

# Know-How

## Web Strategy Demystified

Don't leave your online strategy to fate



BY Suzanne McGann

**A** good online strategy holds great potential to solve specific business problems. The trouble is many enterprises don't know how to get there or where to focus. A solid online strategy is inherently tied to your business goals and should be measurable. Your online strategy needs to guide the specific activities you will take on, such as e-commerce, sales channel development, search strategies (including pay-per-click programs) or webinars that share information.

Developing your strategy often begins with questions or problems such as:

- Is Web 2.0 and its offshoots such as podcasting and blogging right for us?
- Why aren't we driving more traffic to our web site?
- How can we leverage the web to significantly increase sales?

Whether you are building an initial web presence or enhancing your current one, consider these elements:

### Your business informs your online strategy.

An enterprise needs to thoroughly understand their business mission and vision. What are your business goals? How does your business grow? Who are the audiences you need to reach? These answers, along with the level and depth of your firm's bench in both sales and marketing, will help light the path.

Businesses with a marketing focus often have a lean sales staff but are sharp and focused at marketing. Online advertising and branding continuity is essential to this group and so

are search engine strategies. Some good examples of marketing-focused enterprises are typically consumer product companies and professional service firms. Remember, the

less sales capability you have, the more you may need your web site to do the heavy lifting for you.

On the other hand, firms with deep sales capabilities may be lighter on formal marketing and can augment a web presence with sales staff and literature. Online tactics such as regular e-mail communications, newsletters and proprietary online tools are affordable and can deepen customer relationships.

**Study the competition.** Copying the competition doesn't breed innovation. Rather, progress comes from studying the competition's strengths and weaknesses. How do you differentiate yourself from the competition? Is there a tool, information or a service you can offer prospects or customers online that others don't? Key messaging can also be utilized within a well-planned search engine program that leverages key words to render increased visibility and convert online prospects to customers.

**Measure with metrics.** Web sites, search strategies and even e-mail programs offer insightful metrics. These are free, or nearly so, with most hosting companies. It's surprising how many firms ignore this good web data. Find out what kind of traffic you are getting, where it's going and how visitors come to your site. As for return on investment, use the data to guide you. Our greatest success stories occur when web site clients let the web metrics work with their strategies. You want to meld big vision with short-term flexibility to stay on track.

In summary, use your business goals and the needs of your customers as a foundation to build your online strategy. Then assess your resources and budget to determine what's realistic and use tools such as an extranet or podcasting to take your business to the next level.**MB**

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