in Peggy’s Cove” or “Ten minutes from Halifax.” In this case you are adding a modifier to include a nearby city to capitalize on that market that might not think to look for your exact location.

- Include comprehensive geographic-related information throughout your Web site, on your contact page, a maps and directions page, and in your Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

- Pay to play or PPC is covered in another chapter, but you can use the same geographic modifiers in your paid search placement campaigns to zero in on local markets and increase your ROI. Yahoo!, Google, SuperPages.com, Findwhat.com, AskJeeves, and Overture are all examples of search providers that offer some means of search localization.

**Monitoring Results**

As with any business endeavor you want to know how successful you are. There are a number of ways to measure your search engine placement success.

**Web site traffic analysis**—You can check the effectiveness of your keyword placement and utilization by using Web traffic analysis reports. This is discussed fully in Chapter 27. You can use Web traffic analysis reports to determine what sites are referring people to you and how often the search engine spiders are visiting your Web site looking for new content. You can strip down this information further to view only search engine referrals. By looking at this information, you can also see exactly what keywords people are using to find you and you can alter
the keywords used based on this information. Refining your keywords is one of the key elements to success—you’re letting the search engines tell you what you’re doing right and what you could be doing better.

Early in the chapter we looked at how Web traffic analysis can contribute to your master keywords list. Figure 6.6 illustrates how NetIQ’s WebTrends package (http://www.netiq.com/webtrends/default.asp) can show you the keyword phrases the target market is using to locate a Web site.

The amount of targeted traffic and the return on investment (ROI) achieved through your optimization efforts is the true measure of success. How much business you generate on-line ultimately depends on how well constructed your Web site is. Just because you perform well in the search rankings does not mean the target market automatically does business with you. Once the target market reaches your Web site it is up to your Web site to sell your business. As with many popular Web traffic analysis and metrics packages, WebTrends can show you sales data as it relates to particular search engines and keywords, which can then be used to calculate your ROI. Figure 6.7 again uses WebTrends to show the number and value of sales that resulted in a referral from a search engine.

**Figure 6.6.** WebTrends reports the keywords used to locate a site.
Also look at entry pages and paths through your Web site. Because you optimized specific pages for specific keywords, people should be entering your Web site on those pages. If the page is designed to the needs of your target market it should push them deeper into the Web site or to a point where a transaction takes place, which you can monitor by looking at paths through your Web site and entry pages. For example, say you created a Web page to address a particular special at a hotel with a goal of having the target market fill out a reservation request form. If the specials page is performing well in the engines, but people are only staying on the page a few seconds then leaving the Web site then you know it is the page itself that is not performing. Odds are the copy and images do not have the right appeal to the target market, so you can tweak it. The page may not require a complete redesign—it could be that the call to action to fill out the reservation form is not obvious, so make minor changes and monitor performance.

Search engine rankings—You can check the performance of your Web site for a particular keyword phrase by hand or through the use of an application such as WebPosition Gold 2 (http://www.webposition.com/). If you are checking your results by hand then you simply need to go to the search engine in which you’re interested, enter your keyword phrases,
and observe where your Web site ranks. You can hire someone to do this for you as well. Using an application to check your rankings allows you to check more rankings, faster, by automating the process. Search engines tend to frown on this because of the added stress it puts on their system when you have many people using these automated packages to run many searches. Figure 6.8 shows a sample report from the WebPosition Gold 2 software that summarizes search rankings for a series of keywords.

Checking your search rankings tells you how well your Web site is ranking for particular keyword phrases. You can use this information to keep your rankings current and target your optimization efforts toward gaining increased ratings on any particular engines you wish.

**Paid inclusion accounts**—Many search engines that have paid inclusion features, such as the Lycos InSite submission program, gives the customer the means to track some search information. This includes basic information such as the keywords searched for and the number of referrals the search engine sent through to the destination Web site. See Figure 6.9 for an example report from the Lycos InSite program.

**Pay-to-play (PPC) accounts**—At the heart of all pay-to-play campaigns is the tracking functionality. You are paying for each and every click so it is important to know which search terms are working and which are

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**Figure 6.8.** WebPosition Concise Report sample.
not. One of the most well known pay-to-play providers is Overture. When you sign up with Overture you can track all aspects of your campaign, including conversion rates, click-throughs, and revenue generated. Figure 6.10 illustrates Overture’s Marketing Console where you can monitor and adjust your marketing campaigns.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 6**

I have included a number of resources for you to check out regarding making your site search engine friendly. Descriptions of the sites are from the Web sites themselves. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.
susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Search Engine Watch**
http://www.searchenginewatch.com
A Web site devoted to how search engines work, search engine news, search engine information, tips on using search engines, and more about search engines. Be sure to sign up for the Search Engine Report mailing list.

**Search Engine World**
http://www.searchengineworld.com
A great resource for everything surrounding search engines. Plenty of articles, tips, and information to help you achieve online success. This site also has in-depth information on the various search engine spiders.

**Traffick**
http://www.traffick.com
Traffick covers Internet search engines such as Google; Web portals such as Yahoo!, MSN, and AOL; search engine marketing and SEO; Web browsers such as Internet Explorer; and e-mail programs such as
Outlook Express, Hotmail, and Yahoo! Mail. The site offers feature articles, a directory of portal and search engine related sites, etc.

**Search Engine Guide**  
*http://www.searchengineguide.com*  
Search Engine Guide provides a directory of thousands of specialty search engines, daily news about search engines and the search engine industry, and information on using search engines to market your Web site.

**SEO Today**  
*http://www.seotoday.com*  
SEO Today was conceived and developed to create and collect timely and informative content about search engine optimization.

**Spider Food’s Search Engine Optimization and Positioning**  
*http://spider-food.net*  
Over 200 pages of search engine optimization, search engine submission, and Web site promotion tutorials—plus a discussion forum.

**Pay-Per-Click Search Engines**  
*http://www.payperclicksearchengines.com*  
A guide to 621 pay-per-click search engines.

**Search Engine Statistics and Listings for Submission URLs**  
*http://www.searchenginetrends.com*  
Search Engine Trends was started to help untangle the growing web of confusion surrounding search engines. To help unravel the mess, Search Engine Trends maintains an in-depth database of search engine data. This database tracks a number of details about the world’s leading and upcoming search engines.

**Pandia Search Central**  
*http://www.pandia.com/index.html*  
At Pandia you can learn how to search the Web more efficiently, read about search engines and sites devoted to searching, and gain easy access to all the best tools and SE resources on the Internet.

**Li’l Engine**  
*http://www.lilengine.com*  
Li’l Engine provides you with the information and resources you need to get your organic search engine optimization, search engine place-
ment and ranking project going right. Avoid many of the common pitfalls by doing it the right way first.

Bruce Clay—Search Engine Optimization Tools  
http://www.bruceclay.com  
Free search engine optimization, ranking, Web site promotion, keywords advice, and placement material for designers.

Search Engine Decoder—Search Engine Relationship Chart  
http://www.search-this.com/search_engine_decoder.asp  
A free chart that illustrates the relationships between the major search providers.

JimTools.com Webmaster’s Toolkit Command Center  
http://www.jimtools.com  
A number of tools are available on this site that you can use for free. There’s information on search engines and meta-tags, a link checker, and a link popularity tool.

Make Your Web Site Search Engine Friendly  
http://www.iboost.com/promote/search_engines/positioning/20034.htm  
An article with some tips to make your site search engine friendly.

Search Engine Optimization  
http://www.searchengineguide.com/optimization.html  
A resource filled with links to articles by search engine columnists.

Search-Engine-Secrets.net  
http://search-engine-secrets.net  
An article detailing the ten steps to search engine placement.

Submit It! Search Engine Tips  
http://www.submit-it.com/subopt.htm  
The purpose of this document is to provide you with background information on search engine technology and some tips on how to get your Web site to appear on the results pages of search engines and directories.

Optimization Nation  
http://www.optimization-nation.com  
The Optimization Nation offers search engine placement tips and secrets for the “do it yourself” Webmaster.
Submit Corner
http://www.submitcorner.com
Complete guides, Web tools, news, and techniques to optimize and improve your search rankings, meta-tags, and positioning in search engines; includes meta-tag guide, improvement tips, suggestions, and optimization techniques from industry experts.

Indicateur.com
http://google.indicateur.com/
Indicateur.com is a French Web site specializing in search engines. The rule of Indicateur is to inform and to assist you during your search. The site is divided in three independent parts: search engines news, Indicateur’s files, and search guides.

SEO lab: Search engine optimization resources
http://www.seo-lab.com
SEO lab explores in full view how search engines rate and rank different elements of SEO—publicly, and irrevocably—for the benefit of everyone. SEO lab is a public information service and reference point regarding basic search engine optimization issues and techniques.

Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization (SEMPO)
http://www.sempo.org
SEMPO is a nonprofit professional association working to increase awareness and promote the value of search engine marketing worldwide.

Search Engine Optimization Discussion Forums

Search Guild SEO forums
http://www.searchguild.com

JimWorld: Talk SEO forums
http://www.jimworld.com/apps/webmaster.forums/

WebProWorld—search engine forums

Web Master World—search engine forums
http://www.webmasterworld.com/category3.htm
High Rankings: Search engine optimization forum
http://www.highrankings.com/forum/

Search Engine Watch forums

Keyword Research and Evaluation

WordTracker
http://www.wordtracker.com
An online tool for compiling the right combination of keywords. You can run a free trial, but this is a pay service for keyword generation and suggestions.

WordSpot
http://www.wordspot.com
Keyword marketing resources, tactics, and tips.

Overture—Search Term Suggestion Tool
http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion
Overture’s search term suggestion tool to help you identify relevant keywords.

Overture—View Bid Tool
http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/
Overture’s view bid tool that shows you the value per click for specified keywords.

Google AdWords: Keyword Suggestions
https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox/
A free tool provided by Google, intended to help AdWord customers choose keyword phrases.

KwMap
http://www.kwmap.com
A Keyword Map for the whole Internet.

Yahoo! Buzz Index
http://buzz.yahoo.com
The most popular searches on Yahoo!
The Lycos 50—Top 50 Searches
http://50.lycos.com
The top 50 searches on Lycos.

Site Content Analyzer
http://www.sitecontentanalyzer.com
A tool that examines HTML pages for keyword density, weight, and relevancy.

Thesaurus.com
http://thesaurus.reference.com
A thesaurus to help you identify terms that share a similar meaning.

More Webmaster and Search Engine Optimization Tools

iWeb Toolkit: Keyword Analyzer
http://www.jimworld.com/tools/keyword-analyzer/
A tool that analyzes the keyword density and prominence on a Web page.

Keyword Density Analyzer
http://www.gorank.com/analyze.php
A tool that will analyze the keyword density on a Web page.

Keyword Density Analyzer
http://www.keyworddensity.com/
A tool that will analyze the keyword density and word depth on a Web page.

Keyword Surveillance Tool: Stop Word List
http://www.searchengineworld.com/spy/stopwords.htm
A list of search engine stop words.

Robots.txt File Generator
http://www.stickysauce.com/searchenginetools/robottext/
A tool to help you generate a robots.txt file.

Meta-Tag Analyzer
This checks your meta-tags and your HTML code to help you achieve better placement in search engine results. Let their free Meta-Tag Ana-
lyzer program check your meta-tags and help analyze your HTML syntax online.

**Meta-Tag Generator**  
*http://www.siteup.com/meta.html*  
This is a free downloadable tool to help you create properly formatted meta-tags.

**SEO Tools**  
*http://www.webconfs.com/*  
Two free tools—a Similar Page Checker and Search Engine Spider Simulator. The latter tool lets you view your Web site as a search engine would see it.

**A Dictionary of HTML Meta-Tags**  
*http://vancouver-Webpages.com/META*  
A helpful dictionary of meta-tags to assist you.

**Meta-Tag Generator**  
*http://www.submitcorner.com/Tools/Meta*  
A free meta-tag generator tool to create meta-tags for your Web pages.

*Note:* Resources found in the next chapter on search engine submissions are closely related to the information found in this chapter. I recommend reviewing the resources in the next chapter, as many contain valuable information on designing your site to be search engine friendly.
There are billions of Web pages on the World Wide Web, so how can you increase your chances of being found? One method is submitting your Web site to the many search engines and directories. Once you’ve optimized your Web site to be search engine friendly, you are ready to face the challenge of submitting it to the most important search engines. By “search engines,” I’m referring to the combination of search engines, directories, spiders and crawlers. You need to be within the first two pages of search results to ensure your best possible success online. This is no easy feat, but this chapter will provide you with the knowledge necessary to get on the road to success. This chapter covers:

- Search engines, directories, and their ranking criteria
- The submission tools available to you
- Search engine and directory submission pointers.
Submission Process

Although people often use the term search engine interchangeably for search engines and directories/portals, there is a major difference when it comes to submission protocols. The search engines (Google, Yahoo! Search, Teoma, and soon the new MSN/Microsoft Search Engine) allow you to simply “Add your URL.” Your URL is your uniform resource locator—also known as your Web address, your www. yourcompanyname.com. When you add your URL, it is put in a queue and when it is your turn the search engine’s spider or crawler visits your site and includes it in its database.

On the other hand, to submit to directories such as the Yahoo! Directory, Open Directory, and Business.com you have to go to the directory site, select a category, and find the link to their submission form. For the directories, you generally have to complete a detailed form filling in all the blanks of required information.

Paid advertising placements and pay-per-click campaigns are covered in Chapter 8.

A Closer Look at Search Engines and Directories

Search engines and directories share a common goal in providing the searcher with relevant, meaningful results, however, there are many differences in their functionality. In general, search engines have a much larger index than directories and utilize spiders to add sites to their index. In contrast, directories typically have a smaller index and are often maintained by humans. When you’re submitting to a site, you can usually tell the difference between a directory and a search engine by the information they request. A search engine typically asks only for the URL you wish to submit and sometimes your e-mail address. A directory usually asks for much more information, including your URL, the category you wish to be added to, the title of your site, a description, and your contact information.

When you do a search on the Internet, in seconds the search engine has digested what you are looking for, searches the millions of pages it knows about, and responds to your request with appropriate sites ranked in order of importance. Amazing! How do they do it?
Search engines use spiders to index your site. Some search engines are free, while others require you to pay for inclusion. Usually, a search engine’s spider will include the pages on your site in its database once you have submitted the request to be added, but sometimes they can’t for a number of reasons. They might have problems with frames or image maps on a Web site, they might simply miss a page, and so on. Even though a number of spiders constantly crawl the Web looking for sites, I suggest you take a proactive approach and submit all appropriate pages on your site to the search engines to guarantee that all your important pages are properly listed. But before you submit, check the search engine’s submission document to be sure submitting more than one page is permitted, because you don’t want your site to be rejected. A search engine might also have restrictions on the number of pages you can submit in a single day—perhaps only 5 or 10 pages are allowed to be submitted.

As covered in the last chapter, some of the search providers share technology. Many search engines and directories either partner with or license the use of another search engine or directory’s search technology. Being indexed by these engines means your Web site is likely to be found in other major search services. For example, Google’s results can be found on AOL, Netscape, and even sites such as CNN. Google’s paid advertising results appear on many other sites as well.

The ranking criteria can differ to determine who gets top placement so even though two search engines might use the same database they can provide different search results. For example, some search engines determine how often a keyword appears on the Web page. It is assumed that if a keyword is used more frequently on a page, then that page is more relevant than other pages with a lower usage of that keyword. Some search engines look for the keyword in the title of the Web page and assume that if the keyword is in the title, then that page must be more relevant than those that don’t have the keyword in their title. Some search engines determine where keywords are used and assume that pages with keywords in the headings and in the first couple of paragraphs are more relevant. Some search engines use the number of links pointing to a particular page as part of their ranking criteria. Some search engines use information contained in meta-tags; others don’t look at the meta-tags at all.

To summarize, search engines all have different ranking criteria, and this is why you receive different results when you search on the same keyword with different engines. You should learn as much as you can about each of the major search engines’ ranking systems and
make sure your site is optimized for the search engines before you submit. One particularly useful site with this information is \url{http://searchenginewatch.com}.

As covered in Chapter 6, the remaining major players in the search engine industry are:

- Google (\url{http://www.google.com/})
- Teoma (\url{http://www.teoma.com/})
- Yahoo! Search (\url{http://www.yahoo.com/})
- MSN Search (\url{http://search.msn.com})—Soon to be powered by MSNBot. You can learn more about MSNBot here: \url{http://search.msn.com/webmasters/msnbot.aspx}

Let’s turn our attention to directories now. Directories are maintained by human administrators. Some directories permit free submissions, while others require you to pay—just like the search engines. Popular directories include:

- Yahoo! (\url{http://www.yahoo.com/})
- LookSmart/Zeal (\url{http://www.looksmart.com/})
- Open Directory (\url{http://www.dmoz.org/})
- About.com (\url{http://www.about.com/})
- Business.com (\url{http://www.business.com/})

When submitting your Web site to a directory you can expect to wait a longer period of time before seeing your page appear in their index. In general, you can expect to wait from two to eight weeks unless you pay a fee for an expedited review.

For example, the directory aspect of Yahoo! charges US$299 for an expedited review. When you pay the fee, Yahoo! will review your site for inclusion within seven business days. There is no guarantee they will include you, just a guarantee they will review your site and consider including you.
In contrast to a search engine, your site’s position in directories depends much less on its design and much more on the initial submission process itself. For this reason, you will be asked for much more information when submitting to a directory.

Directories catalog a smaller number of pages than search engines. Search engines are known for their enormous databases of indexed Web sites. Google currently claims that it has the largest index, with 4.3 billion indexed pages! Open Directory, Yahoo!, and LookSmart are popular directories, and each has a few million indexed Web pages.

**Submitting to the Search Engines**

Registering with search engines is fairly simple. In most cases, you simply have to submit your URL or Internet address on their submission form. Figure 7.1 shows Google’s search submission page.

![Google's Web page submission form.](image)
Even if your URL is not registered with search engines, a number of the major search engines may eventually find you, since their bots are continually roaming the Internet looking for new sites to index. There are millions of sites and billions of pages out there, so I suggest that you register your site to ensure a speedier listing. Once you are registered, some of the bots will periodically revisit your site looking for changes and updates. How high you rank depends largely on how well your Web site is optimized, along with other proactive marketing activities such as links strategy development.

Outside of pay-to-play advertising options, you will basically encounter two search submission options:

1. Free Submission

2. Paid Inclusion.

**Free Submissions**

Submitting your Web site is free, but no promises are made. Your site might or might not be indexed, and indexing it might take a couple of days or even a few months. There are no guarantees with free submissions.

For free submissions, the search engines have guidelines that indicate how many pages and how often you can submit from a single site. It might be one page in total, one page per day, five pages at a time, or even 50 pages at once. Take the time to read their guidelines to improve your chances of being indexed. Your home page is the most important page on your Web site to be indexed, so if you can only submit one page, be sure that is the one.

**Paid Inclusion**

With paid inclusion you have more control over your destiny, but it comes at a price, which implies the need to create a search submission budget based on your available resources and the submission fees requested by the search engines.

With paid inclusion you are guaranteed to be indexed by the search engine, up to the number of pages you have paid for, within a short, defined period. Paid inclusion options tend to offer other perks as well, such as guaranteed revisits to update your listings (e.g., every 24 hours),
guaranteed inclusion on any partners’ Web sites, reporting to track your performance, and in some cases a review of your Web site to ensure its relevance. Just because you paid to have your site indexed does not mean it will rank well. How well your Web site performs depends on how well it is optimized for a particular search engine.

Search engine submissions can be handled manually, where you go to a search engine and submit your Web site by hand, or they can be handled automatically by an automated application. It is highly recommended that your search engine submissions be completed by hand. Search engines do not like the automatic submissions, and by doing it by hand you know for fact that a submission has been completed. If you choose to use automated submission software, here are a couple of popular applications:

- Web Position Gold (http://www.webposition.com/)
- Search Engine Commando (http://www.searchenginecommando.com/)
- Agent Web Ranking (http://www.agentwebranking.com/)

All of the submission suggestions assume you are interested in being indexed by the major U.S.-based search engines. If you plan to submit your Web site to international search engines or international editions of the major search engines, then you need to take into consideration search engine optimization for specific languages and cultures.

Is Your Page Already Indexed?

Before you submit or resubmit to a search engine, check to see if your page is already indexed. Perform a search using the most important keywords you think people will use to find your page. Also, perform a search using your company name.

With many of the search engines you can narrow the search to your specific domain. Check out the help files for each search engine for more information on how to verify that your URL is included in their index. To check for your Web site in Google, all you have to do is enter the following information into the search field, where “yourwebsite” is replaced by the name of your real Web site:

    site:yourwebsite.com
If your page is found and you’re happy with the results, you need not submit or resubmit. In fact, if you do resubmit, you could end up worse off because you never know when a search engine is going to change its method of determining what pages receive a high ranking—for instance, they might consider your resubmission spam, and penalize your ranking. Only resubmit a Web page if a major change has taken place, where much of the content on the page has changed.

If you were once listed, but have been dropped from the listings, wait a few days to see if your Web site is reindexed. If your original submission is rejected by the search engines then take matters into your own hands and contact the search engine to find out why, so that you can make the necessary changes to be included.

Because search engines change so often, there will probably be a time when resubmitting your Web site to a particular search engine will be necessary.

The Link Popularity Issue

Link popularity is becoming more and more important among the major search engines, including the mighty Google and Yahoo! search providers. Perform a search using your most important keywords on Google to see who is appearing at the top of the results. Chances are the sites near the top contain the most incoming links. Look at the links leading to your competitors because they’re likely to be appropriate links for you as well. If so, ask for a link, ask for a reciprocal link, or, if the page allows it, add yourself to their links to build up your link popularity. This is a time-consuming task, but it will benefit you in the end. Keep in mind that link popularity is good, but link popularity from quality sites is better. Details on finding pertinent link sites, requesting links, and having your link stand out are all covered in Chapter 16.

Submitting to the Directories

When you submit to a directory, you have to take the time to find the best category for your site. Submitting your site to the wrong category could mean a minimal increase in traffic if no one thinks to look for you in the category you submitted to. Also, your site might not be added if you select an inappropriate category.
When choosing categories you want to pick one (or two if the directory permits you to do so) that consistently gets listed near the top of results for popular searches and that accurately represents your Web site. Use the keyword phrases you have gathered to help you identify good categories. If local traffic is important to your business you should look at submitting to the regional categories found on most directories. You can also look at where your competitors are listed in the directory for an indication on where you should be focusing your efforts.

LookSmart’s Travel category contains subcategories including Activities, Destinations, Lodging, Transportation, and so on. These categories are then often broken down further into other categories within the subcategories. The deeper you go, the more specific the category becomes.

Your site’s ranking in a directory depends on the information you provide the directory in the submission form. As such, it is critical that you review each directory’s submission procedure and tips. Compared to a search engine, you will be asked for much more information when submitting to a directory. The title, description, and any other information you give them during submission are what is used to rank your site. Figure 7.2 illustrates Open Directory’s submission form.

The keyword research you performed for optimizing your Web site is every bit as important when it comes to directories. You must use your important keyword phrases when filling out the directory submission forms. Again, for best results be sure to review each directory’s submission guidelines!

**Preparing your Directory Submission**

When submitting to the search engines and directories, take the time up front to develop the submission material carefully. Organize the information in a logical order in a text file. Then, when you go to submit, you can copy and paste the content to the appropriate fields on the submission form.

This approach gives you a starting point and will save you time when submitting your Web site. You still need to adjust your information for each directory submission, though, because they all have unique submission requirements. You need to be careful to follow them to the letter to reduce the risk that a directory editor might change your
submission entry. You want your listing to appear in your words, with no editing!

Be sure to spell-check, check, and recheck everything before you start. Spell-checkers won’t pick up misspelled “works” if that word is also in the dictionary.

The information prepared for each page on the site to be indexed should include:

- URL
- Page title
- 7-word, 10-word, 20-word, 25-word, 50-word, and 100-word descriptions for the page (different engines allow different lengths of description)
- List of keywords for each page (based on the master keyword list you generated in the last chapter)
- Description of the ideal audience for the site

- Category and subcategory you should be listed under for the different directories you plan to submit to

- Contact information:
  - Company name
  - Contact name
  - E-mail address
  - Company address
  - Telephone and fax numbers.

Pay Careful Attention to Titles and Descriptions

Pay careful attention to your titles and descriptions. When it comes to supplying a page title, a directory typically wants you to restrict it to your company name. In some cases, they will provide you with additional direction on supplying a descriptive tagline, however, your company name will be required to accurately represent your company or organization. Proper punctuation and capitalization is a must.

It is a good idea to create a number of different descriptions of varying lengths because the different directories allow different description sizes. Start off by creating descriptions consisting of 7, 10, 20, 25, 50, and 100 words. Make sure that you use the right length for each directory, because you won’t want it to be altered when it is displayed in search results. Editors are notorious for editing descriptions if your submission does not meet the directory’s guidelines or even a particular editor’s style. When submitting to a specific directory it does not hurt to read the other entries in your category to look for a common theme in the descriptions and then modify yours to follow suit.

Your description should be compelling. When you get your site to appear in the first page or two results of a search, the description is what differentiates your site from the rest. It is the description that entices a prospective visitor to click and visit—or pass by and go to a more exciting site.
Always use keywords in your description. Apply the most important keywords first because keywords used farther along in the description are generally given less weight by the major search engines. If possible, use keywords in combination with other keywords, but make sure your description flows naturally. Round off your description with a call to action. It is amazing how many people do what they are told.

**Pay Careful Attention to All Fields on the Submission Form**

When submitting forms to directories, be careful to fill in every field on the form. Some of the directories reject your registration automatically if you have not filled in all the blanks. When you have to choose categories, select them carefully. It would be a shame to have a great product, great price, and a great site, but be listed in a place where your potential customer would never think about looking for you. I cannot emphasize this enough: read the FAQs or instructions first to ensure that you understand exactly what information is being requested.

Proofread your submission at least twice before you hit the Submit button. It isn’t quick or easy to change listings if you make a mistake. Your listing might be wrong for quite a while before it gets corrected. To change a listing you typically either have to contact a category editor directly or fill out a change request form.

**More Directory Submission Tips**

It generally takes longer to be indexed in a directory because you have human administrators who review every page submitted before adding it to the database. Make sure your page contains quality content, is easy to use, is visually appealing, is free of errors and is free of performance issues such as a poor load time. It is the administrators who decide if your page is worthwhile before they include it. Pages that do not meet the requirements of the administrator will not be added to the directory—whether or not you abide by best practices in Web site development can make or break you when it comes to getting listed in directories.

Consider Yahoo!’s directory. Yahoo! won’t add you if you have Under Construction signs on your site. Yahoo! likes sites that are complete, contain good, pertinent information, are aesthetically pleasing, and are easy to use. Before you submit, be sure to check if you’re already in their directory. You may not want or need to submit your site if you’re
already where you want to be. If you are in their directory, but want to change the information displayed, then you can fill out a form located at http://add.yahoo.com/fast/change that is specifically used for changing information already listed in the directory.

The following are some other tips to remember when submitting your site to Yahoo!:

- Remember, your submission counts for almost everything here, so do it right. Yahoo! is a directory, not a search engine. Designing your site to be search engine friendly means very little here.

- Make sure that what you submit is actually what your site is about. Yahoo!'s administrators will review your site, and if they feel the description you provided does not match your site, you will not be added to their directory.

- Keep your description to 150 characters or less, and use descriptive keywords that fit naturally within the description. Yahoo! reserves the right to modify your description if they see fit. You’re the only one who knows what information is important to have included in your description, so you probably do not want Yahoo!'s administrators to modify your description, because you might lose an important part of your description, resulting in less traffic. Keep in mind that Yahoo! does not like submissions that sound like an advertisement—they like concise, pertinent information.

- Submit a short, relevant title, not something such as “The Best Gardening Site on the Web.” Be sure to use descriptive keywords in your title as well. That way, when searches are performed, your page title will be referenced.

- When submitting, develop your page title and descriptions to use keywords in combination with others as this can also give you a boost. Check out your competitors to see who’s on the top and what they’re doing right.

- If you’re looking for local traffic, then submitting to a regional category might be a good approach for you.
• Don’t fill out the submission form using ALL CAPITALS—they hate that. Use proper grammar and spelling. Before you submit, be sure to check and recheck your submission.

• If your domain name contains keywords, you can benefit here. Keywords can help your page stand out when a user performs a search on a keyword that is in your domain name.

• Don’t forget to fill out Yahoo!’s submission form exactly as requested! Read the help documentation and FAQs, beginning with “How to Suggest Your Site,” which can be found at http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest. Figure 7.3 shows Yahoo!’s directory submission form.

**Keep a Record of your Submissions**

Keep a record of the directories and search engines to which you have submitted. The information recorded should include the following:

![Yahoo’s directory submission form.](image)
1. Date of the submission

2. URL of the page submitted

3. Name of the search engine or directory

4. Description used

5. Keywords used

6. Password used

7. Notes section for any other relevant information, such as the contact person for the search engine or directory

8. Date listed.

This list can come in handy when checking the status of your submissions or if you encounter any problems in the future where you need to contact the search provider or resubmit.

**Effective Use of Submission Tools and Services**

There are many search engine submission services available on the Net that will submit your site to varying numbers of indexes, directories, and search engines. They will register your URL, description, and keywords. Use these services only after you have manually submitted to the most important search engines and directories. Check them to see how comprehensive they are before using these services. Here are a couple of sites for you to look at:

**Web Position**

*http://www.webposition.com/*

Search engine submission and evaluation software that tells you where your site is positioned in search results of the most popular search engines and directories. Builds traffic by tracking your search engine positions and helping you to improve your rankings.
Position Pro
http://www.positionpro.com/
Position Pro is a powerful combination of tools providing you the ability to analyze your entire Web site like a search engine would. Offers search engine submission services.

SubmitPlus
http://www.submitplus.com/
Successfully promoting Web sites around the world since June 23, 1998. Its programs and promotion packages were developed with the input of major search engines to assure precise and search engine friendly results.

Microsoft bCentral Submit-It!
http://www.bcentral.com/products/si/default.asp
One of the oldest and most respected submission services, now operated by Microsoft.

SubmitWolf
http://www.trellian.com/swolf/
SubmitWolf v6.0 is an easy to use, professional Web site promotional tool, which automates the process of promoting your Web pages on the Internet. It can dramatically increase the number of visitors to your Web site. SubmitWolf v6.0 can automatically register your Web sites with thousands of engines and directories plus over 500,000 link pages.

Dynamic Submission
Dynamic Submission 7.0 is multi-award-winning Web promotion software. It was developed to offer Web site owners the ability to promote their Web sites to the ever increasing number of search engines on the Internet without any hassles or complications. It helps you submit your Web site to hundreds of major search engines with just a few mouse clicks and drive thousands of guaranteed hits to your Web site.

AddPro
http://www.addpro.com/professional_submission/
AddPro will submit your Web site URL to more than 120 of the most relevant search engines and directories.
AddMe Site Submission  
http://www.addme.com/submission.htm
Basic submission to 14 search engines for free. Professional submission to 1,500 search engines.

Submit Express  
http://www.submitexpress.com/  
Submit your Web site’s URL to 40 search engines, all for free. There is also an option to submit your Web site to more than 75,000 search engines, directories and links pages.

Although these services save a great deal of time, it is essential that you be registered accurately in search engines and directories. For the best results, register individually in as many of the top search engines as you can before you resort to multiple-submission sites. There aren’t that many search engines or directories that have long submission forms, so submit manually to ensure the best results. If you have taken the time to do the work described earlier, submit to the major engines yourself. This way you can take full advantage of the legwork you have done targeting the differences between the engines.

To summarize, each search engine is different. Know the unique qualities of each before you submit.

Complete Your Site Before You Submit

Before you submit to any of the search engines and directories, take the time to complete your site. Many of the major search engines and directories are not fond of receiving submissions from people who have pages that are not yet complete or that are full of sloppy code. You do not want to spend your time submitting your page only to find out it has not been added because it is still under construction.

Be sure to validate your HTML before submitting. You want your site to be free of errors to ensure your success with submissions. A few of the tools you can use to validate your HTML are:

W3C HTML Validation Service  
http://validator.w3.org
NetMechanic  

Dr. Watson, v4.0  
http://watson.addy.com

Search Engine World  
http://searchengineworld.com/validator/

WDG HTML Validator  
http://www.htmlhelp.com/tools/validator/

**Get Multiple Listings**

One way to have your site listed many times is to submit many times. Because each page on your site is a potential entry point for search engines and each page has a unique URL, you can submit each URL (each page) in the various search engines, directories, and so on. Each page of your site should be indexed to improve your chances of having your site listed in the top ten search engine results. And because every page on your site is different, each page should have a different title, a different description, and different keywords. That way, you increase your chances of being found by people searching for different criteria and keywords.

It is important to abide by netiquette. In some search sites, the previously discussed practice of submitting multiple times is acceptable and might even be encouraged. In others it is considered abuse and is discouraged. Check each search engine’s rules, and use your judgment on this one!

**Some Final Pointers**

Here are some important final pointers you should keep in mind. Always read the submission guidelines before submitting. Search engines and directories often provide a number of valuable tips that can help you to achieve better rankings.
Periodically review your rankings in the major search engines and directories. To make this manageable, I suggest you make a list of the search engines and directories to which you have submitted. Divide your list into four groups. Every week check your ranking with each of the search engines and directories in one group. If you have dropped in the ranking or don’t appear in the first couple of pages of search results, then you want to resubmit to that particular search engine or directory. The next week, check your ranking with the next group. By doing so you can set a regular schedule for yourself, keep organized, and determine which search engines and directories you need to resubmit to. Sometimes your site may be removed from an index because the search engine has flushed its directory, or maybe it is just one of those things no one can explain—either way you will be on top of things. If you make any significant changes to your site, you also might want to resubmit. You want to be sure that your listing reflects your fresh content.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 7**

I have included a number of resources for you to check out regarding search engine and directory submissions. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques and resources.

**Major Search Engines, Directories, Meta Engines, and PPC Engines**

Google, Yahoo! and Ask Jeeves/Teoma are largely regarded as the most important search engines.

**About.com**
Site Address: http://www.about.com
Submission Address: Find a category and email the guide directly.

**AlltheWeb.com**
Site address: http://www.alltheweb.com
Submission Address: http://www.alltheweb.com/help/webmaster/submit_site (Powered by Yahoo!)

**AltaVista**
Site address: http://www.altavista.com
Search Engine and Directory Submissions

Submission Address: http://www.altavista.com/addurl/default (Powered by Yahoo!)

AOL Search
Site address: http://aolsearch.aol.com or http://search.aol.com
Submission Address: http://search.aol.com/aolcom/add.jsp (Get indexed by Open Directory)

Ask Jeeves or Teoma
Submission Address: http://sitesubmit.ask.com

Business.com
Site address: http://www.business.com
Submission Address: See their Web site for advertising options.

Dogpile
Site address: http://www.dogpile.com
Submission Address: https://secure.ah-ha.com/guaranteed_inclusion/teaser.aspx?network=dogpile

Excite
Site address: http://www.excite.com
Submission Address: https://secure.ah-ha.com/guaranteed_inclusion/teaser.aspx (Gets you inclusion in Dogpile, Verizon, WebCrawler, NBC, and MetaCrawler)

FindWhat.com
Site address: http://www.findwhat.com
Submission Address: http://www.findwhat.com/content/advertiser/index.asp

Gigablast
Site address: http://www.gigablast.com
Submission Address: http://www.gigablast.com/addurl

Google
Site address: http://www.google.com
Submission Address: http://www.google.com/addurl.html

Google AdWords
Site address: https://adwords.google.com/select/
Submission Address: See their Web site for advertising options.
HotBot
Site address: http://www.hotbot.com
Submission Address: http://insite.lycos.com

LookSmart
Site address: http://www.looksmart.com
Submission Address: http://listings.looksmart.com/?sid=lsl100866

Lycos
Site address: http://www.lycos.com
Submission Address: http://insite.lycos.com

Mamma
Site address: http://www.mamma.com
Submission Address: http://www.mamma.com/info/submit/submit.html

MSN Search
Site address: http://search.msn.com
Submission Address: http://advertising.msn.com/msnsites/SubmitSite.asp

Netscape Search
Site address: http://search.netscape.com
Submission Address: http://dmoz.org/add.html (Get indexed in Open Directory)

Open Directory
Site address: http://dmoz.org
Submission Address: http://dmoz.org/add.html

Overture
Site address: http://www.overture.com
Submission Address: See their Web site for advertising options.

WiseNut
Site address: http://www.wisenut.com
Submission Address: http://www.wisenut.com/submit.html

Yahoo!
Site address: http://www.yahoo.com
Submission Address: http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html
Zeal
Site address: http://www.zeal.com
Submission Address: http://www.zeal.com/users/login.jhtml (You must login to add a Web site).

Search Engine Search Features and Submission Charts
Search Engine Submissions and Registration Chart
http://www.pandia.com/optimization/submit-site.html

Search Engine Features for Webmasters
http://www.searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/features.html

Submission Tools

SubmitPlus
http://www.submitplus.com/
Successfully promoting Web sites around the world since June 23, 1998. Its programs and promotion packages were developed with the input of major search engines to assure precise and search engine friendly results.

Microsoft bCentral Submit-It!
http://www.bcentral.com/products/si/default.asp
One of the oldest and most respected submission services, now operated by Microsoft.

SubmitWolf
http://www.trellian.com/swolf/
SubmitWolf v6.0 is an easy to use, professional Web site promotional tool, which automates the process of promoting your Web pages on the Internet. It can dramatically increase the number of visitors to your Web site. SubmitWolf v6.0 can automatically register your Web sites with thousands of engines and directories plus over 500,000 link pages.

Dynamic Submission
Dynamic Submission V7.0 is multi-award-winning Web promotion software. It was developed to offer Web site owners the ability to promote their Web sites to the ever increasing number of search engines on the
Internet without any hassles or complications. It helps you submit your site to hundreds of major search engines with just a few mouse clicks and drive thousands of guaranteed hits to your Web site.

AddPro
http://www.addpro.com/professional_submission/
AddPro will submit your Web site’s URL to more than 120 of the most relevant search engines and directories.

AddMe Site Submission
http://www.addme.com/submission.htm
Basic submission to 14 search engines for free. Professional submission to 1,500 search engines.

Submit Express
http://www.submitexpress.com/
Submit your Website URL to 40 search engines, all for free. There is also an option to submit your Web site to more than 75,000 search engines, directories and links pages.

Note: If you haven’t already done so, be sure to review the resources for Chapter 6. The information contained in Chapters 6 and 7 is closely related, and their resources tie in well together.
It used to be that you could simply optimize your Web site using traditional organic search engine optimization techniques, as described in Chapter 6, which would enable you to place high in the major search engines and create a great deal of exposure for your product and/or service offerings. This can still be accomplished, however, with thousands of people competing for the top positions on a given search results page, it is becoming an increasingly more challenging task. This is why many businesses are leaning toward PPC online advertising models to generate targeted exposure for their sites, and in turn their products and services. So what options are available to enable businesses to create targeted exposure for their Web sites, and how can businesses with minimal advertising budgets utilize these advertising models to increase their visibility on-line? In this chapter, we cover:

- Maximizing exposure on Google using the AdWords program

**PPC**

PPC, or pay per click, refers to online advertising programs than enable users to bid on specific keywords or phrases to present users with ads when a user searches for information relating to a particular topic. When a user is presented with an ad and decides to click on that ad the advertiser is charged a nominal fee for the referral.
• Expanding your reach using the Overture advertising network
• Expanding your reach with contextual advertising
• Geo targeting ads to better communicate with your target market
• Dayparting, and how you can capitalize on increased traffic levels during specific time periods
• Developing effective landing pages for your ads.

**Generating Targeted Traffic Using PPC Advertising**

At the end of the day the success of your search engine positioning strategy boils down to one thing—results! Over the last several years many search engines have adopted various PPC advertising models that enable advertisers to pay for exposure on their search results pages, based on targeted keyword sponsorship. Businesses can bid on specific keywords or phrases to have their search engine listings appear only when a searcher conducts a particular query using their engine. If the searcher clicks on a particular listing the business pays a nominal fee for the click, but receives a targeted lead for the fee.

The key is that the lead is “targeted.” Using traditional organic search engine optimization techniques can cause your site to appear at the top of search results, generating targeted traffic to your Web site, but even the leading search engines often return results that are not exactly what the searcher desires. What if your Web site always appeared when a searcher conducted a query using a targeted keyword relating to the product or service being promoted on your site? What if you could ensure that everyone interested in your products or services had the opportunity to click on your search engine listing to learn more about what you have to offer?

These are the true benefits of developing your PPC or pay-to-play online promotional strategy. By participating in PPC, you generate targeted traffic to your site and you increase brand awareness for your organization, which ultimately results in increased sales for your organization. Over the years some programs have proven successful while
others have failed, but at the end of the day, two PPC programs have proven to be extremely successful. These programs are:

- Google AdWords (http://adwords.google.com)
- Overture (http://www.overture.com).

**Exploring Google AdWords**

Google AdWords (see Figure 8.1) has quickly become one of the premier online advertising vehicles for businesses for several reasons. First and foremost, why wouldn’t you want to place targeted ads on the Internet’s top search engine to generate exposure for your products and services? In addition, by sponsoring keywords and phrases on a cost per click basis on such a prominent Web portal, you are guaranteed one thing—targeted exposure.

Some PPC programs provide businesses with the opportunity to out-bid each other for top placement of their ads. This means that busi-

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**Figure 8.1.** Google AdWords is quickly becoming one of the most popular PPC advertising channels.
CPC

CPC, or cost per click, refers to the investment that is associated with a particular keyword or phrase when a user clicks on an ad that an advertiser bids on with a PPC program.

Businesses with large advertising budgets can dominate the top placements using these particular programs, which is not exactly fair to those businesses that cannot afford a high CPC.

Google AdWords helps to create a level playing field for all advertisers, meaning that even small businesses with a minimal budget can compete with large enterprises for premium listings. Businesses can set their CPC for particular keywords well above their competitors’, but this doesn’t mean that their ads will appear above the competitors’. AdWords ranks each ad based on a combination of the ad’s CPC and the ad’s click-through rate. What this means is that if a business with a high CPC creates an irrelevant ad that does not generate any clicks, that ad slowly moves to the bottom of the listing of ads that appears on Google’s search results page, and is ultimately removed. This enables businesses with a lower CPC, but more relevant ads, to position higher—at no extra cost!

How AdWords Works

Setting up an AdWords account can be accomplished in 15 to 20 minutes by following a few simple steps. When preparing to launch a campaign with AdWords, you first determine where you would like your ads to appear on Google’s network of Web sites, and which languages you plan to target with your ads. You can choose to communicate your ads to the masses, or you can opt to geographically target your ads to specific locations—even locations within a specific distance from your business’s physical location. Now that’s targeted advertising!

You then need to design an Ad Group for your campaign (see Figure 8.2). An Ad Group is a collection of one or more ads that you wish to display on Google’s network of sites. Each ad consists of a headline and description that, if designed correctly, relates specifically to the keywords that are associated with the overall Ad Group. Once each ad in a given Ad Group is designed, you select targeted keywords that you wish to be associated with the Ad Group.

Why does an Ad Group contain one or more ads? The AdWords program is designed to work effectively for advertisers, weeding out ads that are not generating targeted traffic for them. To illustrate, assume that a given Ad Group consists of five different ads relating to a specific...
Developing Your Pay-to-Play Strategy

When an advertiser launches a campaign, AdWords randomly displays each ad in the Ad Group to the advertiser’s target market. Eventually, certain ads in the Ad Group perform better than others, generating more click-throughs. When this happens, AdWords then displays only ads within the Ad Group that are generating results for the client, and slowly removes the others from the rotation. This helps to maximize the effectiveness of the overall ad campaign.

When launching an ad campaign, you are given the opportunity to set a budget for your campaign. You can set a maximum CPC for each Ad Group along with a maximum daily budget for your campaigns. By default AdWords provides advertisers with a recommended maximum CPC for optimal results with their campaign. The maximum CPC can range anywhere from US$.05 to US$50.

If you are unsure of what your maximum CPC should be, AdWords provides an excellent traffic estimation tool that can help you estimate daily traffic for selected keywords and phrases. The traffic estimation tool helps you fine-tune what your maximum CPC should be based on your overall online advertising budget and campaign objectives. By manipulating the maximum CPC, you are able to determine what your daily expenditures would be based on traffic patterns associated with

Figure 8.2. Creating Ad Groups with AdWords.
the keywords that you have selected, along with where your ads will be positioned during the campaign.

**Where Do Your Ads Appear?**

When implementing a campaign on the AdWords network your ads appear in more places than just within Google’s search results. Through building relationships with some of today’s top industry specific Web sites and search portals, Google expands the reach of your ads to the masses. Popular Web sites such as the New York Times, AOL, Ask Jeeves and Netscape all display AdWords’ advertisements when a Web surfer conducts a search using those sites’ search tools. Figure 8.3 shows some of AdWords’ more prominent advertising partners.

**Extending Your Reach with Overture**

Overture is a prominent leader in PPC advertising, which boasts that they reach over 80 percent of the Internet population through their net-
work of advertising affiliates. As a subsidiary of Yahoo! Inc., Overture displays its pay-for-performance search results on prominent Web sites such as Yahoo!, MSN, and AltaVista—an advertising network that is only expected to grow stronger as time goes on.

Ads that appear on Overture’s search results page appear in the form of a sponsored listing. Overture’s Premium Listings are provided to searchers as the first three search results for any given search. This increases the likelihood that a searcher will click on a listing as it appears as a standard search result to an Internet user. To view an example of a Premium Listing refer to Figure 8.4.

Unlike programs such as Google AdWords, placement of ads on Overture’s network is heavily dependent on the advertiser’s online advertising budget. Advertisers with large budgets quite often become “squatters” by bidding into the top three positions for a given keyword or phrase. Overture does not regulate the ads that are displayed based on performance like AdWords does. As long as an advertiser continues to outbid the competition for top placement it can remain on the top of all listings. Although this seems unfair, it is important to remember that maintaining top placement for prominent keywords often comes at a high price, which is an easy way to blow through an advertising budget in a hurry.

Figure 8.4. Overture’s Premium Listings that appear on a Yahoo! search result page.
How Overture Works

Launching a campaign using the Overture advertising network is similar in some ways to setting up an AdWords account, however, there are distinct differences between the two. On Overture, there are no Ad Groups with multiple ads that are randomly presented to searchers. Instead, individual ads are developed and associated with each keyword or phrase that is being promoted on the site. Although a single ad can be associated with more than one keyword or phrase, Overture’s advertising network does not possess the logic to display one particular ad over another.

The Direct Traffic Center is the headquarters for all information related to your Overture campaign (see Figure 8.5.) Once logged into the Direct Traffic Center, you can manage every aspect of your Overture campaign, including payment methods, keyword sponsorships, advertising options and reporting. You can easily create and launch new ads directly within this section of the site.

To create an ad listing using Overture, you follow a few simple steps. The process begins by researching the different keywords and phrases that you wish to sponsor. Referring to Figure 8.6, you can conduct a

Figure 8.5. Overture’s Direct Traffic Center.
Developing Your Pay-to-Play Strategy

query within the Direct Traffic Center to identify keywords that are being utilized by those who conduct searches on the Overture network. Included within the results, you are presented with the current top bid price, the number of searches conducted within the last month using the keyword or phrase, and the estimated number of clicks that an ad should receive based on historical statistics. Overture’s keyword suggestion tool is a great way for you to identify targeted keywords relating to products and services similar to yours that are being utilized by your target market.

Once you have selected the keywords or phrases that you wish to sponsor, you are prompted to either create a unique headline and description for your advertisement, or a common ad listing that will be shared with each keyword selected (see Figure 8.7). Similar to AdWords, to be effective the headline and description should relate specifically to the keyword being sponsored. This will increase the likelihood that a searcher will click on the ad.

As you build your ad campaign all keywords that are being sponsored are listed within the Direct Traffic Center, which provides the you with a dashboard to view the performance of each ad listing. Within this dashboard you can view the top five bids for each keyword being...
sponsored and can manage your current CPC with a few clicks (see Figure 8.8). The minimum CPC per keyword using Overture is US$.10 per click. The user-friendly interface of the Direct Traffic Center makes it very easy for you to manage your campaigns. The snapshot view of campaign activity makes it very easy for you to identify ad listings that are either performing well or not performing at all, allowing you to take action to improve the performance of the listing.
Where Do Your Ads Appear?

Similar to AdWords, Overture’s vast network of affiliated Web sites ensures that you receive maximum exposure for your online marketing efforts. The network of Overture affiliates that are responsible for promoting Overtures Premium Listings (ranks 1–3), and Classic Results (ranks 4 & below) include many prominent search engines and directories, prominent content sites, ISPs, and even the default search results in the world’s most prominent Internet browser—Microsoft Internet Explorer. The following is a brief listing of current Web sites that display Overture’s PPC listings in their search results:

- AltaVista (www.altavista.com)
- Excite (www.excite.com)
- InfoSpace (www.infospace.com)
- MSN (www.msn.com)
- Sympatico.ca (www.sympatico.ca)
- Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com)
- Juno (www.juno.com)
- Netzero (www.netzero.com)
- Metacrawler (www.metacrawler.com)
- AlltheWeb (www.alltheweb.com)
- CNN (www.cnn.com)
- ESPN (www.espn.com).

Maximize Exposure with Contextual Advertising

Imagine that a consumer is currently in the market for a home theatre system and is viewing a recognized electronics Web site to learn more
about the latest innovations in home theatre technology. If you were a salesperson in a traditional brick-and-mortar store and a consumer wandered into your department, you would approach him or her as he or she was already semi-engaged in the sale, just trying to figure out what to buy. In a similar way, the latest advancement in contextual advertising enables you to reach those same consumers, but in the online marketplace.

To further illustrate the example, assume that you are that same consumer on the electronics Web site and you are viewing a page of content that strictly provides information on plasma televisions. Accompanying the content on this page you are presented with a listing of ads for online retailers who are promoting plasma televisions on-line. Because the ads relate directly to your area of interest, you click on a link, are directed to a Web site, and ultimately place an inquiry with the online retailer about its product.

Similar to how a Web surfer searches for information using a major search engine and is presented with PPC ads, contextual ads enable advertisers to promote their ad listings on content sites that relate to specific information (e.g., electronics). Contextual advertising provides advertisers with yet another opportunity to target specific customer segments with targeted advertisements. Both AdWords and Overture currently offer advertisers the ability to take advantage of contextual advertising opportunities by promoting their ad listings on related content sites within their respective advertising networks. Figure 8.9 illustrates an example of a contextual advertisement within the Travel section of the CNN.com Web site.

**Geo Targeting Your Campaigns**

Implementing a PPC strategy enables you to advertise to a mass audience, or to target Internet users in a specific geographic location. As explained earlier this chapter, AdWords provides you with the opportunity to target customers not only on a state or provincial level, but also on a local level, by only displaying advertisements to potential customers conducting searches in your business’s local area.

With AdWords alone you can choose to target over 250 different countries in up to 14 different languages. You can also choose to advertise within over 200 different regions throughout the United States. Geo targeting provides you with an increased level of control over where
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your ads are displayed and how they spend their advertising budgets. By targeting only those locations where you wish your ads to appear, you can maximize your online advertising dollars whether you are working with a small or a large budget.

Dayparting

When you are analyzing your Web traffic logs you will most likely notice that your traffic levels spike on a particular day of the week and/or during a specific time period throughout the day. When monitoring the performance of your PPC strategy, you can also note when searchers are more apt to click on one of your ads to visit your site and learn more about what you have to offer. If you notice a significant increase in your click-through rates at a specific time you can capitalize on this increased visibility.

Adjusting your PPC advertising strategy to capitalize on traffic during a particular point of the day is what is referred to as “dayparting.” Reports reveal that when you capture your target market when they are more apt to visit your Web site (e.g., during a particular time of the day,
or on a particular day of the week) they will be more apt to click on your ad and ultimately convert to a customer. This strategy requires in-depth analysis of conversion rates, click-through rates, and general traffic levels. The basic premise behind dayparting is that advertisers increase their CPC during the time of the day when searchers will be most apt to view information on their products and services. By increasing your CPC during this timeframe you maximize the exposure for your products or services—providing you are presenting the searcher with optimized ads.

**Maximizing Your Exposure**

Developing ads for your PPC strategy is not just a matter of throwing together a headline and description in the hope that a customer will click on one of your ads. Well, it could be, but this strategy will not result in you meeting your campaign objectives of click-throughs and conversions. Your ads should be designed to entice the searcher, but be wary that if you create ads that are too inviting you can rack up your click-through rate quickly without converting any customers at all. The bottom line is that you do not want to entice uninterested searchers to your Web site, as you would be wasting your online advertising budget.

To avoid this issue make sure that your ads relate specifically to the keywords they are associated with and make sure your message is clear. When a true potential customer views one of your ads you want that person to say “Wow, that’s exactly what I am looking for.” This ensures that your click-throughs are more targeted.

In addition to developing targeted ads for your campaigns, you also want to be sure that the page searchers are directed to when they click on your ad provides them with information about what you are promoting. Too often, businesses simply point click-throughs to their Web site’s homepage, which requires the potential customer to navigate further through the Web site to find more information about the company and their product and/or service offerings. This often results in wasted clicks and fewer conversions.

Instead, try pointing Web surfers to landing or gateway pages that are tailored to specific advertisements. You have to remember, people are not going to buy simply by clicking on your ads—they want information. That’s why you would never simply point a new customer to
your online order form. However, if you develop a landing page that communicates the features and benefits of the promotion and provides the visitor with a clear “Order Now” call to action, you can increase the likelihood that the visitor will convert to a buyer.

When developing landing pages for your PPC strategy you should design various pages and test their effectiveness. The key thing to remember is that if someone is searching for “New York Hotels,” you do not want your landing page to say something unrelated, but rather to include a call to action that says “Click here for New York hotels.” You want to make sure that you provide the viewer with the information that she or he is looking for. In addition, make sure that you do not overwhelm the visitor with navigation options that would distract the visitor from understanding the message you are trying to communicate. Clear communication of your value proposition is the key.

**Maximizing Your Budget**

One of the biggest mistakes that organizations make is assuming that they have to bid into the number one position to make their PPC strategy work. Being number one is associated with being the best, thus it is very easy to let your ego get in the way of your marketing objectives. Bidding into the top positions for more competitive keywords generates optimal exposure, but it also blows through your budget quicker than if your ads were appearing in the lower ranks. Constantly bidding into top positions can result in having to start and stop your campaigns if the budget is not available to constantly maintain them.

To maximize the effectiveness of your budget try bidding into the lower ranks to minimize your average CPC. This helps you to stay under your daily budget and lets you implement longer campaigns with your advertising dollars. Also, bidding on the most competitive keywords is not always the best strategy. Use the tools that are available with your PPC program to identify keywords that are proven to be effective, but are not being capitalized on by your competitors. Advertisers typically focus their efforts on the keywords that are most utilized by their target market and avoid keywords that are less popular.

To illustrate, assume that using the Overture PPC program, the most popular keyword related to New York hotel accommodations is the phrase *New York Hotels*. This is the most popular keyword phrase used
by your target market, but its CPC is US$5.55. However, after conducting additional research you discover that the keyword phrase *New York Accommodations* is used slightly less by your target market, but only has an average CPC of US$.30. This is a much more attractive keyword to sponsor as it still generates targeted exposure for your site, but at only a fraction of the cost. Identifying popular keywords that are cost effective is an excellent way to stretch your advertising budget—it just requires a little more upfront work to conduct the appropriate keyword research.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 8**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding designing your Web site. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Popular PPC Advertising Programs**

- **Google AdWords**
  Site Address: [https://adwords.google.com/select/](https://adwords.google.com/select/)

- **LookSmart**
  Site Address: [http://www.looksmart.com](http://www.looksmart.com)

- **Overture**
  Site Address: [http://www.overture.com](http://www.overture.com)

- **Kanoodle.com**
  Site Address: [http://www.kanoodle.com](http://www.kanoodle.com)

- **Lycos Insite Adbuyer**
  Site Address: [http://insite.lycos.com](http://insite.lycos.com)

- **FindWhat.com**
  Site Address: [http://www.findwhat.com](http://www.findwhat.com)
Keyword Research and Evaluation

WordTracker
http://www.wordtracker.com
An online tool for compiling the right combination of keywords. You can run a free trial, but this is a pay service for keyword generation and suggestions.

WordSpot
http://www.wordspot.com
Keyword marketing resources, tactics and tips.

Overture—Search Term Suggestion Tool
http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion
Overture’s search term suggestion tool to help you identify relevant keywords.

Overture—View Bid Tool
http://uv.bidtool.overture.com/d/search/tools/bidtool/
Overture’s view bid tool that shows you the value per click for specified keywords.

Google AdWords: Keyword Suggestions
https://adwords.google.com/select/main?cmd=KeywordSandbox/
A free tool provided by Google, intended to help AdWord customers choose keyword phrases.
Utilizing Signature Files to Increase Web Site Traffic

A signature file, or sig file as it is commonly referred to, is your electronic business card. It takes the form of a short memo and is attached at the end of your e-mail messages. You can use your signature file in a number of clever ways, from just giving out phone numbers and addresses, to offering some substantial information. Sig files can be used to let people know about a special event or to inform people about an award or honor your company has received. In this chapter, we cover:

- The appropriate size of sig files
- The content and design of sig files
- Creating sig files to add statements to your messages
- The benefits of sig files.

Presenting Your e-Business Card

A signature file is your e-business card. It should be attached at the end of all your e-mails—those that are sent to individuals and espe-
Utilizing Signature Files to Increase Web Site Traffic

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Specially those that are sent to Usenet newsgroups and mail lists. Most, if not all, e-mail programs allow for the use of a signature file. If yours doesn’t, you should consider switching e-mail programs because sig files can be effective in drawing traffic to your Web site when used appropriately.

Your sig file should always include all basic contact information: name, organization, snail address, phone, fax, e-mail, and URL. You should provide every way possible for recipients to reach you, do not provide only the way in which you would like to be contacted. The customer is king and it is the recipients’ choice if they would rather call than e-mail you.

Some businesses also have a “Click here” on their sig file, which takes you directly to their Web site. This is a nice idea, but you must also remember to include your URL so that the recipients have it. Sometimes people just print their e-mail to take home that night, and they can’t get to your Web site by trying to click on a piece of paper.

You should also include a tag line offering information about your company, its products and services, a current sales promotion, where you will be located at a trade show, a special event you are hosting, an award your company has received, or other marketing-focused information. Sig files are readily accepted online and, when designed properly, comply with netiquette.

Always remember to place http:// before Web site URLs and mailto: before e-mail addresses to make them hypertext links. This allows the readers to click on the links to take them directly to a Web site or to e-mail you without having to copy and paste the address in their browser or e-mail program.

How to Develop Your Signature File

In preparation for designing and developing your sig file, you should decide what information you want to include and what you want your e-business card to look like. Depending on the e-mail program you use, you can create your sig file using Windows Notepad, Microsoft Word, or any other processor and save it as a text file (with a .txt extension), or you can create your sig file within your e-mail program.

If you are using Microsoft Outlook, Outlook Express, Netscape Messenger or AOL, take the following steps to develop your sig file:
**Microsoft Outlook 2004**

1. On the menu bar, click “Tools."
2. In the drop-down menu, click on “Options.”
3. Click the “Mail Format” tab.
4. Click the “Signature Picker” button.
5. Then click the “New” button to add your new signature.
6. Enter a name for your signature, and select the “Start a new signature” radio button and click next.
7. Enter your signature and click “Finished.”
8. If you have more than one signature, pick one that will be used as a default.
9. Click ok, then ok again.

**Microsoft Outlook Express 6**

1. On the menu bar, click “Tools.”
2. On the drop-down menu, click on “Options.”
3. Click on the “Signatures” tab.
4. Click on “New” to create your sig file.
5. Type in your sig file contents.
6. Make sure “Add sig file to all outgoing messages” is checked under signature settings.
7. Click “Apply.”

**Netscape Messenger**

1. Create your sig file using any text editor and save it as a .txt file.
2. On the menu bar, click “Edit.”

3. Select the “Mail & Newsgroups” category.

4. Go to the folder named “Identity.”

5. Click on “Attach Signature.”

6. In the “Signature File” text box, enter the location and name of the signature file you saved earlier or use the Open dialog box to browse through your folders until you find the location of the file. When you find it, select it and then click “Open,” returning you to the Preferences dialog box. Click “OK” to return to the Messenger window.

**America Online**

1. Click on “Mail Center” on the toolbar.

2. Select the “Insert Signatures” file icon with the picture of a pencil and click on “Set Up Signatures” on the drop-down menu that displays.

3. Click on the “Create” tab on the “Set Up Signatures” display that appears.

4. Type in a name for your Signature file in the “Signature Name” area.

5. Under the “Signature” area enter your signature information.

6. Click on the “Insert” signature tab on the toolbar on your write mail display to add your message, which will be placed on your e-mail.

**The Dos and Don’ts of Signature Files**

It is a good idea to develop several signature files to use with different groups of recipients. You can use an appropriate sig file for each different group you are targeting. You should update your sig file often to reflect current marketing-related information.
Some e-mail programs allow a maximum of 80 characters per line for sig files. You should design your sig file to fit well within the limits of all programs. Use no more than 65 characters per line to be assured that your sig file will be viewed as you have designed it no matter what reader is being used. As a matter of fact, the fewer characters the better to ensure that what you have on one line appears on one line (and not two) in your viewers’ browsers. Sometimes people open and view their e-mail in a small window and not the full screen.

Some people get really innovative in the design of their sig files. They often include sketches, designs, or logos developed by combining keyboard numbers and punctuation. Including graphics in your sig file is not a good idea. This might look quite nice on your screen, but when you send it to other people who have a different e-mail program or are using different screen resolutions, it could look quite different on their monitors. You should also stay away from using icons or sketches in your signature files. Check out sig files attached to messages you receive or those posted to newsgroups to see what you like, what you don’t like, and what suits you best. You can always build it, test it on your colleagues, and then decide whether you should use it or not.

The use of sig files offers a number of benefits to your company. If you use sig files appropriately, you promote your company and your online presence in the following ways:

- **The use of sig files increases your company’s online exposure.** By merely placing a sig file at the end of a posting to a newsgroup, you ensure that your company name will be seen by thousands of people. A great tag line with a call to action encourages people to visit your site.

- **As with any advertisement, the design and content of your sig file can be used to position your business and create or complement a corporate image.**

- **Using your sig file can enhance the reputation of your company based upon the e-mail that it is attached to.** If your postings to newsgroups and mailing lists are helpful and continually appreciated, this will become associated with your company name.

- **Using appropriate sig files signals to the online community that you are a member who respects proper netiquette.**

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**Tag line**
Advertising message, usually included in your signature file attached to an e-mail.
Sig Files to Bring Traffic to Your Web Site

The major benefit of sig files is that they can attract visitors to your Web site. Use your signature file as a mini-advertisement for your company and its products and services (called sigvertising). With sigvertising you can go beyond offering the basic contact information. Use your sig file as a tool to bring traffic to your Web site. Instead of simply listing your company’s phone number and URL, give the reader some insight into your company and a reason to visit your site.

One of the most important elements of your signature file from a marketing perspective is the tag line. Your signature file should always include a one-line tag line or catch phrase. A tag line is a small sentence that is used in branding and is often recognizable without even the mention of the company or product name. Does your tag line give the reader a real and compelling desire to visit your Web site?

Do you recognize any of these tag lines?

- “We try harder.”
- “It’s the real thing.”
- “Like a rock.”
- “Just do it.”
- “Kills bugs dead.”

A catch phrase might be something that catches the reader’s attention and intrigues her to find out more. You should include a call to action in the catch phrase wherever possible to have your reader take action. I often include the catch phrase “Check out our Web Site Report..."
Card” in my signature file with a hypertext link to my Web site, with positive results. The recipients often do check out our Web site report card, ask for additional information, and often become clients. It works!

Consider some of the following tag line or catch phrase possibilities to increase the traffic to your Web site:

- Announce a sale or special offer. Briefly mention that your company will be having a sale, or inform people that there is a special offer available on your Web site.

- Offer something for free. Inform readers of free information or samples that they can access if they visit your site.

- Announce an event. If your company is organizing or sponsoring a special event, inform people through your sig file, and invite them to your site for more information.

- Announce a contest. If your site is holding a contest, tell readers that they can enter by visiting your site.

- Announce an award or honor. If your company or your Web site has received special recognition, tell people about it through your sig file.

Sig files are accepted online in e-mail, newsgroups, mail lists, and discussion groups. However, be cautious when developing your sig files to ensure that they will be well received. Sig files that are billboards, or sig files that are longer than most of your text messages, are to be avoided. Sig files that are blatant advertisements definitely are not appreciated. The online community reacts unfavorably to hard-sell advertising unless it is done in the proper forum. Here is an example of a sig file that might offend Internet users.

Are you in need of a reliable vehicle? If you are, come on down to Sunnyvale Volkswagen! We have the best deals in town and will beat any of our competitors’ prices on new and used cars! Money-back guarantee! Great deal on a 2001 Diesel Jetta . . . . $6,995.
Talk to Jane Doe about our new lease incentives!
101 Main Street, Woodstock, New York 10010
Tel: (800) 555-0000
Cell: (800) 555-1010
Fax: (800) 555-1020
www.bug.com

Another mistake that people make is that they try to make their sig files too flashy or eye catching. Using a lot of large symbols might catch people’s eyes, but the impression it leaves will not be memorable. Here is an example of what not to do:

✻✻✻✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪✻✻
✻
!Sunnyvale Volkswagen!
✻ !Jane Doe, Marketing Assistant!
✻ !jdoe@bug.com!
✻ 232 Main Street (800) 555-0000
✻ Woodstock, New York ✗ (800) 555-0002
✻ 30210 ✲
✻ “Test drives @ www.bug.com”
✻✻✻✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪☛✪✪✪✻✻

Here are some examples of what sig files should look like:

=======================================================
Sunnyvale Volkswagen
Jane Doe, Marketing Assistant
mailto:jdoe@bug.com
101 Main Street, Woodstock, New York, 10010
Tel: (800) 555-0000 Fax:(800) 555-0002
“Our once-a-year sales event is on now @ http://www.bug.com”
=======================================================

_____________________________________________________________
Jane Doe, Marketing Assistant
Sunnyvale Volkswagen
jdoe@bug.com
101 Main Street
Woodstock, New York, 10010
Tel: (800) 555-0000
Fax: (800) 555-0001
Check out our online contest http://www.bug.com today and WIN!
Internet Resources for Chapter 9

I have included a few resources for you to check out when developing your signature file. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

Coolsig Signature Files
http://www.coolsig.com
This site contains signature files in a variety of categories.

Esther’s Massive Signature File Collection
http://www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~moose/sigs.html
A massive collection of sig files to review—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Internet Strategist
http://www.techdirect.com/strategy/sigfiles.html
What to do and not to do on sig files and mailing lists. Learn how to create your personal sig file and what the different types are used for.

Siglets.com
http://siglets.com
Siglets are short notations, humorous or serious, placed at the bottom of an e-mail, usually in a sig file.

Signature Files
Signature files are an absolutely vital way of promoting your Web site. Learn how to market your product on the Internet from the leading Internet marketing experts, and it is all free.
Webnovice.com
www.Webnovice.com/sig_files.htm
“Everything You Wanted To Know About Signature Files...But Didn’t Know Where To Ask.”

Creating Signature Files in Outlook Express
http://www.webterrace.com/outlook/signature.htm

Promotion World
www.promotionworld.com/tutorial/504.html
This tutorial will teach you the basics of creating signature files.
E-mail is rapidly becoming one of the most crucial forms of communication you have with your clients, potential customers, suppliers, and colleagues. E-mail is now a widely accessible and generally accepted form of business communication. We are seeing a huge increase in commercial e-mail volume. The reason for this significant increase is understandable given that e-mail is a very cost-effective, time-efficient tool that has a high response rate. E-mail is used to build your community online, sell products and provide customer service, reinforce brand awareness, and encourage customer loyalty.

In the online community, e-mail is an extremely efficient way to build and maintain relationships. As a marketing tool, e-mail is one of the most cost-effective ways to maintain an ongoing dialogue with your audience.

However, with the overabundance of spam, spam detection software, filtering of e-mail, and the new anti-spam legislation, things are changing rapidly in the e-mail world. It is becoming a challenge to make sure that your e-mail is received, opened and responded to.

In this chapter, we cover:

- Strategies for creating effective e-mail messages
- E-mail netiquette
• E-mail marketing tips

• Sending HTML versus ASCII (text-based) e-mail messages.

**Making the Connection**

E-mail is a communication medium, and, as with all forms of communication, you do not get a second chance to leave a first impression. E-mail must be used appropriately. People receive large amounts of e-mail each day, and the tips in this chapter will help to ensure that your e-mail is taken seriously.

One of the greatest benefits of e-mail is the speed with which you can communicate. E-mail takes seconds rather than weeks to send a message around the world. The cost of this form of communication is negligible, compared to making a long-distance phone call or sending a fax. The economies of scale are significant. One e-mail message can be sent to millions of people across the globe simultaneously. This type of mass mailing is done at a fraction of the cost and a fraction of the time (and internal resources) it would take with *snail mail*.

All kinds of files can be sent via e-mail, including sound, video, data, graphics, and text. With an autoresponder, information can immediately be sent automatically to customers and potential customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year in response to their online requests.

E-mail is interactive. Your current and potential customers can immediately respond to you and carry on an ongoing dialogue with you. E-mail is seen much more like a conversation than a text document. It is perceived as being more personal than snail mail and can go quite a long way in building relationships.

**E-mail Program vs. Mail List Software**

The time has come where mail list software is essential for sending mass, permission-based, marketing e-mail. In this chapter we’ll talk about regu-
lar, day-to-day e-mail. See Chapter 14 for the discussion on marketing e-mail sent to a group or private mail list marketing.

**Effective E-mail Messages**

Most people who use this medium get tons of e-mail, including their share of junk e-mail. Many use organization tools, filters, and blockers to screen incoming e-mails. The following tips will increase the effectiveness of your e-mail communication to ensure that you have the best opportunity to have your e-mail opened, read, and responded to.

**The Importance of Your E-mail Subject Line**

The first thing most people do when they open their e-mail program is start hitting the delete key. They have an abundance of mail in their inbox and they want to get rid of the clutter, so they delete anything that looks like spam or an ad. How do they determine what is junk? The subject line is usually the deciding factor. It is essential that your e-mail subject line not look like ad copy.

Never send an e-mail message without a subject line. Subject lines should be brief, with the keywords appearing first. The longer the subject line is, the more likely it will not be viewed in its entirety because different people set the viewable subject line space at various widths.

The subject line is equivalent to a headline in a newspaper in terms of attracting reader attention. When you read a newspaper, you don’t really read it; generally you skim the headlines and read the articles whose headlines grabbed your attention. The same is true with e-mail. Many recipients, especially those who receive a significant number of e-mails daily, skim the subject lines and read only the articles whose subject line grabs their attention. The subject line is the most important part of your e-mail message because this phrase alone determines whether or not the reader will decide to open your e-mail or delete it.

Effective subject lines:

- Are brief, yet capture the reader’s interest
• Don’t look like ad copy
• Build business credibility
• Attract attention with action words
• Highlight the most important benefits
• Are always positive
• Put the most important words first.

Effective subject lines should grab the reader’s attention, isolate and qualify your best prospects, and draw your reader into the subheads and the text itself. Avoid SHOUTING! Using CAPITALS in your subject line is the same as SHOUTING AT THE READER! DON’T DO IT!! Stay away from ad copy in your subject lines—it is the kiss of death for an e-mail. When most people open their e-mail, they delete all the ads as the first step.

**E-mail “To” and “From” Headings Allow You to Personalize**

Use personal names in the “To” and “From” headings whenever possible, to create a more personal feeling. People open e-mail from people they know and trust. If your message is coming from 257046@aol.com rather than Jane Doe, will your friends know it is coming from you? Most e-mail programs allow you to attach your own name to your e-mail address.

If you are using Microsoft Outlook Express, the following are the steps to set up your name in the “From” heading:

1. On the menu bar, click “Tools.”
2. On the drop-down menu, click on “Accounts.”
3. Click on the “Mail” tab.
4. Click on your e-mail account, then click “Properties.”
5. Click on the “General” tab.

6. Under “User information,” type your name and organization in the appropriate boxes. It is the name from this area that will be seen in the “From” field in the user’s e-mail program. Then click “Apply,” then “OK” and “Close.”

For all other e-mail programs, consult the Help file included in the program.

**Blind Carbon Copy (BCC)**

Have you ever received an e-mail message in which the first screen or first several screens were a string of other people’s e-mail addresses to which the message had been sent? Didn’t you feel special? Didn’t you feel the message was meant just for you? This sort of bulk mailing is very impersonal, and often recipients will delete the message without looking at it.

A few years ago I would have suggested using the BCC feature when sending bulk or group e-mails. Today, a number of Internet service providers look for multiple addresses in the BCC area to determine if an incoming message is spam. If your message is deemed to be spam it will probably not go through to your intended recipient. This is one of the reasons I recommend moving to private mail list software for marketing messages that are going out to a group. See Chapter 14 on Private Mail List Marketing.

**Effective E-mail Message Formatting**

The content of the message should be focused on one topic. If you need to change the subject in the middle of a message, it is better to send a separate e-mail. Alternatively, if you wish to discuss more than one topic, make sure you begin your message with “I have three questions” or “There are four issues I would like to discuss.” People are busy, they read their e-mail quickly, and they assume you will cover your main points within the first few sentences of your message.
E-mail is similar to writing a business letter in that the spelling and grammar should be correct. This includes the proper use of upper- and lowercase lettering, which many people seem to ignore when sending e-mail. However, e-mail is unlike a business letter in that the tone is completely different. E-mail correspondence is not as formal as business writing. The tone of e-mail is more similar to a polite conversation than a formal letter, which makes it conducive to relationship building. In general, you should:

- Keep your paragraphs relatively short—no more than seven lines.
- Make your point in the first paragraph.
- Be clear and concise.
- Use `http://` at the beginning of any Web address to ensure that you make it “live.” When you provide the URL starting with the `www`, the reader has to copy and paste the Web address into the address field in the browser if he wants to visit your site. When you place `http://` before the `www`, the link is “live” and the reader just has to click on the address to be taken directly to your site. Make it as easy as possible for your reader to visit your Web site.
- Give your reader a call to action.
- Avoid using fancy formatting such as stationery, graphics, different fonts, italics, and bold, because many e-mail programs cannot display those features. Your message that reads: “I loved the flowers. Love ya” could be viewed as “I <I>loved</I> the flowers. <B>Love ya</B>” if the recipient’s e-mail software can’t handle formatting. That kind of loses the impact!
- If your e-mail package doesn’t have a spell-check feature, you might want to consider composing your message first in your word-processing program. Spell-check it there, then cut and paste it into your e-mail package.
- Choose your words carefully. E-mail is a permanent record of your thoughts, and it can easily be forwarded to others. When-
ever you have the urge to send a nasty response, give yourself an hour or two to reconsider. Those words can come back to haunt you—and they usually do.

A Call to Action

When you give your readers a call to action, it’s amazing how often people will do as they’re told. I’ll give you an example of something we did at Connex Network. We ran a series of ten Internet marketing workshops for a large organization. Their staff and selected clients were invited to participate in any, some, or all of the workshops. Their clients could include up to three employees. Because the workshops extended beyond noon, lunch was provided.

Because Connex Network was responsible for organizing and managing the project, we needed to know the approximate number of people who would be attending each of the workshops to organize the luncheons. When we contacted each company’s representatives by e-mail looking for participation RSVPs, we conducted an experiment. We sent half the representatives one version of the message and the other half a slightly different version. The only difference between the two messages was that in one, we included a call to action. In that message we asked: “RSVP before Wednesday at noon indicating if you will be attending as we must make arrangements for lunch,” and in the other, this same line read: “Please let us know if you are planning to attend as we must make arrangements for lunch.”

There was a 95 percent response rate from the group who received the first message. This is because we gave people a call to action and a deadline, and they felt obligated to respond more promptly. Meanwhile, fewer than 50 percent of the people in the second group responded to our message. What does this tell us? To improve your response rate, give your readers a call to action when you send them e-mail. People respond when told to do something; they act with more urgency when there is a deadline.

Appropriate E-mail Reply Tips

Do not include the entire original message in your replies. This is unnecessary and is aggravating to the original sender of the message. However,
use enough of the original message to refresh the recipient’s memory. Remember to check the “To” and “CC” before you reply. You would not want an entire mail list to receive your response intended only for the sender. The same applies for selecting “Reply to All” instead of “Reply.”

**HTML or Text?**

Should you send e-mail messages as text or as HTML? HTML messages allow you to send a Web page via e-mail. These HTML messages are far prettier and eye-catching than text, and studies have shown that HTML messages deliver significantly higher click-through rates.

Today, the rule of thumb is that you send text e-mail for your routine, individual communication and you use HTML for mass, permission-based marketing communication like your newsletter or e-specials. You send your routine e-mail with your e-mail program and you send your HTML marketing e-mail with your private mail list software. See Chapter 14 on Private Mail List Marketing.

**Always Use Your Signature Files**

As discussed previously, signature files are a great marketing tool. Always attach your signature file to your online communication. See Chapter 9 for information on signature files. Remember to be sure that the signature files are right for the intended audience.

**Discerning Use of Attachments**

If you are sending a fairly large amount of data, you might want to send it as an attached file to your e-mail message. However, only include an e-mail attachment if you have the recipient’s permission to send an attached file. You would never consider going to someone’s home, letting yourself in, finding your way into their living room, and then leaving your brochure on the coffee table. However, people do the online equivalent of this when they send an unsolicited attachment. The attachment is sent across the Internet to the recipient’s computer and is downloaded and stored on the computer’s hard drive. This is considered quite rude and, in most cases, unwanted.
Also, unless the recipient of your e-mail is aware of the file size and is expecting it, don’t send an attachment that is larger than 50K. Although your Internet connection might be a cable modem or a T1 line, and a 3 MB file is sent in seconds, the person who is receiving your message and attachment might be using a 14.4 Kbps modem and a slow machine. If you send a 3 MB file, it might take the person with the 14.4 Kbps modem two hours to download the file. Needless to say, he or she won’t be too pleased.

Another factor to consider when sending an unsolicited attachment is that the attachment you are sending might be incompatible with the operating system or the software on the recipient’s system. You might be using a different platform (Mac/PC) or different operating system, and the recipient might not be able to open and read your file. Even PC to PC or Mac to Mac, the recipient might not be able to open and view the attachment if that particular program is not installed on his machine. Someone using a 1994 version of Corel WordPerfect might not be able to read a Microsoft Word 2000 document sent as an attachment. Thus, you have wasted your time sending the file and the recipient’s time downloading the file.

Finally, it is a well-known fact that e-mail attachments can act as carriers for computer viruses. You might unknowingly send someone an attachment with a virus, and even if the file you send is virus-free, you could still take the blame if recipients find a virus on their system, just because you sent them an attachment. Basically, avoid sending e-mail attachments of any type unless you have the recipient’s permission. Be mindful of the size of the file you intend to send, compatibility with other platforms, and computer viruses. One alternative to sending a large attachment is to post the file on a Web server, and in your e-mail message direct users to a URL from which they can download the file.

**Viruses**  
Programs that contaminate a user’s hard drive, often with unwanted results.

**Expressing Yourself with Emoticons and Shorthand**

In verbal communication, you provide details on your mood, meaning, and intention through voice inflections, tone, and volume. You also give clues about your meaning and intention through facial expression and body language. E-mail does not allow for the same ex-
pression of feeling. The closest thing we have to this online is the use of emoticons.

Emoticon is a combination of “emotion” and “icon.” Emoticons are combinations of keyboard characters that give the appearance of a stick figure’s emotions. They have to be viewed sideways and are meant to be smiling, frowning, laughing, and so on. Emoticons let you communicate your meaning and intentions to your reader. For example, if your boss gives you an assignment via e-mail and your response is, “Thanks a lot for unloading your dirty work on me,” your boss might become upset at your obvious defiance. But if you replied with this: “Thanks a million for unloading your dirty work on me :-),” your boss would understand that you were jokingly accepting the assignment.

Emoticons enable you to add a little personality and life to your text messages. However, their use is not universal and should generally not be used in business correspondence. Some of the more commonly used emoticons include:

- :-) Smiling
- :@ Screaming
- :-0 or :-o Wow!
- :-p Tongue wagging
- ;-) Wink
- (: I’m left-handed
- :V Shout
- :-& Tongue-tied
- :r Tongue hanging out
- ;-() or ;-) Crying
- :-# My lips are sealed!
- :-* Oops!
- :-S I’m totally confused.
- 8-0 No way!
- :- Skeptical
- :-< Sad or frown
- ~~:-() I just got flamed!
- %:-0 Bug-eyed
- \ Befuddled
- :-D Laughing, big smile
- ):-> Devilish, devious
E-mail shorthand is used in newsgroups and other e-mail to represent commonly used phrases. Some common abbreviations are:

- BTW  By the way
- IMHO In my humble opinion
- IMO In my opinion
- IOW In other words
- JFYI Just for your information
- NBD No big deal
- NOYB None of your business
- TIA Thanks in advance
- PMFJI Pardon me for jumping in
- OIC Oh, I see . . .
- OTL Out to lunch
- OTOH On the other hand
- LOL Laughing out loud
- LMHO Laughing my head off
- ROFL Rolling on the floor laughing
- BFN Bye for now
- CYA See ya!
- FWIW For what it’s worth
- IAE In any event
- BBL Be back later
- BRB Be right back
- RS Real soon
- WYSIWYG What you see is what you get
- <g> Adding a grin

Because e-mail shorthand is most commonly used in newsgroups and chat rooms, you will be most successful when using these acronyms with others who are familiar with them.

**E-mail Marketing Tips**

Be prepared. You will receive a number of e-mails requesting information on your company, your products, your locations, and so on, from people who have seen your e-mail address on letterhead, ads, business cards, and sig files. Don’t wait for the first inquiry before you begin to
develop your company materials. Here are some tips. Following them will make you more prepared to respond.

**Include a Brochure and Personal Note**

Have an electronic brochure or corporate information available that you can easily access and send via e-mail. Try to send a personal note in your e-mail along with any material requested.

**Gather a Library of Responses**

Different people will ask a number of the same questions, and over time you should develop a library of responses to these frequently asked questions. When responding to an e-mail, ask yourself if you are likely to get the question again. If your answer is “yes,” then consider developing a document in your word processor called “Frequently Asked Questions,” or “FAQs.” In the future, when you get a question that you have answered before, simply cut and paste your response from your FAQs file into your e-mail message. Always make sure to appropriately edit and personalize your responses.

**Following Formalities with E-mail Netiquette**

When writing e-mails, remember these points:

- Be courteous. Remember your please and thank-yous.
- Reply promptly—within 24 hours.
- Be brief.
- Use lowercase characters. Capitals indicate SHOUTING!
- Use emoticons where appropriate.
- Check your grammar and spelling.
- Use attachments sparingly.
- Do not send unsolicited bulk e-mail.

Reply Promptly

People expect an answer the same day or the next day at the latest. E-mail communication is like voice mail. If you do not respond within 24 hours, you send a very clear message to your clients, potential clients, and colleagues: “Your communication is not important to me.” Respond within 24 hours, even if the message is only, “Sorry, I can’t get to this immediately. I’ll try to have a reply for you by the end of the week.” This might be a response you will want to save in a readily available file, from which you can copy and paste it into an e-mail message. A prompt reply, even if it says you can’t respond immediately, is better than a delayed full response. The people writing you for information will appreciate the fact that you felt their message was important enough to respond to immediately.

Internet Resources for Chapter 10

I have included a few resources for you to check out when using e-mail. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

A Beginner’s Guide to Effective E-mail
http://www.Webfoot.com/advice/e-mail.top.html
Help in writing the e-mail you need. Formats and why you need e-mail are all explained in detail.

E-mailAddresses.com
http://www.e-mailaddresses.com
A directory of numerous free e-mail services including POP accounts, e-mail forwarding, newsletters, and so on.
E-mail—The Mining Company
http://e-mail.miningco.com/internet/e-mail
Updated weekly, this site consists of articles and links to e-mail resources on many topics: beginning e-mail, finding people, free e-mail, greeting cards, privacy, and much more.

I Will Follow.com E-mail Tips
http://www.iwillfollow.com/e-mail.htm
This site offers advice to beginners on all aspects of using e-mail.

Smith Family Internet Marketing Support
“The Secrets of E-mail Marketing Success,” an article by Lesley Anne Lowe.

Windweaver
http://www.windweaver.com/emoticon.htm
Recommended emoticons for e-mail communication.
Autoresponders act much like fax-on-demand systems. With fax-on-demand systems you call from your fax machine, dial the specified code, and you’ll get back the requested document on your fax machine. The autoresponder works much the same way—you send an e-mail to an autoresponder e-mail address and you’ll get back the requested information via e-mail. In this chapter, you will learn:

- What autoresponders are
- Why you should use autoresponders
- What types of information to send via autoresponders
- Autoresponder features
- Tips on successful marketing through autoresponders.

**What Are Autoresponders?**

An autoresponder is a program located on a mail server that is set up to automatically send a preprogrammed reply to the e-mail address that sent
mail to it. The reply can be a single message or a series of preprogrammed messages. They are known by many names, such as infobots, responders, mailbots, autobots, automailers or e-mail-on-demand.

**Why Use Autoresponders?**

One of the major benefits of using an autoresponder is the immediate response—24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, providing immediate gratification for the recipient.

Autoresponders are a real time saver, eliminating the need for manual responses for many mundane and routine requests. They also enable you to track responses to various offers to assist you in your ongoing marketing efforts.

One big advantage with today’s autoresponders is the ability to schedule multiple messages at predetermined intervals. The first response can go immediately, with a second message timed to go two days after the first, a third message to go five days after the second, and so on. Market research shows that a prospect needs to be exposed to your message multiple times to become a motivated buyer.

Today’s autoresponders are getting even more sophisticated in terms of mail list administration. These programs gather the e-mail addresses of people requesting information, and store them in a database. The program adds new names to the database and eliminates e-mail addresses that no longer work. Today’s autoresponder programs also provide reports about site visitors requesting information. This technology is very cost effective when compared to manual responses by a human, not to mention the associated telephone and fax costs.

Personalization is a standard feature of today’s autoresponder programs. Autoresponders are used to send all kinds of information:

- Price lists
- Welcome letters
- Thank you letters
- Out-of-office advice
- Order confirmations
Sales letters

Catalogs

News releases

Brochures

Job lists

Spec sheets

Assembly instructions.

You can provide a copy of your newsletter so people can read a copy before subscribing, or anything else in which your target market might be interested.

Why use an autoresponder when you could just provide the information on your Web site? There are many reasons. With the autoresponder you have the interested party’s name and e-mail address; you don’t get that from a visitor to your site. The autoresponder also provides you with the opportunity to send multiple messages to your potential customer.

Types of Autoresponders

There are three different types of autoresponders:

- Free

- Web host

- Other autoresponder providers.

There are many free or minimal-fee autoresponders available that come with an ad on your responder page. Some Web hosting companies provide autoresponders in their Web hosting packages. There also are many autoresponder service providers that offer packages for a fee if you don’t want to have ads placed on your responder page.
The important thing is to get the autoresponder that has the features you are looking for.

**Autoresponder Features**

When you are looking for an autoresponder, you want to make sure it has all the features to enable you to make the most of this marketing activity. Today’s autoresponders keep getting better—new features are being added all the time. Some of the things you want to look for are discussed below.

**Personalization**

Today’s autoresponders capture the requester’s name as well as e-mail address, allowing personalized responses.

**Multiple Responses**

Studies have shown that a potential customer has to be exposed to your message multiple times before he or she is ready to buy. Many autoresponders allow multiple messages on a scheduled time line.

**Size of Message**

Some autoresponders have a limit on the size of the message that can be sent. Ensure that your autoresponder can handle any message you would want to send to prospective customers.

**Tracking**

You must have access to tracking reports that provide you with information to enable you to track the results of your marketing efforts. You need to be able to determine what is working and what is not.
**HTML Messaging**

Choose an autoresponder that can handle HTML and plain text e-mails. Studies have shown that HTML marketing e-mails get a higher click-through rate.

Autoresponders are constantly being enhanced. Stay current.

**Successful Marketing through Autoresponders**

The technology itself is only one piece of this marketing technique. The content of the messages sent out by the autoresponder is the determining factor in converting recipients of your message to customers. The following tips will help you produce effective messages:

- **Personalize.** Personalize your messages using the recipient’s name throughout the message and in the subject line.

- **Tone.** Selling is all about relationships. Give your messages a tone that builds relationships.

- **Focus on the reader’s needs, and how your product or service provides the solution.** Focus on the benefits.

- **Subject line.** Have a catchy subject line, but don’t use ad copy. Ad copy in a subject line is a sure way to get your message deleted before it is read.

- **Include a call to action.** It is amazing how often people do what they are told to do.

- **Use correct spelling, upper- and lowercase letters, grammar, and punctuation.** This correspondence is business correspondence and is a reflection of everything related to how you do business.

- **Get to the point quickly.** Online readers have little patience with verbose messages.

- **Write for scannability.** Have a maximum of six or seven lines per paragraph.
Internet Resources for Chapter 11

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding autoresponders. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

Autoresponder Marketing by iBoost Journal
http://www.iboost.com/promote/marketing/autoresponders
Some interesting articles on autoresponders and how they can assist you in your online marketing.

Care & Feeding of the Press
http://www.netpress.org/careandfeeding.html
Journalists’ manifesto for how PR people should work with the media.

GetResponse.com
http://www.getresponse.com
An autoresponder system that allows you to send multiple responses without unwanted advertising, and best of all it is free; also includes the ability to send HTML e-mails.

Responders.com
http://www.responders.com
This site offers free request-form processing, online form builder, and autoresponder e-mails. Allows for easy integration into your Web site, and provides a live demo.

Send Free—The Original Autoresponder Ad Exchange
http://www.sendfree.com
A free service that allows you to have autoresponders running from your Web site, but also allows you to advertise your business in the e-mail body of other targeted sites’ autoresponders, and vice versa.

SmartAutoResponder.com
http://smartautoresponder.com/index.htm
An autoresponder service that charges a fee of US$15.99 per month. Allows you to customize your autoresponder to your specifications.
Effective Promotional Use of Newsgroups

People participate in newsgroups by “posting” or e-mailing comments, questions, or answers to other participants’ questions, thus taking part in a conversation or thread. Using proper netiquette is important. To do this, read the FAQ files and rules, “lurk” first, and stay on topic. In this chapter, we cover:

- The benefits of using newsgroups in your marketing plan
- Newsgroup netiquette
- Reading the FAQ files, abiding by the rules, and lurking
- How to advertise if advertising is not allowed
- Developing your Usenet marketing strategy
- Identifying your target newsgroups
- Participating in this online community
- How to respond correctly to messages
• Cross-posting and spamming

• Using signature files.

**Newsgroups—What Are They?**

Every day, people from all over the globe enter a virtual community with others who are interested in the same topic. These people are brought together by their common interest in the topic of discussion. While they are in this virtual community, only that specific topic is discussed. There are many communities discussing different topics. You can visit and participate in as many of them as you wish. These virtual communities are called newsgroups.

Newsgroups are hierarchical and are arranged by subject. Each newsgroup is dedicated to a discussion of a particular topic, such as antique cars, home schooling, travel, artificial intelligence, or the latest hot band.

Visitors to these virtual communities can “post” messages. These messages might be questions or comments or responses to other participants. Everyone who visits the newsgroup has the opportunity to view these “postings.” Often, many visitors participate in these discussions, and every side of the issue is presented.

There are three types of newsgroup visitors:

• People asking questions or advice

• People providing answers or advice

• People who read the discussion without taking part.

**The Changing Face of Newsgroups**

Back in the early days, Usenet newsgroups started out as places where academics conducted discussions on research. They quickly expanded to include newsgroups on every topic imaginable, with participants hav-
ing wonderful conversations relevant to the topic. Usenet newsgroups had to be accessed using your newsgroup reader. Today newsgroups can be accessed through the Web.

Then commercialization saturated the Web, and today there are many newsgroups overrun with advertisements with very little topical discussion taking place. However, there are still many newsgroups that have vibrant discussions with loyal participants that provide a great opportunity for communicating with your target market.

Every visitor to a newsgroup made an effort to get there. He or she chose the specific newsgroup for a reason, usually an interest in the topic being discussed. If your business’s products or services are related to that topic, you have found a group of your target market (they have pre-qualified themselves) in one place interested in discussing what you have to offer.

The Benefits of Newsgroups

There are many ways online marketers can benefit from participating in newsgroups:

- Reaching prospective customers. You can immediately reach thousands of your targeted potential customers with a single message.

- Communicating with existing customers. You can provide your loyal customers with valuable information.

- Market research. You can use newsgroups to find out the latest trends, customer needs, what people are looking for, and what they are talking about. These newsgroups can be beehives of information where you can check out your competition and gather invaluable data on your market.

- Reputation building. By answering people’s questions and helping to solve their problems, you build your reputation as an expert in the field.

- Increased traffic. You can direct people to your commercial Web site if you do it in an informative way.
Thousands of Newsgroup Categories

Newsgroups are organized into different types of discussions or categories. Each of the major categories has lots of individual newsgroups in which you can participate. Major newsgroup categories include:

- **alt**—Discussions on alternative topics.
- **biz**—Discussions on business topics. You might find groups that allow advertising here.
- **comp**—Discussions on computer hardware- and software-related topics.
- **humanities**—Discussions on fine arts, literature, and philosophy topics.
- **misc**—Discussions of miscellaneous topics that don’t have their own categories such as employment, health, and other issues.
- **news**—Discussions on Usenet news and administration.
- **rec**—Discussions on recreation topics such as games, hobbies, and sports.
- **sci**—Discussions on science.
- **soc**—Discussions on social issues.
- **talk**—Making conversation.

Each of the major categories has a number of subgroups, and each of the subgroups has a number of sub-subgroups. For example, under the rec major group you can find a subgroup rec.sports. Here the discussion revolves around all kinds of sports. Under the subgroup rec.sports you can find sub-sub-groups and sub-sub-sub-groups, for example:

- rec.sports
- rec.sports.hockey
As you can see, the longer the name, the narrower is the discussion that is taking place.

**Target Appropriate Newsgroups**

With the large number of Usenet newsgroups that currently exist and additional groups being introduced every day, it is a formidable task to identify appropriate newsgroups for your company’s Internet marketing activities. First, you need to determine which newsgroups your prospective customers frequent.

Look for a close fit between a newsgroup and the product or service you are offering. For example, if your company sells software that aids genealogical work, then one fruitful newsgroup for your business might be soc.genealogy.methods. Try finding newsgroups that your target market would enjoy reading, or ask your clients or customers which newsgroups they participate in or find interesting.

There are many ways to find appropriate Usenet newsgroup listings. You can do a search using the newsgroup functions of the two leading browsers, Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer, and most newsreader programs have a search capability.

Search the newsgroups for keywords that relate to your target market, your product, or your service to identify possible newsgroups for your marketing effort. A good place to start is Google Groups (http://groups.google.com), or you can go to http://www.google.com and select “Groups” from the four tabs (Web, Images, Groups, or Directories). Here you can conduct a keyword search of the Usenet newsgroups by typing your keywords into the search box and clicking “Google Search.” The search results are displayed in chronological order, with the results at the top being the most recently used. You should choose keywords right for your target customer or client. These methods can identify a fairly large list of potential newsgroups to be considered for your marketing activities.

If your company specializes in providing exotic vacations to Mexico, search for keywords like *Mexico, vacation, travel, tropical, resorts, beaches,*
and so on, to find potential newsgroups for your marketing effort. A benefit of the Google site is that you can post to the newsgroups directly from the site. You don’t have to go through alternative software to do so.

**Read the FAQ Files and Abide by the Rules**

Read the FAQ files, *charter*, and rules about posting and advertising for each of your target newsgroups. It is very important that you abide by all the rules. If the FAQ files do not mention the group’s stance on commercial advertising and announcements, then go back to Google Groups. Conduct a search based on the group’s name and charter. This tells you where the newsgroup stands on commercial activity.

**Lurking for Potential Customers**

Once you have narrowed your potential newsgroup list, visit each one to determine whether its participants are, in fact, potential customers. Spend time *lurking*. Monitor the types of messages being posted. Is there likely to be an opportunity for you to contribute? Are the participants your target market? Research the newsgroup to ascertain if it might appeal to your customers. The name of the newsgroup might not reveal what the newsgroup is about, so take your time and make sure.

**Tips on Posting Messages**

After you have become familiar with the rules of your selected newsgroup, have spent some time lurking, and have decided that the newsgroup is one where your target market is participating, you can begin to post messages. Remember to abide by the rules! If the rules do not allow advertising, then do not blatantly post an ad. To take full advan-
tage of the newsgroup, you have to gain the trust of its members. With one wrong message, you could outrage all of the potential customers who participate in the newsgroup.

It is a good idea to run a test before you post a message to a newsgroup. Doing a test shows you how the posting works and prevents you from making a mistake when it comes to the real thing.

Becoming a respected member in a newsgroup is a way to promote yourself as well as your company. Provide valuable responses—the readers can tell when you are making a valuable contribution and when you are just advertising. In time you might forget that you began reading the newsgroup to promote your business. You will find yourself reading newsgroups in order to participate in stimulating discussions. You will be discussing anything and everything about the newsgroup subject. Only mention your Web site when you find an opportunity to bring your business knowledge into the conversation.

Newsgroups exist for specific purposes. They can be designed for discussions, news announcements, postings related to particular topics, and even buying and selling goods. They might have hundreds of messages sorted and available for access at any moment. Newsgroup participants will decide whether to open or pass up your posted message based on the words in the subject area. Make your subject short and catchy so that your message will be read. Try to put the most important words of the subject first. This is a critical part in posting a message to a newsgroup. Some people adjust the screen to see only the first few words in the subject area. When deciding on the text for the subject area, think about what keywords someone would use to search for information on the content of your message. The worst thing that you can do is post a message to a newsgroup with no subject at all. This will definitely receive no attention and is a waste of your time.

Start your message with a short description of how it relates to the group’s main topic. People are looking for answers to specific questions, so it is rude to jump into the conversation with a topic that doesn’t match the one in the subject line. You should attempt to get your message across right away. You should get to the point of your message in the first sentence. By doing so, you catch the readers’ attention and ensure that they read the entire message.

Message length should be short, no longer than 24 lines. Short paragraphs of six or seven lines work well. Write for scannability.
When responding to a message in a newsgroup, you have the option of privately responding to the individual who posted the message or responding through the newsgroup. Determine which is better under the given circumstances. If your message is of value to the entire group or promotes your company’s capabilities, then post the response to the newsgroup for all to see. If you think that your company has a solution for the individual and would like to provide details to the “target customer,” but feel that it would not benefit the other members of the group, then deliver a private response. Often you do both because once the answer to a question has been received, the original poster might not visit the newsgroup for awhile and you want to make sure he or she has the benefit of your posting. Whichever approach you take, make sure that you respond as quickly as possible so that the first message is still fresh in the mind of the recipient.

**Tips to Ensure That Your Messages Are Well Received**

Here are some basic rules to help you post well-received messages.

**Keep to the Newsgroup Topic**

Make sure you always stay on the newsgroup’s topic of discussion. People participate in specific newsgroups because of that subject and don’t appreciate off-topic postings.

**Stay on the Thread**

When responding to a message, use the Reply option. When you reply without changing the subject line, your message will appear immediately below the message you are responding to in the newsgroup. This is referred to as “staying on thread” and makes it easy for others to follow the discussion.

**Make a Contribution**

Informed, quality responses to people’s questions give you credibility with the group and reflect well upon you and your company. If you post
positive and useful information, visitors will return to the newsgroups and look for your posts.

**Don’t Post Commercials or Advertisements**

Advertising is not welcome in most newsgroups, and many charters specifically forbid the posting of ads. Read the FAQ files before posting a message. If the newsgroup does not allow commercial messages or ads, don’t post them.

**You Don’t Have to Have the Last Word**

Don’t post gratuitous responses in newsgroups. Never post a message with just a “Thanks” or “I like it” if you have nothing else to contribute. If you feel such a response is warranted or would like to discuss the issue privately, send a private e-mail to the person to convey your appreciation or opinion.

**Newsgroup Advertising Hints**

Newsgroups have been developed for different audiences and different topics. Some newsgroups are dedicated to posting advertisements. If advertising is appropriate for your company, the following newsgroup types might be included in your Internet marketing strategy. Most of the newsgroups that allow advertising are readily identifiable. The newsgroup name itself might include one of the following:

- biz
- classified
- for sale
- marketplace.

Again, read the FAQ files and lurk to determine if the newsgroup is appropriate for your target market before you post. Use a short, catchy subject line with keywords at the beginning—the subject will determine
whether your message warrants a read or a pass. Avoid ALL CAPITALS. This is equivalent to shouting on the Internet. Stay away from !!!!, ****, @@@@@, and other such symbols.

When you have found a newsgroup whose participants include your target market but the newsgroup does not allow advertising, don’t despair. When responding to queries or providing information that is of genuine interest to the newsgroup, you have the opportunity to attach your sig file. A sig file can be as effective as an ad if it is designed properly. Your message should offer valuable information pertinent to the discussion. (A thinly veiled excuse to get your sig file posted will not be appreciated.) If your information is relevant and of value to the participants of the newsgroup, the fact that the tag line in your sig file is an advertisement will not matter—in fact, it could add credibility to the information you have provided and enhance your company’s reputation. See Chapter 9 for discussion on signature files.

Cross-Posting and Spamming

Cross-posting is posting identical messages to a number of relevant newsgroups. Doing this is considered to be inappropriate because of the number of common users in associated newsgroups. Spamming is posting identical or nearly identical messages to irrelevant newsgroups without care or regard for the posting guidelines, the newsgroup topic, or the interests of the group. Cross-posting and spamming annoy the readers of the newsgroup. Doing these things reflects badly on you and your company and prevents you from achieving your online marketing objectives.

Earning Respect with Newsgroup Netiquette

Following are ten rules for netiquette. Incorporating them in your newsgroup posting will gain you respect by the other participants.

1. Don’t use CAPITALS. They are akin to shouting on the Internet.
2. Don’t post ads where they are not welcome.
3. Do provide valuable, on-topic information for the newsgroup.

4. Don’t be rude or sarcastic.

5. Don’t include the entire message you are replying to in your response. Only quote relevant sections of the original message.

6. Do a thorough review of your message before you post. Check your spelling and grammar. Check your subject; it should be short and catchy with the keywords first.

7. Do provide an appropriate sig file.

8. Don’t post messages that are too lengthy. Online communication tends to be one screen or less.

9. Don’t spam or cross-post.

10. Don’t post replies that contribute nothing to the discussion (e.g., “I agree” or “Thanks”).

**Internet Resources for Chapter 12**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding newsgroups. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Google—The Source for Internet Newsgroups!**

[http://groups.google.com](http://groups.google.com)

The Web site where you can read, search, participate in, and subscribe to more than 50,000 discussion forums, including Usenet newsgroups. Google has recently bought Deja.com, a resource for finding people, getting noticed, and getting answers to all sorts of questions. You can find discussion forums on any topic imaginable.
Internet FAQ Archive
http://www.faqs.org
Formerly at the University of Ohio, the Internet FAQ Archive is the place to look for Usenet newsgroup descriptions and Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) lists. They also have quite a bit of general information about Usenet as well.

MG’s House of News Knowledge
http://www.duke.edu/~mg/usenet
A great resource filled with information on every aspect of newsgroups, from how to post to how to create your own newsgroup.

Newsgroups
News.newusers.questions
News.announce.newusers
News.newusers
These provide information to new Usenet users on posting, finding appropriate newsgroups, netiquette, and other frequently asked questions new users are faced with.

Tile.net
http://www.tile.net
A service for finding newsgroups and mailing lists as well as their descriptions.

Worldnet User’s Service Desk
http://www.wurd.com/cl_news_faq.php
The Worldnet User’s Reference Desk (WURD) is dedicated to providing AT&T Worldnet members the very best information available about AT&T Worldnet Service and how to use third-party software.
Internet mailing lists are quick and easy ways to distribute information to a large number of people. There are thousands of publicly available online lists. You can also create your own Internet mailing lists to keep your clients and prospects informed of company events, product announcements, and press releases. In this chapter, we cover:

- How to identify useful publicly accessible mailing lists (discussion lists)
- Subscribing to the mailing list
- Writing messages that will be read
- Mailing list netiquette
- Creating your own mailing list.
Connecting with Your Target Audience

Discussion mailing lists are publicly accessible and are focused on a particular subject. Participating in a discussion list relevant to your line of business can help you attract new customers. Discussion lists are organized hierarchically by subject in a way similar to Usenet newsgroups. Likewise, the membership of each discussion mailing list varies. People subscribe to particular lists to participate in that list and to receive all of the postings that are sent to the group, generally because they have an interest in the topic. When you post a message to a mailing list, the message is sent out by e-mail to everyone who has subscribed to the list.

Discussion mailing lists offer an efficient way to distribute information to masses of people interested in a particular topic. The difference between discussion mailing lists and newsgroups is that while anyone on the Internet can visit newsgroups at any time and anonymously read any articles of interest, a discussion list delivers all messages posted directly to the subscribers’ e-mail. Only discussion list subscribers can receive these messages. To subscribe to a discussion list, you have to send a subscription message to the list administrator and request permission to join the mailing list.

Types of Publicly Accessible Mailing Lists

Publicly accessible mailing lists can be one of several types, each with varying degrees of control. Following is a discussion of the two major types of lists.

Moderated Discussion Lists

This type of list is maintained by a “gatekeeper” who filters out unwanted or inappropriate messages. If you try to post an advertisement where it is not permitted, your message will never make it out to the list of subscribers. Similarly, flames (i.e., publicly chastising another list member) are screened out. The gatekeeper also keeps the topic of discussion on track.
Unmoderated Discussion Lists

An unmoderated list is operated without any centralized control or censorship. Many publicly accessible lists are of this type. All messages are automatically forwarded to subscribers. Unmoderated lists tend to have more blatant advertisements and flame wars because there is no gatekeeper to guide the discussion. It is then the responsibility of the list members to police their own actions. If the list participants aren’t rigidly abiding by the rules and reprimanding others who stray, the list could end up being a landfill for spammers. When this happens, many members simply leave the list.

Targeting Appropriate Discussion Mailing Lists

There are four types of mailing lists:

- Publicly accessible mail lists
- Direct mail lists
- Private mail lists
- Bulk mail lists.

There are thousands of publicly accessible lists on-line and a number of sites that provide lists of these mailing lists. Several of the most popular and comprehensive are:

- Topica at http://lists.topica.com/ (Figure 13.1)
- Tile.net at http://tile.net/lists.

There are also companies on-line that specialize in providing targeted lists for a fee, much like purchasing a direct-mail list in the offline world. One company that provides this type of list is Post Master Direct Response at www.postmasterdirect.com. This company rents e-mail lists of people who have requested information on a particular topic. These direct-mail lists are discussed fully in Chapter 15.
Another option is to develop your own private mailing list. This concept is discussed in Chapter 14.

Still another option is to purchase bulk e-mail lists—not. We’ve all received e-mails that say, “Reach 5 million with our mailing list available for $29.95.” After all, one of the major benefits of the Internet is reaching large numbers of people quickly—right? Wrong! Do not use these! This is an unacceptable practice because it involves spam. Bulk e-mail lists are generally sold without the permission of the addressees, much like junk mailing lists. The recipients did not ask to be put on a mailing list and often do not appreciate being sent unsolicited e-mail. Another drawback is that usually these lists are not targeted. By using bulk e-mail lists, you run the risk of not reaching any of your target market. You also risk annoying those addressees who under other circumstances might have been interested in what you were trying to sell.

The best approach is to choose a list whose subscribers fit your target market as closely as possible. For example, if you are selling geographic information systems to municipalities, a shotgun approach is a
waste of both your time and your resources. By using bulk e-mail, you raise the ire of thousands of recipients, destroy your corporate image, and potentially damage your professional credibility. In this case, a targeted list, even though much smaller, would get a much higher-quality response rate. Less is sometimes better.

**Finding the Right Mailing List**

Whether you join a publicly accessible discussion mailing list or choose to purchase an opt-in e-mail list from one of the many online sources, you want to find a list whose members are your target market. You need to do your homework here, because there are thousands of lists to choose from.

There are various meta-indexes of publicly accessible mailing lists where you can search by title or by subject. Some of these sites provide detailed information on the lists, such as their content and the commands used to subscribe. We have provided information on a number of these in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

Once you have identified mail lists that have your target market as members, subscribe to those lists. To confirm that the list is right for your marketing purposes, lurk a while to monitor the discussion taking place. Then you can begin participating in the list by providing valuable content. If advertising is not allowed, abide by the rules. However, signature files are generally allowed, and you can always have that one-line tag line or mini-ad to advertise where advertising isn’t allowed.

**Subscribing to Your Target Mailing Lists**

Topica ([http://lists.topica.com/](http://lists.topica.com/)) and tile.net/lists ([http://tile.net/lists](http://tile.net/lists)) are great resources that provide a huge roster of accessible mailing lists plus specific instructions for joining those that interest you. After you subscribe, you generally receive an e-mail response with the rules, FAQs, and instructions on how to use the list.

For the most part, the rules for posting to newsgroups apply to mailing lists as well. Read the rules carefully and abide by them. A lurking period should be considered before you post a message. This
helps you observe what types of messages are posted and the commonly accepted practices for that particular group.

**List Digests**

When subscribing to a mail list, quite often you are given the option to subscribe or to subscribe to the digest. When you subscribe, you receive each message as it is posted. When you subscribe to the digest, the messages are accumulated and sent in one e-mail, usually overnight. The compilation of many individual messages is sent to each subscriber as one bulk message. Many digests contain a table of contents. The good thing about a digest is that you do not receive as many separate e-mail messages and your mailbox doesn’t become clogged.

**Composing Effective Messages**

As discussed in the previous chapter, your e-mails must be carefully prepared before you post to a mailing list. Remember to make your subject line relevant, keep your messages short and to the point, and always include your sig file. If you are unsure whether your posting is right for the group, you can send a test message to the moderator asking for advice.

Unlike newsgroups, the members of mailing lists receive all the messages directly into their mailbox every day. Some people prefer to receive the postings in digest form; that is, all the messages for that day are compiled into one e-mail sent to the recipient at the end of the day. At the beginning of the e-mail, the digest provides a listing of all the messages with the “From” and “Subject” identified, followed by the complete messages. Just as individuals who visit a newsgroup don’t read all the messages, subscribers to publicly accessible discussion lists do not read every posting. They decide which messages to review based on the subject line. Thus, the content of the “Subject” field is extremely important.

Never repeat the same or similar messages to a mailing list, as you might do in a newsgroup. Once members of a mailing list have seen your posted message, they don’t appreciate seeing it again, whereas a
newsgroup has different readers all the time and similar postings are acceptable if they are timely. The following tips on mailing list postings should assist you in becoming a respected member of their online community:

- Make sure that your messages are on the subject. List subscribers don’t want to receive announcements unrelated to their topic.

- You should be a regular contributor to your list before making any commercial announcement. If your mailing list does not allow advertising (most do not), use your sig file. Sig files are generally accepted. Be sure to make effective use of your tag line to get your mini-ad into discussion mailing lists where blatant advertising is not permitted.

- Track and record your responses when you use a new mailing list. You should have a call to action in your posting, encouraging the readers to visit a specific page on your site or to send e-mail to an address designated solely for this purpose. Only by tracking responses can you know with any certainty which mailing lists are successful and which are not. It’s amazing how well calls to action work. For some reason, people tend to do what they’re told.

- Set reasonable and achievable goals. As a benchmark, in most e-mail marketing campaigns, a 1 to 3 percent response rate is considered a good response. However, if your mailing list is well targeted and you are offering something of interest or value to a particular group, your response rates should be significantly higher.

**Building Your Own Private Mailing Lists**

You might want to build your own private mailing list. Generating your own lists is often beneficial because of their many marketing uses. They can be used to maintain dialogue with existing customers regarding updates, support, specials, and so on. They can also be used to communicate with current and prospective customers through distribution of
corporate newsletters, price lists, new catalogues, product updates, new product announcements, and upcoming events. A full discussion of private mail lists is provided in Chapter 14.

Starting Your Own Publicly Accessible Mailing List

You can create your own publicly accessible Internet mailing list. This is something you should carefully consider before you make your final decision. It takes lots of time and effort to do this right, so be sure you’re ready and that it would bring sufficient return on your investment. First you must give it a name that reflects the desired discussion and is enticing for your target market. You must draft an FAQ file or charter containing information on what the list is all about. You must develop guidelines for participation.

You should create a Web page for your list to provide information about the list as well as its charter and guidelines. You should provide an opportunity to subscribe from the Web site as well. This adds credibility to your mailing list.

Once the list is up and running, advertise it so that people actually subscribe. You can promote your list by participating in newsgroups that relate to your mail list topic. Remember not to post blatant ads where advertising is not allowed. Contribute to the newsgroup with your postings and use a tag line in your signature file to promote your mail list. You can also trade e-mail sponsorships with other mailing lists for promotion purposes.

There are a number of places to announce your list. Get your mail list linked from the many lists of lists on the Internet. We provide some of these in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter. Make your list worth reading by ensuring that you and others have valuable information on the topic to share. You should make sure you include an opportunity for your subscribers to spread the word or to recommend your mail list to others. You can do this in your mail list messages and also through the companion Web page. In the newsletter or announcement mail lists where messages go only one way, it is easy to encourage your subscribers to send a copy to a friend who they think might be interested. If you encourage viral marketing in this way, you want to make sure you have included the how-to-subscribe information in the messages as well. When encouraging viral marketing through the
companion Web page, make sure you include a call to action. It’s amazing how well this works!

**Internet Resources for Chapter 13**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding publicly accessible mailing lists. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**AOL, Prodigy, and CompuServe**
All have their own areas where you can search for mailing lists.

**Campaign E-mail Marketing Software**
http://www.arialsoftware.com
This is e-mail marketing software used to conduct legitimate e-mail marketing campaigns. Campaign can import your contact database information and send personalized e-mail messages to all of your contacts.

**HTMARCOM**
A mailing list that discusses high-tech marketing. To subscribe, send the message “subscribe htmarcom your name” to the e-mail address listserv@usa.net.

**Internet Marketing Mailing List**
http://www.o-a.com
The Online Advertising Discussion List focuses on professional discussion of online advertising strategies, results, studies, tools, and media coverage. The list also welcomes discussion on the related topics of online promotion and public relations. The list encourages sharing of practical expertise and experiences among those who buy, sell, research, and develop tools for online advertising, as well as those providing online public relations and publicity services. The list also serves as a resource to members of the press who are writing about the subject of online advertising and promotion.
L-Soft’s CataList
CataList, the catalog of listserv lists! From this page, you can browse any of the 56,423 public listserv lists on the Internet, search for mailing lists of interest, and get information about listserv host sites. This information is generated automatically from listserv’s lists database and is always up to date.

List-Etiquette’s Guide to E-mail List Guidelines, Rules and Behavior
http://www.arialsoftware.com
Helpful tips for publishers, subscribers, moderators, and discussion list members regarding good mailing list netiquette.

Topica
http://lists.topica.com
A very big directory of mailing lists and newsletters organized by subject categories. Topica provides details on how to subscribe to each of the mailing lists in its database and provides information on content as well.
Private mailing lists enable you to create one-way communication to your target market and are a tremendous vehicle for building relationships and a sense of community. Generating your own mailing lists is highly recommended because a targeted opt-in list has many marketing uses. The list can be used to maintain dialogue with customers and potential customers regarding updates, support, specials, and so on. It can also be used to distribute corporate newsletters, price lists, new catalogues, product updates, new product announcements, and upcoming events. In this chapter, we cover:

- Why have your own mailing list?
- The issue of privacy
- Managing your mail list
- Building your mail list
- Promoting your mail list
- Tips to stay under the spam radars
- Recent legislation.
Why Have Your Own Mailing List?

There are numerous reasons to own and use your own mail list. They include some of the same reasons that make it imperative to join someone else’s list. Running a private mailing list can be beneficial in many ways, including:

- Permission-based marketing
- Establishing yourself or your business as an expert in your field
- Networking
- Conserving contacts
- Building repeat traffic to your Web site (as discussed in Chapter 3)
- Branding
- Promotion of your business’s products and services
- Potential source of revenue.

Permission-Based Marketing

Permission and privacy are critical to the success of any e-mail marketing campaign. Although unsolicited direct “snail mail” might be generally accepted or at least tolerated by many consumers, the rules are completely different on-line. Unsolicited e-mail (known as spam) runs the risk of damaging your company’s reputation, not to mention the very real possibilities of flames, public blacklisting, hack attacks, or having your Internet services revoked. For serious spammers, recent legislation adds the possibility of prison. Online consumers are quick to let you know when you have crossed the line, and unsolicited e-mail definitely crosses the line. Because of this, online marketers are using many techniques to get their customers, potential customers, and Web site visitors to give them “permission” to send e-mail on a regular basis.

Permission marketing is really a win-win situation. Recipients receive information that they asked to receive, and the marketer is com-
communicating with an audience that has expressed interest in what is being marketed. Online marketers claim that permission e-mail marketing is one of the best ways to improve customer retention and boost sales. Permission e-mail marketing generally yields response rates ten times that of banner advertising.

So how do you get this coveted permission? Generally you have to provide something of value and of interest to your target market. There are many opportunities on your Web site to ask for permission. The more repeat-traffic generators on your site, the more opportunities you can provide for visitors to give you the permission. (See Chapter 3 for repeat-traffic generators.) You should leverage repeat-traffic generators with permission marketing that “sells the sizzle” and accelerate responses with a call to action. On my Web site I have a call to action that says “Sign Up Now” for Susan’s biweekly newsletter filled with Tips, Tools, Techniques, and Resources to assist you in achieving your Internet Marketing goals. Here are some typical examples:

- “We change our coupons every week! Click here to join our mail list to be notified as soon as we update.”

- “Click here to join our mail list and receive our biweekly Internet marketing tips, tools, techniques, and resources newsletter.”

- “We have new specials on a regular basis. Click here to be notified by e-mail when we post our new specials.”

- “We have a new contest every three weeks. Keep checking back or Click here if you’d like to be notified by e-mail every time we begin a new contest.”

- “We constantly update our Calendar of Events. Keep checking back or Click here if you’d like to be notified by e-mail every time we update.”

- “Join our e-club to receive our member-only specials, our great newsletter and advance notice of upcoming events!”

You get the picture. Almost every page on your Web site provides an opportunity for you to offer permission marketing. Of course, when site visitors click, they are taken to a screen where they add themselves to your mail list. Your mail list program should keep track of the ele-
Establishing Your Private Mailing List

ment the visitor gave you permission to send. Your mail list should be integrated with the Web site so when someone gives you permission his or her name is automatically added to your database.

Permission marketing enjoys its success because it is personal, relevant, and anticipated. Your messages should be personalized, enhancing the one-to-one relationship marketing element.

Privacy is a very big issue when a Web site visitor is deciding whether to give you an e-mail address or not. It is very important to assure your visitors that you will not pass on their e-mail address to others or use it for anything but the purpose intended. Your privacy policy should clearly be evident on your Web site. The privacy policy can read like a legal document or be short and to the point.

Benefits of Private Mail Lists

- **Establish Yourself as an Expert.** By operating your own private industry-specific mailing list and offering your advice to members of your list, you can establish yourself as an expert in your field. As a result, you can quickly earn the respect and admiration of your peers and develop new business contacts and clients.

- **Networking.** Having your own private list permits you to network closely with others in your industry and with current and potential clients. Very often, new business relationships and opportunities develop when people with similar interests are brought together. Use your mailing list to create these sorts of relationships. It could be that you find new business partners, establish new clients, or start another business venture.

- **Conserving Contacts.** You develop many great contacts every day in business. Often businesses develop a relationship with a client firm, complete a project with it, and then lose contact as time goes on. Starting your own private mailing list enables you to stay in constant contact with these individuals. This helps you to maintain these relationships in the long term, and ultimately results in more business and a stronger reputation for your business.

- **Branding.** Once you develop your own private mailing lists and generate a loyal list of subscribers, people relate the value of
your list to your company’s products or services. Mailing lists are an effective way to brand your business’s products and services on-line. If you send messages to your subscribers on a regular basis, they will be exposed again and again to your corporate ID and products and services.

- **Promotion of Your Business’s Products and Service.** It is important to remember that people are subscribing to your mail list to receive valuable information that helps them in some way. If your mail list messages consist solely of blatant advertising, the retention rate of your subscribers will drop dramatically. However, to take advantage of your mailing list’s potential as a branding tool, you should always include a call to action that encourages a subscriber to click through to your Web site and learn more about your products and services. This is a great way to generate exposure for your products and services.

- **Potential Source of Revenue.** Once your list becomes established and has many subscribers, you might be able to sell advertising to people interested in marketing to your list members. Needless to say, a mailing list becomes an excellent revenue source as its credibility and membership numbers expand. In the end, the time and effort you exert nurturing your list to prominence can pay for itself and more. If you are already a member of a publicly accessible mailing list, take note of the number of advertisements that appear in each posting you receive from the list. Administer your own private mailing list and earn advertising revenue for yourself. However, be ever mindful of the number and type of ads you have in your mail list. The ads should not detract from your message or your credibility.

- **The Issue of Privacy.** Privacy is a growing concern among many online users. You can boost your mailing list’s sign-up rate by guaranteeing that subscribers’ e-mail addresses are kept confidential and not sold to anyone else. If you cannot assure them that your company will use their e-mail address solely for your correspondence with them, they will not feel comfortable giving their e-mail address to you. Provide people with your privacy policy statement. Make them feel comfortable about divulging their
e-mail address to your business. To do this, you should place a link to your business’s privacy policy in a prominent location on your Web site, especially on your mail list sign-up page.

You should never add someone’s name to your mailing list without his or her permission. People really resent receiving unsolicited mail, even if you give them the option to unsubscribe.

Where We Need To Be

There are only two ways to do more business on-line:

- Have more people to receive your offer.
- Improve your conversion rate of Web site visitors to Web site customers.

There are only a few ways to have more people to get your offer:

- Increase the number of visitors to your Web site.
- Increase the number of people whom you reach with your online marketing in newsgroups, public mail lists, affiliate marketing or any of the 101 ways in this book.
- Increase the number of people in your mail list who have given you permission to send them e-mail on an ongoing basis.

Ideally, where we’d like to be in terms of mail list marketing is:

- Have the right mail list technology.
- Grow your mail list through permission-based marketing as big as you can as fast as you can.
- Provide consistently valuable content to your list on an ongoing basis.
• Learn as much as you can about everyone in your list, building a profile on each person, so that you can send more targeted communication.

The Right Mail List Technology

There are several ways that you can manage your mail list:

• Use your e-mail program (not recommended)

• Use mail list software

• Outsource your mail list management.

Using Your E-mail Program

Although managing your mail list through your e-mail program might look like a great option in that it doesn’t cost you anything and is run from your desktop, giving you ultimate control, there are limitations. Your e-mail program doesn’t easily afford you the opportunity to segment your mail list—those who asked to receive your newsletter versus those who asked to receive notification when you update your What’s New section, for example. Your e-mail program doesn’t generally provide the technology to quickly and easily personalize your communication—that is, insert the recipient’s first name in designated areas within the e-mail. E-mail programs do not provide much in the way of tracking information, either. It would be nice to be able to track such things as how many people opened your e-mail, how many sent a copy to a friend, how many clicked through and visited your Web site. The tracking technology is generally available only through mail list software or from the third party that manages your mail list marketing if you choose to outsource this activity.

Another drawback is the administrative headache of manually managing all the “Subscribes,” “Unsubscribes,” and “Changes of e-mail Address,” particularly when you have multiple sign-up opportunities on your Web site—for example, someone wants to unsubscribe from your e-spe-
cials but still wants to receive your newsletter and coupons. The time really has come when you need to invest in mail list software or outsource if you want to take this element of online marketing seriously.

**Using Mail List Software**

There are numerous mail list management software programs available to help you organize your list distribution. This software enables you to easily add or remove subscribers. Mail list management software enables you to draft and send properly formatted messages directly from within the software. Mail list software generally allows you to personalize your e-mails quickly and easily. Most of these programs can be integrated with your Web site so that people can add themselves to your list right from the site. You can also use this software to set up notification mechanisms to reply to subscribers confirming that they have been added to the list. This makes running your mail list less time-consuming, as the software does most of the work for you.

Using your own mail list software requires an initial investment to purchase the program or an ongoing cost if you use an Application Service Provider (ASP)—a company that develops the mail list software and provides it to you as a monthly or annual service rather than as a product. The major advantage to this model is that as new bells and whistles are introduced they are immediately available to all users of the software.

The cost to purchase software can range from an entry-level program at $99 to a robust, full-featured program at $2,500. The ASP model could cost you from $30 a month to several thousand if you use an application that charges you per e-mail sent and you have a very large database.

Some of these programs run from your desktop; others have to be run from your server or through your Internet service provider. Many of the ASP model programs are run from the ASP’s server. Most of these programs are sophisticated enough to allow you to segment the e-mail addresses in your database so you know who has asked to receive what from your Web site.

Most of these programs today have the personalization capability to allow you to insert a recipient’s first name throughout the correspondence and in the subject line of the message as well. For this
to work, you have to capture the first names for each e-mail address in your database. Keep this in mind when asking people if they’d like to give you permission to send them e-mail for whatever reason—in addition to their e-mail address, have a mandatory field for their first name.

More and more of these programs are incorporating tracking features to let you know what’s working and what’s not. From an administrative perspective, many of these programs do a great job of adding new “Subscribes,” deleting “Unsubscribes,” and managing undeliverable addresses. This feature alone is worth its weight in gold.

Features to look for in mail list software include:

- **Personalization capability**—You want to be able to personalize each e-mail by inserting the recipient’s first name in the subject line, salutation and throughout the body of your message.

- **HTML capability**—You want to be able to send HTML e-mail (e-mail that looks like a Web page rather than text), which gets much higher readership than text e-mail.

- **Message editor**—You want to be able to bring up a past e-mail, edit it and re-send to a group.

- **Previews**—You want to be able to preview your message before you send it to make sure the formatting is correct, the personalization is working and that the message looks great before you send it.

- **Spam checker**—The spam checker is a valuable tool to ensure your message has the best chance of being received and not being rejected as spam. You want to be able to run your message through the spam checker to see how you score before you send any message. Today if you score 5.0 or higher in the spam checker you will want to edit your message to reduce your score before you send.

- **Multi-threaded sending**—This feature is important for large lists. It divides a list and sends multiple messages at one time through different streams.
Filtering—This feature allows you to send specific messages to parts of your list. You could send a message only to those individuals in a specific state by filtering on the name of the state. You could send a message only to those interested in golf if you have that information in a field in your database.

Scheduling—This allows you to pre-arrange to send your e-mail at a specific future time and date. Great if you want to set up all of your “Tips of the Week” in advance or if you are going to be traveling when you want you newsletter to be sent out.

Autoresponders—Some mail list software applications have autoresponders built in. See Chapter 11 for details on their uses.

Web site integration—You want your mail list software to work with your Web site so when someone subscribes from your site their contact information is automatically included in your mail list software. If someone wants to unsubscribe or change their contact information they can take care of it through your site or through the e-mails they have received from you. This really cuts down on the administration you have to deal with.

Reporting and tracking—Some mail list software provides reports on messages sent (audience selected, date sent, clicks, total sent, number of bounces), subscriber activity (subscribes, unsubscribes, e-mails opened), link tracking, and bounce activity (number of undeliverables, hard bounces, soft bounces).

Outsourcing Your Mail List

A third option is to outsource your mail list management to a third party. There are companies that specialize in this service with great depth of experience. One such company that we have had the pleasure to work with is Inbox360.com (http://www.inbox360.com).

When you outsource this activity, of course you have a monthly service fee. The software is run from the outsource company’s server or their ISP’s server.
Virtually all of the mail list service providers have the latest software, allowing you to personalize your messages, segment your lists, and get great tracking reports. Generally, administrative issues like adding the “Subscribes,” deleting “Unsubscribes,” and managing the undeliverables are handled by the outsource company.

On the down side, you might lose some control—over content, over your customer, and over timing of your message release. It is imperative to have a clearly laid-out contract with the outsource company, addressing:

- Ownership of e-mail addresses
- Use of e-mail addresses
- Timing of correspondence
- Final approval of content
- Responsibility and timelines for replies to subscribers.

It is important that you retain ownership of all e-mail addresses and that the contract clearly states that all subscribers’ names and e-mail addresses are the property of your company. Also include in the contract that you are provided the current list in digital format every month. This way, if you decide to change service providers, your list goes with you. It takes a lot of effort to build your list, and it is a very valuable asset. Make sure you protect it.

Make sure that your contract clearly states that your e-mail addresses are not to be used by anyone else or provided to anyone else for any purpose whatsoever. People on your list have given you their e-mail addresses in confidence. They trust that you will not abuse the relationship. Make sure it is in your power to live up to that expectation.

Make sure that you have final control over the timing of your communication. It is important that your messages be delivered when you want them delivered. Timing is everything. We discuss timing later in this chapter.

Make sure that your contract has a clause that permits you to approve the final content going out to your list. You want to see and approve everything. You want to make sure the formatting is the way you want it; you
want to be sure the personalization is working as it should; and you want to make sure there is no problem with graphics or word wrap.

You want to have a clear understanding with the outsource company regarding replies from messages going out to your list. Often the “From” field, although it looks like it is coming from you, is actually an address that resides with the outsource company. Discuss and agree on what happens when a recipient replies to your communication. Where does it go? When does it go? To receive a batch of replies three weeks after your communication went out is not acceptable.

There are certain benefits to outsourcing this activity to a third party that specializes in mail list marketing. This is their core responsibility. Often the outsource company has been involved in many campaigns—gaining expertise in what works and what doesn’t. Often they can help you tweak your content or format to help achieve your objectives. Also, outsourcing this activity to a competent third party frees up your time and allows you to focus on other priorities.

**Building Your Database or Mail List**

Once you are committed to private mail list marketing, you want to focus on building your database of e-mail addresses. The more people you can reach in your target market with your message, the better.

There are many ways to grow your list:

- Import from your existing database. You probably already have a customer or prospective customer list that you can import into your mail list. You should send a one-time message asking them if they’d like to be on your list or join your e-club. The best way to handle this is with an opt-out message. Tell them what they’ll be receiving and how often, and stress the benefits. Tell them that if they’d like to receive it they don’t have to do anything—they’re already included. Provide instructions for them to unsubscribe if for some reason they don’t want to be included.

- Use permission marketing techniques to ask if site visitors would like to be included in your list to receive your newsletter, your e-specials, your coupons, or anything else you want to use to
entice them to join your list. See Chapter 5 for more information on permission marketing.

- Collect names and e-mail addresses at your point of contact—registration desk at a hotel, checkout counter in a retail environment, member renewal or registration forms for membership associations or organizations. Ask permission to add them to your e-club—remember to “sell the sizzle.”

- Have employee contests and reward the employee who collects the most sign-ups for your e-club.

- Have posters in your bricks-and-mortar location promoting your e-club and letting people know how to join. Think about providing an incentive: Join our e-club and get a 10 percent off coupon for your next purchase or a free gift.

- Promote your e-club in all your direct mail pieces and ads.

- Use direct e-mail rental lists to ask for sign-ups.

- Use brokers to run campaigns on complementary sites to get targeted sign-ups.

- Promote your e-club in your signature file.

- Encourage viral marketing via existing list members: “Send a copy to a friend” works for a number of repeat-traffic generators such as coupons, newsletters, e-specials, contest information, special offers, and promotions. Make sure that every viral marketing communication includes sign-up information so recipients can add their names and e-mail addresses to your list as well: “If you’ve received a copy of this newsletter… or coupon… or e-special from a friend and would like to be included in our list to receive your own in the future, Click here.” The link should take them to a sign-up page on your Web site or open a new message in their e-mail program with “Subscribe” in the subject line and details of what exactly they would like to subscribe to in the body of the e-mail message.
• If you use tele-sales, add an element that promotes your mail list and asks if the person would like to join.

**Promoting Your Private Mail List**

Promote your private mail list wherever you can reach your target market: on your site, on-line through various online marketing techniques, and off-line. You will:

• Encourage your Web site visitors to join your list by making sure you have “Join our mail list—click here” calls to action throughout your site. You might enhance this with an incentive “Join our mail list to receive our biweekly tips, tools, and techniques and to be included in our drawing for a Palm Pilot—Click here.”

• Include a viral marketing element as previously described to encourage your subscribers to recommend your mail list to others.

• Publicize your mailing list in postings to other mailing lists and newsgroups if it is appropriate. There is a moderated mailing list devoted to helping new list owners promote their list. To subscribe, send a message containing the line “Subscribe NEW-LIST firstname lastname” to listserv@vm1.nodak.edu.

• Invite your friends, colleagues, current clients, and potential clients to join your list.

• Remember to mention your mailing list in your e-mail signature file. This is an easy way to promote the list.

• If you are looking for a large distribution list, you might even register your mailing list with Topica (http://www.lists.topica.com), or other public mail lists (see Chapter 13 on Public Mail Lists).
Your Communication with Your Mail List

To be successful with private mail list marketing, you have to have a great targeted list and you have to know how to communicate effectively with your subscribers. How often should they receive your messages? When do you start to become an irritant? What time and day are your recipients going to be most receptive? How should your communication be formatted? Should it be text or HTML? These all are important questions to be answered if you want to improve the response.

How often should you communicate? It depends on what you’re sending and what they asked to receive. Newsletters should generally be sent out every couple of weeks. Special promotions, coupons, and e-specials generally will be sent out weekly at a consistent time. What’s-new updates would generally be sent monthly unless you’ve got something “hot.” Tips of the day should be sent…daily. Tips of the week should be sent…weekly.

When should your communication be delivered? There have been many studies on this topic, and consensus has it:

- Never send your message late in the day or first thing in the morning. If you do, your e-mail is included in that large group that is in the recipient’s inbox first thing in the morning. You know what happens to all that e-mail because you do it yourself—the first thing you do is see how much you can delete—starting with anything that looks remotely like an ad or promotion.

- Not after 2 p.m. on Friday or afternoon on Friday in the summer months. Being buried in that huge pile awaiting a recipient on Monday morning is the kiss of death for your e-mail.

- Lunch hour is best for business-to-business messages. Generally, people clean out their e-mail first thing in the morning and again before they go to lunch. After their lunch break they are a little more relaxed and the first thing they do is check their e-mail. This is the best chance for your e-mail to get noticed.

When it comes to the formatting of your correspondence, if you communicate in a newsletter, coupons, e-specials, or this type of marketing content, an HTML message has a better chance of grabbing the
viewer’s attention. If your message is meant to look like a personal one-on-one message, then text-based is better. Your communications should be personalized using the recipient’s first name appropriately throughout the correspondence and in the subject field.

Your content should always be valuable, fresh, relevant, and succinct. One bad message could result in many “Unsubscribes.”

Each paragraph should be written so it can be easily scanned, containing no more than six or seven lines. Include calls to action. Always encourage viral marketing—“Send a copy to a friend”—and provide instructions for the friend to subscribe to be included in your list.

Use a personal name in the “From” field. You want to build a relationship!

Take time with your subject field:

- Avoid ad copy
- Avoid gimmicky slogans
- Build business credibility
- Use action words
- Be positive
- Personalize.

**Stay Under the Spam Radar**

These days anywhere between 5 and 20 percent of legitimate, permission-based e-mail is filtered out by the spam detectors and never reaches the intended recipients. Always run your marketing messages through a spam checker before sending out. The spam checkers will give you a spam rating score and tell you how you received that score. Today if your score is 5.0 or higher it will be deemed to be spam by most of the spam filters. If your message scores too high you should edit your message to eliminate or change the items that gave you the score. Then you should run your new message through the spam checker to make sure you have an acceptable score before sending your message out.
Many ASP mail list software programs have an integrated spam checker. If yours does not there are a number of free spam checkers online and others that charge a fee.

Some of the e-mail elements that add points to your spam rating include:

- Using software and listservers that are commonly used by spammers. The header identifies the software that you are using.

- Spam words in the subject line. Things such as:
  - FREE in CAPS
  - GUARANTEED
  - Subject talks about saving
  - Starts with Hello
  - $

- Hyperlinks—Using links without the http:// prefix or using IP numbers instead of domain names.

- Color discrimination
  - Color tags not formatted correctly
  - Using colors not in the 217 Web-safe colors
  - Hidden letters (same color as background)

- Background other than white

- HTML issues
  - HTML message has more than 50 percent HTML tags
  - JavaScript within the message
– HTML forms within your e-mail

– HTML comments that obfuscate text

• Using excess capital letters.

• Using large fonts and characters. Fonts larger than +2 or 3 can cause you to have points added to your score. Use H1, H2, H3 instead.

• Using spam words or phrases in the body of your message adds points to your score. There are way too many of these to list. Your spam checker lets you know what words are adding points. The following are the type of words and phrases that they are looking for:
  – Great offer
  – Risk free
  – You have been selected
  – Guarantee
  – Call now
  – Amazing
  – Act now
  – Millions
  – Order now

• Carefully word your Unsubscribe. Claims that you can be removed, claims that you listen to removal lists and list removal information all add points to your score. Use text like “Use this link to unsubscribe.”

• If your communication is a newsletter, say so. The spam rating also allows points to be deducted from your score for certain
elements. When the subject contains a newsletter header, or contains a newsletter frequency, month name or date, you might be spared some unwanted points.

- Use a signature file. This is another element that can cause points to be deducted from your score. Spammers never include their signature file.

- Don’t mention spam compliance—only spammers do this.

- Keep your message size over 20k. Spammers’ messages are very small in file size because they often send millions in a mailing.

Always make sure you update your list and do your housekeeping regularly. Remove any addresses that have bounced back to you as undeliverable if your software doesn’t automatically do this for you. Remove and “spam flag” addresses in your database—those that begin with spam@, abuse@, postmaster@, or nospam@.

Set up test accounts for yourself at the popular e-mail hosts to ensure that your mail is getting through. Set up test accounts at MSN, Hotmail, Yahoo, AOL and some of the popular ISPs.

Always monitor the Blacklists to make sure you are not included. A number of Blacklists are included in the Resources section at the end of this chapter.

**Recent Legislation**

It is essential to make sure you are in compliance with legislation regarding anti-spam (in the U.S.), privacy (in Canada) and other rules and regulations related to commercial e-mail throughout the world.

The U.S. legislation, which took effect January 1, 2004, is called the Controlling the Assault of Non-Solicited Pornography and Marketing Act (CAN-SPAM). This legislation provides regulations for commercial e-mail. The full details can be found at [http://www.spamlaws.com/federal/108s877.html](http://www.spamlaws.com/federal/108s877.html).

The main rules for CAN-SPAM include:
• You must provide accurate header information. The sender has to identify him/her/itself accurately.

• You must provide an accurate Subject line for commercial e-mails.

• You must provide a functioning return e-mail address that is clearly and conspicuously displayed and permits a recipient to decline future commercial e-mails (opt-out) from that sender.

• Commercial e-mail must include the (snail mail) postal address of the sender.

• Commercial e-mail must include clear and concise identification that the content of the e-mail is an advertisement or solicitation.

• If a person opts out of your mailings you must remove that individual from your database within 10 days and you are not allowed to transfer, sell, or give that individual’s contact information to anyone else after they have asked to be removed.

The Canadian legislation is the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act, commonly referred to as PIPEDA. The Canadian legislation establishes rules to govern the collection, use and disclosure of personal information. It recognizes the “right of privacy” of individuals with respect to their personal information. Full details on the Canadian legislation can be found at http://www.privcom.gc.ca/legislation/02_06_01_01_e.asp.

The main rules for PIPEDA include:

• Accountability—An organization is responsible for personal information under its control and shall designate an individual or individuals who are accountable for the organization’s compliance with the following principles.

• Identifying purposes—The purposes for which personal information is collected shall be identified by the organization at or before the time the information is collected.
• Consent—The knowledge and consent of the individual are required for the collection, use, or disclosure of personal information, except where inappropriate.

• Limiting collection—The collection of personal information shall be limited to that which is necessary for the purposes identified by the organization. Information shall be collected by fair and lawful means.

• Limiting use, disclosure and retention—Personal information shall not be used or disclosed for purposes other than those for which it was collected, except with the consent of the individual or as required by law. Personal information shall be retained only as long as necessary for the fulfillment of those purposes.

• Accuracy—Personal information shall be as accurate, complete and up-to-date as is necessary for the purpose for which it is used.

• Safeguards—Personal information shall be protected by security safeguards appropriate to the sensitivity of the information.

• Openness—An organization shall make readily available to individuals specific information about its policies and practices relating to the management of personal information.

• Individual access—Upon request, an individual shall be informed of the existence, use, and disclosure of his or her personal information, and shall be given access to that information. An individual shall be able to challenge the accuracy and completeness of the information and have it amended as appropriate.

• Challenging compliance—An individual shall be able to address a challenge concerning compliance with the above principles to the designate individual or individuals accountable for the organization’s compliance.

**Measure, Measure, Measure**

You want to improve your effectiveness as you learn from experience. This can only happen if you keep track of past performance. You want
to track such things as delivery rate, how many undeliverables, how many unsubscribes, click-through rates, gross response, and net response. You want to compare response rates within different timings, different types of creativity, different formats, different segments of your list, and different target markets. Once you analyze what is working and what is not, you’ll be in a better position to improve your conversion ratios.

**Where to Go from Here**

In this chapter, we discussed reasons you might want to have your own mailing list, how you can set up your list, and other issues you might face once your list goes live. Private mailing lists are prime marketing vehicles if you manage them correctly and actively promote them. You can reach out to your target market with a mailing list. This technique of permission, or opt-in, e-mail marketing is the key to your success. If you have something to offer to people in your industry and it is feasible for you to establish and administer a mailing list, give the idea strong consideration.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 14**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding private mail lists. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Mail List Software**

**Professional Cart Solutions**

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

This is the mail list software I use for my newsletter. It is a combination shopping cart and mail list software solution. Great in terms of functionality, easy to use and fantastic support. The program has built in autoresponders, integrates easily with your Web site, automatically handles the administrative issues of subscribes and unsubscribes, pro-
vides great reports, and allows you to build the profile of everyone in your database.

**nTarget**

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

nTarget’s permission e-mail marketing software allows you to manage your own marketing program with only a Web browser. nTarget’s permission e-mail marketing software is so intuitive and easy to use that even beginners can create an account, enter contacts, and distribute an e-mail promotion within minutes.

**Topica Email Publisher**

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

Topica’s Marketing Automation Software allows you to build and manage your customer database, create and send targeted e-mail campaigns, and track and optimize your campaign results.

**Lyris**

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

Lyris is a powerful e-mail list server that automatically delivers newsletters, announcements, and discussion lists.

**SparkList**

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

Sparklist is an outsourcing service for e-mail announcement and discussion lists. With Sparklist, you don’t need special equipment or an IT staff—all you need is a Web browser connected to the Internet, and you’re ready to mail!

**EmailFactory**

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

EmailFactory helps you build superior customer relationships with sharp, targeted permission e-marketing tools. A start-to-finish e-mail marketing solution, EmailFactory offers you every tool you’ll need to achieve your unique marketing.

**Majordomo**


Majordomo is a program that automates the management of Internet mailing lists. Commands are sent to Majordomo via electronic mail to handle all aspects of list maintenance. Once a list is set up, virtually all
operations can be performed remotely, requiring no intervention by the postmaster of the list site.

**GotMarketing Campaigner**
http://www.gotmarketing.com/index.html
E-mail marketing with Campaigner is fast, easy and affordable. Campaigner has plenty of self-serve tools to help you get started. Tutorials, live-chat assistance, online help and audio best practices are integrated right into the product! Create and send campaigns whenever you want, 24/7.

**Constant Contact**
http://www.roving.com
Constant Contact, Do-It-Yourself E-mail Marketing helps small and midsize businesses and associations develop an ongoing relationship with their customers and site visitors. Constant Contact makes it easy and affordable to build and manage permission e-mail lists, create and send eye-catching HTML e-mail newsletters, announcements and promotions, and track results.

**MailWorkZ**
http://www.mailworkz.com
MailWorkZ—experts in the business of e-marketing software and services. With products like Broadc@st’s E-mail Marketing Software and services like ezListZ and the newest addition, ezTrackZ, thousands of MailWorkZ customers have everything they need to increase market share, revenue, and profits as well as improve their customer relationships.

**EmailUnlimited**
http://www.4officeautomation.com/EmailUnlimited/index.asp
EmailUnlimited makes it extremely easy to send professional-looking e-mail messages to large lists of recipients. Just select your address list, type in your message or select an existing text or HTML file, click on the Send button and your customers can soon be informed about your newest products and offerings.

**Microsoft bCentral ListBuilder**
List Builder is the e-mail marketing software of choice. Use it to quickly and easily create professional-looking e-mail newsletters, targeting different customer segments with personalized messages.
Outsourcing

InBox360
http://www.inbox360.com
The 360 System is one of the most flexible and powerful database and permission-based e-mail-marketing systems available today.

Bluestreak
http://www.bluestreak.com
Bluestreak is a global online direct marketing firm founded upon advanced technologies and best practices for interactive marketing.

Blacklists

Razor2
http://www.razor.sf.net

DCC List

Pyzor
http://www.pyzor.sf.net

Mail Abuse Prevention
http://www.mail-abuse.org

Network Abuse Clearinghouse
http://www.abuse.net

Not Just Another Blacklist
http://www.njabl.org

SPAM Blocking Blackhole
http://www.blackholes.bruli.net
For years marketers have been renting mail lists from reputable companies for direct marketing purposes. These companies take their customers’ marketing materials and manage the process of printing labels, affixing the labels and postage, and sending the materials out. The same type of service is available on-line—only the marketing message is sent via e-mail rather than snail mail. In this chapter, we cover:

- How direct mail list companies work
- How to select a company to work with
- How you work with a direct mail list company
- Costs related to direct mail list marketing
- Tips on how to make the most of your direct mail list marketing.
Online direct mail list companies work on the same premise as offline direct mail list companies. They provide a service to organizations that want to directly market to a particular demographic or geographic segment of the population. To do this effectively, they develop large databases of individuals that fit specific criteria.

How they generate these databases is what differentiates the good from the bad. The not-so-reputable companies and the bulk mail list companies tend to “grab” e-mail addresses from newsgroups, public mail lists, and a number of other places on the Internet, using programs built just for that purpose. Reputable companies, on the other hand, have a number of strategic ways to build their lists of people interested in receiving information on specific topics. They partner with sites that have significant targeted traffic to offer relevant and interesting information to that site’s visitors. They offer the site visitors the opportunity to “opt in” to receive updates or information on the specified topic.

To opt in, there has to be an offer for information on the topic and the visitor has to ask to be put on the list, provide his or her e-mail address, and often also provide his or her first name. The list company wants the first name so that future correspondence can be personalized.

Some of the more reputable companies require a “double opt-in” to increase the value of their list and to ensure the validity of the names on their list. With a double opt-in, the site visitor asks to be put on the list to receive updates or information on a particular topic. When the mail list company receives this request, it follows up with an e-mail notifying the individual that the request has been received and asking for confirmation of the request by a reply to the e-mail.

These direct mail list companies organize their databases by area of interest. They continually improve their lists by doing a little data mining with their correspondence to the people on their lists. Sometimes they use tracking techniques to hone in on specific areas of interest, sometimes they ask a question or two to access more demographic or psychographic information about the individuals on the list, and sometimes they send a detailed survey-type questionnaire asking for feedback so they can better tailor the information being sent to the individual.
How to Select a Direct Mail Company

There are a number of factors to consider when selecting a direct mail list company to work with. First and foremost, the company must be reputable.

The company should have a topic list that meshes with your target market. If you sell tropical fish, the company should have a category that fits. Not all direct mail list companies focus on the same categories. Some concentrate on business topics, others on individual leisure topics, still others on technology topics and some focus on a combination.

When you have narrowed down the reputable companies with topic lists that relate to your product or service, look at costs, tracking, policies on content and opt-in policies. You want to work with a company that personalizes its correspondence to the individuals on the list. You also want to be able to encourage recipients to visit your Web site, so you don’t want to have any restrictions on hypertext links. Some direct mail list companies provide tracking statistics for their customers. It is useful to know how many people read the message, and how many people merely “clicked through” to your Web site rather than taking the action you wanted them to.

How to Work with a Direct Mail List Company

Once you have selected the direct mail list company or companies you want to work with, you should:

- Fine-tune the specific list to receive your message.
- Provide the message content to the direct mail list company.
- Approve the sample message.

Then, the mail list company will:

- Compile the specific list.
- Develop or format the message you provided.
- Send you a sample for final approval.
- Merge the list with your message so that each person on the list receives a personalized message.
- Send out the message to the list.
- Track specific actions taken by recipients once they have received the message.

You work with the direct mail list company employees to have them develop the specific list that meets with your objectives and fits your budget. These companies usually can segment their lists to come up with just the right grouping to meet your needs and budget. For example, you might want your message to go out to people interested in white-water rafting. If the direct mail list company’s list for outdoor adventure enthusiasts is segmented, they can pull out the white-water rafting segment. If that list provides more names than your budget can afford, they might be able to segment the list again to only include white-water rafting enthusiasts in specific states.

**Costs Related to Direct Mail List Marketing**

The costs for direct mail list marketing are always on a per name basis. Often there is a sliding scale based on volume. The costs per name generally include all the services you need from the direct mail list company, including segmenting and rental of the list, merge and personalization, and delivery of the message. Different companies charge different amounts per name.

Postmaster Direct (http://www.postmasterdirect.com) is one of the oldest and most reputable direct mail list companies around (see Figure 15.1). It has more than 3,000 topic lists, with more than 30 million e-mail addresses. It has the largest database of business-to-business double-opt-in e-mail addresses. One hundred percent of the names on its list are opt-in. It partners with high-traffic reputable sites to generate
its lists—sites like About.com, Internet.com, and CNET. Postmaster Direct costs per name range from 10 cents to 35 cents, including rental, merge, and delivery. A minimum order costs $1,000.

There are a number of direct mail list companies to consider. I have provided a link to many of them from the free Internet Resources section of my Web site (http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). Although the pricing information and numbers of topic lists or categories were correct at the time of printing this book, check the direct mail list company sites for updates before making any decisions.

**Figure 15.1.** PostMaster Direct is one of the oldest and most reputable direct mail list companies around.

**Make the Most of Your Direct Mail List Marketing**

Direct mail list marketing is a great way to reach a significant number of your target market with your message in a short period of time. Ideally, you would like to have each of these names on your private mail
list. If you’re smart about the content of the message you have the direct mail list company send out, you can go a long way toward converting the direct mail list recipients to your private mail list subscribers.

In your direct mail list message, you want to give recipients a compelling reason to visit your Web site. The URL or specific page reached by the hypertext link in your direct mail message should provide them with not only the content they are expecting, but also a compelling reason to join your private mail list and an opportunity to easily sign up.

To ensure that your message is opened and read put in the time and effort to have a dynamite subject line. Often the subject line determines whether the message is read or is one of the many deleted unopened. Consider personalizing the subject line with the recipient’s name. And make sure the subject line copy does not read like an ad. Ads and junk mail are the first to be deleted.

Write your message so it can be easily scanned. That’s how busy people read their e-mail—they scan it. Grab the reader’s attention in the first sentence. If you don’t, he or she won’t read any further.

Of course, be sure you have used the proper upper- and lowercase, correct grammar, and correct spelling. You know yourself how many business e-mails you get that don’t take this seriously. Your e-mail is a reflection of the attention to detail you give everything in your business.

Make sure you access and analyze any tracking information available from the direct mail list company. Notice what copy works best. Notice what subject lines give a better response rate. Notice the different responses from different direct mail list companies.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 15**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding direct mail list marketing. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**Act One Lists**

http://www.act1lists.com

Act One Lists is a full-service list company specializing in compilation, brokerage, management, data processing, and direct marketing consulting with 26 years of experience.
Direct Mail Library
http://www.amlist.com/Knowledge/articlelist.asp
Lots of articles on everything from how to create your e-mail message to the 12 most common direct mail mistakes.

Direct Marketing Network
http://www.minokc.com/dmnetwork
A searchable database of more than 80,000 business listings for direct mail marketing.

DMNews.com
http://www.dmnews.com
An online paper devoted to direct mail marketing.

Dunn & Bradstreet Sales and Marketing Solutions
http://www.zapdata.com
Provider of direct mail list solutions.

GreatLists.com
http://www.greatlists.com
An independent supplier of both domestic U.S. and international business-to-business and professional marketing lists to clients throughout America and in more than 25 countries around the world.

iList
http://www.ilistinc.com
iList provides double-opt-in e-mail list services from the top e-mail solution providers in the United States.

Nerd Wide Web Direct Marketing Resources
http://www.nerdworld.com/nwd9490.html
Links to lots of companies providing direct mail list solutions.

Tips for Writing your E-mail Message
http://www.htmail.com/article5.html
Tips to keep in mind when writing your e-mail marketing piece.

USADeata’s Direct Marketing Portal
http://www.usadata.com
USADeata’s Direct Marketing Portal allows you to easily and quickly launch your own targeted direct mail program.
Developing a Dynamite Link Strategy

The more strategically chosen links you have to your site, the better! Increase your traffic and improve your search engine ranking by orchestrating links from related Web pages. In this chapter, we cover:

- Developing a link strategy
- How to arrange links
- Getting noticed—providing an icon and tag line hypertext for links to your site
- Link positioning
- Tools to check your competitors’ links
- Using links to enhance your image
- Web rings and meta-indexes
- Getting links to your site
Developing your link strategy is one of the most crucial elements of Internet marketing. It is a time-consuming task, but it is time well spent. Links are important for several reasons.

1. Strategically placed, they can be a real traffic builder.

2. A number of the frequently used search engines use link popularity and link relevancy as part of their ranking criteria. The more links to your site, the more popular it is, so the number of links you have to your site can significantly impact your placement with those search engines.

3. The more links you have to your site, the more opportunities search engine spiders have to find you.

Links Have Staying Power

When you post a message to a newsgroup where you promote your Web site through your brilliant contributions and your signature file, you receive increased traffic while the message is current and is being read by participants in the newsgroup. As time passes, your message appears farther and farther down the list until it disappears, and then your traffic level returns to normal. The same goes for a promotional effort in a mail list. You can expect increased traffic for a short while after your mail list posting, but as soon as everyone has read your posting and visited your site, traffic levels return to normal.

This is not the same for links. Traffic from links does not go away as easily as other forms of Internet marketing. Links generally stay active
for a long time. When a link to your site is placed on another Web site, you hope people see it and are enticed to click through to visit your site. As long as the site that hosts your link has new traffic, you continue to receive traffic through it. The beauty of links is that in three months, that link will still be there and people will still be clicking through!

Links are very important because if you have links placed on a high-traffic Web site, they can turn into traffic builders for your own site. They also are important because they can have a major impact on your ranking in search engines, because some of the busiest ones use link popularity in their ranking criteria. Some of these search engines include:

- Google (www.google.com)
- Yahoo search (www.search.yahoo.com)
- AltaVista (www.altavista.com)
- HotBot (www.hotbot.com)
- MSN (www.msn.com)
- Inktomi (www.inktomi.com).

Once your link strategy is implemented and you begin to see an increase in the number of sites linking to your Web site, you will see your ranking in the previously mentioned search engines improve. For more information on search engines and their ranking criteria, see Chapters 6 and 7.

A Quick Talk about Outbound Links

The more links to your site, the better chance that someone will be enticed to visit. However, a quid quo pro usually applies, and this means providing reciprocal links, giving people the opportunity to leave your site with the click of a button. To minimize this “flight effect,” make sure you place outbound links two or three layers down in your site. Never place outbound links on your home page. You want your visitors
to come into your site and see and do everything you want them to before they have the opportunity to go elsewhere.

There are two ways you can provide outbound links. The first is by providing a hypertext link, which transports the visitor from your site to some one else’s with a single click. The second and preferred method is to have each outbound link open a new browser window when clicked. This way your visitors get to see the referred Web site, but when they are finished and close that window, the original browser window with your Web site is still active. The browser window with your site should still be visible on the task bar during their visit to the referred site.

Regularly test all of the links from your site to ensure that they are “live” and are going to the intended locations. Dead links reflect poorly on your site even if they are out of your control. There are tools available on-line to help you determine whether you have dead links. These tools include NetMechanic at http://www.netmechanic.com (see Figure 16.1) and Dr. Watson at http://watson.addy.com. Each of these tools is discussed in more depth in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

Figure 16.1. The NetMechanic site provides many valuable tools. Its HTML Toolbox can be used to find out if you have dead links on your site or if you have any HTML errors that need correcting.
Strategies for Finding Appropriate Link Sites

 Ideally, you should be linked from every high-traffic site that is of interest to your target market. Develop a strategy to find all of these sites and arrange links.

 Start with the popular search engines. Most people use search engines and directories to find subjects of interest on the Internet. Most of the people searching never go beyond the first 20 to 30 results that the search engine returns. Thus, these top 20 to 30 sites get a lot of traffic. Search relevant keywords in all the popular search engines and directories, and investigate these top sites for link possibilities. Some of these sites will be competitors and might not want to reciprocate links. The best opportunity for links is with noncompeting sites that have the same target market. I suggest you take your most important keywords, do a keyword search in the 20 most popular search engines and directories, and review the top 30 sites in each for potential link sites.

 Another strategy to find useful link sites is to see where the leaders in your industry and your competitors are linked. I use the term “competitors” very loosely. It would include your direct competitors, your industry leaders, companies selling noncompeting products to your target market, companies selling similar types of products or services to your target market, and companies that compete with you for search engine ranking. See what your competition is doing. Determine where they are linked from, and decide whether these are sites that you should also be linked from. Learn what they are doing well, and also learn from their mistakes. You should be linked everywhere your competition is appropriately linked, and then some.

 Explore These URLs

 There are many tools on the Internet to help you identify a Web site’s links. These tools can be used to see which sites are linking to your Web site. But they can also be used to see what sites are linking to your competition. This is a great way to research where your site could be linked from but isn’t—yet! Let me walk you through a step-by-step process to increase the number of links to your Web site.

 When determining which sites you should be linked from, you first have to develop a lengthy list of competitors. A competitor can be any business or site that offers the same products or services as you do or
anyone targeting the same demographic group. Because the Internet creates a level playing field for all businesses, you are also competing against large and small companies from around the globe. Someone using a search engine to find information on services that your company can provide might see results from companies from all across the world in the top ten results.

Once you have developed your extensive list of competitors and have gathered their URLs, you must then find out what sites they are linked from. Tools have been developed to assist you in finding who is linking to your site. In most cases you enter your URL, and then these tools provide a list of sites linking to it. However, by entering the URL for a competitor’s site you can just as easily determine which sites are linking to your competition and industry leaders.

The more organized you are for this exercise, the better. I suggest that you:

1. Gather an extensive list of competitors and their URLs.

2. Choose the tool(s) from the next section that you are going to use for this exercise.

3. Enter the first competitor URL to find the sites linking to it.

4. Copy and paste the results into a Word, Notepad, or other file that you can access later.

5. Enter the next competitor URL to find the sites linking to it.

6. Copy and paste the results into the same Word, Notepad, or other file, adding to your list of potential link sites.

7. Repeat steps 5 and 6 until you have found all the sites linking to your competition. When this is done, you have your potential link sites list.

8. Now develop a link request (see the next section for details) and keep it open on your desktop so that you can copy and paste it into an e-mail when you find a site you’d like to have a link from.

9. Next, visit every one of the potential link sites to determine whether the site is appropriate for you to be linked from. If so,
send your link request. If the site is not appropriate for whatever reason, delete it from your list. Also delete duplicates. When you get to the bottom of your list, it has changed from a potential links list to a request links list.

10. Follow through and follow up. Follow through and provide an appropriate link to those who agree to a reciprocal link. Follow up to make sure that they provide the link to your site as promised, that the link works, and that it is pointing to the correct page on your site.

11. Submit the Internet address of the page that has provided the link to the popular search engines so that they know it's there. This will help boost your link popularity scores.

**Tools to Identify Your Competitors’ Links**

The following tools can be used to obtain a list of locations on the Internet that are linked to your competitors’ Web sites:

**AltaVista**

http://www.altavista.com
To find out where your competitors are linked using AltaVista, simply enter the competitor’s URL in the search area like this: link: yourcompetitorsdomain.com. This returns all pages in AltaVista with a link to your competitor’s Web site.

**Excite and Other Search Engines**

Just enter your competitors’ URLs and see what comes up. (Be sure to include http://.) If anything, the search query will include all indexed Web sites that contain the URL searched.

**Google**

http://www.google.com
Enter your competitor’s URL in the search box like this: link: yourcompetitorsURL. The results will contain all Web sites linking to your competitor’s Web site.
HotBot
http://www.hotbot.com
Enter your competitor’s URL in the search box and change the default from “all the words” to “links to this URL.” When you type in the URL, remember to include http://. The results will contain all Web sites linking to your competitor’s Web site.

Link Popularity
http://www.linkpopularity.com
Simply type in your competitor's URL and it will give you a list of all the sites linking to that particular site (see Figure 16.2).

Link Popularity Check
http://www.linkpopularitycheck.com
Use this tool to compare your Web site to up to three other competitors’ sites using their link popularity check. In addition to a comparison graph of the number of links each site has, it also gives details on where those links are coming from.

Figure 16.2. LinkPopularity.com offers a free link popularity check service.
WebCrawler
http://www.webcrawler.com/WebCrawler/Links.html
Enter your competitor’s URL into the search query box to find out how many links are provided to that page. WebCrawler provides the names of all the referring sites.

Other Potential Link Strategies

Another strategy for finding potential link sites is to visit the many different search engines and do a search on keywords you feel people would search on if they were looking for your site. The top results get a lot of visits from your target market so they are always good potential link sites.

The following is a step-by-step strategy to get linked from these sites.

1. Make a list of your most important keywords for your Web site using your master keyword list and meta-tags (see Chapter 6).

2. Develop a list of the top 30 search engines (check SearchEngine Watch.com).

3. Go to each of the 30 search engines and input your most important keyword as identified in step 1.

4. Copy and paste the results into a Word, Notepad, or other file that you can access later.

5. Enter the next keyword and copy and paste the results into the same Word, Notepad, or other file, adding to your list of potential link sites.

6. Repeat step 5 until you have used all the keywords in your list. When this is done, you will have 900 potential sites for each keyword. You now have your potential link sites list.

7. Now develop a link request (see the next section for details) and keep it open on your desktop so that you can copy and
paste it into an e-mail when you find a site you’d like to have a link from.

8. Next, visit every one of the potential link sites to determine whether the site is appropriate for you to be linked from. If so, send your link request. If the site is not appropriate for whatever reason, delete it from your list. Also delete duplicates. When you get to the bottom of your list, it has changed from a potential links list to a request links list.

9. Follow through and follow up. Follow through and provide an appropriate link to those who agree to a reciprocal link. Follow up to make sure that they provide the link to your site as promised, that the link works, and that it is pointing to the correct page on your site.

10. Submit the Internet address of the page that has provided the link to the popular search engines so that they know it’s there. This will help boost your link popularity scores.

**Winning Approval for Potential Links**

Now that you have a list of Web sites you would like to be linked from, the next step is to determine from whom to request the link. Usually this can be found on the site. Titles such as Webmaster@ or any variation on that theme are usually a safe bet. If the site does not have an obvious contact, try feedback@. You can either send the request there or ask for the e-mail address of the right person.

If you cannot find an e-mail address on a Web site you can visit a domain registration service such as Network Solutions (www.networksolutions.com) to find out contact information for that domain name. Click on the “WHOIS Lookup” link and submit the URL to do a search. The results will include the contacts, both technical and administrative, for that Web site. The technical contact most likely is the person you are looking for, because that is who most likely looks after the Web site. The administrative contact is usually responsible for the re-
newal of the domain name, and the billing contact is usually the bill payer for the domain name.

Generally, a short note with the appropriate information in the subject line is most suitable. Your note should be courteous, briefly describe your site’s content, and provide the rationale for why you think reciprocating links would result in a win-win situation. It doesn’t hurt to compliment some aspect of the site that you think is particularly engaging.

It is a good idea to develop a generic “link request” letter that you can have on hand when you are surfing. You should always keep this letter open on your desktop when surfing the Internet so that you can easily copy and paste the letter into an e-mail.

Here is an example of a link request e-mail:

Dear Web Site Owner,

I have just finished viewing your site and found it quite enjoyable. I found the content to be very valuable, particularly [customize here]. My site visitors would appreciate your content as I think we appeal to the same demographic group. My site, http://www.mysitename.com, focuses on [my site content] and would likely be of value to your visitors. I’d like to suggest we trade links.

Sincerely,

John

A typical response might say that they would appreciate the link to their site and offer to provide a reciprocal link. To facilitate this, you should either have the HTML for the link ready to send or have it available on your site, or both. Make sure you have your most important keyword in the text around the link to your site to ensure you score as high as possible in the link relevancy category.

Make sure to follow through and follow up. If you said that you would provide a reciprocal link, do so within 24 hours. Follow up to make sure that your site has been linked from theirs, the link works properly, and it is linked to the right page on your site.

Then remember to send a thank you. Because they are doing you a favor by adding your site to their Web page, you should strive to develop a good relationship with them. This way they might be more generous
with the link they give you. They might place it higher on the page, or even offer you the opportunity of having a small graphic link on their page, which would be dynamite for increasing traffic to your site. These graphic links are explained in more detail later in the chapter.

Another way to get links is to ask for them on your site. In a prominent location on your site, place a link that says something like, “Would you like to provide a link to this site? Click here.” Link this message to a separate page that holds several options for links. You can provide viewers with several different sizes of banner ads they could place on their Web site. You can also provide them with a thumbnail icon, the HTML, and your tagline, which they could simply copy and paste into the HTML code on their Web site. Again, remember to select appropriate keywords to include in the text around the link to increase your link relevancy score with the popular search engines.

Quite often, if you offer viewers these opportunities for links, you have a better chance of receiving these enhanced link features. If you make it easier for them to add the link, they will be more willing to provide it. Figure 16.3 shows an example of a site that provides the relevant coding and images for people who want to provide a link.

![Figure 16.3](image)

Figure 16.3. By providing the HTML text and icons on your site you can make it very easy for visitors to add your link to their site.
You might want to offer an incentive to people who provide you with a link. It could be something that can be downloaded or a free sample of your product in exchange for a link. This provides you with another opportunity to market your site because you are giving something away for free, and thus you can be listed on the many Internet sites that identify sites for freebies. Another useful tactic is to include viewers who provide a link to your site in a drawing for a prize.

You might run a contest such as “Provide a Link to Us and Win,” where you include all those sites linking to you in a drawing once a week or once a month, depending on the size of the prize.

Meta-indexes and Web rings are other sources for links. For a complete discussion of meta-indexes and Web rings, see Chapters 18 and 23, respectively.

You might need to prompt sites to provide promised links. If you have made an arrangement for a link and find that the link is not there, it is appropriate to send an e-mail reminder. When sending the follow-up e-mail, include your icon, HTML, URL, and any other helpful information.

**Making Your Link the Place to Click**

There are links and then there are links. Usually links are your company name hyperlinked to your home page, and your company’s site link is listed with a number of other companies’ links. Sometimes, if you are lucky, there is a brief description attached to the link.

You should take a proactive approach with linking arrangements. Explore every opportunity to have your link placed prominently and, if possible, to have it differentiated from the other links on the page. Figure 16.4 demonstrates how having an image associated with your link can make your link stand out among all of the other links.

Once you have an agreement with a site willing to provide a link, you should ask if you could send them an icon and the HTML for the link. The icon (GIF or JPG format) should be visually pleasing and representative of your company. Within the HTML, include a tag line or call to action that entices people to click on the link. With the icon or logo, the tag line, and your company’s name, your link will stand out. Again, remember to include appropriate keywords to add to your link relevancy score to improve your search engine ranking.
If another Web site is generous enough to provide a link to your site, your image should be only a thumbnail, for you don’t want to take up too much space. This image could be your corporate logo or a graphic from a current promotion for one of your products or services. By having this image and tag line strategically placed on a Web site, the chances that a viewer will click through to visit your Web site are much higher.

Here is an example of what it should look like:

<IMG SRC="images/nameofgraphicfile"><A HREF="http://www.yourdomainname.com"> Catchy tag line here.</a>

Figure 16.4. By adding a small graphic to your link, you can make your link stand out from the others.

If another Web site is generous enough to provide a link to your site, your image should be only a thumbnail, for you don’t want to take up too much space. This image could be your corporate logo or a graphic from a current promotion for one of your products or services. By having this image and tag line strategically placed on a Web site, the chances that a viewer will click through to visit your Web site are much higher.

Here is an example of what it should look like:

<IMG SRC="images/nameofgraphicfile"><A HREF="http://www.yourdomainname.com"> Catchy tag line here.</a>

To Add or Not to Add with Free-for-All Links

There are thousands of free-for-all links on the Net. These sites allow you to add your URL to a long list of links, but they provide little traffic unless you make your link stand out from the rest. One advantage you can get from these sites is in search engine ranking. As mentioned previously, some search engines use the number of links to your site in their ranking criteria.
Add Value with Affiliate Programs

Another way of benefiting from links to your Web site is by developing an affiliate program. Affiliate programs (also called reseller or partnership or associate programs) are revenue-sharing arrangements set up by companies selling products and services. When another site agrees to participate in your affiliate program, it is rewarded for sending customers to your business. These customers are sent to your site through links on your associates’ or affiliates’ Web sites. By developing and offering this type of program, you generate increased business and increased links to your site and increased link popularity for search engines. Affiliate programs are explained in more depth in Chapter 17.

Maintaining a Marketing Log

Record all new links to your site in your Internet marketing log. It is important to maintain this log and review it regularly. You must periodically check to make certain that links to your site are operational and are going to the appropriate location. Along with the URL where your site is linked from, you should also keep track of all contact information gathered when communicating with the Webmaster.

A Word of Caution with Link Trading

You must be aware when trading links that all links are not created equal.

- If you provide a prominent link to another site, make sure you receive a link of equal or greater prominence.

- Be aware, when trading your links with sites that receive substantially less traffic than you do, that you will probably have more people “link out” than “link in” from this trade. Consider trading a banner ad and a link from their site for a link from your site, thus making it more of an equal trade. If their site has more traffic than yours, don’t mention it unless they do.
• Never put your outbound links directly on your home page. Have your outbound links located several levels down so that visitors to your site will likely have visited all the pages you want them to visit before they link out.

• When incorporating outbound links, make sure that when the link is clicked, the Web page is opened in a new browser window so that the visitor can easily return to your Web page.

• Sometimes when people update their site, they change the Internet address or delete a page altogether. If you have placed a link on your page to that page, and one of your viewers tries to link out to that page and receives an HTTP 404 error, this reflects badly on your site. You should frequently check your Web site for dead links.

• When you change content on a page within your site, don’t create totally new pages; just update the content on your current pages and keep the same file names. There might be links to your pages and if you delete them, anyone trying to click on a link to your site from another site will get an HTTP 404 error. This results in a dead link on the referring page as well as in any search engine listings you might have.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 16**

I have included a few resources for you to check out about developing a dynamite link strategy. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

**Tools That Check for Dead Links**

NetMechanic
http://www.netmechanic.com
To find out if you have any dead links with NetMechanic, simply enter your URL into the query box and view the results. The site generates a detailed report, which outlines whether you have any dead links—and if so, where.

**Dr. Watson**
http://Watson.addy.com
Dr. Watson is a free service to analyze your Web page. You give it the URL of your page and Watson gets a copy of it directly from the Web server. Watson can also check out many other aspects of your site, including link validity, download speed, search engine compatibility, and link popularity.

**Site Owner**
http://www.siteowner.com/badlinks.cfm?LID=229
When using Site Owner, you can check your site for various Web site criteria. To check for dead links, you must enter your URL into the query box. The results outline any dead links that are on your site.

**BizLand SiteDoctor**
http://www.bizland.com/product/sitedoctor.html
This Link Check tool searches your site, tests each link it finds and reports the status of each link it tests.

**Reciprocal Link Information**

**Virtual Promote**
This tutorial covers how to promote traffic to your Web site with reciprocal links. This is a free service for all Web site developers who want to learn more about announcing their Web site and promoting more traffic to the Internet.

**Automate link exchange**
http://www.linkautomate.com/index.html
Reciprocal Link Exchange software and automate link exchange management software.
**Free-for-All Link Sites**

**FFA Net**

*http://pages.ffanet.com/links/list.pl*

This page has a detailed listing of thousands of free-for-all link pages. It also offers you the opportunity to set up your own free-for-all link pages on the FFA network.

**Link-O-Matic**

*http://www.linkomatic.com/index.cgi?10000*

This site allows you to submit your URL to more than 450 quality promotional sites with one click, driving traffic to your Web site and saving you loads of time.
It is a well-known fact that referral business is the easiest and most efficient business to generate. When doing business on-line, affiliate programs enable you to capitalize on this concept. The concept of setting up a referral business model was first started in 1996 when Amazon.com started paying other Web site owners for referring customers to their Web site. This referral business model caught on, and now many sites are incorporating this model into their everyday business activities. The idea and the corresponding software technology have come a long way since 1996. The software available today makes the process so simple that anyone with basic Web skills can set up an affiliate program.

There are many different affiliate programs available on the Internet. These programs vary in terms of reliability, quality, and the amount of commissions offered. E-tailers use these programs to develop repeat business and increase sales. A side benefit to having an affiliate program is that every affiliate provides a link to your site, which in turn improves link popularity, which in turn improves your ranking in a number of the popular search engines. On the downside, developing and implementing the affiliate program takes time and effort, and you must be competitive with other affiliate programs to encourage participation. In this chapter, you will learn:

- How to distinguish among the different types of affiliate programs
Affiliate Programs: Increase Traffic to Your Web Site

To understand the opportunities available, you must first understand the different types of affiliate programs. All pay for referral business, but in different ways. Before you decide to implement an affiliate program, you must first look at your objectives, your products and services, and your target market, and then decide whether an affiliate program is appropriate for your site. If so, choose the type of program that works for you.

Commission-Based Affiliate Programs

The most common type of affiliate program is commission based. This type offers the referring Web site a percentage of sales income resulting from its referrals. Commissions typically range from 1 to 15 percent. Some programs offer a two-tier commission structure, and some offer an increased commission for higher-traffic sites. In a two-tier commission program, an affiliate is paid a commission on each sale (or lead or click-through) it refers plus a commission on each sale referred by any affiliate it told about your program. Some examples of commission-based affiliate programs include:

- Amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com)
- One and Only (http://www.oneandonlynetwork.com)
Flat-Fee Referral Programs

Flat-fee referral programs pay the owner of a Web site a fixed amount for every new visitor who links from the referring site to the host site and takes certain predefined actions. The required action often is making a purchase on the host site. Some flat-fee programs do not require a purchase; the predetermined actions might be joining its e-club, signing up to receive its e-specials or newsletter, downloading a free demo, ordering a catalogue, requesting a quote, or taking another action desired by the host site. A good example of this is eBay (http://www.ebay.com), which offers affiliates compensation when visitors to their Web site click through and bid on an item (see Figure 17.2).

Click-Through Programs

A click-through program is one in which affiliates receive a fee for every unique visitor who clicks through on the referring link on the affiliate’s...
Web site or from a link the affiliate has included in a signature file, e-zine article, advertising or elsewhere. There are many click-through programs on the Internet. For example, Google AdSense (http://www.google.com) and ValueClick (http://www.valueclick.com) have click-through programs that eliminate the problems of finding individual advertisers and allow you to place banner advertisements on your Web site. Whenever a visitor links out from your site through one of these banner ads, you receive a flat fee. Two other popular click-through programs are:

- AllClicks (http://www.allclicks.com—see Figure 17.3)

**Selecting an Affiliate Program That Is Right for You**

The first step in deciding whether to start an affiliate program is to ask whether this fits in with your Web site objectives. Click-through programs can serve to increase traffic to your Web site as long as your banner ad is designed with your target market in mind and the banner
ad is placed on sites that are of interest to your target market. Commission-based and flat-fee affiliate programs can further encourage the referred visitors to do what you want them to do when they get to your site. The referring site knows that it receives a commission only when a certain action has been taken by the visitor, whether that action be a purchase, a quote request, or something else. The referring site has a vested interest in having the referred visitor take the desired action and is in a position to suggest or recommend that the visitor take that action.

How to Succeed with Your Affiliate Site

You may have an affiliate program, but are you really doing all you can to exploit it? There are several things you could do to be successful with an affiliate program. You should go out of your way to help make the links stand out on your affiliates’ sites. Provide different-sized icons that grab visitors’ attention and are designed with the target market in mind. Also prepare the proper HTML coding and a tag line linking to

Figure 17.3. AllClicks has one of the top click-through affiliate programs on the Internet.
your Web site, and you help your affiliates get the attention of their visitors. You can also inspect your affiliates’ Web sites regularly to determine whether there is anything you can do to help them add value to the links on their pages. You could offer them advice about where they should locate your links if they are in an obscure place on their Web site. Remember that you don’t run their Web sites, so be diplomatic.

Other affiliate program operators offer more advanced tools to their affiliates. For example, a program operator might offer affiliates a generic e-mail newsletter, which the affiliate could easily download, personalize, and send out in its mailing list. This generic newsletter is written in an enticing manner and encourages the affiliate’s mail list subscribers to visit the affiliate Web site and click on the affiliate program link.

Some affiliate program operators provide a weekly e-mail to their affiliates with new material, icons, articles, banners, etc. as well as recommended actions to be taken by the affiliates for the coming week.

The key point is that you should take advantage of as many opportunities as possible to leverage the power of your affiliate program. Through providing your affiliates with these value-added services, you not only strengthen the power of your affiliate program, but you also show your affiliates your commitment to seeing that they are successful with your program.

You should also make sure that you, the affiliate administrator, do your best to be prompt with reporting and referral payments. People will not want to participate in your program if you are late with payments or don’t provide them with detailed reports of their referrals from the previous reporting period. By sticking to the program schedule and doing the best you can for your affiliates, you not only keep your affiliates happy, you also advance the interests of your affiliate program.

**Benefits of Creating an Affiliate Program**

There are many benefits to participating in an affiliate program, especially if you decide to create your own. There are also some not-so-obvious advantages that you can benefit from. By creating your own affiliate program, you could generate a significant increase in traffic to your own Web site. When your affiliates place links on their Web sites linking to your site, you will increase your link popularity and, if you’re
strategic about the keywords that you include in the text around the link to your site, you will increase your link relevancy score as well.

The affiliate links generate a significant amount of traffic to your site and also help to increase your search engine rankings. Some of the major search engines use link popularity in their ranking criteria. Once you have successfully launched your affiliate program and have developed a wide sales force on the Internet, you might be surprised by the amount of new traffic coming to your Web site.

Your greatest advantage is the opportunity to expand your sales force to thousands of people. If you run a good affiliate program, your sales force could consist of people all over the world, thus expanding your target market into different cultures that your personal sales force otherwise might not have been able to penetrate.

Another benefit of launching an affiliate program on your Web site is that you increase the brand awareness for your business. For example, how many times have you seen an Amazon.com logo on a personal or commercial Web site? Many hundreds of thousands have subscribed to Amazon.com’s affiliate program, making it one of the largest programs on the Internet. All of Amazon.com’s affiliates place banner ads, buttons, text links, and other promotional tools on their Web site in an effort to encourage their visitors to click through to the Amazon.com Web site and make a purchase. Even though not everybody clicks through to the Amazon.com site, their Web site visitors are still exposed to the Amazon.com brand, thus increasing the brand exposure for Amazon.com’s products and services. This could ultimately result in those visitors going directly to the Amazon.com Web site in the future to make a purchase, thus bypassing the affiliate’s Web site and the need to pay that affiliate a referral for their business.

Purchasing Affiliate Software

There are several options when it comes to purchasing Affiliate software:

- You can use an ASP.
- You can purchase software.
- You can build your own.
• You can use a storefront software solution that includes an Affiliate module.

Depending on what features you would like to provide to your affiliates, the cost of tracking software ranges from $300 to $15,000.

There are many varieties of affiliate software. Some programs are quite unsophisticated and offer few features, and others offer all the bells and whistles. There are some features that you should watch for when purchasing your software. They can help you to run a smooth affiliate program and can save you a lot of time. Here are some of the more important features available:

**Automated Signup.** You should always look for this feature because you want to make it as easy as possible for your affiliates to sign up for your program. It should not take them days to officially sign up; they should be able to do so automatically. You want them to get started as quickly as possible, so as soon as they sign up, they should automatically be sent all information that you feel is necessary for them to quickly incorporate your program on their Web site.

**Automated Tracking System.** This is one of the most important features that you must look for. You want to make sure that your software is capable of tracking all sales made so that you can reward your affiliates with the appropriate commission. You don’t want to have to calculate which Web sites the sales came from at the end of the month. You want to be able to let the software do all of the tracking for you, and at the end of the reporting period provide you with a report outlining payment due to your affiliates.

**Automatic Contact Systems.** You should be able to contact all of your affiliates whenever you find it necessary. Some software allows you to send messages to all of your affiliates at the click of a button. It compiles their e-mail addresses in a database.

**Real-Time Statistics.** Real-time statistics allow your affiliates to view their current sales statistics. This lets them know how many people clicked through from their site and how many of those people actually purchased something. This is a very good feature because it is
important to keep your affiliates informed about their current sales status in your program.

**Variable-Payment Option.** Another important feature that you should look for is the variable-payment option. Some forms of affiliate software only let you work with so many variables, meaning the fixed fee, percentage, or flat rate per click-through that you multiply by the referrals from your affiliates’ sites. Some software is only designed for certain types of programs. You might purchase software designed to calculate payments for a click-through program. If you wanted to have a commission-based program that pays a percentage of sales resulting from each click-through, this software would not be good for you. It would not be able to comprehend and manipulate data to calculate the payments, for it is incapable of using the percentage-of-sales variable. Check this out before you purchase any software.

**Automatic Check Payment.** Once your affiliate program is up and running, and you have developed an extensive list of affiliates, it can become a hassle to write checks at the end of each payment period. Some software comes equipped with an automatic check payment option that allows your computer to print the checks. This can make your affiliate program run more smoothly and can save you time.

**Automatic Reporting-Period Statistic Distribution.** Some of the more advanced affiliate-tracking software automatically e-mails each of your affiliates at the end of the reporting period. This tells your affiliates how much success they are having with your program, and allows them to adjust their marketing strategy to help them to succeed with your program.

Some of the more popular affiliate-tracking software programs available to people wanting to start their own affiliate program are:

**My Affiliate Program**

http://www.myaffiliateprogram.com

Kowabunga! Technologies provides affiliate-tracking software that allows you to manage all of your affiliate members and track impressions, click-throughs, and online sales.
AffiliateLink
http://www.affiliatezone.com
AffiliateLink enables you to do everything from signing up affiliates to checking on both administrative and individual affiliate statistics.

Affiliate Shop
http://www.affiliateshop.com
The premier affiliate-tracking system. It provides Webmasters with a powerful and easy-to-use affiliate-management tool. No complicated software to be installed; just cut and paste a few lines of HTML code on your site to get your affiliate program going.

Affiliate Wiz
http://www.affiliatewiz.com
Affiliate tracking software for managing an affiliate marketing program. Affiliate programs are one of the most effective ways to drive traffic to your site while rewarding your affiliates for their participation. You provide your affiliates with a special link to your site, whether it is a text link or image or even a picture of your product. The affiliate displays your link on their site and then you sit back and watch visitors start traveling to your site. You then reward your affiliates for sending traffic your way.

Internet Resources for Chapter 17

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding affiliate programs. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

My Affiliate Program
http://www.myaffiliateprogram.com
Technologies, the makers of MyAP, is a leader in Affiliate Marketing and has been offering intuitive affiliate tracking and management solutions since 1998.

2-Tier.com
http://www.2-tier.com
2-Tier.com offers a directory of more than 1,136 affiliate programs.
**Affiliate Handbook**  
*http://www.affiliatehandbook.com*  
This is the definitive resource for affiliate program managers aspiring to develop a best-of-breed affiliate program.

**AssociatePrograms.com**  
*http://www.associateprograms.com*  
The AssociatePrograms.com directory helps you find the best associate programs—also known as referral, partner, revenue-sharing, or affiliate programs—to earn money from your Web site.

**ClickQuick: Affiliate and Pay-per-Click Program Reviews**  
*http://www.clickquick.com*  
ClickQuick provides in-depth reviews of Webmaster affiliate, associate, and pay-per-click programs that offer opportunities to make money on the Internet. Also provides reviews of banner ad networks and helpful articles on improving affiliate program performance.

**MakeMoneyNow.com**  
*http://www.makemoneynow.com*  
A great site filled with resources on affiliate programs, including a directory of programs and tips on starting your own.

**Refer-it.com**  
*http://www.refer-it.com*  
Refer-it.com is the authoritative guide to Internet affiliate programs, associate programs, and referral programs. Refer-it is a great resource for merchants with affiliate programs and for Webmasters with affiliate Web sites.

**Successful Affiliate Marketing for Merchants**  
*http://www.affiliatemanager.net*  
Everything you wanted to know about affiliate marketing but were afraid to ask.

**AffiliateWorld.com**  
*http://www.affiliateworld.com*  
Affiliate World is the Web’s premier site for finding affiliate programs.

**Commission Junction**  
*http://www.cj.com/index.jsp*
Commission Junction affiliate programs offer pay-for-performance online advertising and Internet marketing solutions.

**More Popular Affiliate Programs**

**Amazon.com**  
[http://www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)  
A pioneer in the affiliate program industry, Amazon.com claims to have the world’s biggest selection of products, including free electronic greeting cards, online auctions, and millions of books, CDs, videos, DVDs, toys and games, and electronics.

**Barnes and Noble**  
[http://www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)  
BarnesandNoble.com offers a wide selection of books and has more than 120,000 Web sites participating in its affiliate program.

**CDNow**  
[http://www.cdnow.com](http://www.cdnow.com)  
CDNow is the world’s leading online music store.

**Chapters Indigo**  
[http://chapters.indigo.ca](http://chapters.indigo.ca)  
Chapters Indigo gives you 5 percent for each purchase made from your Web site.

**Reel.com**  
[http://www.reel.com](http://www.reel.com)  
Reel.com is one of the biggest places on-line to buy movies.

**Priceline.com**  
Affiliates earn money each time a visitor books hotel, air, or car rental service.

**SusanSweeney.com**  
[http://www.susansweeney.com/affiliate.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/affiliate.html)  
Sign up now and start earning money from your site!
Maximizing Promotion with Meta-Indexes

Meta-indexes are designed to be useful resources for people who have a specific interest in a particular topic. Meta-indexes are a large and valuable resource for reaching your target audience and should be utilized to their full potential. In this chapter, we cover:

- What meta-indexes are
- Why meta-indexes are useful
- How to make the links to your site stand out
- Creating your own meta-index.

What Are Meta-Indexes?

Meta-indexes are lists of Internet resources pertaining to a specific subject category and are intended as a resource for people who have a specific interest in that topic. These lists, such as the one for Internet
Maximizing Promotion with Meta-Indexes

shopping sites shown in Figure 18.1, consist of a collection of URLs of related Internet resources that are arranged on a Web page by their titles. The owners or creators of meta-indexes put a lot of effort into compiling these lists and are eager to find new sites to add to them. It used to be that the owners of these sites would list your site for free because they desired to have the most meta of the meta-indexes—they strived to have the largest of the large indexes, and more sites means a larger index. Today, many of these meta-indexes are commercial and charge a fee for the link to your site.

Some of these meta-indexes have a “Submit” or “Add Your Site” area; for others, you have to develop an inclusion request e-mail and send it to the owner of the site. In your inclusion request e-mail, let the owner know that you visited the site and feel that your site would be appropriate to be included. Give the reasons you think your site is appropriate and request the link. You should provide the HTML for the link as well. Review the techniques discussed in Chapter 16 to have your link stand out with a graphical icon, hypertext link, and tag line as well including targeted keywords to enhance your link relevancy scores for enhanced search engine placement.

Figure 18.1. All-Internet Shopping Directory—meta-index of malls, stores, products and services on the Web.
Meta-indexes are directed at a specific topic, such as “Connecticut Country Inns” or “Antique Car Sites.” Meta-indexes provide easy access to a number of sites on a specific topic, and they are a great way to draw targeted, interested people to your Web site. In addition, some users might rely on meta-indexes as their only search effort. They might not use a search engine to perform a query on Mexican resorts, for example, if they know a certain meta-index contains 200 sites on Mexican resorts. Where search engine results might show books on Mexican resorts, personal Web pages relating to family vacations at Mexican resorts, etc., experienced Web users know that meta-indexes only provide links to the Web sites of Mexican resorts. Meta-indexes can increase your chances of being found by people who are interested in what you have to offer.

You might want to consider placing a banner ad on one or more of the meta-indexes you find, given that the target audience you want to reach will be the people using these indexes. Choose carefully, though; you don’t want to buy a banner ad on a meta-index that is not up to par and doesn’t provide the traffic you are looking for. Take your time and investigate the meta-index before advertising on it. Does it appeal to the eye? Is it of good quality? Are there many dead links? Is it updated frequently? Does it have sufficient traffic?

Meta-indexes can be an effective way to increase traffic to your Web site. Word spreads quickly about the best meta-indexes because they are a great resource. Your target market will tell two friends and they will tell two friends, thus increasing traffic. In addition, as more people add links to your meta-index, and the more links you have to your Web site, the more traffic your site gets.

**How to Find Appropriate Meta-Indexes**

Now that you know what a meta-index is, how do you find one? You might be browsing on the Web and happen to come across one. A better way to find meta-indexes is through the search engines and directories on the Web.

You need to know how your particular search engine of choice works. Most search engines have advanced search capabilities, so be sure to explore them. When you’re looking for meta-indexes, we recommend that you create a more focused search by adding an extra word such as
directory, list, index, table, resource, reference, or guide. By adding one of these words in conjunction with another word—for example, travel—you’re increasing your chances of finding appropriate meta-indexes. Performing a search on travel alone will return far less targeted results. Looking for a travel directory alone might not work for you.

Why not? A search for a travel directory on the search engines often means looking for all sites that contain the words travel and all sites that contain directory. You should refine your searches to achieve more accurate results. Some general techniques that use the words travel and directory as examples you can apply in your search for meta-indexes are:

- Entering travel directory generally means: Look for all sites containing the words travel or directory, but try to gather those sites with travel and directory together.

- Entering “travel directory” (with quotation marks) often means: Look for all sites containing the words travel and directory next to each other.

- Entering +travel directory generally means: Find all sites with the word travel and preferably the word directory as well.

- Entering +travel+directory generally means: Find all sites with both words.

Search engines look for information in different ways and allow different techniques to be applied in order to narrow or broaden the search criteria. This information can be obtained by looking at the respective search engines’ Help page (Figure 18.2).

Many search engines and directories offer an Advanced Search or Search Options page that lets you perform more detailed searches without using the parameters outlined above. Yahoo! (Figure 18.3) and Google (Figure 18.4) are two such sites.

**Enlisting Meta-Indexes for Optimal Exposure**

To ensure that you are taking full advantage of meta-indexes:
Figure 18.2. AltaVista’s Help page and Quick-Search Guide.

Figure 18.3. Yahoo!’s Advanced Search page.
Meta-indexes can be arranged by subject (such as sites that provide information on book publishing) or by geography (tourist sites in Alaska). As mentioned before, the major search engines are a good place to start. For example, to find tourist sites in Alaska, conduct a search by entering +Alaska+tourist+directory. Once you find a good list and start to check the links, you will likely find other lists. Bookmark or keep a record of the meta-indexes you like for future reference.

When requesting a link to your site, send an e-mail with “Site addition request” in the subject area of your message. Include the following in the body of the message:

- Search for appropriate meta-indexes
- Request a link
- Provide the details necessary
- Look at sponsorship or banner advertising opportunities.
Once you have identified indexes that appeal to your target market, determine whether additional opportunities exist for sponsoring or purchasing banner advertising on the site. Meta-indexes that relate to your market are a great place to advertise because they are accessed by your target customers.

To make your link stand out, inquire about adding a prominent link or icon to the meta-index page along with a short tag line, in addition to your company name. If you provide the GIF and the HTML, the meta-index owner might be happy to include it.

Keep in mind that the compilers of the free meta-indexes are motivated by noncommercial reasons and are under no obligation to add your site to their list or process your request quickly. However, more and more meta-index sites have a commercial focus.

A listing on a meta-index might be free, but there could be a fee charged for placing a hypertext link within the listing. However, there also are meta-indexes that charge a fee for the listing. If you are considering paying a fee to be included in a meta-index, consider the volume of traffic the meta-index receives, whether the traffic is targeted, and the cost involved in relation to the return on investment. It might be wise to contact those already listed in the meta-index to see if the listing has been a good investment for them.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 18**

I have included a few resources for you to check out on meta-indexes. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.
Essential Links: Portal to the Internet
http://www.el.com
Essential Links is a portal to Internet portal sites, news headlines, search engines, Web directories, references, and utilities.

Internet Resources Meta-Index
http://www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/Mosaic/MetaIndex.html
A meta-index of the various resource directories and indexes available on the Internet.

Metaplus
http://www.metaplus.com
The Webmaster’s Ultimate Resource—A meta-index of the directories and essential sites.

Virtual Library
http://vlib.org/Overview.html
The Virtual Library is the oldest catalog of the Web, started by Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of the Web itself. Unlike commercial catalogs, it is run by a loose confederation of volunteers who compile pages of key links for particular areas in which they are experts. Even though it isn’t the biggest index of the Web, the VL pages are widely recognized as being among the highest-quality guides to particular sections of the Web.

WWW Meta-Indexes and Search Tools
http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/globe/metaindex.html
A Library of Congress Internet resource page.

WWW Meta-Indexes and Search Tools
http://www.fys.ruu.nl/~kruis/h3.html
A Library of Congress Internet resource page.
There are literally hundreds of Cool Sites, Sites of the Day, Hot Sites, and Pick-of-the-Week Sites. Some of these sites require you to submit; others are selected based on such things as:

- Awesome graphics
- Dynamite content that is useful and interesting
- Uniqueness
- Fun features.

If you are selected for one of these sites, it can mean a huge increase in the number of visitors to your site. You must be prepared for the increased traffic flow as well as the increased demand for online offerings. In this chapter, we cover:

- Where to submit your site for award consideration
- How to win Site of the Day—tips, tools, and techniques
• Getting listed in What’s New
• Posting your awards on your site
• Hosting your own Site of the Day.

It’s an Honor Just to Be Nominated

There are sites that find and evaluate other sites on the Internet and recognize those that are outstanding by giving them an award. The award sites are generally quite discriminating in terms of selecting which sites are the recipients of their award. They have established criteria defining what they consider “hot” or “cool” and base their award selection on those criteria. Figure 19.1 shows a variety of awards.

What’s New Web sites are designed to inform Internet users of new sites and updates to existing sites, and are often selective in which new sites they promote. The owner of each site also selectively chooses awards for Site of the Day, Week, Month, and Year. As mentioned earlier, some of these sites require you to submit an announcement or site description, and the awards are granted based on criteria such as graphics, dynamic content, uniqueness, and the “fun” quality of your site. Other

Figure 19.1. A collage of some of the more popular award sites.
sites grant their awards based solely on the personal likes and dislikes of the owner of the site and do not adhere to any criteria at all.

Some awards are taken just as seriously as the Academy Awards. The Webby Awards have a very comprehensive nomination procedure. Information regarding the Webby is available on their Web site at http://www.webbyawards.com.

When you win an award, you post it on your site for all to see. The award icon is usually a link back to the site that bestowed the honor on you.

Choosing Your Awards and Submitting to Win

There are different levels of prestige associated with the award sites. Some are an honor to receive. Some are highly competitive because of the number of submissions they receive.

Some awards are easier to receive than others, such as those from commercial sites that give out awards in an attempt to increase the traffic to their own site. Traffic increases because the award is a graphic link displayed on the winner’s site that visitors can follow back to the award giver’s site. Other Webmasters give out awards to anybody and everybody who makes a submission. The award is granted with the sole purpose of building traffic.

The bottom line is that awards are valuable assets. The average Web user cannot tell which awards are the prestigious ones and which are given to anyone who submits. So, submit for any awards that you choose to, as long as your site is ready. (A sample submission form is shown in Figure 19.2.)

Where you place these awards is important. If you win many awards, consider developing an Awards page with a link from your navigation bar to house them.

Something to consider before you submit for an award is whether the huge amount of new traffic would benefit your site. If you sell T-shirts emblazoned with WWW cartoons, then any traffic is good traffic, and awards could benefit your site. On the other hand, if you are a marine biologist specializing in red tides in the Arctic, then the traffic that Site of the Day would bring might be more of a hindrance than a help in marketing your services. Always determine if the marketing tools and
techniques will increase visitors from your target market before deciding to include them in your online marketing strategy.

Getting mentioned on one of the popular Cool Sites lists is probably the single biggest way to draw a tremendous amount of traffic to your site. However, that traffic is like a flash flood—fast and furious. Be careful what you wish for—you just might get it! Be prepared! Have a plan that you can implement on a moment’s notice. If you offer something free from your site, be sure that you can access a huge volume of whatever it is and that you have a plan to distribute quickly. If you offer a free download from your site, plan to have a number of alternative FTP sites available to your visitors. If you have a call-in offer, make sure you have a telephone response system in place and staff to handle the huge volume of calls you might get. You need a plan to handle a huge volume of e-mails as well.

Once you have decided that the type of traffic that comes along with winning awards fits with your marketing strategy, make sure your site has the makings of a winner and then submit to as many award sites as you can.

**Figure 19.2.** Sample award submission form. This one is for Coolstop.

**FTP**

File Transfer Protocol is the simplest way to transfer files between computers on the Internet.
First, make a list of the URLs of the award sites you are interested in.

Understand the submission form and guidelines. Review a number of forms to determine the information commonly requested.

To save time, develop a document with the answers to the various questions from which you can copy and paste into the different submission forms.

Submission forms capture the following types of information:

- URL
- Title of your site
- Contact person (name, e-mail, phone, address)
- Owner of the site

Submission guidelines tell you what types of sites can be submitted. (Some awards do not accept personal pages; others do not include commercial sites.) The submission guidelines also tell you what meets the definition of “cool” or “new” and what doesn’t.

Some award sites require that you display their award icon on your site. Posting an award on your site can provide a number of positive results—including enhanced credibility.

**What’s Hot and What’s Not in the Name of Cool**

Most of the award sites provide their selection criteria. Some base their selection on valuable content; others look for innovative and unique capabilities. Sites vary on what they consider “hot” or “cool,” but they are fairly consistent on what doesn’t make the grade, as summarized next.
Posting Your Awards on Your Site

If you have managed to collect a few awards for your Web site, you want to display them. After all, any award is a good award, and the site that granted you one expects you to display it in return for the recognition. Posting the awards on your home page might not be the best idea, though. For one thing, the additional graphics that will have to be downloaded will slow the load time for your home page. Second, by posting the awards on your home page, you are placing links leading out of your site on the first page. Thus, you are giving people the opportunity to leave your site before they have even had a chance to explore it. Where should you post your well-deserved awards, then? Simply create an awards section on your Web site. Here, you can list all of your awards without adversely affecting the load time of your home page or losing traffic.

Becoming the Host of Your Own Awards Gala

You can also create your own awards program to draw traffic to your site; however, this requires a considerable amount of work to maintain. The benefits of having your own award program include having links back to your site from the awards placed on winners’ sites, which is important for search engine placement because of link popularity. Because you control the text around the link back to your site, make sure you include your most important keywords to enhance your link relevancy score to further improve your search engine ranking. There are also great opportunities for permission ("Click here to be notified via e-mail when we have a new award winner") and viral marketing ("Tell
a friend about this award—Click here”). In addition, having your own awards program provides you with “bragging rights” and the opportunity for press releases to announce your awards, which gain exposure for your Web site and increase traffic. You need to work at it daily or weekly, so you must be committed to it. Be sure there is a benefit from a marketing perspective before you design and develop your own awards program. You must also be prepared to conduct your own searches to find sites worthy of your award if the quality of sites being submitted to you is not up to your standard.

There are a number of steps involved in getting your awards program up and running:

- Develop the criteria to use in your site selection.

- Develop several Web pages related to the award (information on selection criteria, submission forms, today’s or this week’s award winner, past award recipients page, etc.) in order to promote the award. (Be sure that you stipulate whether you are looking for submissions from commercial sites or personal pages and what criteria will be used in judging submissions.)

- Develop your award icon. Have this icon link back to your site. The award distinguishes the winner; thus, the link might be displayed prominently on its site. This is a great traffic builder.

- Finally, announce the award and market, market, market.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 19**

I have included a few resources for you to check out about winning awards and being designated a cool or hot site. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

**Award Sites**

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

Free guide to promoting, marketing, or just browsing some of the best sites on the Internet that offer a diverse range of information, services,
Winning Awards, Cool Sites, and More

or products—including many with excellent Web site award or review programs.

**Jayde.com**
Awards the Gold Diamond Award to sites with great style, design, and content. Jayde.com also has an award for commercial sites.

**Webby Awards**
[http://www.webbyawards.com](http://www.webbyawards.com)
The Webby Awards have been embraced by the online community as the leading creative honors for digital media. The awards recognize the most creative and innovative Web sites of the year and the talented editorial, technical, and design teams behind them.

**WebAwards**
[http://www.webaward.org](http://www.webaward.org)
Since 1997, the annual WebAward for Web site development has been the premier awards event where Web sites are recognized, competing head to head with other sites within their industry and against an overall standard of excellence.

**The AXIEM AWARDS**
[http://www.axiemawards.com](http://www.axiemawards.com)
The AXIEM AWARDS is an international awards program created to honor those who produce the best in all forms of electronic media.

**Hot Sites/Cool Sites**

**100 Hot Web Sites**
[http://www.100hot.com](http://www.100hot.com)
Directory of Web sites based on Web traffic and organized by category.

**Cool Site of the Day**
[http://www.coolsiteoftheday.com](http://www.coolsiteoftheday.com)
Cool Site of the Day is a wildly popular Internet award site that features interesting, provocative, and irreverent Web sites from around the world.

**CoolStop**
[http://www.coolstop.com](http://www.coolstop.com)
The Best of the Cool Award consistently recognizes outstanding sites in terms of design, originality, and content.

**JimWorld Way Cool Hot Site Award**
http://jimworld.com/hotpg.html
From this site you can visit some of the coolest, most interesting hot sites on the Web. These sites are selected by a blue ribbon panel of one—Jim. The sites here are truly special. Jim receives about 500 submissions every week; that’s about 2,000 per month. Out of that he usually finds only one winner. Visit a few of these sites. It’s worth the time.

**USA Today Hot Sites**
http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/ch.htm
USA Today scours the Web for sites that are hot, new, and notable. Visit their daily list to find some of the best sites the Web has to offer. They look for sites that stretch the design envelope and show where the Web is headed—sites that offer something unusual or unexpected, or just plain useful.

**Virtual Reference Meta-Index of Award Sites**
http://www.refdesk.com/textcool.html
A listing of sites that host Site of the Day, Hot Sites, and so on.

**Web Pages That Suck**
http://www.webpagethatsuck.com
Keep your site from being nominated to this awards site, and you are probably doing well. However, you can learn much here about how to properly design your site from a marketing perspective.

**World Best Websites**
http://www.worldbestwebsites.com
World Best Website Awards are granted to exemplary Web sites that are pursuing “best practices” in Web site design and Internet communications.
The world of banner advertising is changing rapidly. Several years ago banner advertising was in vogue, visitors were clicking through, good banner space was hard to find, and prices were rising. What a difference a day makes! The last several years have seen banner advertising prices decline significantly. Quality space is not difficult to obtain, and click-through rates are on the decline dramatically. Banner advertising is being used primarily to meet branding objectives.

Despite all the doom and gloom and bad press, however, banner ads can still be an effective advertising medium if the banner ad is properly developed and placed on a well-chosen site. We are starting to see a shift toward ads using rich media. Advertising on-line provides visibility—just as offline advertising does. You must develop a banner advertising strategy that works with your product, your marketing objectives, and your budget.

Advertising in the search engines is an important related topic. This topic is covered in Chapter 8.

In this chapter, we cover:

- Your online advertising strategy
- Advertising opportunities on the Web
• Banner ad design and impact on click-throughs
• Banner ad sizes and locations
• Placing classifieds
• Tips to creating dynamite banner ads that work
• The cost of advertising on-line
• Measuring ad effectiveness
• Banner ad exchange networks
• Using an online advertising agency
• Sources of Internet advertising information.

Expanding Your Exposure through Internet Advertising

Today, Internet advertising is being recognized in the advertising budgets of businesses around the globe. Banner ads are a way to create awareness of your Web site and increase the traffic to it. Banners are placed on the sites that your target market is likely to frequent, thus encouraging this market to click through and visit you!

The Internet offers many different advertising spaces. Banner ads can be placed on search engines, content sites, advertising sites, and online magazines. The choice of where your ad is displayed is based on the objectives you wish to achieve with your online advertising strategy. There are a number of advantages to online advertising:

• The response from these ads can easily be measured within one day through Web traffic analysis.
• The amount of information that can be delivered, if your Web site is visited, far surpasses that of a traditional advertising campaign.
• The cost of developing and running an online advertising campaign is much less than using traditional media.
Traditionally, advertising used to be handled by a public relations (PR) firm or advertising company that would come up with your marketing concept. As clients, businesses would review and approve (usually after several attempts) the concepts before they were ever released to the public eye. The PR or advertising firms would be responsible for developing TV, radio, and print ads for the businesses. They would come up with the media-buy strategy after reviewing appropriate publications, editorial calendars, pricing, and the discounts that they would receive for multiple placements. The ads were then gradually released over the period of the campaign and finally were viewed by the public. At the end of the campaign, the PR or advertising company would evaluate the success of the marketing campaign. This is very easy if the objective of the campaign was to achieve X number of sales, but it is much more difficult if the goal of your campaign was to generate brand awareness.

Today, online banner ads are developed in much less time and are placed on Web sites quickly. Web traffic analysis software can tell you the next day if the banner ad is working or not by tracking the number of visitors who clicked through and visited your site through the ad. This provides you with the opportunity to change the site on which you are advertising or to change the banner ad to see if it attracts a greater audience.

Nielsen Net Ratings (http://www.nielsen-netratings.com—Figure 20.1) offers great up-to-date resources to find out who is doing the most online advertising. You can check this resource to find the top ten banners displayed on the Internet each week and the top ten advertisers on-line.

Maximize Advertising with Your Objectives in Mind

When developing your advertising strategy, start with the objectives of your advertising campaign. The most common objectives for an online advertising campaign include:

- Building brand awareness
- Increasing Web site traffic
- Generating leads and sales.
You have a number of choices to make, such as what type of advertising to use and where to advertise. These decisions should be based on your objectives. If your objective is to increase overall brand recognition, a nicely designed banner ad on several of the high-traffic search engines would be effective. If you would like to develop leads and find new clients, then a more targeted approach should be taken, such as placing a banner ad on a high-traffic Web site that is frequented by your target market.

When deciding how to proceed with your advertising strategy, consider how many people you want to reach. Do you want a high-quality response from a small number of much targeted people, or do you want to reach a mass audience of grand proportions?

Think about the people you are targeting. If you sell dentistry supplies to dental practices, then you want to target dentists and hygienists. It would not make much sense to put an ad on Yahoo! when you could advertise on a site about new medical discoveries in dentistry.

Always keep your budget in mind when you are devising your online advertising strategy. There are many ways to stretch your advertising dollar. If you have the time, you can find promising sites to trade ban-

Figure 20.1. Neilsen Net Ratings provides you with continuously updated statistics on who is doing the most advertising on the Internet. The site also provides you with interesting information and popular banner ads.
ners. You can also participate in banner exchange programs, which are set up by a third party, and your banner is displayed randomly on other banner exchange participants’ pages.

**Online Advertising Terminology**

**Banner Ads**

Banner ads are small advertisements that are placed on a Web site. Companies usually develop their banner ads, find sites for placement, and then either purchase or trade banner space.

**Click-Throughs**

When a viewer clicks on a banner ad with the mouse and goes to the site advertised, it is called a “click-through.” Sometimes banner advertising prices are determined by the number of click-throughs.

**Hits**

Hits to a site are the number of times that another computer has accessed that site (or a file in a site). This does not mean that if your site has 1,000 hits, 1,000 people have visited it. If your home page has a number of graphic files on it, this number could be misleading. A hit is counted when the home page main file is accessed, but a hit is also counted for every graphic file that loads along with the home page. So if a person visits six pages on a site and each page has five graphics, at least 30 hits would be generated.

**Impressions or Page Views**

When a banner ad is viewed, it is called an impression. Banner advertising prices are often calculated by impressions. If a person visits a page six times, this generates six impressions.
CPM

Cost per thousand, or CPM, is a standard advertising term. CPM is often used to calculate the cost of banner advertising if a site sells advertising based on impressions. If the CPM of banner advertising on the site was US$40 and the number of impressions the ad had was 2,000, then the advertiser would have to pay US$80 for displaying the ad.

Keywords

You can purchase keyword banner advertising on search engines (see Chapter 8) sites that have sophisticated banner advertising programs, or sites whose banner advertising real estate is maintained by online advertising agencies that have sophisticated banner advertising programs. Your banner ad appears when someone does a search on the keyword that you purchased. This is good for zooming in on your target market.

Geotargeting

Purchasing geographically targeted banner advertising is one of the latest trends in Internet marketing. This is done by purchasing banner advertising for a range of IP addresses. Every device that connects to the Internet has its own unique IP address. These are assigned centrally by a designated authority for each country. We are now seeing search engines sell IP addresses to help businesses pinpoint their target geographic group. For example, John Doe is building a new home in Utah and is searching for a company selling lumber in his area. Dooley Building Supplies, a lumber company in Utah, happens to be marketing over the Internet, and as part of Dooley’s banner advertising campaign they have purchased banner ads by keyword and by IP address. Simply stated, they have said that they only want their banner ad to appear when the keyword lumber is searched on by individuals whose IP address is within a certain range (the range being those existing in Utah). When John Doe does his search on the word lumber, the Dooley Building Supplies banner ad is displayed at the top of the page holding the search results. Someone in Michigan searching for lumber would see a different banner ad.
Jump on the Banner Wagon

Banner advertising is the most common and most recognized form of online advertising. Banner ads are available in various sizes. (See Figure 20.2 for some of the more popular banner ad sizes.)

Banners usually have an enticing message or call to action that coaxes the viewer to click on it. “What is on the other side?” you ask. The advertiser’s Web site, of course. Banner ads can also be static, just displaying the advertiser’s logo and slogan, or can be animated with graphics and movement.

If you use an advertising or PR company to develop your offline ads, quite often they provide you with a library of banner ads that you can use for your online advertising campaign. If you choose not to use an advertising or PR company, you can outsource the creation of a banner ad to another company or create your own.

The banner ad is designed to have a direct impact on the number of click-throughs it achieves. There are a number of resources on-line to assist you in developing dynamic banner ads. The Banner Generator at

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**Figure 20.2.** There are many different marketing resource Web sites available on-line that can provide you with the popularity of different sizes and types of banner ads.
http://www.coder.com/creations/banner allows you to create banners online at no charge. The Media Builder at http://www.3dtextmaker.com allows you to develop animated banner ads directly from its site. Other resources to assist you in designing and building banner ads are identified in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

As noted previously, there are a wide variety of banner sizes available. You should consult with the owners of the Web sites on which you want to advertise before creating your banner ad or having one created professionally for you.

The objective of your banner ad is to have someone click on it. Do not try to include all of your information in your ad. A banner that is too small and cluttered is difficult to read and is not visually appealing. Many banners simply include a logo and a tag line enticing the user to click on it. Free offers or contest giveaways are also quite effective for click-throughs because they tend to appeal to the user’s curiosity.

### Exploring Your Banner Ad Options

Static banners are what the name suggests. They remain static on the same Web page until they are removed. Your banner ad will be visible on that particular page until your reader moves to another page.

Animated banners are banners that move on a Web site. Animated banners are usually in GIF format and contain a group of images in one file that are presented in a specific order (see Figures 20.3a through 20.3c). When using animated banner ads, you can choose to loop the file so that the banner continues to move between the images in the files, or you have the option to make it stop after a complete cycle.

Rotating banners are banner ads that rotate among different Web pages on the same site. Some rotating banners rotate every 15 or 30 seconds, so a visitor might see several ads while remaining on the page. Other rotating banner ads rotate every time there is a new visitor to the page. Rotating banners are commonly used in high-traffic Web sites.

Scrolling banners are similar to modern billboards. Here the visitor sees a number of billboard ads, scrolled to show a different advertisement every 10 to 30 seconds.
Banner Ad Tips

Follow these tips to ensure that your banner ad achieves your marketing objectives:

- Make sure that your banner ad is quick to load. If the Web page loads in its entirety before the banner, then the viewer might click away before ever seeing it. Ideally, you should have a very fast banner ad on a relatively slow loading site. This way your viewers have nothing to do but read your banner ad while they are waiting for the site to load. You should always try to keep your banner ad size under 5K.
• To see how big files are when using any version of Internet Explorer, you can follow these steps:
  – Right-click on the banner ad.
  – Select Properties.
  – In the Properties window you will see a Size line which will tell you the banner size.

• Keep it simple! If your banner contains too much text or animation, or too many colors and fonts, viewers experience information overload and will not be encouraged to read or click on your banner.

• Make sure your banner ad is easily viewed. Many banners on the Internet are nicely designed but difficult to read. Use an easy-to-read font with the right size. Be careful in your choice of color.

• Always use Alt tags for those visitors who surf the Internet with their graphics turned off or cannot see your banner ad for whatever reason.

• Make sure your banner ad links to the optimum page in your site. It is not uncommon to click on an interesting banner only to find an error message waiting for you. This is annoying to Internet users and counterproductive for your marketing effort. Check your banner ads on a regular basis to verify that the link remains active and is pointing to the right page on your Web site.

• If you are using animated banner ads, limit your ads to two to four frames.

• You should always include a call to action such as “Click here.” It is amazing how many people do what they are told. You still have to make your ad interesting and one that grabs their attention. Don’t simply say “Click here”—give your audience a compelling reason to do so.

• Test your banner ads with the different browsers, the different versions of these browsers, and at different screen resolutions to make sure that they look the way you want them to.
• If you know absolutely nothing about advertising and graphic design, do not try to create a banner on your own. Go to a professional. If you do design your own banner, get a second opinion and maybe a third.

**Interesting Banner Ads**

The following are more technologically advanced forms of banner advertising. They are interesting to viewers because they have attributes that are unique or unusual in some way. These attributes might be more apt to grab viewers’ attention and entice them to click on the banner ad.

*Expanding Banner Ads.* An expanding banner ad (see Figures 20.4a and 20.4b) is one that looks like a normal banner ad but expands when you click on it, keeping you on the same site rather than transporting you to another site on the Internet. Usually these say “Click to Expand,” and the viewer then can learn more about what the banner is promoting. Some of the more advanced expanding banner ads have e-commerce capabilities, which allow you to actually order products from the banner, without ever going to the Web site.

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*Figure 20.4a.* This expanding advertisement displays the ad and then prompts the viewer to expand the banner ad.

*Figure 20.4b.* When the banner expands it explains more about the product while remaining on the site that hosts the banner ad.
Animated Banner Ads. Animated banner ads contain a group of images in one file that rotate in a specific order. These banner ads are more likely to receive a higher click-through than a normal banner ad because moving images increase chances of the viewers reading the banner. These banners also allow you to deliver more information than in a normal banner ad because you can show different files, which contain different data. Limit your banner ads to two to four frames to keep your load time fast and to make sure your viewers read your information before they continue to surf the Internet.

Drop-Down Menu Banner Ads Containing Embedded HTML. Lately we are seeing an increase in banner ads containing embedded HTML (see Figures 20.5 and 20.6). This allows viewers to select from a drop-down menu which site they want to visit. These banners are great because instead of making viewers click through and then navigate through your site, as with a conventional banner, these

Figure 20.5. Trips.com advertises using banners with embedded HTML which allows the viewer to choose various different sites from the drop-down menu.

Figure 20.6. Another embedded HTML banner allowing different selections for the viewer to choose.
direct your viewers to the page of interest on your site. This type of banner ad also is great for co-op advertising programs. Several companies selling noncompeting products or services to the same target market can use this type of banner advertising to get more exposure for their dollar.

**Interstitial Ads.** These are advertisements that appear in a separate browser window while your visitors wait for a Web page to load.Interstitial ads are more likely to contain large graphics, streaming presentations, and more applets than a conventional banner ad. However, some users have complained that interstitial ads slow access to destination pages.

**Java, Flash, and Shockwave Ads.** These banner ads allow you to use rich media in your advertisements. By using these technologies, you can incorporate animation and sound into your banner advertisement. Although Java banners are more technologically advanced and offer more features, they also take longer to download and risk not being viewed. Flash was designed to generate faster-loading Web sites, online animation, and advertising. If you want to incorporate rich media into your banners, you may want to go with Flash or Shockwave because you want your visitors to see your banner ads as quickly as possible.

**Floating Ads and DHTML.** These ads appear when you first view a Web page, and they appear to “fly” or “float” over the page for anywhere from 5 to 30 seconds. They tend to obscure your view of the page, and they often disable mouse input until the ad is finished loading so that you must watch it before being able to access the page content. They have a high click-through rate and are great for branding, although their intrusiveness has been questioned.

**Unicast Ads.** Although not widely seen on the Internet at the present, their popularity is increasing. A Unicast ad is basically like a television commercial that runs in a pop-up window. It has animation and sound and can last from 10 to 30 seconds. Although they are like television commercials, they go a step further in that a viewer can then click on the ad to obtain further information. They have a higher than average click-through rate.
Location, Location, Location

As with all types of advertising, the location of the ad is extremely important. There are any number of targeted sites where you can place your banner ads. Always make sure that your banner advertising location is consistent with your objectives.

Search Engines

Advertising with the Search Engines is covered in Chapter 8.

Content Sites

If your objectives include bringing interested people from your target market to your site, then advertising on strategically chosen content sites would be extremely effective. These are sites that concentrate on a specific topic. The CPM of advertising on content sites ranges from US$25 to US$50 depending on the traffic volume they see and the focus of their visitors.

Banner Ad Price Factors

The price of banner ad space varies from site to site. Banner ads often are sold based on the number of impressions or number of click-throughs. As stated earlier, an impression is an ad view, and click-throughs are the actual clicking on the banner ad and being sent to the advertiser’s Web site. The price per impression should be less than the price per click-through.

When site owners charge per impression, there is usually a guarantee that your ad will be seen by a certain number of people. The burden is on the seller to generate traffic to its site. When the charges are per click-through, the responsibility is on you, the advertiser, to design an ad that encourages visitors to click on it. Sites that charge per impression are more common than those that charge per click-through.

There are obvious advantages to the advertiser when paying per click-through. The advertiser doesn’t have to pay a cent for the 10,000 people who saw the banner but did not pursue the link. Sites that do not have a large volume of traffic often charge a flat rate for a specified period of time.
Considerations When Purchasing Your Banner Ad

Before you sign on the dotted line to purchase banner advertising, there are a few things you should consider:

- How closely aligned is the target market of the site you want to advertise on to yours?

- How many sites are there like the one you are considering advertising on? Are there other sites you could use to reach the same audience?

- What banner sizes are allowed? Generally, the larger the banner, the more it costs.

- How many ads are on each page? The more ads on a page, the lower the click-through rate for any particular ad on that page. Generally, the more ads on a page, the lower the price per ad.

- What banner rotation system is being used? Is there a comprehensive program that automatically profiles the visitors and provides the best banner? The more targeted the audience, the more expensive the ad; these profiling systems can provide ads to a very targeted audience.

- What are the site’s competitors charging?

- Does the site have a sliding-scale ad rate?

Make Sure Visitors Can See Your Banner

A major thing that is often overlooked is the fact that some people still surf the Internet with their graphics turned off. Not a big deal, right? What if you purchased a banner ad? They are not going to see it, so how could they click through? An easy way to make sure that the viewer still knows that your banner is there is to attach an Alt tag to your banner. An Alt tag is a small piece of HTML code that is added to a Web site. It tells the browser what is supposed to be displayed if the graphic cannot be viewed. It is here that you should develop a clever tag line that still entices the viewer to click through to your Web site. Re-
member that it is important to include an Alt tag on all of the graphics on your Web site.

**Making It Easy with Online Advertising Networks**

If your objective is to reach a large number of users through a wide variety of sites, Internet ad networks could be right for you. Ad networks manage the banner advertising real estate on a wide range of different Web sites that people look at every day. If you are going to join an ad network, you are known as an advertiser. You supply your banners to the ad network and determine how you want it to promote you. ValueClick (http://www.valueclick.com) is an example of a popular ad network (see Figure 20.7). ValueClick has 6,000 Web sites in its network and is emerging as an ad network leader. It can target a specific industry of your choice or advertise your banner to a mass audience. For a more targeted audience, your CPM would be higher. Even though you have to pay a little more initially, it saves you in the long run.

The benefit of joining an ad network is that the network not only targets your audience, it also provides you with real-time reports that

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**Figure 20.7.** ValueClick is a large ad network offering advertisers the opportunity to target their audience using ValueClick’s network.
indicate the success of your banner ads. This allows you to evaluate the success of your current banner ad campaign and offers you the chance to change your marketing strategy if you are not happy with your results. Maybe you want to take a different approach, or maybe a different banner design might work better for you. Whatever it might be, the data that the ad network can provide you with is beneficial to determining the strength of your banner ad campaign.

You can also join an ad network as a publisher. Publishers are the Web sites that banners are placed on. If you have a Web site and would like to make some additional online revenue from your site, you can join an ad network, which will place banner ads on your site and pay you for the usage of this space. Very similar to an affiliate program, or banner exchange, by joining an ad network you can dramatically increase your online revenue. A detailed list of ad networks is listed in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

**Bartering for Mutual Benefits with Banner Trading**

Using this technique requires you to barter with other Web sites to trade banners with their sites. If you are browsing the Internet and find a site that you think appeals to your target market, then ask for a trade. Send the Web master an e-mail outlining your proposition. Include the reason you think it would be mutually beneficial, a description of your site, where you would place that site’s banner on your site, and where you think your banner might go on its site.

When you make arrangements like this, be sure to monitor the results. If the other site has low traffic, then more visitors could be leaving your site through its banner than are being attracted. Also, check the other site regularly to make sure that your banners are still being displayed for the duration agreed upon.

**Tips for Succeeding with Classified Ads**

Classified ads are also displayed on various Web sites. Some sites offer to display classified ads for free; others charge a small fee. Here are some tips for creating effective classified ads:
• **Headlines.** The headline of your ad is very important. The subject line determines how many people read the rest of your ad. Look at the subject lines of other ads and see what attracts your eye.

• **Entice.** Use your classified ad to get people to request more information, not to make immediate reservations. You can then send them a personalized letter outlining all of the information and make a great pitch to attract an order.

• **Be Friendly.** Your classified ad shouldn’t be formal and businesslike. Make your ad light and friendly.

• **Call to Action.** Do not only offer information about what you are selling. Call the reader to action—for instance, to order now!

• **Do Some Tests.** Run a number of different ads and use a different e-mail address for each one. This way you can determine which ad receives the most responses. You can then run the best ad in a number of places to find out which place gets the biggest response.

• **Keep a Record.** Keep records of your responses so that you know which ads were the most successful.

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**Form Lasting Advertising with Sponsorships**

Sponsorships are another form of advertising that usually involve strong, long-lasting relationships between the sponsors and the owners of the sites. Sponsors might donate money, Web development, Web hosting, Web site maintenance, or other products and services to Web site owners in this mutually beneficial relationship. By sponsoring Web sites on the Internet, you can achieve great exposure for your site. People appreciate sponsorships and look at banner ads that are from a sponsor. The benefits of sponsorships on the Internet are that you can target a specific audience, you usually get first call on banner ad placement, and you show your target market that you care about their interest. Overall, by sponsoring sites on the Internet, you have the opportunity to get directly in the face of your target market.

There are a number of ways in which you can advertise on-line through sponsorships. The following is a list of the more common forms of online sponsorship:
• **E-Zines and Newsletters.** An example of this would be Nike sponsoring a Golf Digest e-zine.

• **Content Sites.** An example would be DuPont sponsoring a NASCAR racing Web site.

• **Online Chat Sessions.** An example would be CDNow sponsoring a chat on the Ultimate Band List.

• **Events.** An example would be a search engine such as AltaVista or Google sponsoring a seminar on search engine strategy.

**Commercial Links**

Another form of online advertising is commercial links. A number of targeted sites provide lengthy lists of URLs related to a specific topic. See Chapter 18 on Meta-Indexes. These sites often provide your listing for free but charge a fee to have a hypertext link activated from their site to yours. There are also Web sites where you can be listed if you don’t have a Web site and would prefer to have only your business name and phone number or e-mail address listed. These are great sites, especially because they are targeted toward your demographic group. An example of this would be Franchise Solutions (http://www.franchisesolutions.com). This site (Figure 20.8) has a database of franchise and business opportunities targeted toward entrepreneurs wanting to open their own business. If you are a franchiser and are interested in expanding your business, you would want to have a link on this Web site because your target market visits sites like this.

**Sponsoring a Mailing List**

Another online advertising opportunity is presented by mailing lists. Mailing lists provide a much targeted advertising vehicle. Mailing list subscribers are all interested in the list topic and are therefore potential clients, if you select the mailing list carefully. The rates for sponsoring lists are quite low. The cost would be determined on a price-per-reader basis and is usually between 1 and 10 cents per reader.
Subscribe to the lists that appeal to your target market and read the FAQ files to determine whether advertising or sponsorship opportunities exist for each mailing list. If the mailing list allows sponsorship, contact the mailing list administrator to inquire about the cost of sponsoring and, if it is reasonable, check availability and sponsors. All of the members of the mailing list have subscribed and want to be on the list; therefore, they are likely to read your e-mail. This is an excellent opportunity for you to expose your products and services to these potential consumers. A good example of this would be Trip.com’s sponsoring a mailing list about vacation destinations around the world. Readers are interested in the topic, so they might be encouraged to click through and book a trip.

**Online and Offline Promotion**

Your advertising strategy shouldn’t be limited to online activities. It is important to integrate your offline advertising strategy to include promotion of your Web site. For more information on offline promotion, see Chapter 26.
Internet Resources for Chapter 20

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding productive online advertising. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

Banner Ad Tools

Animated Communications
http://www.animation.com
An online resource to build your own animated banners in minutes.

Animation Online
http://www.animationonline.com
Create your own animated banner in minutes for free from this site.

The Banner Generator
http://www.coder.com/creations/banner
The Banner Generator is a free service to help you create graphical banners for your Web pages.

Online Advertising Agencies

.Com Marketing
http://www.commarketing.com
.Com Marketing is an interactive advertising and marketing firm specializing in driving traffic to Web sites. It provides Web advertising strategy, ad banner design, online media research and planning and search engine submission services.

Ad Networks

24/7 Media
http://www.247media.com
24/7 Media is a network of branded sites in a vast variety of categories. This allows advertisers to zero in on their target market and get results from their online marketing efforts.
B2B Works
http://www.b2bworks.com
B2B Works has well over 70 industries in its network and is emerging as an ad network leader. It can target a specific industry of your choice or advertise your banner to a mass audience.

DoubleClick
http://www.doubleclick.com
The DoubleClick ad network’s goal is to provide solutions to make advertising work for companies on the Internet. Five types of services are offered. The site enables you to market globally and locally. It can help you to build brand awareness, or to close the loop on your target market. DoubleClick also offers its clients the opportunity to participate in the e-commerce world by offering online sales technology to advertisers that would like to sell products online.

ValueClick
http://www.valueclick.com
ValueClick is the Internet’s largest results-based advertising network. It uses a cost-per-click model, which enables participants to pay only for the viewers who click through to their Web site.

Banner Exchanges

GSAnet
http://einets.com/
GSAnet Banner Swap is unique in that it offers up to a 1:1 display ratio to members depending on where you locate the banner on your Web page(s). In addition, sites with few visitors see an even greater ratio due to what are called “charity banners.”

Online Advertising Education

Advertising Age Magazine
http://adage.com/news_and_features/deadline
This advertising industry publication always has interesting articles on advertising online.
Internet Advertising Bureau—Online Advertising Effectiveness Study
The IAB Online Advertising Effectiveness Study is the most comprehensive and projectable test of online advertising effectiveness to date. With 12 major Web sites and over 16,000 individual users taking part in the test, the study ranks as the largest, most rigorous test of advertising effectiveness.

Nielsen Net Ratings
http://www.netratings.com
Nielsen Net Ratings provides you with continuously updated statistics on the top advertisers on the Internet, and which banner advertisements are the most commonly viewed on the Internet. The site also offers a wide range of other Internet-related statistics that could prove important to your marketing needs.

Know This
http://www.knowthis.com
KnowThis.com and its Marketing Virtual Library contain a wealth of information, resources, and references for professionals, academics and students in traditional and Internet marketing, advertising, selling, e-commerce, market research, PR, and more.
Your online media strategy can be extremely effective in building traffic to your site. News release distribution can be done easily. Build the right list of e-mail addresses or make use of one of the online news release distribution services. Most reporters and writers have e-mail addresses. Some do not like to receive e-mailed news releases; others prefer the e-mail versions. When e-mail news releases are sent out, reporters reply by e-mail. They will expect your response within 24 hours. Develop a media kit that you can e-mail out to editors. In this chapter, we cover:

- Developing your online media strategy
- Public relations versus advertising
- Online public relations versus traditional public relations
- Effective news releases
- News release and distribution services on-line
- How to distribute news releases on-line
• Providing an area for media on your site
• How to find reporters on-line
• How reporters want to receive your information
• Encouraging republication of your article with a direct link to your site or the article
• Providing press kits on-line
• Electronic newsletters.

**Managing Effective Public Relations**

Media relations are very important to your marketing efforts. The best results are achieved when you integrate both online and offline publicity campaigns. News release distribution can be accomplished easily if you have an established list of reporters and editors, or if you make use of a news distribution service.

Maintaining effective public relations delivers a number of benefits to your company. Your company and products gain exposure through news releases, and a positive image for your company is portrayed. Your relationship with current customers is reinforced, and new relationships are formed.

**Benefits of Publicity versus Advertising**

Media coverage, or publicity, has a major advantage over paid advertisements. Articles written by a reporter carry more weight with the public than ads do because the media and reporters are seen as unbiased third parties. The public gives articles printed in media publications more credibility than they do paid advertisements. Another advantage of distributing news releases is that it is more cost-effective than advertising. You have to pay for advertising space on a Web site or
time on the radio, but the costs of writing and distributing news releases are minimal.

One of the disadvantages of news releases compared to advertising is that you don’t have control over what is published. If the editor decides to cast your company in a negative light, there is nothing you can do to stop him or her. If the writer of the piece does not like your company, for whatever reason, this might come across in the article. Basically, after your news release is distributed, you have no control over what will be written about your company.

It is important to note that when generating publicity you might lose control over the timing of your release as well. For example, you might want an article released the day before your big sale, but the editor could relegate it to a date the following week. There is nothing you can do about this. It is not a good idea to rely exclusively on publicity for important or newsworthy events, because if the release is not reviewed or is not considered newsworthy, you might be stuck with no promotion at all.

What Is a News Release?

Before you begin your media campaign, you should know what news releases are and how to write them. News releases are designed to inform reporters of events concerning your company that the public might consider newsworthy. News releases can get your company free public attention. A news release is a standard form of communication with the media. News releases must contain newsworthy information. Companies that continually send worthless information in a blatant attempt to get their name in the press do not establish a good relationship with the media.

Writing a News Release

Journalists are bombarded with volumes of news releases. To improve the chances of having your story interest the journalist enough to publish it, you must make the journalist’s job easier by presenting your news release in an appealing format and style. Your news release should be written as if it were prepared by an unbiased third party. The news
release should follow a standard format, which is described in the following paragraphs.

Notice of Release

The first thing the reader sees should be:

\[
\text{FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE}
\]

unless you have sent the information in advance of the time you would like it published. In that case, state it as follows:

\[
\text{FOR RELEASE: Wednesday, April 14, 2005 [using the date you want it released].}
\]

Remember that no matter what date you put here, the publication can release the information before or after that date. If the news is really big, it is unlikely that the publication will hold it until the date you have specified.

Header

The header should be in the upper-left corner. It should contain all of the contact information for one or two key people. These contacts should be able to answer any questions regarding the news release. If reporters cannot get in touch with someone to answer their questions, they might print incorrect information or even drop the article altogether.

\[
\text{Contact:}
\]

\[
\text{Susan Sweeney}
\]

\[
\text{Connex Network Incorporated}
\]

\[
(902) 468-2578
\]

\[
\text{susan@susansweeney.com}
\]

\[
\text{http://www.susansweeney.com}
\]
Headline

Your headline is critically important. If you get it right, it will attract the attention you are looking for. Your headline should be powerful, summarizing your message and making the reader want to continue reading. Keep the headline short—less than ten words.

City and Date

Name the city you are reporting from and the date you wrote the news release.

The Body

Your first sentence within the body of the news release should sum up your headline and immediately inform the reader why this is newsworthy. With the number of news releases reporters receive, if you don’t grab their attention immediately they won’t read your release. Begin by listing all of the most relevant information first, leaving the supporting information last.

Ask yourself the five W’s (who, what, where, when, and why) and answer them up front. Write the news release just as if you were writing a newspaper article for publication. Include some quotes from key individuals in your company and any other relevant outside sources that are credible. If there are any statistics that support your main message, include them as well, providing references.

Your last paragraph should be a short company description.

The Close

If your release is two pages long, center the word “more” at the bottom of the first page. To end your release, center the word “end” at the end of your message. A sample news release is shown in Figure 21.1.

Advantages of Interactive News Releases

Online news releases take the same standard format as offline news releases, but the online news release can be interactive, with links to a
variety of interesting information that supports your message. When your news release is provided by e-mail and you provide a hypertext link in that e-mail, the journalist is just a click away from accessing all the information he or she needs to complete the story. Helpful links to include in your interactive news releases are:

- A link to the e-mail address of the media contact person in your organization so that with the click of the mouse a journalist can ask a question via e-mail.

- A link to the company Web site so that the journalist can quickly and easily access additional information as part of his or her due diligence or can find required information.

- Links to articles that have been written about the company and related issues, both on the corporate Web site and on other sites.

- Links to graphics and pictures for illustration. If your story relates to a product, have a link to a graphic that can be used.

Figure 21.1. This press release from Destination Hotels & Resorts contains several hypertext links, enabling a journalist to quickly access additional information and perform due diligence.
• Links to key corporate players, their biographies, their photos, and possibly some quotes. Journalists usually include quotes in their stories.

• A link to a FAQ section where you can have frequently asked questions and a few that you wish were frequently asked.

Figure 21.2 is an example of an online news release.

**Sending News Releases on Your Own versus Using a Distribution Service**

When distributing news releases on your own, you save the money it would cost to have a service do it. You can also be more targeted in your efforts than a service would be. Some services’ lists could be outdated or incomplete. Their lists of reporters and editors might not be comprehensive and might not have been updated. On the other hand, some services could get your news release taken more seriously. A re-

![Figure 21.2](http://www.example.com/image.jpg)

**Figure 21.2.** This news release from Apple.com contains textual URLs within the release.
Maximizing Media Relations

porter who recognizes the name of the service might be more receptive than if the release were to come from an unknown company. Using a service is bound to save you a lot of time.

If you decide to send your news releases on your own, you have to build a list of journalists. When reading publications, look for the names of reporters and find out their contact information. If you don’t know whom to send a news release to at any publication, you can always call and ask for the name of the appropriate editor. Subscribe to a personalized news service to receive articles about your industry. This is a great way to find the names of journalists who might be interested in what you have to say.

There are a number of online resources to assist you in building your news-distribution list, such as the one shown in Figure 21.3. Mediafinder (http://www.mediafinder.com) is a Web site that might be useful. It provides access to a database of thousands of media outlets including magazines, journals, newspapers, newsletters, and catalogues. MediaMap (http://www.mediamap.com) is a public relations resource that has detailed profiles on more than 20,000 media contacts, including their phone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and work pref-

Figure 21.3. Use Mediafinder.com to locate appropriate magazines, journals, newspapers, newsletters, and catalogs.
erences (Figure 21.4). They also have editorial calendars that tell you who will be writing a scheduled story, what the topic of the story is, and when it will be written.

There are a number of news release distribution services on-line (Figures 21.5 and 21.6). Several of them are listed in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

**Golden Tips for News Release Distribution**

When distributing your news releases, don’t send them to the news desk unaddressed. Know which editor handles the type of news in your release, and address the news release to that person. Don’t send the news release to more than one editor in any organization unless there is more than one angle to the information in the news release. Call ahead, if possible, to discuss and solicit the editor’s interest in your news release before sending it. Also, follow up with a phone call a few days later to make sure that it was received and to answer any questions. Be sure to review editorial calendars of publications in your industry to see if there are upcoming articles where your story could make a contribution.

*Figure 21.4.* MediaMap is a software and media information company.
**Figure 21.5.** Internet News Bureau is an e-mail news release service company that provides distribution and also the writing of e-mail news releases.

**Figure 21.6.** You can submit your news release to PRWeb.
News Release Timing and Deadlines

One of the most important things to remember when sending a news release or advisory is the deadline. Know how far in advance you should send your information for each of the media. Here are some time guidelines for your news release distribution.

Monthly Magazines

For monthly magazines, you should submit your news releases at least two to three months before the issue you want it to appear in. Magazines are planned far in advance, because it often takes a number of weeks to have the magazine printed and in subscribers’ mailboxes.

Daily Newspapers

It is a good idea to have your news release arrive on the editor’s desk at least several weeks in advance. If it concerns a special holiday, you should send it even earlier.

TV and Radio

When submitting news releases to TV and radio, remember that you might be asked to appear on a show as a guest. Be prepared for this before you submit the release. TV and radio move very quickly; a story that has been given to the news director in the morning might appear on that evening’s news.

Formatting Your E-mail News Release

Your news releases can be e-mailed. Some reporters prefer e-mailed releases; others say they prefer mailed or faxed releases. Check the reporter’s preference before you send your news release. If you e-mail your news releases, make sure that your e-mails are formatted properly. Refer to Chapter 10 for guidelines on how to create effective e-mail messages.

Keep your e-mailed news releases to one or two pages with short paragraphs. It is best to insert the news release in the e-mail. Do not
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send your news release as an attachment. You don’t know which platform or word-processing program the reporter is using. You might be using Microsoft Word 2004 on a PC, but the reporter could be using an incompatible program on a Mac and will not be able to open the file. There could also be problems downloading, which would prevent your release from being read. The person on the receiving end of your e-mail could be using an old computer with a slow dial-up connection, so what might take you two minutes to transfer might take the recipient 20 minutes or two hours to download. In addition, you may be using a PC platform but the reporter may be using a MacOS-based computer. Someone who spends 20 minutes or longer downloading your e-mail only to find that it’s useless won’t be impressed—great start to getting the journalist to do a positive story on you!

Make sure the subject line of your e-mail is compelling. Journalists can easily delete e-mailed releases unopened, and quite often they do, because journalists receive large volumes of these daily. Make sure your e-mail is clear and concise. Get to the point with the first sentence. If you don’t grab the reader’s attention at the beginning of the release, the recipient might not keep reading to find out what your news is.

It’s important to be able to send news release information in digital format (as a file rather than hard copy). With a quick copy-and-paste, the journalist would then have the “first draft” of the story (Figure 21.7). You have made it easy for him or her to then edit the draft and have a story quickly. Everybody loves to save time, and nearly all of these journalists are under tight deadlines.

What Is Considered Newsworthy

Your news release has to contain newsworthy information for it to be published. One of the main concerns for public relations representatives is figuring out what is considered newsworthy and what isn’t. You have to have a catch, and, if possible, it should appeal to some sort of emotion. Here is a list of newsworthy items:

- A merger or partnership between your company and another

- A free service or resource offered by your company to the general public
A survey or forum that your company is holding to discuss an already hot news topic

The appearance of a celebrity at a company event or upcoming online promotions

Your participation in a trade show

The findings of a report your company has conducted

A breakthrough in technology resulting in a significant new consumer product

The development of new strategic alliances or partnerships

A charitable contribution by your company

A milestone anniversary that your company is celebrating

An award presented by your company
- Holiday event tie-ins
- Tips, articles, or advice
- Stories with a human interest element.

**What Isn’t Considered Newsworthy**

Some things that aren’t news to the general public might be news to targeted trade magazines and journals. Use your own judgment when trying to determine if your news release is news or just an excuse to get your company’s name in print. If your release focuses on any of the following, it is probably not newsworthy enough to publish.

The launch of a new Web site has not been news for a number of years now. Unless the site is based on a breakthrough in Internet technology or serves the public interest in an innovative way, you won’t get a mention in the news. Nor is a new feature or change to your Web site newsworthy information. Even if your site has undergone a major overhaul, this is not news to the general public.

Launching a new product is not newsworthy unless the product represents a significant breakthrough in some area. The upgrade of an old product simply won’t cut it.

**Preparing Your News and Media Kits**

Your press kit is an essential item at news conferences and interviews. This kit can also be sent to reporters when they request more information about a news release you have sent to them. Your press kit should start with a folder displaying your company logo and basic contact information. The folder should have pockets inside so that different sheets of information can be inserted. The following items should be included in your press kit:

- A news release outlining the newsworthy event
- A company history
• Brochures
• Other articles written about your company
• Pictures
• Background information on key players
• FAQs and answers to anticipated questions
• Quotes from key individuals
• Contact information
• Business card.

Developing an Online Media Center for Public Relations

If publicity is a significant part of your public relations strategy, you should consider developing an online media center as part of your site (see Figure 21.8). The media center should be easily accessible from your navigation bar. It would include all the components a journalist needs when doing a story on your company. Journalists should be able to find pictures to include in the story and all the information necessary to do their due diligence. They should be able to send a question to the appropriate media contact within the organization with one click. The media center should include:

• A chronology of news releases distributed by the company.
• The company’s history and background information.
• An electronic brochure.
• Links to other articles written about your company.
• Links to story ideas for future articles.
• Links to pictures of a related product or products. Perhaps have a gallery where journalists can choose the pictures they want to
include in their story. The TIFF (Tag Image File Format) is preferred by journalists for crispness and clarity and works best for desktop-publishing applications. The file will have a .tiff or .tif extension. The .tif format is not supported by Web browsers, so you can make it easy for journalists to acquire the photos by placing thumbnails on your Web site and then having an autoresponder send them the specific photos they request in the preferred format. There are also great online media tools available such as CleanPix (http://www.cleanpix.com).

- Background information on key company personnel, along with their pictures, bios, and quotes.

- A link to your company’s media contact and contact information.

- FAQs and answers to anticipated questions.

By having a media center on your site, you are sending a clear message to the journalist. You are saying, “You’re important to me! I want to provide you with everything you need to quickly and easily complete your story on our company.” With the media center you are providing...
all the information, in a format journalists can use, to enable them to do the story no matter what time they choose to do it.

You will want to encourage permission marketing by offering visitors the opportunity to be notified to receive your news releases “hot off the press.” Place a “Click here to receive notification of our news releases” link on your Web site. In addition, make it easy for visitors to send a copy of your news release to a friend. Sometimes journalists work on stories together, so give the journalist the option to send the news release to a colleague or even to her editor through viral marketing.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 21**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding news releases. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

**News Releases**

- **Care & Feeding of the Press**
  [http://www.netpress.org/careandfeeding.html](http://www.netpress.org/careandfeeding.html)
  Journalists’ manifesto for how PR people should work with the media.

- **Xpress Press—E-mail News Release Information**
  Information on how to write and format a news release to be distributed by e-mail.

**Where to Submit Your News Releases**

- **Businesswire**
  [http://www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com)
  This news release distribution service provides a wide range of services and has several showcases.

- **Click Press Direct**
News release contact list of the nation’s top business-related newspapers and magazines. It has a subscription service that allows access to a list of 8,176 publications you can e-mail your press releases to.

**Emailwire.com**  
*http://www.emailwire.com*  
Submit your news releases to more than 300,000 business owners, business executives, individual investors, and consumers and to 27,000 journalists, editors, publishers, and syndicators.

**Internet Media Fax**  
*http://www.imediafax.com*  
Custom online news-distribution service that creates targeted media lists “on the fly.”

**Internet News Bureau Press Release Service**  
*http://www.newsbureau.com*  
For a fee, you can distribute your news release to thousands of online media outlets here. It also links to a number of good PR resources.

**Market Wire**  
*http://www.marketwire.com/mw/home*  
*http://www1.internetwire.com*  
The Market Wire offers online news release distribution via e-mail.

**Partyline**  
*http://www.partylinepublishing.com*  
The standard media placement newsletter for the public relations trade.

**PR Newswire Home Page**  
*http://www.prnewswire.com*  
A leading source for worldwide corporate media, business, the financial community, and the individual investor.

**PR Web**  
*http://www.prweb.com*  
A dynamite site that distributes news releases but provides an extensive list of PR resources as well.

**WebWire.com**  
*http://www.webwire.com*  
WebWire is a community of PR professionals, corporate communicators, and individuals who deliver qualified and professional press re-
leases to Web-based emerging and conventional media. Full access to WebWire is provided to the media at no cost, and many aspects of WebWire are free of charge for PR professionals, corporate communicators, and individuals. There is a nominal charge for press release submissions and associated distribution.

**Xpress Press News Release Distribution Service**  
*http://www.xpresspress.com*  
News releases delivered electronically by e-mail to 10,000 journalists and media members in more than 73 countries.

**Canada News Wire**  
*http://www.newswire.ca*  
Canada NewsWire is Canada’s number one resource for time-critical news and information from more than 10,000 sources coast to coast and around the world. Public companies, associations, unions, nonprofits, municipal, provincial and federal governments all rely on CNW’s services and networks to effectively send their messages to newsrooms, the financial community, and the public.

**CMP Media LLC**  
*http://www.cmp.com*  
CMP Media is a leading integrated media company providing essential information and marketing services to the technology and healthcare industries.

**E.Release**  
*http://www.ereleases.com/index.html*  
E.Release specializes in press release writing and distribution services, distributing press releases on-line to subscribing journalists. Unlike other press release services, they will post all press releases to PR Newswire and to targeted media in your industry.

**News Release Distribution Software**

**PRWizard**  
*http://www.prwizard.com*  
PRWizard is a powerful, automated news release submission software package that lets you effortlessly broadcast your news release to almost 28,000 targeted media contacts.
More than 60 percent of Internet users frequently read online publications, or **e-zines**. You can identify marketing opportunities by searching for and reading e-zines that are relevant to your business. In this chapter, we cover:

- What electronic magazines are
- Finding online sites on which to advertise or arrange links
- How to find appropriate e-zines for marketing purposes
- Submitting articles to e-zines
- Advertising in e-zines
- E-zine resources on-line.
Appealing to Magazine Subscribers on the Net

Many Web users frequently read e-zines. This is one of the reasons they are among the most popular marketing tools on the Internet. Five years ago there were a few hundred e-zines in publication. Now there are thousands of e-zines dedicated to a wide variety of topics such as travel, business opportunities, food, child care—you name it. For any topic you are interested in, there quite likely are several e-zines dedicated to it.

What Exactly Are E-zines?

E-zines, or electronic magazines, are the online version of magazines. They are content-rich and contain information regarding a certain topic in the form of magazine articles and features. Many e-zines display ads as well. Some e-zines are Web-site-based and others are e-mail-based.

Many offline magazines provide a version on-line as well (Figure 22.1). Coastal Living, Southern Living, Time, People, and Sports Illustrated are

Figure 22.1. Southern Living is an example of an offline magazine that has an online version.
all accessible via the Internet. Some of these provide the full version of their traditional magazine; others are selective about the articles they provide; and still others provide the previous month’s edition.

**Web-Based E-zines**

There are Web-based e-zines that have only an online presence (Figure 22.2). These e-zines are accessed through their Web sites by browsing from page to page. They have the look and feel of a traditional magazine. They include lots of glossy pictures and advertisements. Usually there is no charge to view the Web-based e-zines, but some do charge a subscription fee. These Web-based e-zines tend to be as graphically pleasing as offline magazines.

**E-mail E-zines**

Although e-mail e-zines can come as text or HTML, these days we are seeing more and more HTML as they get a much higher readership and
most e-mail viewers have no problem displaying HTML e-mails, which look like a Web page. Today we are seeing a blur between newsletters and e-mail e-zines as most newsletters now are sent as HTML and most are content-rich on a specific subject.

E-mail-based e-zines tend to be very content-rich and, as such, tend to be more of a target-marketing mechanism. E-mail e-zines tend to be several screens in length with one main or several short articles and, sometimes, classified advertising. The benchmark is that these e-zines should be able to be read in about five minutes. Circulation is often in the thousands. Most run weekly or biweekly editions. Most e-zines are free to subscribers.

People interested in the subject have taken the time to subscribe and ask to receive the information directly in their e-mail box. Once you have found an e-zine that caters to your target market, the e-zine could be a valuable marketing vehicle.

Every subscriber to an e-mail-based e-zine has access to the Internet. These people regularly receive and send e-mail and quite likely surf the Net. If you advertise in this type of medium and place your Internet address in the ad, your prospective customer is not more than a couple of clicks away from your site.

People subscribe because they are interested. Even if they don’t read it immediately when it is received, they usually read it eventually. Otherwise, they would not have subscribed. Subscribers will see your URL and product advertisements. For this reason, e-mail e-zines are a great marketing tool.

**Using E-zines as Marketing Tools**

Online publications are superior marketing tools for a number of reasons. They can be used in a number of ways to increase the traffic to your Web site. You can:

- Advertise directly
- Be a sponsor
- Submit articles
Finding Appropriate E-zines for Your Marketing Effort

There are many locations on-line to find lists and links to both Web-based and e-mail e-zines. A number of these resources are listed in the Internet Resources section at the end of this chapter.

You evaluate an e-zine’s marketing potential by its audience, reach, and effectiveness. The most important element of choosing an e-zine is to find one that reaches your target market. E-zine ads are effective because there is a high correlation between the target customer and the magazine’s subscribers. If you advertise in an e-zine simply because it has the largest subscriber rate, you will probably be disappointed unless your products or services have mass-market appeal.

You should review a number of the e-zine-listing sites, such as the one shown in Figure 22.3. Some of these sites have keyword search

Figure 22.3. eZINESearch.com provides a searchable directory of e-zines.
capabilities. Others have their e-zines listed by category. Once you have a list of e-zines you feel fit well with your marketing objectives, you should subscribe and begin reviewing these e-zines.

The Multiple Advantages of E-zine Advertising

One of the major advantages of e-zine advertising is the lifespan of your ads. E-zines that are delivered to e-mail addresses are read by the recipient and sometimes saved for future reference. Many e-zines archive their issues with the ads intact. Advertisers have received responses to ads that are several months old!

When you place an ad in an e-zine, you see it in a relatively short period of time, perhaps the next day or the next week depending on how often the e-zine is published. Most traditional magazines close out their ad space months before the issue is available on the newsstand.

Your ad in an e-zine is also much more likely to be noticed because there are so few of them. In a traditional magazine every second page is an ad, whereas e-zines have a much greater focus on content and far fewer ads.

When your ad appears in an e-zine, your customer is just a click away because your ad is usually hyperlinked to your Web site. This brings your customer that much closer to being able to purchase your products or services.

Another advantage of e-zine advertising is that e-zines are often shared with friends and associates. Most e-zines use viral marketing effectively, encouraging readers to send a copy to a friend. Your ad might be passed around a number of times after it first enters the mailbox of the subscriber. You are being charged for the ad based on the number of e-mail subscribers. Therefore, the extra viewers of your ad cost you nothing.

One of the most tangible advantages of e-zine advertising is the relatively low cost due, in part, to the low overhead for development, production, and delivery. E-zines need to fill all of their available space. If an e-zine advertising section has empty spaces, the publisher might be willing to negotiate. Some will even barter with you—advertising space at a discounted price in exchange for their e-zine promotion on your Web site.

E-zines provide a very targeted advertising medium. People subscribe to various e-zines because they have a genuine interest in the topics covered. This provides a major advantage over other advertising medi-
ums. E-zine ads have been shown to have very high response rates due to their targeted nature.

Because they are distributed via the Internet, e-zines reach a far wider audience geographically than most traditional magazines. It is not uncommon for an e-zine to have subscribers from all around the world.

There are thousands of e-zines out there related to every topic imaginable. Most e-zines have thousands of subscribers. When you couple the low cost to advertise in these e-zines and the many e-zines that might reach your target market, it is no wonder many companies are allocating more and more of their advertising budgets to online activities.

**Guidelines for Your Advertising**

Once you have found e-zines that reach your target market, you should consider a number of other factors before you make a final decision on placing your ad.

- Check the ads displayed in the e-zine for repetition. If advertisers have not advertised more than once, then they probably did not see very positive results.

- Respond to some of the ads and ask the advertisers what their experiences were with advertising in that particular e-zine. Be sure to tell them who you are and why you are contacting them. If you are up front, they will probably be receptive to your inquiry.

- Talk to the e-zine publisher and ask questions (e.g., how many subscribers there are). Ask what other advertisers have had to say about their results. Find out what types of ads they accept and if there are any restrictions. Check to see if the publisher has a policy of never running competing ads. Maybe the e-zine has a set of advertising policies that you can receive via e-mail.

- Find out if the publisher provides tracking information and, if so, what specific reports you will have access to.

- Find out if your ad can have a hyperlink to your Web site. If the e-zine allows hyperlinks, make sure you link to an effective page—one that is a continuation of the advertisement or a page
that provides details on the item you were advertising. Provide a link to the order form from this page to assist the transaction.

- In some cases e-zines have an editorial calendar available to assist you with the timing of your ad. The editorial calendar will tell you what articles will be included in upcoming issues. If an upcoming issue will have an article relating to your type of product or service, you could choose to advertise in that issue. You might contact the editor regarding a product review or submit an article relevant to the issue topics.

- Make sure that the advertising rates are reasonable based on the number of subscribers, and ask yourself if you can afford it. Find out the “open” rate, or the rate charged for advertising once in the e-zine. Ask what the rate is for multiple placements. If you are not in a position to pay for the advertising now, ask if there are other arrangements that could be made. For example, the publisher might accept a link on your Web site in exchange for the ad.

- Develop your ads with your target customer in mind. They should attract your best prospects. Wherever possible, you should link to your site or provide an e-mail link to the right individual within your organization.

- Develop a mechanism to track advertising responses. You could use different e-mail accounts for different ads to determine which ads are bringing you the responses. You can also use different URLs to point viewers to different pages within your site. If you have a good traffic-analysis package, you can track the increase in visitors as a result of your ad.

- Make sure you are versed in the publication’s advertising deadlines and ad format preferences.

**Providing Articles and News Releases to E-zines**

Besides advertising, a number of other marketing opportunities can be explored with e-zines. Once you have found the e-zines that cater to
your target market, these e-zines could be fruitful recipients for your news releases. Refer to Chapter 21 for recommendations on news release development and distribution. The editors might also accept articles of interest to their readers. You might be able to incorporate information on your products and services in an interesting article that would fit the editor’s guidelines.

There are many e-zines looking for great content. If you can write articles for them that provide great content for their readers and at the same time provide a little exposure for you, it’s a real win-win situation. You’ll want to target those e-zines that have the same target market you do and have a broad subscriber base. You’ll want to make sure the e-zine includes a resource box at the end of the article crediting you as the author and providing a hyperlink to your Web site or your e-mail address. Having articles published enhances your reputation as an expert, and people like to buy products and services from people who are experts in their field. You might see if you can be a contributing editor or have a regular column or feature in their e-zine.

Besides sending your articles directly to targeted e-zines, you can also submit them to “article banks” on-line. Article banks are online resource sites for e-zine publishers. E-zine publishers search through these banks for appropriate articles for their e-zine and, if they use one, they include the resource box of the author.

### Reasons You Might Start Your Own E-zine

You can start your own e-zine. Today, this is relatively easy. There are lots of resources on-line regarding e-zine development and administration. Don’t make this decision without much thought, though, as you can damage your reputation if you don’t deliver consistent, valuable content.

There are a multitude of reasons that you should consider developing and distributing your own e-zine. E-zines can be an extremely effective online marketing tool for the following reasons:

- You become established as an “expert.” By providing your readers with valuable articles related to your area of expertise, you become, in their eyes, a valued and trusted expert.

- You establish trust. The first time someone visits your Web site, he or she has no idea who you are, how capable you are, or how
professional you are. Sure, visitors get an impression from the look and feel and content of your site, but are they ready to do business with you? By providing them with free, valuable content over a period of time, you earn your visitors’ trust, and they are more likely to turn to you when they need the type of product or service you provide.

- You generate significant traffic to your Web site. Your e-zine should always reference and provide a hyperlink to something available from your Web site. Once your visitor links through, there should be elements that encourage him to stay awhile and visit a number of pages on your site. The more often people visit your site, the more likely they are to do business with you.

- You build loyalty. Relationship marketing is what it’s all about on the Web. You build relationships over time, and your e-zine will help you do just that. Your subscribers receive something free from you every month. Whom are they going to do business with when they have a need for your product or service? People prefer to spend their money with businesses they know and trust.

- You stay current with your customers and potential customers. When you are in front of your subscribers every month, you’re not too easy to forget. You can keep them up to date on what’s new with your company and your products and services, or what’s new in your area of expertise.

- You grow your database. See Chapter 14 for tips on how to build your database.

**Developing Your Own E-zine**

If you do start your own e-zine, you should spend sufficient time planning and testing before you publish to ensure that you do it right. You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression, and you want your readers to subscribe and tell others about the great e-zine they found. You want them to be excited to read your e-zine every time it is
delivered to their e-mail box. The following tips will help you in your e-mail-based e-zine planning and preparation:

- Provide great content. This goes without saying. If you have content that people want to read, they will remain subscribers. Don’t think that shameless self-promotion is great content; your target audience certainly won’t. As a rough guide, make sure your e-zine is 80 percent rich content and no more than 20 percent promotion and ads. Your e-zine should be full of what your target market considers useful information.

- You should keep length a consideration because you want your e-zine to be read and not put aside for later because it is always too long to read quickly. In this case, less is more. Subscribers should be able to read your e-zine in five minutes or less. If you do have a lengthy article, you might give a synopsis in the e-zine with a hyperlink to more detail on your Web site.

- Limit your content to four or five dynamite articles for an e-mail-based e-zine. Provide a brief table of contents at the beginning of the e-zine. Keep the copy short and to the point.

- Keep your line length under 60 characters including spaces to avoid word-wrap issues.

- Encourage your readers to send a copy to others they feel might be interested in your great content. Make sure you provide subscribing instructions as well for those who receive these forwarded copies (Figure 22.4). You should also provide instructions on how to opt out, or unsubscribe.

- Test your e-zine with different e-mail programs to ensure that your e-zine looks the way you designed it no matter which e-mail program your reader uses. Send test copies to friends with different e-mail readers such as Outlook Express, Netscape Mail, Pegasus Mail, and Eudora. See how it looks, make sure that word-wrap is not an issue, and make sure the hyperlinks work.

- Keep your subscriber addresses private and let subscribers know your privacy policy.
360  101 Ways To Promote Your Web Site

As the word about your e-zine spreads, you will have a large community of people who fit your target market reading it.

Once you have your own e-zine, you'll have to:

- Promote it to your target market through newsgroups, mail lists, your Web site, and your e-mail signature file. If you do promote your e-zine in newsgroups and mail lists, be sure it is appropriate to advertise your e-zine in a given newsgroup or mail list before you post. You do not want to be accused of spamming. However, promote your e-zine shamelessly on your site (let people subscribe to the e-zine on your site) and in your signature file.

- Provide an opportunity for subscribers to let others know. In your online e-zine, have a form that allows subscribers to e-mail a copy of the e-zine to their friends and colleagues. Use a call-to-action statement such as “Do you know someone who might be interested in this e-zine? Click here to send them a copy.” This is a great way to pick up additional subscribers because some of

Figure 22.4. Encourage readers to send a copy of your e-zine to a friend and provide subscribe instructions for those who receive forwarded copies.
the non-subscribers who read your e-zine might then become subscribers if your content is interesting to them.

- Make it easy for people to subscribe to your e-zine. Provide clear subscription instructions in each e-mail version of your e-zine and on the online version. Have a form handy on your site to collect e-mail addresses from people who wish to subscribe. Always ask for the first name so that you can personalize your e-zine.

- Provide an archive of past issues on your Web site so that visitors can sample your wares before subscribing. Make sure you provide an option for visitors to subscribe from that page as well.

- Don’t provide your list of subscribers to anyone. This protects your subscribers’ privacy and keeps your list spam-free. Thus, when you mail your e-zine, use the BCC feature or use a specialized e-mail program that hides all the recipients’ addresses so the entire list is not compromised. People will not be happy if they start receiving spam as a result of your e-zine.

Internet Resources for Chapter 22

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding e-zines. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

BestEzines
http://www.bestezines.com/ezines/master.shtml
Directory of e-zines organized by category. A great site to find e-zines to reach your target market.

The Book of Zines
http://www.zinebook.com
Dynamite site with tons of links to e-zines, advice on developing your e-zine, reviews, interviews, how-to section, newly noted, and zine tips.
Ecola Newsstand
http://www.ecola.com
Ecola Newsstand has more than 8,400 magazines, newspapers, and publications. There are more than 100 categories of magazines from which to choose.

Ezine-Universe
http://ezine-universe.com
Ezine-Universe is a great directory of e-mail-based e-zines.

InfoJump
http://www.infojump.com
Browse a huge directory of e-zines by category.

List City’s Book of E-zines
http://www.list-city.com/ezines.htm
A list of e-zines organized by category that accept paid advertising as well as all the details and contact information for each e-zine.

MediaFinder
http://www.mediafinder.com
A national directory of magazines with details on target audience, publisher, contact, telephone numbers, Web addresses, e-mail addresses, editorial descriptions, issue frequency, and subscription price. In many cases, an information request form is attached should you want further details. Great resource!

Ezine Directory
http://www.ezine-dir.com
The Ezine Directory lists over 2,400 of the best e-mail newsletters available on the Internet today. Search, browse, or add your e-zine for free!
Web rings provide a different way to organize sites. They are a free service offered to the Internet community. Web rings arrange sites with similar content by linking them together in a circle, or a ring. Each link in the ring is directed to a CGI script on the Web ring’s server that sends the viewer on to the next site in the ring. There are literally thousands of rings with subjects such as communications, games, art, real estate, and so on. If there isn’t a ring suitable for your site, you can create your own. The types of visitors you receive from participating in the Web ring will be potential customers who are responsive to the content of your site and curious about your products or services. In this chapter, we cover:

- What are Web rings and how do they work?
- What promotion possibilities are available with Web rings?
- How do I participate and what will it cost?
- Where will I find Web rings that work for my company?
- What Web ring resources are available on the Net?
An Effective Alternative to Search Engines and Directories

Web rings are a fast-growing service on the Internet, providing one of the easiest ways for visitors to navigate the Internet. In each of its tens of thousands of topic-specific rings, member Web sites have linked their sites together, thus permitting more targeted visitors to reach the joined sites quickly and easily.

People increasingly are becoming dissatisfied with search engines and directories as tools to identify specific topic-related sites. Searches on a specific keyword sometimes yield results that include totally unrelated sites. For instance, if you were planning a vacation to Mexico and you wanted to search for resorts in Mexico, the search engine results would likely include sites only vaguely related to what you were looking for. The results might include book titles at Amazon.com related to Mexican travel, personal pages with other people’s experiences traveling in Mexico complete with pictures from their family vacation, travel agencies, and tour company sites. The Web ring provides an alternative to these tools.

Site owners typically trade links with other Web sites to help promote each other’s sites. The Web ring was developed to enlarge the scope of link trading. A Web ring joins together many sites with a common topic.

Two of the major Web ring sites are:

- WebRing ([http://dir.webring.com/rw](http://dir.webring.com/rw))
- RingSurf ([http://www.ringsurf.com](http://www.ringsurf.com))

What Are Web Rings?

A Web ring is made up of a number of topic-specific sites that are grouped together. There are country inn Web rings, Star Trek Web rings, prenatal care Web rings, BMW Web rings, and remote-sensing Web rings in the huge list of Web rings that exists today. At WebRing there are several major categories:

- Business and Finance
• Computers and Internet
• Cultures and Community
• Entertainment and Arts
• Family and Home
• Games
• Government and Politics
• Health and Wellness
• Hobbies and Crafts
• Music
• Recreation and Sports
• Regional
• Religion and Beliefs
• Relationships and Romance
• Schools and Education
• Science

RingSurf also has many categories:

• Arts
• Automotive
• Business
• Computers
• Dating
• Food
• Games
• Health
• Home
• Home Pages
• Kids and Teens
• Miscellaneous
• News
• Pets
• Recreation
• Reference
• Regional
• Religion
• Science
• Shopping
• Society
• Sports
• Travel
• United States.
Each of these major categories has a number of subcategories, and each of the subcategories has a number of individual rings.

Rings can contain any number of sites. There must be at least three before the ring is listed in the directories. Generally, the rings contain between 20 and 200 sites. Some rings are smaller and some are substantially higher, with close to a thousand sites included.

Each ring was started and is maintained by an individual Web site owner. Through navigation links found most often at the bottom of member pages, visitors can travel to all or any of the sites in a ring. They can move through a ring in either direction, going to the next or previous site, or listing the next five sites in the ring. Visitors can also jump to a random site in the ring or survey all the sites that make up the ring.

An extraordinary system, Web rings are entirely open and free of charge to both visitors and members. As more and more people discover Web rings, we will see phenomenal growth in this as a preferred method to surf the net. At the time this edition was written, RingSurf had 36,964 Web rings with 312,246 member sites.

**How Do Web Rings Work?**

To surf a ring, all you have to do is use the links at the bottom of the page in the Web ring block. At the bottom of a Web ring participant’s pages, you find the Web ring navigation aid. A common Web ring graphic includes links to the “Next” site in the ring, the “Previous” site in the ring, or a “Random” site in the ring. You also have the option, in many cases, to see a list of the “Next 5” sites in the ring or to view the entire “Index” of the ring’s sites. Once you begin surfing a ring, there is no clear beginning or end, just a circle of related material. The Web ring program compensates for sites that are unreachable because they no longer exist or have server problems. You will always be able to navigate the ring.

When using a search engine, you are provided with a list of sites, only some of which are relevant. You visit the sites listed and then, depending on which browser you are using, you may use your “Back” button to return to the Results page to make another selection. With a Web ring this backing out is unnecessary. Once you’ve finished reviewing a site in the ring, you proceed to the next site that is of interest or simply surf through the connected sites one by one.
How to Participate in Web Rings

The first thing to do is find Web rings that are right for your product or service—those that cater to your target market. You can review the directories at the WebRing site http://dir.webring.com/rw and also at the RingSurf site http://www.ringsurf.com.

Once you have found a promising Web ring, you contact the owner to ask permission to join. See Figure 23.1 for an example of this. The owner reviews your site to determine your “fit” with the theme. Once you are accepted, the owner provides you with the required code and accompanying graphics, which you insert on your page. The ring owner provides all the required material; you slip it into your HTML file, and that’s that.

Once the code is on your site, WebRing or RingSurf monitors the traffic and collects the statistics for your site, as they do for all Web ring sites. This is beneficial to you because you can see how much traffic you are getting through the Web ring.

Any Web site owner who feels no existing ring is suitable can apply to create a new ring. If the application is approved, WebRing or RingSurf
will provide all the necessary code and instructions. New Web rings are listed in the directory once they contain at least five sites.

**Web Ring Participation Costs**

The cost to participate in these Web rings is absolutely nil. No application fees, no charge for the approval, no charge for the code to be inserted on your pages, no charge for the increased traffic a Web ring brings.

**The Benefits of Web Rings**

There are many benefits to both the users of Web rings and the participating Web sites. Benefits to the user include:

- Web rings provide a great navigation tool when looking for more information on a specific topic.
- Web rings are easy to use. They provide one of the most efficient ways to find specific content on the Internet.
- Web rings avoid the duplication found in search engines, where a site may appear several times in one search. Each site is linked only once in each Web ring.
- Web rings speed up search time.
- Web rings eliminate sifting through mounds of search engine results for appropriate sites.

Benefits to participating Web sites include:

- Web ring participation increases the number of targeted visitors to your Web site.
- The organizers of the Web rings make it easy to monitor how successful your ring is. Traffic reports and “top rings” statistics are made available to participants.
• Web rings drive traffic to your site.

**Business Reluctance to Participate in Web Rings**

One of the biggest hurdles Web rings face in being adopted by the business sector is that when you join a ring, you are linking to the competition. It is likely that this mentality explains why Web rings have been so popular for personal sites and special-interest groups, but have failed to catch on in today’s business community. But, again, small businesses and retail-oriented sites have not shied away from rings. For example, rings and banner programs are hot marketing strategies for stores that sell collectibles. This is particularly true for hard-to-find collectibles. Take the Pez phenomenon: Not being on a Pez Web ring could be a crucial mistake for vendors. After all, if a customer hits a site and it doesn’t have a specific Pez, the quest isn’t over—it’s on to the next site. What better way to get there than via a ring? Your site might just be the next one.

Lately we have seen growth in the commercial application of Web rings. There are a few reasons for this:

• A number of articles have appeared in Internet marketing magazines related to the high volume of traffic through these Web rings. Businesses have sometimes found that the bulk of the traffic to their site is coming through the Web ring.

• Other articles talk about the benefits of being conveniently located near your competition, bringing more traffic for everyone. Several have likened it to what happens in the real world in the fast-food industry. When a McDonald’s opens, you quickly see a Burger King, Wendy’s, Pizza Hut, KFC, and Taco Bell all open up close by. This means more business for everyone.

**Other Marketing Opportunities Provided by Web Rings**

When you have found a Web ring that attracts your target market, you can participate and enjoy the increase in visitors to your site. The Massage and Bodywork Web ring shown in Figure 23.2 is an example of a
professional type of Web ring. It is a Web ring devoted to massage schools and educators and other support services for massage professionals. Web rings provide an array of other opportunities as well.

You can search through the list of participants in a Web ring to arrange reciprocal links. You can also search a Web ring for banner-advertising purposes. You can either exchange banners or purchase advertising on these sites. You can find sites that may be appropriate for cooperative advertising purposes. You can exchange coupons with another site you are linked to, which works especially well when you sell noncompeting products to the same target market.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 23**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding public Web rings. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.
RingSurf
http://www.ringsurf.com
Sites of a particular subject together in a ring. A visitor to any site in the ring can easily move forward or backward through the ring and visit other sites within that subject area. This drives targeted qualified traffic to all the ring sites. Surfers don’t want to deal with mounds of irrelevant search engine results. They want to visit sites on topics they love. RingSurf is a free service that lets users quickly, easily, and reliably navigate thousands of related Web sites organized by areas of interest.

WebRing
http://dir.webring.com/rw
Web rings are one of the fastest and most exciting ways to navigate the World Wide Web. In each of its tens of thousands of rings, member Web sites have banded together to form their sites into linked circles. Their purpose is to allow more visitors to reach them quickly and easily.
Webcasting is defined by Netlingo (http://www.netlingo.com) as: “Using the Internet, and the World Wide Web in particular, to broadcast information. Unlike typical surfing, which relies on a pull method of transferring Web pages, Webcasting uses push technologies.”

According to a study conducted by Arbitron New Media and Northstar Interactive, 70 percent of the Webcast audience clicks for content information, and while listening to or viewing streaming media, nearly 60 percent click through for advertising information. The study also states that approximately half of the Webcast audience buys online-advertised products and 44 percent click online ads. The majority of Webcast users tune in from home (63 percent), followed by at-work users (37 percent). In this chapter, we cover:

- Streaming versus nonstreaming media (also known as rich media)
- Advertising with rich media
- Barriers to acceptance of Webcasting
- Uses of Webcasting
- Prominent Webcasters.
Streaming versus Nonstreaming Media

Before we explain the marketing implications of Webcasting, or rich media, it is important to explain some of the terms and what the end user requires to view them. Webcasting consists primarily of video and audio. Whatis.com defines rich media as:

*Rich media is an Internet advertising term for a Web page ad that uses advanced technology such as streaming video, downloaded applets (programs) that interact instantly with the user, and ads that change when the user’s mouse passes over it. For example:*

- An ad for a Hollywood movie that includes a streaming video sample of a scene from the movie
- A mouse cursor that changes to an image on a particular Web site if the user requests it
- A standard-size banner ad that includes an inquiry form about ISDN installation, capturing the user’s filled-in personal information and telling the user he or she will be contacted by a company representative—all simply by interacting with an ad on an online publisher’s Web page.

This section talks about streaming and nonstreaming content, with most emphasis placed on streaming because it has the highest promotional potential. What is the difference between streaming and nonstreaming? To put it simply, streaming is presented as it arrives. RealAudio files are an example of streaming media. Meanwhile, nonstreaming requires you to download the entire clip or file before you can listen to it or view it. AVI, MP3, and MOV file formats are nonstreaming file formats.

*Video. This category includes both streaming formats (Real Audio, G2, and Windows Media Player) and nonstreaming video formats (such as AVI and MOV files). Streaming video is often sent from prepared files but is usually distributed as a live broadcast feed. Examples of this include news clips, movie clips, and online movie presentations.*
• **Audio.** Audio also includes streaming and nonstreaming formats. Leading providers of streaming audio are RealNetwork’s RealAudio, Macromedia’s Shockwave, and Microsoft’s Windows Media Player.

Obviously, streaming video file formats contain an audio element as well. After all, a movie clip is much more interesting when there is sound associated with it.

Other popular Webcasting or push technology formats include:

• **ASF (Advanced Streaming Format).** Designed to store synchronized multimedia data and deliver it over a large variety of networks and protocols.

• **CDF (Channel Definition Format).** Permits Web developers to push information to users through the use of channels.

Push technologies involve sending information to your target market across the Internet. Internet users install software on their system that receives content from the Webcaster. For example, they might receive the latest sports scores, current weather conditions in 20 cities around the world, or current headlines. The information is “pushed” to the client’s system. This is different from “pull” marketing, in which the client specifically requests content from a Web site by loading it into the browser.

Technically speaking, e-mail is one of the earliest forms of push technology. Internet marketers send e-mail messages to individuals in their target market without permission to do so from each of the recipients. However, we all know that this is spam. Savvy Internet marketers can still use e-mail to push their message to potential clients, but they must have the potential clients’ permission beforehand.

Webcasters can use push technologies much as Internet marketers do with e-mail marketing campaigns. RealNetworks (http://www.real.com) has been involved in the Webcasting field for several years. Their RealPlayer software is a prime example of how to use push technology. The basic version of the player can be downloaded for free from the RealNetworks Web site. Active channels have been incorporated into the RealPlayer application. Clicking on one of the active channels in the “Channels” menu automatically connects the user to a streaming audio/video presen-
tation from the site of one of RealNetworks’ partners. In this way, RealNetworks assists its partners (ESPN, Fox, ZDNet, etc.) to brand themselves through the RealPlayer Webcasting software, and RealNetworks likely receives a healthy sum of money in exchange for this advertising. The RealPlayer software permits you to subscribe to other channels as well. Thus, RealNetworks gives users a free application, but the company profits from RealPlayer by selling advertising space. RealNetworks is the perfect example of how Webcasting can be used to quickly achieve brand recognition and earn additional revenue.

Aside from RealNetworks, the following companies also provide software to allow for the distribution of channels:

- Apple’s QuickTime (http://www.apple.com/quicktime)
- Microsoft Active Channels software (http://www.microsoft.com).

Advertising with Rich Media

Companies can use rich media by purchasing a “commercial” that precedes an online presentation or audio event, or a company can develop and use rich media on its own Web site to provide a greater sense of interactivity, which results in more repeat traffic. For an example of this, go to Yahoo! Platinum (http://platinum.yahoo.com). Yahoo! Platinum provides current streaming audio and video footage of almost any event you could imagine. For instance, you can listen to the commentary of an entire NBA basketball game. However, just before the game gets under way, you will be greeted by a 25-second audio advertisement. Why is this good advertising?

- Rich media advertising leaves a deeper impression on customers than does a static banner ad.
- Rich media averages higher recall.
- Higher customer recall of rich media makes it easier to brand a company name or product.
- Rich media has higher click-through rates.
• Rich media is more “likeable.”

**Higher Recall**

A recent usage study among consumers who had recently switched from dial-up to high-speed Internet access revealed the following results:

• 93 percent of users download more MP3s than they did when using a dial-up connection.

• 90 percent download more music and videos.

• 89 percent watch more streaming video.

• 86 percent listen to more streaming audio.

• 79 percent transfer a greater number of large files.

• 78 percent share more photos on-line.

This means that more and more people are likely to remember your company’s streaming media presentation than a static banner ad, as they are more apt to view rich media.

**Better Branding**

It goes without saying that better customer recall leads to better branding. Creating brand awareness with banner ads is difficult because banner ads are not very interactive. The combination of sight and sound possible with rich media advertising makes it much more effective than a static image or looping animated GIF.

**More Click-Throughs**

A banner ad incorporating Java or Flash Media will have more than twice the number of click-throughs than a static banner ad. Static banner ads average less than one click-through per hundred impressions. If
you have a banner ad that actively engages your customer, you can achieve higher click-through rates and generate more sales leads.

**More Likeable**

Intel concluded that a nonstreaming interactive banner ad offers a 20 percent potential increase in likeability. People are more likely to interact with a banner ad that has some sort of game built into it as opposed to a static image. Therefore, an interactive banner ad has the potential to attract many people who are not usually inclined to click on banner ads of any sort. Likewise, a 30-second spot in a streaming multimedia presentation (e.g., watching the Superbowl on-line) is going to be more acceptable to a user than is a pop-up banner ad.

The bottom line is that if people like you, they will probably buy from you. Both steaming and nonstreaming broadband media advertising increase your chances of making a positive impression on customers.

**More Reasons to Use Rich Media Advertising**

Given the high recall rates, the cost per branding impression (i.e., the number of times a customer must view the ad before becoming familiar with your brand) decreases. This increases your ROI (return on investment) because you do not have to invest as much in rich media advertising to get your message across as you would with traditional advertising. For instance, to brand your company’s name or product using television advertising could require a substantial financial investment. People change the channel during commercial breaks, so it is harder to reach television viewers.

However, when people intentionally subscribe to an Internet channel, they are viewing and listening to information they are interested in. Plus, it is more of an effort to switch channels on the Net than while watching television. Therefore, the user’s tendency to remain “tuned in” is higher.

Also, the Internet is a worldwide network. Television, magazines, and other traditional marketing vehicles are more regionalized. Therefore, a rich media advertisement streaming across the Internet has the potential to reach a much larger audience.
The Barriers of Webcasting (Rich Media) Acceptance

With every new medium, there are bound to be barriers to its public acceptance. Webcasting, both streaming and nonstreaming, is no different. There are six primary obstacles that Webcasting must overcome before it becomes a publicly acceptable advertising medium.

Cost

The possibilities are there, but so are the costs, and you must be aware of this. Although the cost is coming down, the cost of developing streaming media and nonstreaming media still can be considered expensive for some budgets. Moreover, if you’re looking to advertise on a site that applies video and audio content, then you must be made aware that most of the sites that apply this technology are high-budget, high-volume, and high-bandwidth sites and will likely ask for quite a fee to advertise.

You must also consider the potential return on investment. We described earlier how rich media advertising has a higher recall rate than standard Web advertising. Also, rich media is more cost-effective and efficient for branding purposes. Therefore, although the initial expense of producing a rich media advertisement might be quite high, it could quickly be recovered by the interest and sales the ad generates.

Rich Media Advertising Is Not Accepted by All Sites

Although many sites do not have the resources to offer Webcast advertising opportunities, a lot of major sites do. Content sites such as Launch.Yahoo.com and RollingStone.com place ads in front of some of the videos you can view on their site. These streaming media sites offer tremendous exposure opportunities for companies that advertise with them.

There are also sites such as MP3.com (http://www.mp3.com) that offer free Webcast advertising. On MP3.com, unsigned music artists can post MP3 versions of their songs for the world to hear. MP3.com is a high-traffic site as a result of the community of artists they have created, and the artists themselves benefit from the increased exposure.
Bandwidth Constraints

Both streaming and nonstreaming media require that users have high connection speeds in order to experience a Webcast as it is intended. To view streaming content, you need a plug-in or player of some sort. Popular applications used to view or hear streaming content include:

- Windows Media Player
- Quicktime
- RealPlayer
- Macromedia Shockwave Player.

It is important to note that the higher the connection speed, the more convenient the use of streaming content is. If you’re still using a 14.4 Kbps modem, you’re simply not going to get the performance needed to make it worthwhile. This presents an obstacle to people with slower Internet connection rates. Also, some people simply do not wish to download and install the plug-ins necessary to play rich media files. You will not be able to target your Webcasting advertising campaign toward these users.

Irritates User

Does Webcasting annoy users? Sure it does. But this is the case only for people with low bandwidth or less robust machines. Also, some people despise advertising in any form, so you probably won’t win over any of these individuals either.

Too Complicated

The software to create rich media content exists and, with a little initiative, can be learned by anyone. You first should determine if your target market is likely to be a user of rich media. Learning to create rich media just requires a little bit of initiative and patience.
The Technology Changes Too Often

Webcasting is a relatively new medium. Of course, new standards are being introduced every few months. The key here is to watch what technologies the major Internet sites are using. If you see some of the major players in the Internet starting to use a particular Webcasting technology, you should investigate it. Generally, the learning curve for new technologies is not very steep because they are based on previous technologies.

Uses of Webcasting

Despite the existence of a few barriers to using Webcasting as a promotional vehicle, you should investigate it if you think your target market is ready for it. Some important uses of providing rich media content to the general public include:

- Live continuous broadcasts of radio stations and networks
- Broadcasts of cable networks and television stations
- Coverage of sporting events (both streaming and nonstreaming footage)
- Live music including concerts and club performances (both streaming and nonstreaming footage)
- On demand shows, corporate events, CDs, audiobooks, video titles, and so on.

As bandwidth increases and more people have access to higher-end technology, Webcasting will become a regular part of our lives and be more accepted as an advertising medium. The transition to Webcasting has already begun, as is evidenced by the large number of prominent players already entrenched in the field.

Today we are seeing that many major corporations are providing live Webcasts of their corporate annual meetings. This is a great idea for a number of reasons. If there are company shareholders who are unable
to attend the annual meeting in person, they are able to observe the meeting remotely via the Internet and Webcasting. Similarly, potential investors can view your annual meeting on-line and gain valuable insight into your organization, which might result in the individuals making an investment in your organization. If potential investors or shareholders miss the live Webcast of the annual meeting, they can visit your site and download the event to watch at their convenience. This is just one example of how Webcasting can add value to your Web site, and ultimately your organization.

Many travel and tourism sites are providing virtual tours of their locations. A picture is worth a thousand words, and this is certainly the case when it comes to marketing hotels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, golf courses, theme parks, attractions, and other travel destinations.

We are also seeing an increase in the number of professional training organizations providing online training modules, or “virtual seminars,” from their Web sites. The growing popularity of online training is a result of the flexibility and cost efficiency offered by these organizations. In order for your clients to attend your seminars in person, they would be inconvenienced by the need to schedule time for it. This inconvenience incorporates travel expenses, the seminar fee, and the opportunity costs of being absent from their office. Virtual seminars enable your clients to usually pay a much smaller fee to view the same seminar from the comfort of their desk. Business professionals are also finding online training useful because it allows them to decide when to view the seminar, as some of the online training sessions can be viewed at their convenience. Others are “live” and available only at a specific time and date.

Many professional speakers are now offering live Webcasts, downloadable training modules, and streaming video clips from their Web sites in an effort to increase their online bookings. For example, meeting planners and organizers who are looking for speakers for their upcoming conference can visit my Web site, SusanSweeney.com (http://www.susansweeney.com), to download streaming video clips of samples of my speaking. This enables visitors to gain a feel for my presentation style and the quality of content that I deliver. I also offer live “Webinars” every couple of weeks on various topics related to Internet marketing (http://www.susansweeney.com/tele_seminars.html). While I’m on a roll I’ll also give a plug for The Recognized Expert Marketing Show (http://www.recognizedexpert.com), an online radio program where I’ve been interviewed.
Internet Resources for Chapter 24

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding Webcasting and rich media. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

Yahoo! Platinum
http://platinum.yahoo.com
Yahoo! Platinum offers a wide variety of on-demand audio and video content, from space shuttle launches to full-length movies.

Internet Pictures Corp
http://www.ipix.com
This company is known for its 360-degree virtual tours.

The Media CHANNEL
http://www.mediachannel.com
A guide to video on the Internet.

RealNetworks
http://www.real.com
Innovators in the field of streaming media, RealNetworks has several popular Webcasting software applications, including RealPlayer, RealJukebox, and RealSlideshow.

Streaming Media World
http://www.streamingmediaworld.com
Streaming Media World offers media player reviews, news, tools, tutorials, discussion forums, and cool links devoted to streaming video, audio, MP3, multimedia, and GIF animation.

VideoDome.Com Networks Inc.
http://www.videodome.com
Offers a variety of Internet On Demand video solutions to meet your online video needs.

Virtual Kingdom Interactive Inc.
http://www.virtualkingdom.ca/vkingdom/
A company that provides virtual tour technology for your Web site.
VirtualTuner.com
http://www.virtualtuner.com
Directory of live and on-demand radio links for the Internet.

Web-Radio
http://www.web-radio.com
A comprehensive directory of radio stations broadcasting on the Web.

WebReference.com
A directory of multimedia tools including Windows Media Player, Real, Emblaze, and Macromedia.
Grand Opening Tips for Your Web Site Virtual Launch

Just as you would have a book or software launch, you can have a Web site launch. In preparation, you must develop a launch strategy. In this chapter, we cover:

- Development of your Web site launch strategy
- Web site announcement mailing lists
- Direct e-mail postcards to your customers or prospective clients.

Launching and Announcing Your Web Site

A new Web site or your new location in cyberspace can be launched in many of the same ways that you would launch a new physical store location. This might involve both online and offline activities. Just as you would prepare a book launch strategy or a new software product launch strategy, you can de-
velop an appropriate launch strategy for your new Web site. Sometimes a launch strategy could be more work than the benefit that would be gained. On the other hand, if you are opening the next Amazon, it is imperative.

**Your Web Site Virtual Launch**

Let’s take a look at a traditional retail store grand opening. For the grand opening, which usually lasts for an evening or a day, there are invitations to the media, press releases distributed to the media, invited guests, opening ceremonies, advertising, and possibly gift giveaways.

A Web site virtual location launch occurs in cyberspace, and the “grand opening” can last for a day, a week, or a month. Many of the activities you would include in your traditional grand opening can also be included in your Internet grand opening. The effectiveness of your launch can be increased with the following tips:

- Media attention can be generated through the distribution of press releases on-line and off-line. (See Chapter 21 for press release distribution information.)

- Guests can be invited to your online opening through postings in newsgroups, newsletters, “What’s New” sites, banner advertising, direct e-mail, and signature files, as well as through offline direct mail and advertising.

- Opening ceremonies can be just as exciting on-line as off-line. They can last for a month rather than a day. The opening must be designed to appeal to your target market.

- You can feature special guests in chat areas for your grand opening or several special guests over the duration. Again, relate your guests and the topics to be discussed to the needs and wants of your target market.

- You can run contests that require visitors to visit various parts of your site to compete for prizes. Perhaps they have to complete a multiple-choice quiz whose answers are found throughout your site. This way you encourage your guests to visit all
those pages you want them to. You can also ask if they would like to be notified via e-mail of the winner. This gives you an opportunity to send them e-mail with their permission.

- You can have audio and video greetings from your site.

- You can have press releases regarding your opening available for download by the media. Make your press release interactive. (See Chapter 21 for details on how to do this.)

- Special free gifts can be provided to the first 20 or 50 visitors to your site. You can also provide prizes to the first 100 to link to your site.

- Do some offline advertising for your new URL (see Chapter 26 for innovative offline opportunities), or take advantage of online advertising via announcement sites.

There are many other innovative “grand opening” attention grabbers that can be brainstormed with marketing and public relations individuals. Whatever you decide to do, make it memorable, make it appropriate for your target market, and provide reasons for them to return.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 25**

I have included a few resources for you to check out for your Web site virtual launch. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at [http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html](http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html). There you can find additional tips, tools, and techniques.

**Best-Web-Sites Announcement List**
You can join this mailing list by e-mailing the message “sub BESTWEB [your name]” to listserv@vm3090.ege.edu.tr.

**Nerd World What’s New**
The newest links added to Nerd World, and a place to show off your site. Not just for nerds.
WhatsNu
http://www.whatsnu.com
The WhatsNu search engine filters Web site listings by date/category and offers the Internet community a free weekly notification of new Web sites launching on the Internet.

Get Ready for Grand Re-Openings
http://www.clickz.com/experts/media/media_buy/article.php/1579801
A great article about site reopening and buying media.
Effective Offline Promotion

There are many benefits to cross-promoting your Web site using traditional media and print materials. Your Web site can answer many questions and provide more information than you can print in a magazine or newspaper ad. Your site can be kept up to date with the latest information available. People can request additional information or order online. In this chapter, we cover:

- Tips for offline promotion of your Web site
- Offline promotion opportunities.

**Offline Promotion Objectives**

Because visitors can be directed from offline promotion to request additional information or order online, you should promote your URL on every piece of promotional material you produce! The more exposure your URL receives, the more likely it is that people will remember it when they go online.

Be creative with your offline promotion campaign. Brainstorm with innovative thinkers to come up with a number of good places to pro-
mote your URL; for example, try displaying your URL in your TV and radio commercials, magazine and newspaper ads, and billboards. The more places your URL appears, the more it will get noticed. Some businesses even incorporate their URL into their building and vehicle signage. Answer your telephone “YourCompanyName.com, Good Morning.” This is quite effective in letting people know that you want them to visit your Web site and providing them with your URL at the same time. Next time they have a question or want to place an order, they can go directly to the Web site.

Displaying your URL in traditional media encourages people to visit your site for more information about your company. Another benefit is that people usually can order from your Web site. Naturally, your site should be up to date, with all of the latest information on products, prices, and sales promotions. If a 6-month-old advertisement is seen in a magazine, as long as the URL is displayed in the ad, readers can go to your site and get current information. Your Web site is your most effective advertisement, but it is an advertisement that people have to know about before they can view it.

If you have a bricks-and-mortar location you can consider having posters or promotional material on display letting people know about your Web site or encouraging them to join your e-club.

**URL Exposure through Corporate Literature and Material**

It is important that your corporate image be consistent in both your online and offline promotional campaigns. Businesses should use the same colors, style, fonts, logo, and tag lines on all of their marketing materials. As a rule of thumb, try to place your URL on everything you put your logo on—which means just about every piece of corporate literature. Make sure to include your URL on the following:

- Letterhead
- Business cards
- Corporate brochures
• Envelopes
• Checks
• Fax coversheets
• Report covers
• Flyers
• Advertisements
• Direct mail pieces
• Newsletters
• Press releases
• Media kits.

**URL Exposure through Promotional Items**

If your company uses promotional items as giveaways at trade shows and events, it is a good idea to incorporate your Web site marketing with these items. Figures 26.1 and 26.2 offer examples of the different promotional products that you can order on the Internet for your business. Promotional items that are used in and around computer workstations are ideal because your URL is visible when people are in a position to actually visit your site. Some examples are:

• Mouse pads
• CD holders
• Screen cleaning kits
• Software
Figure 26.1. Mousepads.com is a site where you can order personalized mouse pads.

Figure 26.2. At epromos.com you can put your Web address on a multitude of different products.
• Screen savers
• Pens and pencils
• Scratch pads
• Coffee mugs
• Coasters
• Letter openers
• Stress balls
• Calendars
• Sticky notes.

**URL Exposure through Clothing**

Articles of clothing are another great promotional item. When people wear an article of clothing with your URL on it, they become a walking billboard for your site. I personally have a jacket that was provided by Webjacket.com (see Figure 26.3), and the quality is great. Your corporate jacket provides exposure for your company and your Web site. If you have a corporate uniform, your URL should be displayed. Put your URL and a catchy phrase or tag line on items such as:

• Golf shirts
• T-shirts
• Sweatshirts
• Hats
• Aprons
URL Exposure on Novelty Items

Novelty items can be an effective place to print your URL. If your target market is a younger audience, then put your URL on items that appeal to them, such as:

- Frisbees
- Balls
- Beach towels
- Sunglasses
- Key chains
- Magnets
- Chocolate bars
Bumper stickers.

**Promotion with a Touch of Creativity**

Be creative and come up with catchy slogans that have a connection with the promotional item. For example:

- **Clocks**: “Take some time to visit our Web site at …”
- **Rulers**: “For a measurable difference, visit us at …”
- **Coffee mugs**: “Take a break and visit our Web site at …”
- **Tape measures**: “Visit our Web site at http://www.YourURL.com and see how our site measures up.”
- **Magnifying glasses**: “You don’t need one of these to see that our site is the best. Come visit us online at …”
- **Watches**: “Isn’t it about time you visited us at …?”
- **Bookmarks**: “Take a break from reading and visit our Web site at …”

**URL Exposure on Your Products**

If possible, put your URL on your products themselves. This is an innovative idea that Joe Boxer has used. They stitch their URL into the waistband of their underwear.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 26**

I have included a few resources for you to check out about offline promotion. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Re-
sources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

Advertising Concepts
http://www.bumperstickers.com/ad.htm
“Why Use Promotional Products?” This site gives you good promotional ideas and explains what these promotional products can do for you.

Digital-Women.com
http://www.digital-women.com/unique.htm
This includes unique ideas for online and offline promotion.

e-Promos.com
http://www.epromos.com
This site has a huge offering of items appropriate to display your logo.

Mousepads.com
http://www.mousepads.com
Mousepads.com allows you to choose from many styles or will develop a custom one just for you. They also allow you to sign up for their e-specials on their site.

PC Mojo
http://www.pcmojo.com/content/techsuppwebpromoteoffline.htm
Information on why you need to promote your site off the Internet.

Promotional Webstickers
http://www.websticker.com/products.htm
Simple ideas to effectively promote your Web site offline.

Webjacket.com
http://www.webjacket.com
Webjacket.com provides a great quality jacket with your corporate logo and Web address. You design your own right on the site. I have one!
Today, technology not only allows us to generate interactive Web sites for our viewers, it allows us to learn about our viewers as well. Many Web sites are now using Web traffic analysis software that enables them to analyze not only what page of the Web site their visitors came to first, but also where they came from, how long they were there, and what they did while they stayed. Once you have this information, you can do some calculations to see what is working for you and what is not. In this chapter, you will learn:

- What your Web server’s log files can tell you
- How analyzing log files with Web traffic analysis software can benefit your Web site
- How to develop a profile of your visitors
- How to optimize your Web site to accommodate your visitors
- How to get the most for your marketing dollar
- How to generate leads for your business
How analysis software can help you to manage your online advertising business

How you can get Web traffic analysis software for your Web site

The popular brands of Web traffic analysis software.

Do You Know Who Is Visiting Your Web Site?

Retailers have always spent endless hours trying to analyze the shoppers who visit their stores. They are constantly trying to collect data about their markets so that they can decide what the best forms of advertising are for their target market, what consumers really want in order to make wiser buying decisions, what services are important to them, what product features their target market is looking for, and so on. The same thing is happening today on the Internet. Companies are constantly collecting data on their target market—their needs, wants, preferences, and desires. Most people are unaware that they are even doing this.

Web traffic analysis software helps companies to focus on their target market like never before. It helps them to understand the traffic on their Web site and enables them to make the necessary changes that are critical to producing the results that they desire from their Web site. “But how do they do it?” you ask.

Using Log Files to Your Advantage

All Web servers log a list of all the requests for individual files that people have requested from a Web site. These logs include the HTML files and their embedded graphic images and any other associated files that get transmitted through the server. These logs can be analyzed by Web traffic analysis tools to generate the following data:

- The number of visitors to your home page
- Where the visitors came from in terms of their IP addresses
- How many times each page on your Web site was requested
• What time, day of the week, and season people access your site

• Which browser your visitor is using

• Which keywords or phrases your visitors are using to find your site using a search engine

• Which advertisements are viewed the most on your Web site

• Detailed information on visitors and demographics.

This might not sound like very important information; however, there are some very amazing things you can do with this data. Like any good experiment, you must collect the data first, complete the experiment, and then make the recommendations.

**Analyzing Log Files with Web Traffic Analysis Software**

By analyzing the data from your log files, you can generate results that could significantly increase the popularity and success of your Web site. By tracking the visitors on your Web site in terms of where they spend their time, how they came to your site, and if they do what you want them to do, you can fine-tune your Web site to fit the specific needs of your target market.

**Developing a Profile of Your Visitors**

Who is visiting your site? Are most of your visitors from the United States? Canada? Australia? Are your visitors AOL users? University students? Government? Are your visitors primarily Mac or PC users? Which browser are they using? Which version of the browsers are they using?

By analyzing the log files, you can learn a great deal about your audience. You can see how the majority of your audience came to your site and what they like to do while they are there—meaning whether they request information or not, if they download products, or if they are interested in free giveaways. You can use this information to find out if your site needs to be changed to accommodate the needs of your visitors. For example, if you find that many of your visitors are spend-
ing much of their time on your What’s New page, maybe it would be in
your best interest to start a monthly mail list to inform your audience
about new additions to your Web site.

The log files can tell you when your audience is entering your site.
For example, if the log files indicate that your traffic is mostly at night,
you could predict that most people visit your site from home. Because
many homes do not have high-speed access, you might want to check
your graphic sizes to make sure that they are not taking too long for
your site to load. If your analysis tells you that not many people visit
your site on Saturday, you could select this day as your maintenance
day. You don’t want to make changes to your site on days when you
receive high traffic because it is very discouraging to your visitors to
receive HTTP 404 errors because your site is temporarily down.

You can also see your visitor’s IP address, which the software trans-
lates into his or her geographical location; some of the software is even
capable of narrowing the data down to the city (see Figure 27.1). From
a marketing perspective, this can benefit you in planning your market-
ing efforts in other media. If you are planning a television campaign for

Figure 27.1. WebTrends can tell you what cities are bringing you the most
online traffic.
your business, you might want to start in a city that frequently visits your site, thus increasing the chance of a successful campaign.

It is very common for Web traffic analysis software to indicate which browser your visitors are using when visiting your Web site (see Figure 27.2). Although you want to have a Web site that is designed to be compatible with both older and newer browsers, this data can be used to your advantage. Older browsers that cannot read Java scripting properly and that do not have the proper plug-ins for a Flash introduction might still be in use by your viewers. However, if a majority of your viewers are using the latest browsers, you could incorporate more of the latest technology into your site. Remember that you should always offer a “Skip Flash” option on your site and the latest Java plug-ins for people with older browsers.

**Which Pages Are Popular and Which Pages Are Not?**

What pages are most popular with your visitors? Do you see traffic spike when you have new content? Release a newsletter or news re-

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**Figure 27.2.** This WebTrends report lets you know which versions of each browser your visitors are using.
lease? Do you get more traffic on the weekend or during the week? Are your online marketing efforts having an impact? Are people clicking through?

When you look at the log files and see where your audience is spending most of their time on your site, you can also tell where they are not. You can then use this information to determine what the popular pages on your site incorporate that the less popular ones do not. Perhaps the popular pages are similar to the less popular, but are visited by a specific source (i.e., search engines, newsgroups). Maybe there is a content problem on the less popular pages, or maybe they take longer to load than the other pages and visitors do not want to wait for them to load. Whatever the case may be, you can use this information and attempt to fix those problems that would keep visitors from spending time on all the pages of your site.

**Find Out How Each Visitor Found Your Site**

By finding out how each visitor came to your site, you can boost your traffic tremendously. You can determine which of your banner ads is producing the best results (see Figure 27.3). You can use this information to

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**Figure 27.3.** This WebTrends report identifies how frequently a banner ad is viewed.
help you with the selection of banners you use and also the allocation of your online advertising budget. You can determine how many visitors found your site through search engines (see Figure 27.4). You can even determine which keyword led to the most visitors through the search engines (see Figure 27.5). If most of your traffic is coming from the Excite search engine (http://www.excite.com), you could consider purchasing a banner advertisement on that page. The same theory applies if your traffic is coming from a newsgroup, meta-indexes, and so on.

You can also find out where your visitors go when they leave your Web site. You want your viewers to stay at your site as long as possible. If you notice that the majority of your viewers are not traveling through your entire site and are not viewing important information that you want them to see, you may want to manipulate the layout of your Web site to decrease the “flight effect.” If you notice that your top exit page is your home page, you might even decide to try a whole new approach because people seem to be turned off from searching through your site from the beginning.

Single-access pages are pages on your Web site that are accessed through a link or search engine and then are immediately exited. If a high percentage of your Web site traffic is a result of these pages, it is very important that you convey a strong message while you have the
visitors’ attention. If you have pages like this, you should reevaluate what is on those pages and try to come up with content that entices your visitor to search through the rest of your site.

Most of the Web traffic analysis software will tell you which keywords and phrases your visitors used to find your site using a search engine. This is extremely valuable information because you can use these keywords to increase your popularity in the search engines. By knowing the most popular keywords your visitors are using to visit your site, you can make sure you use them in your meta-tags, Alt tags, and page titles, and in the text of your page for higher placement in the search engines. Also, by seeing which search engines are being used more by your visitors, you can choose to purchase a banner ad or keywords for that engine to achieve maximum visibility to your market.

Another benefit of observing who is viewing your site is that you can see when spiders and crawlers from search engines have crawled to your page. This means that your site most likely will be indexed on their corresponding search engine. This is good to know, not only because it reassures you that you are going to be indexed, but also because by
knowing this, you will not resubmit your site to the search engine and risk spamming.

**Identifying Your Target Market**

After you have collected data from your log files and used the Web traffic analysis software to determine which demographic groups are actually visiting your site, you then must determine whether these are the groups that you want to target. If not, you must then determine how you are going to reach your target market. For example, you might find that you need to change your online advertising campaign. Or perhaps you should reevaluate your Internet marketing strategy, taking into consideration the new data that you have collected.

**Find out What Forms of Online Promotion Work for Your Site**

When you first launch your Web site, you are going to aggressively implement your Internet marketing strategy by experimenting with all of the different forms of online marketing. However, when you analyze who is actually visiting your site and you find out where the majority of your traffic is coming from, you can then determine where to focus the majority of your marketing efforts. You might find that a link on a particular Web site is resulting in a high amount of traffic to your site; therefore, you might consider purchasing a banner advertisement on that site. The same goes for all of the other forms of Internet marketing. If, after a short period of time, your analysis software tells you that you are receiving low traffic from a banner ad that you have purchased, you should pull it off that site and allocate your investment to another site on the Internet. This is a good way to make sure you get the most for your investments in online marketing.

**How Do You Get Web Traffic Analysis Software for Your Site?**

One option is to use a tracking service like eXTReMe Tracking (http://www.extreme-dm.com), where the tracking software resides on the ser-
vice provider’s server. You place the tracker code on your Web site, which provides all the input to the tracking software, and then you have access to all the tracking reports.

You can purchase Web traffic analysis software if you wish, but for it to work it must be installed on the server where you host your Web site. If you are hosting your own Web site, you definitely have to purchase your own software; however, if you are paying an ISP to host your Web site, the host should already be able to provide some sort of analysis software. Most people don’t take advantage of the tremendous marketing opportunities available from analyzing their traffic; therefore, they do not ask their ISP about the software. It should be available to you, for you are paying for their services. If it is not, simply ask them to purchase the Web traffic analysis software of your choice, for they would much rather have you as a client than say no. In some cases they might charge you an additional fee for this service.

Internet Resources for Chapter 27

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding Web traffic analysis. For additional resources on a variety of topics, visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you can find additional tips, tools, and resources.

Web Traffic Analysis Services

Analog
http://www.analog.cx
“The most popular log file analyzer in the world.”

eXTReMe Tracker
http://www.extreme-dm.com/tracking
The eXTReMe Tracker is a completely free service that offers comprehensive real-time reporting, with no limit on the amount of traffic that you receive on your Web site. It is capable of tracking your visitors’ geographic location, their domain, e-mail address, the browser they are using, and much more.
Funnel Web Analyzer
http://www.quest.com/funnel_web/analyzer
Every person who visits your company’s Web site leaves behind a trail. Your Web server logs their every action, and you can use this information to help improve your business. Funnel Web Analyzer provides essential Web site visitor and traffic analysis. It measures everything from server load and referrals to visitor demographics and marketing ROI. Funnel Web Analyzer helps you optimize your Web site, by allowing you to analyze how users interact with your site, and helps you make informed decisions about what changes you can make to improve their experience.

HitBox
http://www.hitbox.com
HitBox is designed for ad-supported, personal, or e-commerce sites. It’s capable of developing user profiles, tracking which sites refer visitors to your site, and how much traffic you receive on a daily, monthly, and annual basis. HitBox can also track how your visitors navigate around your Web site, which can help you in customizing your Web site to your viewers’ needs.

IBM SurfAid Analytics
SurfAid customers range from startups to Internet giants. Regardless of your traffic volumes, SurfAid processes your data in hours. SurfAid has handled the processing and analysis for some of the world’s most heavily trafficked Web sites to date, including the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games.

TheCounter.com
http://www.thecounter.com
The Counter provides tracking services to its members. By placing a small image on your Web site, you can get information such as when your visitors came, from where, and by using what browser. If you are just experimenting with Web traffic analysis, you can’t go wrong with TheCounter.com.

Webalizer
http://www.mrunix.net/webalizer
The Webalizer is a fast, free Web server log file analysis program. It produces highly detailed, easily configurable usage reports in HTML format, for viewing with a standard Web browser.
Web Site Traffic Reports
http://www.websitetrafficreport.com
This free service provides you with a bit of code to insert into your Web page, and then sends you an e-mail daily with your Web traffic report.

Web-Stat Traffic Analysis
http://www.web-stat.com
For $5 per month you can use this service, which provides very detailed Web traffic analysis reports.

Web Traffic Analysis Software

AccessWatch
http://www.accesswatch.com
AccessWatch is open source shareware. AccessWatch generates browser statistics, referrer, page views, and other Web site traffic statistics.

Mach5 FastStats Analyzer
http://www.mach5.com/products/analyzer/analyzer.html
A powerful software application that provides detailed analysis of your server’s log files.

NetIQ’s WebTrends Enterprise Suite
The WebTrends Enterprise Suite is one of the most comprehensive Web site analysis software packages available. It provides you with reports on everything from the number of views your banner ads receive on another Web page, to which keyword was used when a visitor found your site using a search engine. You can easily target specific hits and user sessions that include file types and names, entry pages, time and day, user addresses, or any other medium that might have pointed a visitor to your page. WebTrends develops detailed advertising reports, which tell you how often banners on your Web site are viewed and how often people click through. This assists you in selling and billing space to your clients. This is an all-in-one piece of Web traffic analysis software that does more than answer the question of who is actually visiting your site.
NetTracker eBusiness Edition

http://www.sane.com

NetTracker uses an Oracle database engine, which is great for most companies because they don’t need a database administrator to use it. The Business Edition can handle really large log files with the speed and agility of an Oracle8 database. The Business Edition also lets you access your data for additional analysis using standard reporting tools such as Crystal Reports and products from Cognos, Information Builders, and more. This product contains 79 standardized summaries, plus you can create and save your own. NetTracker generates usage reports for multiple Web sites, proxy servers, firewalls, and FTP sites.
Over the past few years the Internet has come a long way toward being a sales and distribution channel for most businesses. As with any distribution channel, there are costs involved. Where business costs are involved, the owners want to see a return on their investment. To determine the return on investment, businesses need to measure and analyze a number of things.

Over the past year we have seen more and more companies allocate significantly more of their marketing budget to Internet marketing. Businesses are taking the Internet very seriously these days. Businesses are beginning to measure their Web site’s effectiveness from both a marketing and a merchandising perspective. In this chapter, we cover:

- Measuring your online success
- What to measure
- Conversion ratio
- Sales per visitor
- Cost per visitor
- Cost per sale
Measuring Your Online Success

E-commerce is a numbers game. The trick is to focus on the right numbers so that you can make accurate decisions about how to improve your Web site, and ultimately, your customer conversion rate. Without e-metrics, the Web continues to be a grand experiment, a government research project that escaped the lab, mutated, and took over the world. But with e-metrics you have the opportunity to approach the Web from an objective, systematic perspective. You can move from trial and error to trial, measure and improve.

Bryan Eisenburg
CIO Future Now Inc.
http://futurenowinc.com

It is becoming imperative that companies track the effectiveness of their online marketing campaigns in real time and make adjustments, if necessary, immediately. It is also imperative that companies track the effectiveness of the elements on their Web site and make adjustments over time.

From a marketing perspective, organizations want to measure and improve advertising effectiveness, click-throughs, cost of customer acquisitions, etc.

From a Web site perspective, organizations want to improve online sales, cross-sells, up-sells, customer retention rates, average order per customer, number of page views per visitor, customer loyalty, newsletters, sign-ups, and so on. They want to determine the most popular areas of the site so the content can be improved. They want to identify popular “exit” pages so they can modify them and make their site more “sticky.”
There are a few basic ways to improve your success online:

- Generate more traffic to your Web site—that’s what this book is all about.

- Improve your conversion rate or convert more of your Web site visitors into paying customers.

- Your sales conversion rate is affected by:
  
  – How well you have targeted your audience
  
  – How good your offer is
  
  – How convincing your copy is
  
  – How well your audience knows you—loyalty and trust factors
  
  – Reducing the clicks to buy—the more clicks to the check-out, the more abandoned shopping carts

- Get your customers to buy more. Ways to do this include:
  
  – Cross-sell
  
  – Up-sell
  
  – Improve your sales copy
  
  – Offer value-added services, such as gift wrapping and expedited shipping.

If you don’t track, you can’t measure. If you don’t measure, you don’t improve. It is as simple as that.

**What to Measure**

The digital nature of the Web makes the medium inherently measurable. You need to know what to measure, how to measure it, and
how to improve over time. Quite often industry benchmarks are irrelevant. What you are concerned with is measuring your own organization’s results and ratios and improving them month after month. As long as you keep getting better at what you’re doing and improving your performance and bottom line, does it really matter that there is a benchmark out there that you’re not beating? There are too many variables at play that can distort industry-wide or Internet-wide benchmarks.

Some of the key metrics that you want to measure include:

- Conversion ratio
- Sales per visitor
- Cost per visitor
- Net profit per sale
- Return on investment.

**Conversion Ratio (CR)**

A conversion ratio is the number of times a desired action is taken, presented as a percentage of the number of opportunities for the action to be taken. Although most people look at this ratio as the conversion of a site visitor into a paying customer, there are many other conversion ratios that are relevant. Conversion ratios of site visitors to sign-ups for any permission marketing opportunity (newsletters, coupons, e-specials) is a very important ratio.

By way of example, let’s assume you have 300 visitors to your Web site in a day and you have 30 sales in the same time period. The sales conversion ratio would be:

The number of people who purchase divided by the number of people who visit the site: \( \frac{30}{300} = 10 \) percent

If you had 3,000 visitors and 30 sales, your conversion ratio would be 1 percent: \( \frac{30}{3,000} = 1 \) percent

If you could find a way to increase your conversion ratio from 1 percent to 2 percent, you will have doubled your sales. Obviously, the higher the conversion ratio the better.
Sales per Visitor (SPV)

The sales per visitor is calculated by taking the gross sales or total dollar sales amount for a period of time divided by the number of visitors over the same period of time.

If you have $3,000 in sales for the day and 300 visitors, you have a $10 sales per visitor ratio: $3,000 sales/300 visitors = $10 SPV.

You want to increase this number over time.

Cost per Visitor (CPV)

Your cost per visitor can be calculated two ways. You can look at your total cost per visitor over all marketing activities, or you can choose to measure your cost per visitor for a specific campaign. The specific-campaign measurement is more relevant because you want to know which Internet marketing activities are most cost-effective and yield a higher return on investment.

To calculate your overall cost per visitor, you simply take all your marketing expenses and divide by the number of unique visitors.

To calculate a campaign-specific cost per visitor, you take the cost of the campaign and divide it by the number of unique visitors provided by that campaign. Let’s run an example. Let’s say you run a banner advertising campaign that costs you $20 CPM (cost per thousand impressions). And let’s further assume you get a 1 percent click-through rate. Your 1 percent click-through yields you ten visitors (1,000 × 1 percent = 10 visitors). Your cost per visitor for this campaign is $2. You take the campaign cost (in this case, $20) and divide it by the number of visitors (in this case, ten): $20/10 visitors = $2 cost per visitor for this campaign.

Cost per Sale (CPS)

Your cost per sale is calculated as the cost of your campaign divided by the number of sales it produces.

Let’s follow through on the previous example. Our campaign cost was $20 for 1,000 banner ad impressions. We had a 1 percent click-through rate, or ten visitors. Let’s assume that 10 percent of our visitors
bought, so 10 percent is one sale. To calculate our cost per sale, we take our campaign cost and divide it by the number of sales: $20 campaign cost/1 sale = $20 CPS.

**Net Profit per Sale (NPPS)**

Let’s continue with our example. Let’s assume that each sale produces at $45 gross profit. Gross profit is calculated by taking the selling price and subtracting the cost of goods sold. Net profit per sale is calculated by taking the net profit and subtracting our cost-per-sale (which is the previous calculation we figured as $20). The net profit per sale for this campaign is: Gross profit per sale - cost per sale: $45 - $20 = $25 NPPS.

**Return on Investment (ROI)**

The return on investment before non-marketing expenses is calculated by taking the net profit per sale and dividing it by the investment or the cost per sale. In this case, you had a $25 net profit per sale divided by $20 cost per sale: $25/$20 = 125 percent ROI.

This campaign was profitable. But you need to do these calculations for all of your campaigns so that you can compare them against each other to see where you want to focus your marketing dollars and also to improve your ratios over time on the same types of marketing activities—in other words, get better at the game.

**Web Metrics Tools**

Now that you have learned how to do all the calculations and your heart is racing thinking about this new full-time job that has just been created, we’ll let you in on a few tools that might help.

Some of the tools available include:

- AdMinder (http://www.adminder.com). AdMinder can calculate not only the cost per click, but also the cost per sale (or action) and the return on investment for that particular campaign.
AdMinder allows for easy management of multiple campaigns by displaying ads that are scheduled to run in the near future and ads that are about to expire. AdMinder allows for the export of data to Excel or any other spreadsheet software.


- NetAuditNow (http://netauditnow.com). NetAuditNow is a service that logs onto your Web server, grabs your log files, and then uses them to spit out reports. One of the reports that NetAuditNow generates is the advertising quality and return-on-investment report. This report compares the quantity (total and average number) to quality (time, pages viewed, and purchases) of visitors who came to your site from various ad banners and links. Can report on everything from search engine traffic to total monthly page views and unique visitors.

- Net Quantify (http://www.netquantify.com). Online reports reveal which placements generate the most sales, registrations, and any other activity you want to track.

- PromotionStat (http://www.promotionstat.com). PromotionStat reports on and separates visitors from different advertising vehicles or sources and tracks their behaviors once they’re on your site.

**Internet Resources for Chapter 28**

I have included a few resources for you to check out regarding Web metrics. For additional resources on a variety of topics, I recommend that you visit the Resources section of my Web site at http://www.susansweeney.com/resources.html. There you will find additional tips, tools, techniques, and resources.

**How to Interpret Web Metrics**

http://www.clickz.com/sales/traffic/article.php/992351

An interesting article on how to interpret what all these numbers mean.
Web Metrics and ROI
http://www.stepbystepwebmarketing.com/bottom.php
Another article about Web metrics from the Institute of International Research.

Understanding Web Metrics to Improve Site Performance
http://www.powerhomebiz.com/vol29/metrics.htm
Many online entrepreneurs fail to properly understand and utilize their site’s metrics. Here’s an in-depth look on how statistics can be used to achieve traffic, marketing, sales, and customer service goals.

Marketing Experiment
Marketing Experiment tests 26 different Web metrics tools to determine the simplest, most accurate way to capture the numbers you need.
About the Author

Susan Sweeney, CA, CSP

Renowned industry expert, consultant and speaker Susan Sweeney, CA, CSP tailors lively keynote speeches and full- and half-day seminars and workshops for companies, industries, and associations interested in improving their Internet presence and increasing their Web site traffic and sales. Susan is the founder and president of Connex Network Inc. (www.connexnetwork.com), an international Internet marketing and consulting firm. Susan holds both the Chartered Accountant and Certified Speaking Professional designations. She is an experienced Internet marketing professional with a background in computers, marketing, and the Internet. Susan is the author of several books on Internet marketing and e-business: *101 Ways To Promote Your Web Site*, *Internet Marketing for Your Tourism Business*, *Going for Gold*, *101 Internet Businesses You Can Start from Home*, and *The e-Business Formula for Success*. She is also the developer of a 2-day intensive Internet Marketing Boot Camp. Susan offers many Web-based teleseminars, seminars on CD, and e-books related to Internet marketing.

Susan is a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers, the National Speakers Association, and the International Federation for Professional Speakers.

Connex Network is a marketing firm that provides Internet and international marketing consulting and training services to industry and government. Their clients range in size from single-person startup operations to multi-million-dollar international firms. Their primary services include Internet marketing workshops, Internet marketing strategies, Web site report cards, Internet marketing consulting, market research, and competitive analysis. During their workshops and training sessions, they ensure that their clients have a complete understanding of the principles involved with developing a strong online presence. The team of Internet marketing analysts at Connex is highly trained in
the area of Internet marketing, and all stay up-to-date with the latest technological advancements and industry trends in the online marketing world. Every person on the team has extensive practical hands-on experience and the necessary skills to use proven tips, tools, and techniques to generate high volumes of traffic to your site.

As a result of technological change and global competitiveness, a strong Internet presence is essential. Susan instructs individuals with her enthusiastic personality combined with her vast hands-on international marketing experience, which keeps her listeners informed and captivated. Let Susan help you increase your traffic and make your business prosper!

Susan Sweeney, CA, CSP
Connex Network Inc.
75 Brentwood Drive
Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada  B4A 3S2
Phone: 902/468-2578; Fax: 902/468-0380
www.connexnetwork.com
susan@connexnetwork.com
Appendix A: Terminology

404 – File Not Found. This message is returned from a Web server when a requested document cannot be found.

Animated GIF. Special image-editing applications can meld several GIF images into a single image much like slides in a slide show. Each of the images is displayed briefly in turn to create the illusion of motion (similar to cartoon flipbooks).

ASCII text file (American Standard Code for Information Interchange). The worldwide standard format for text files in computers and on the Internet. The code represents all the uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, punctuation, etc. There are 128 standard ASCII codes in which a seven-digit binary number, 0000000 through 1111111, represents each character.

ASP (Application Service Provider). A company that offers individuals or enterprises access over the Internet to applications and related services that would otherwise have to be located in their own personal or enterprise computers.

Autoresponder. A program that automatically responds to incoming e-mail. It is like an electronic fax-back system for e-mail.

Backbone. Large transmission lines that carry data being transferred from smaller lines. These lines, or paths, connect local or regional networks together for long-distance communication. The connection points are known as network nodes or telecommunication data-switching exchanges (DSEs).

Backend systems. Software systems, usually inventory, accounts receivable, CRM, and others that are internal to a company that are sometimes integrated or that interface with a Web site.

Banner ad. A graphical advertisement on a Web site that links to a particular promotion when the user clicks on it. Banner ads are used to increase product awareness and company and brand identity, and can be a source of revenue (advertising revenue) to the site that hosts the banner ad.

BBS (bulletin board system). A computer that can be reached by computer modem dialing (or by Telnet) for the purpose of sharing or exchanging messages or other files. Some BBSs are devoted to spe-
specific interests; others offer a more general service. The definitive BBS List says that there are over 40,000 BBSs worldwide.

**BCC (blind carbon copy).** Including e-mail addresses in the BCC field of an e-mail message hides all the addresses aside from each recipient’s address.

**Benchmark.** A point of reference by which something can be measured or compared. In surveying, a “bench mark” (two words) is a post or other permanent mark used as the basis for measuring the elevation of other topographical points.

**Branding.** Creating public awareness of a company, product, or service so that the company, product, or service is quickly and immediately identified and associated.

**Browser.** The software used to view the various kinds of Internet resources, or sites.

**Bulk e-mail.** A group of identical messages e-mailed to a large number of addresses at once. This is a technique commonly employed by spammers, and it results in many very impersonalized e-mail messages.

**Cache.** A place to store something more or less temporarily. Web pages you request are stored in your browser’s cache (pronounced “cash”) directory on your hard disk. When you return to a page you’ve recently viewed, the browser can get most of the information from the cache rather than the original server. A cache saves you time and saves the network the burden of additional traffic. You can usually vary the size of your cache, depending on your particular browser.

**CGI (Common Gateway Interface).** Guidelines that define how a Web server communicates with another piece of software on the same machine, and how the other piece of software, the CGI program, talks to the Web server. Any piece of software can be a CGI program if it handles input and output according to the CGI standard.

**Cgi-bin.** This is the most common name for the directory on a Web server that holds a CGI program. Most programs located in the cgi-bin directory are text files—scripts that are executed by binaries located elsewhere on the same machine.

**Chat.** Real-time conversation between one or more individuals across a network. IRC and ICQ are common forums for such discussions often held in topic-driven chat rooms.

**Clickstreams.** The paths a user takes as he or she navigates a Web page or cyberspace in general. Advertisers and online media providers have developed software that can track users’ clickstreams.
Click-through. A hit generated from a banner advertisements when a user clicks on the banner ad.

Click-through rate. This is the percentage of banner ad views that result in a user’s clicking on it (a click-through).

Cookie. On the Internet, a cookie refers to a piece of information sent by a Web server to a Web browser. The browser software is expected to save the cookie and send the information back to the server whenever an additional request is made. Cookies may contain information such as user preferences, registration or login information, online shopping cart info, etc.

Cost per click. The rate charged to an advertiser each time a user clicks on their banner ad. This is one method site owners can use to collect advertising revenue from banner ads.

Crawlers. Crawlers quietly comb through Web sites and index the information they find.

CPM (cost per thousand page views). Banner ad rates are typically measured in cost per thousand (page views)—shorthand for the cost of delivering a marketing message to 1,000 people.

CPTM (cost per thousand targeted ad views). This implies that the audience you have targeted is of a particular demographic group. See Demographics.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management systems). An information industry term for methodologies, software, and usually Internet capabilities that help an enterprise manage customer relationships in an organized way.

Cybermall. A collection of online storefronts better known as an Internet shopping mall.

Cybernaut. A person who uses the Internet.

Cyberspace. Used to describe all areas of information resources available through computer networks and the Internet. William Gibson originated the term in his novel Neuromancer.

Database marketing. Actively maintaining and updating a database of clients and potential clients (data warehousing), mining the data for specific demographic information (data mining), and focusing your advertising campaign on the target market. For instance, once you determine the people in your database that fit a particular demographic group, you can then send a targeted e-mail marketing message to these people.

Data mining. Obtaining specific information from a data warehouse by running queries. Marketers can determine how many people in a
database file fit a certain demographic group and then market to that particular group of individuals.

**Data warehouse.** A place for storing, retrieving, and managing large amounts of any type of data. Data warehouse software often allows you to conduct fast searches, as well as advanced filtering. Planners and researchers can use this database freely without worrying about slowing down day-to-day operations of the production database.

**Demographics.** Specific data about the size and characteristics of a population or audience that can be used for marketing purposes.

**Domain name.** The unique name that identifies an Internet site. A domain name always has two or more parts, separated by a dot. The part on the left is the most specific, and the part on the right is the most general. A given machine may have more than one domain name, but a given domain name points to only one machine. For example, the domain names `connexnetwork.com` and `yahoo.com` can both refer to the same machine.

**Download.** The transferring of data from one computer to another across the Internet.

**DTD (Document Type Declaration).** Specifies the organization that issued the language specification and the exact version of the specification. This information is typically found at the beginning of an HTML document or other programming documents. In XML, a DTD specifies the meaning of every tag and tag attribute contained within a set of XML pages.

**E-business.** Electronic business is the conduct of business on the Internet—not only buying and selling, but also servicing customers and collaborating with business partners.

**E-commerce.** The process of buying and selling goods and services on the Internet.

**Effective frequency.** The optimum regularity with which you execute an e-mail marketing campaign.

**E-mail (electronic mail).** Mail messages, usually text, sent from one person to another via computer. Messages can also be sent automatically to a large number of addresses on a mailing list.

**Emoticons.** Symbols made from punctuation marks and letters that look like facial expressions. Commonly used in e-mail and in Internet chat rooms to convey expressions and additional meaning to written text.

**Exposure.** How broadly known you or your product is from being on the Internet.
Extranet. A new buzzword that refers to an intranet that is partially accessible to authorized outsiders. Whereas an intranet resides behind a firewall and is accessible only to people who are members of the same company or organization, an extranet provides various levels of accessibility to outsiders. You can access an extranet only if you have a valid user name and password, and your identity determines which parts of the extranet you can view.

Ezine, e-zine (electronic magazine). Used to describe an electronic magazine, including those of print magazines such as National Geographic and Newsweek that have electronic editions. Thus, E-Zine databases include both electronic-only magazines together with electronic-edition magazines.

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). Documents that list and answer the most common questions on a particular subject or problem area. There are hundreds of FAQs on subjects as diverse as car repair and franchise advice.

Firewall. A set of related programs located at a network gateway server to protect the resources of a private network from users of other networks.

Flame, flaming. Flaming usually involves the use of harsh language directed toward a group or an individual for sending unwanted messages (marketing) on a newsgroup or mail list.

Forums. Another name for a newsgroup in which people are formed together in a group to chat and discuss.

FTP (File Transfer Protocol). The common method of moving files between two computers through the Internet medium. FTP is a method for logging onto another computer or Internet site for the purpose of retrieving or sending files.

Hit. A single request from a Web browser for a single item from a Web server; thus, in order for a Web browser to display a page that contains three graphics, four hits occur at the server: one for the HTML page, and one for each of the three graphics. Hits are often used as a rough measure of visits on a server.

Home page. The main Web page for a business, organization, or person—or simply the main page of a collection of Web pages.

Host. Any computer on a network that can hold files available to other computers on the network. It is quite common to have one host machine provide several services to other machines, such as WWW and Usenet.

HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). The coding language used to create documents for use on the World Wide Web. These documents
have a file extension of *html* or *htm*. HTML code looks a lot like old-fashioned typesetting code, where you surround a block of text with codes that indicate how it should appear. HTML or HTM files are meant to be viewed using a World Wide Web client program, such as Netscape or Internet Explorer.

**HTTP (Hypertext Transport Protocol).** The most important protocol used in the World Wide Web for moving hypertext files across the Internet. Requires an HTTP client program on one end and an HTTP server program on the other end.

**Hypertext.** Clickable text that links to another document, that is, words or phrases in one document that can be clicked on by a reader, causing another document to be retrieved and displayed.

**Image map.** A single graphic that has multiple hot links to different pages or resources.

**Impression.** Sometimes used as a synonym for “view,” as in “ad view.” Online publishers offer, and their customers buy, advertising measured in terms of ad views or impressions.

**Internet Protocol, Internet Protocol address.** Basically, the set of rules for one network communicating with any other (or occasionally, for broadcast messages, all other networks). Each network must know its own address on the Internet and that of any other networks with which it communicates. To be part of the Internet, an organization needs an Internet network number, which it can request from the Network Information Center (NIC). This unique network number is included in any packet sent out of the network onto the Internet.

**Interstitial ad.** Meaning “in between”—an advertisement that appears in a separate browser window while you wait for a Web page to load. Interstitials are more likely to contain large graphics, streaming presentations, and applets than conventional banner ads, and some studies have found that more users click on interstitials than on banner ads. Some users, however, have complained that interstitials slow access to destination pages.

**Intranet.** A private network inside a company or organization that uses the same kinds of software found on the public Internet, but that is only for internal use and cannot be viewed outside the network.

**ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network).** A faster way to move more data over existing regular phone lines. Rapidly becoming available around the world, it is priced comparably to standard analog phone circuits. It can provide speeds of roughly 128,000 bits per second over the regular phone lines.
ISP (Internet service provider). A provider that allows access to the Internet. Usually there is a cost to the consumer, although there are still some free community networks.

Java. A programming language that is specifically designed for writing programs. It can safely be downloaded to your computer through the Internet and immediately be run without fear of viruses or other harm to your computer. Using small Java programs, called “applets,” Web pages can include functions such as animations, calculators, and other fancy tricks that cannot be done by normal HTML.

LAN (local area network). A network limited to the local area, usually the same building or floor of a company.

List server software. An application installed on a publicly accessible server that manages messages sent to and from a mailing list. This software is required if you intend to administer your own publicly accessible mailing list.

Login. The account name used to gain access to a computer system, not a password. Also can mean the act of entering onto a computer system.

Lurking. Reading Usenet newsgroups, consumer online service forums, or Internet mailing lists without posting anything, just reading. A lurker is a person who observes what everyone else is doing within that group.

Mailbot. Software programs that automatically respond to all incoming e-mail. A mailbot, or autoresponder, replies to them by sending the author a file or message.

Mailing list, mail list. A system that allows people to send e-mail to one address, whereupon their message is copied and sent to all other subscribers to the list. This method allows people with different kinds of e-mail to participate in discussions together.

Mailing list manager. A software program that collects and distributes e-mail messages to a mailing list. See List server software.

Meta-indexes. A listing of Internet resources pertaining to a specific subject category, intended as a resource to those who have an interest in a specific topic. A meta-index is simply a collection of URLs for related Internet resources, all arranged on a Web page by their titles.

Net. The shorthand version for Internet.

Netiquette. Internet etiquette.

Netizen. From the term “citizen,” referring to a citizen of the Internet, or someone who uses networked resources.

Netpreneur. An online entrepreneur.
Netscape. Web browser and the name of a company. The Netscape browser was based on the Mosaic program developed at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA).

Newbie. A newcomer to the Internet.

Newsgroups. Name given to discussion groups on Usenet.

Opt-in mail list. People are given the choice to take part in a system that allows people to send e-mail to one address, whereupon their message is copied and sent to all other subscribers to the list. This method allows people with different kinds of e-mail to participate in discussions together.

Page view. The number of times a page is viewed.

Password. A code known only to one person or a specific group of individuals used to gain access to a locked system. Good passwords contain letters and nonletters and are not simple combinations such as john12.

Permission marketing. Marketing to individuals via the Internet with their permission, either by having the individual opt-in to a mail list or giving permission by other means to receive e-mail and other information.

Portal. A new term, generally synonymous with gateway, for a World Wide Web site that is or proposes to be a major starting site for users when they get connected to the Web or that users tend to visit as an anchor site.

Posting. A message entered into a network communications system, such as a newsgroup submission.

Privacy policy. A policy for protecting the privacy of individually identifiable information. When an organization is engaged in online activities or electronic commerce, it has the responsibility to implement and post a privacy policy.

Registration. You submit personal information to become part of a mail list or newsgroup, in order to receive other information in return.

ROI (return on investment). The amount of profit you obtain from your original investment.

Search engine. The most popular way to find resources on the Internet. There are numerous search engines, each with its own unique styles and capabilities.

Secure server. A network-accessible (i.e., the Internet) computer that uses SSL (Secure Socket Layers) for encryption to allow for private online transactions. The encryption protects an online shopper’s
credit card and personal information from being compromised while conducting an e-commerce transaction.

Server. A computer that stores information and makes these files available to other users on a network or the Internet.

Signature. A block of information used at the end of every message or online document sent by a particular user.

Site. A unique location on the Internet to post your information and get noticed.

SKU. Stock Keeping Unit.

Snail mail. A slang term for the regular postal service.

Spam, spamming. An inappropriate attempt to use a mailing list, Usenet, or other networked communications facility as if it was a broadcast medium by sending the same message to a large number of people who didn’t ask for it.

Spider. An automated program that indexes documents, titles, or a portion of each document acquired by traversing the Web.

SQL (Structured Query Language). A specialized programming language for sending queries to databases.

Storefront. A set location on the Web that stores and displays a collection of information about you and your business.

Streaming media. The simultaneous transfer and display of the sound and images on the World Wide Web.

Subject. The subject line in an e-mail message stating the topic of the mail.

Subscribe. Submitting information to an e-zine or mail list in order to receive information.

Superstitial. Nonbanner rich media ads that can be any size on the screen and can be authored in most any creative format. Preloaded using a patent-pending “polite” delivery system that eliminates the latency problems often experienced with streaming online advertising solutions, superstitials only play on a user-initiated break in surfing, such as a mouse click.

Telnet. A program that allows people to log on to other computers or bulletin board systems on the Internet and run software remotely from their location.

Thread. A sequence of responses to an initial message posting. This enables you to follow or join an individual discussion in a newsgroup from among the many that may be there.

Thumbnail. A term used by graphic designers and photographers for a small-image representation of a larger image, usually intended to make it easier and faster to look at or manage a group of larger
images. For example, software that lets you manage a number of images often provides a miniaturized version of each image so that you don’t have to remember the file name of each image. Web sites with many pictures, such as online stores with visual catalogs, often provide thumbnail images instead of larger images to make the page download faster. This allows the user to control which images are seen in full size.

**Unsolicited e-mail.** Sending e-mail ads to people without their consent.

**Upload.** The transfer of a file from your computer to a server online.

**URL (Uniform Resource Locator).** The standard way to give an address of any resource on the Internet that is part of the World Wide Web (WWW). The most common way to use a URL is to enter into a WWW browser program, such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, or Lynx, and type it in the location bar.

**Usenet.** A system of discussion groups. Comments are passed among hundreds of thousands of machines, with over 10,000 discussion areas, called “newsgroups.”

**User session.** A person with a unique address that enters or reenters a Web site each day (or some other specified period). A user session is sometimes determined by counting only those users that haven’t reentered the site within the past 20 minutes or a similar period. User session figures are sometimes used to indicate the number of visitors per day.

**Vaporlink.** A link within a site on the Internet is supposed to lead to more information (hypertext). A vaporlink is one that has become nonexistent and does not lead anywhere, a dead link.

**Viral marketing.** Word-of-mouth or friend-to-friend e-mail marketing.

**Virtual community.** A community of people sharing common interests, ideas, and feelings over the Internet or other collaborative networks.

**Virus, viruses.** A program (or programs) that, when executed, contaminates a user’s hard drive—often with unpleasant results (erases files, sends unauthorized e-mail from your machine, contaminates other documents, etc.).

**Visitors.** People who have accessed or visited your site.

**Web.** The shorthand version of “World Wide Web.”

**WWW (World Wide Web).** The whole constellation of resources that can be accessed using Gopher, FTP, HTTP, Telnet, Usenet, WAIS, and some other tools. Also referred to as the universe of hypertext servers (HTTP servers), which are the servers that allow graphics, text, sound files, etc., to be mixed together.