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## Marketing and Technology - A Potent Mix

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It's hard to believe that business once operated effectively and efficiently with typewriters, rotary telephones, pencils and erasers. Today, however, computers, email, websites and countless shapes and sizes of wireless devices have all become industry "standards."

The magic in all of these technologies, in business terms, comes from understanding their potential and exploiting them to their fullest. It's about finding ways to make them enhance corporate value and deliver reasonable returns on investment.

It starts with a few basic ideas:

- Websites can become the focal point, and underlying infrastructure, for your business.
- Internet-based technologies can be tailored to support, qualify and quantify specific business functions.
- Internet-based technologies create efficiencies, generate revenue and facilitate growth.
- As an electronic tool, websites are not limited by time or place.
- Websites are only as good as the people that build, manage and maintain them.
- You get what you pay for.

**Be prepared.** It's important to have a well-defined business objective, a clear picture of how your company operates (both internally and externally) and a manageable budget before you start planning an online strategy. There's no point in pursuing technology, developing new systems and implementing change if you haven't done your homework and set realistic goals. While this is true for most endeavors, none are quite as involved or require the degree of investment as some aspects of interactive technology.

Once you have a clear idea of what you expect from a website or centralized interactive digital environment, it can be tailored to suit specific organizational, departmental and/or individual needs. Of course, the degree of customization, while achievable, impacts directly upon cost. This is when a fully defined budget becomes important. As with an evening gown or formal suit, costs for tailoring can vary dramatically based on expectations, degree of detail and the skill of your tailor. In addition, and based on recent experience, there are issues relating to ownership, including copyright and intellectual property, which are often left undefined and legally unresolved. Along with marketing and technical support, legal counsel is an important part of this process.

**Websites are portals.** There's really no limit, other than imagination and budget, to what degree a website (defined specifically as internet or intranet) can be used to help you effectively and efficiently operate and grow your business.

One of the best aspects of interactive technologies is that they can all be developed, implemented and maintained from a central location while the organization and its operatives are active throughout a variety of geographic locations. In other words, both internal and external staff operating throughout the country (or the

world), can view, retrieve and submit data. As long as there's internet access, and with just about any computer or PDA, you can have secure access to company information from a myriad of locations including airports, tradeshow, off-premise meetings, hotel rooms and conference sites.

While sales and marketing professionals tend to be the primary users of internet-based technologies, they can also be linked to other business support and operational departments. From supply chain management and inventory control to finance and human relations, websites have the flexibility to become "windows" to every aspect of your operation.

**Websites are an extension of your brand.** When you acknowledge that buyers are craving convenience, coupled with the way business relationships are developed and transactions are made, it's easy to understand how websites have become influential marketing tools and dynamic sales environments. As long as the level of contact is consistent with previous encounters, brands are enhanced.

There are also many ways in which visitor activity can be tracked. By embracing specialized technologies, you can identify and quantify activity throughout your site. Although "tracking" can be quite involved, let's simply acknowledge that, regardless of the maturity of your company and/or brand, there are appropriate solutions that will provide a clear picture of the online experience visitors have encountered.

Now that you have some idea of what can be accomplished with websites and the internet, here's a short list of things to consider:

- Have a clear picture of what you want to achieve. There's no sense in making investments if the need is not fully defined.
- Establish a budget. It's important to roll out technology, as with any other business expenditure, in a manner that is prioritized, appropriately funded and provides financial returns in excess of the investment.
- Pursue quality. The effectiveness of technology is directly related to the level of training and experience your services provider has to offer. Make sure there's a proven track record and tangible proof of performance before you hire a web development company or technology consultant. It's not uncommon for companies to invest in technologies that are inappropriate, poorly planned or fail to perform. You'll get what you pay for.

Keep in mind that interactive technology is in a constant state of change. What was considered state-of-the-art last week may be outdated today. Don't be intimidated or confused by what you don't understand. There are experts for that. Your role is to be expert in what's best for your company, supports operational efficiency and promotes organizational growth.