



INCREASING HITS

and

SELLING MORE

on your

WEB SITE

Proven Web marketing techniques that will:

- *Increase traffic on your Web site*
- *Turn visitors into customers*

G R E G H E L M S T E T T E R

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What About the Big Picture?

If you are interested in Web marketing enough to be reading this book, then I assume that you are astute, industrious, ambitious, and—most of all—progressive in your thinking (it's easy to forget sometimes, but most companies are not yet on the Web). Trying to sell you on the great reasons for going online would probably be like preaching to the choir. The short truth is that there are great reasons for heading to the Web, such as its ability to target narrow markets inexpensively and reduce administrative costs related to making sales or conducting follow-up customer service.

But let's not go crazy. Too many commentaries about the advantages of Web commerce are made by people who are excited about the prospects without necessarily being accountable for cashing in on those prospects. It's good if you are excited—that enthusiasm will help you get through the long hours of work ahead. But, the more excited you are, then the more likely it is that you could use a dose of conservatism.

Perhaps you've heard some of these remarks made about the potential of Web commerce:

- The Mother of All Paradigm Shifts
- The Future of Commerce
- The Second Goldrush
- The Leveler of Playing Fields

Instead of panting with excitement and nodding blindly, let's look at each of these claims with a discriminating mind and an eye toward realism and, most of all, hard-core business pragmatism: What is going on? How can we reach the best possible outcome given the changing environment?

The Mother of All Paradigm Shifts?

The term “paradigm shift” has only recently been used enough to qualify it as an official buzzword. The truth, however, is that paradigms have been shifting since back when a few plant cells in the primordial ooze got tired of competing for scarce sunlight and said “heck with this” and started eating fellow plant cells instead. Animals were born. A paradigm shifted.

In the grand scheme of things, that was probably more significant than Netscape walking off with the de facto Web interface standard, in broad daylight, right under Bill Gates's nose.

We are indeed at the cusp of a significant change in the way people conduct their daily lives—but, for a sense of perspective, think about the degree to which other, relatively recent innovations have affected people and business. Agriculture, written language, antibiotics, and railroads have all had a far more significant impact on humanity than Web commerce is likely to, even with virtual reality thrown in.

But I promised to keep this discussion pragmatic. These examples serve as a point of reference for our thinking, and for an important reason. If you focus only on what is happening today, you will probably fail at Web marketing or at least *fail to excel* at Web marketing. As the saying goes, “Assume that whatever people can think of today will be possible tomorrow and assume that whatever is *possible* today will be *affordable* tomorrow.” In the midst of running your day-to-day business, devote some time every now and then to studying, at the very least, what is possible (but still expensive) today.

TIP: Avoid being taken by surprise: Periodically ask yourself the question, “If such-and-such suddenly became cheap tomorrow, how would that affect my business?”

The Web is most significant in its ability to synergistically combine the existing power of current technologies and practices. If you think about it, the Web does little on its own except substantially beef up the usefulness of our computers, our phones, video, and even FedEx. How earth-shattering would it be that people can now receive a catalog and order something in minutes online, if they still had to wait six to eight weeks to receive their order?

To imagine the near-term boundaries of the Web’s potential commercial impact, imagine that *every* business in the world, no matter how small,

- Could be easily located online
- Offered immense, searchable, hyperlinked volumes of all non-sensitive company information
- Were connected by bandwidth that supports two-way, full-screen video

If all companies were connected in such a way, it would mean amazing things for everyone. And the Web would even qualify for paradigm-shift

status. But would it be the Mother of Them All? No. Is it the most significant change in our lifetimes? It might be the most significant change *for commerce* in most of our lifetimes (depending on how long one lives), but it is not difficult to imagine the *social* impacts of the Web changing our lives and world more significantly, such as with telecommuting, education, and even dating.

The Future of Commerce?

Is the Web the Future of Commerce? Yes, yes, yes. Partly. By that, I mean that nearly all businesses will require Web connection as a standard element of doing business. If for no other reason, firms will be forced to go online because Web communications are likely to merge with or supplant traditional telephone communications.

Second, the *intranet* (a company's internal, private information network) is rapidly emerging as a primary driver of Web growth as firms begin to realize the tremendous efficiencies made possible by connecting all their workers and making documents easily accessible.

But, saying that *all businesses* will be connected to the Web does not mean that all *commerce* will take place over the Web. I doubt that anyone has ever said that *all* commerce will drift toward the Web, but there is certainly disagreement among experts as to the degree and rate of migration. You've probably heard it before, but people don't usually like buying clothes that they haven't yet tried on. What about clothier catalogs? That's a good point—*some* people will buy clothes without first trying them on in a dressing room. But recognize that the \$60 billion spent in all catalog sales in this country accounts for only 3 percent of all retail sales. This number will probably increase somewhat due to the sheer number of "catalogs" that can be accessed online for virtually no incremental cost. Rather than looking for online commerce to replace traditional retail commerce, expect to see Web-enhanced ways in which companies sell products with hybrid distribution models, such as being able to try clothing on in a store to assure fit and then see color options, for example, on the store's computer. The store could then offer greater variety while lowering inventory holding costs, and manufacturers could respond to demand for particular stock items in real-time—eliminating much unnecessary waste and lowering costs, particularly in industries where fashions and preferences change quickly, such as apparel.

Nearly all firms will be hooked up to the Web eventually, so a more useful question is, "*When* will they be hooked up?"

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