

by Jay Conrad Levinson

Now that every service provider worth its megabytes is offering a free Web page to every account-holder, small businesses and large are putting information on the Worldwide Web and waiting for the magic to happen. But people who sit back and wait for the magic will be waiting a long time. The keys to online marketing success are visibility, credibility, and relationships, and that means work.

Visibility - The Web may be the fastest-growing part of the Net right now, but putting up a Web page is no more a guarantee of visibility than uploading an article to an FTP or Gopher server--it's not visible if nobody knows where it is and why they might want to go check it out. Visibility isn't automatically conferred by the type of presence you have or the elegance of its design. Visibility comes by placing your message and your Web site or other presence address in front of as many of your customers as possible. This means:

- using a signature on your e-mail messages that directs people to your site for further information;
- posting useful replies or new messages to discussion groups related to specific aspects of your business;
- posting classified ads in appropriate places; and
- establishing links or listings on as many Net directories as possible.

Credibility - Visibility is great, but it works against you if you're not building a credible image. Canter & Siegel's green card lottery posts are certainly visible in many newsgroups, but the pair's disregard for netiquette in the groups where they post has ruined their credibility. Credibility comes from being a good netizen and from providing useful information. For example:

- Don't post to a discussion just for the sake of posting or agreeing with someone else. If you can't add to the discussion or answer a question, keep lurking until you can.
- Don't waste other people's time with long-winded diatribes in discussion groups.
- Don't post lengthy articles to discussion groups. Instead, post a synopsis and say where people can get the full text.
- Try keeping your signature to four lines or less. Anything longer can be considered self-indulgent. When was the last time you bought something from somebody who did nothing but talk about himself?

Relationships - If you are visible and credible, you'll begin to establish relationships with individuals. Just remember that your customers are individuals, not names on a mailing list or numbers in a general ledger. Show a little personality in your e-mail notes. Follow up after the sale to make sure everything is okay. If you focus more on what your customers want than on how you can make them buy what you're selling, you'll develop the lasting relationships with satisfied customers that are the basis of continued profits.