

# eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals

## UPS, They've Done it Again! And FedEx too!

—By Scott Sanfilippo

- ◆ Starting an Affiliate Program—A How-To Guide (Part I of III)
- ◆ Boundary Scanning: Putting on Your P.I. Hat
- ◆ Sexual Harassment— An Introduction to a Delicate Issue

Read this issue and Valentine season will mean hearts, flowers and profits. Or skip it. Enjoy the massacre!

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February 2008 Volume 2 • Number 2

<b>UPS, They've Done it Again! And FedEx too!</b> .....	18
Things the shipping companies don't want you to know that will save you money.	
<b>From the Editor</b> .....	3
Scott shares his fundamentals that puts the wow factor into any website.	
<b>Letters to the Editor</b> .....	3
Our readers comments and questions.	
<b>Designing for Search Engine Optimization</b> .....	4
SEO Techniques done right, will help you reap some healthy rewards.	
<b>Invest in Your Image with Good Public Relations</b> .....	6
Build and keep a good reputation through the use of well managed PR practice.	
<b>Boundary Scanning: Putting on Your P.I. Hat</b> .....	8
A few boundary-scanning tips when checking out your competition.	
<b>What's the Big Deal with Diversity</b> .....	10
How to create an environment in which people will enjoy going to work.	
<b>Sexual Harassment— An Introduction to a Delicate Issue</b> .....	12
Defining sexual harassment, what you should do to prevent it and how to handle it when it occurs.	
<b>Doing Something Right at CountryTradeDays.com</b> .....	13
Vance Selin chats about his ups, downs and quest for help to turn a struggle into a business.	
<b>What is Good Graphic Design?</b> .....	14
Answering the critical questions of design with principals that give merchants a solution to their retail objectives.	
<b>Starting an Affiliate Program—A How -to Guide (Part I of III)</b> .....	16
Insights to ease the worries you may have about starting an affiliate marketing program.	
<b>Tech Corner: Integrate Google Apps to Streamline Your Tech Communications</b> .....	22
Centralized management of e-mail, resource scheduling, calendaring, and document sharing is easy and inexpensive. Learn the benefits of Google Apps integration!	

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#### Volume 2, Number 2

eBiz Insider (ISSN 1939-2923) is published monthly by Solid Cactus, Inc. 100 North Wilkes-Barre Blvd., Suite 175, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to eBiz Insider, 100 North Wilkes-Barre Blvd., Suite 175, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702

For advertising information, call 1.888.361.9814 ext 7100.

Mail subscription orders or changes to eBiz Insider, 100 North Wilkes-Barre Blvd., Suite 175, Wilkes-Barre, PA 18702.

For subscription information, call 1.888.361.9814 ext 7100.

For editorial reprints or web rights, call Scott Sanfilippo at 1.888.361.9814 ext 7100 or e-mail scott@sbizinsider.com.

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Subscription price: USA, U.S. possessions and Canada—\$9.99 annually for 12 monthly issues.

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# From the Editor



By Scott Sanfilippo,  
Editor in Chief

Think about websites you've discovered that made you say "wow!" Was it the design, layout, functionality— what? Here are my fundamentals.

## Design

A visually appealing website is paramount. The site design needs to be functional and non-distracting. Keep flash, animation, and unnecessary elements to a minimum. Avoid using elements that require installation on your front page and any landing pages.

## Navigation

Make it easy to buy. Keep sections and subsections to a minimum so the customer does not get confused or lost.

Keep nav bars quick-loading by using text instead of graphics.

## Page Layout

Put the "add to cart" button in a prominent location that commands attention. Make it stand out visually. Also, keep pricing simple. Don't clutter up the price area with hard to read tables or formulas.

## Product Photography

Don't sacrifice quality when it comes to product pictures. Customers need photographs to convey texture, color, finish, etc. Invest in a good digital camera and lightbox for product photography or send your products out to a professional photographer. NEVER put items on your site without a photo!

## Copywriting

Good copy sells. Unique copy gets you better search engine placement. Descriptions provided by manufacturers will turn up on other sites selling the same item and that's not good. If you aren't a good writer, hire a copywriter. It's an investment that will pay off.

## Checkout

Keep your site design consistent through the checkout process and don't clutter the checkout with unnecessary information. Customer service policies can be put at the top of a checkout page, but links should be given to the entire policy in your About Us section. The goal is to get the customer to checkout, not bail.

Those are my fundamentals of a good website. To share your own, drop me an e-mail. **eBiz**



- Q. With Valentine's day coming up I want to offer gift cards to my customers, but I don't see any way in Yahoo! Store to do that. Is it possible?  
—Beverly T., Oakley, KS
- A. The Yahoo! Store system allows you to sell gift cards, but there is no way to redeem them. There is the option to sell and redeem electronic gift certificates via the store, but there is no way to track gift card purchases and redemptions through the store. Yahoo! listen up, this is a great feature request!
- Q. I received my December issue of *eBiz Insider* very late and the mailing label had someone else's name and company listed on it but my January issue was correct, do I need to change something?  
—Fred H., Charleston, WV
- A. In an attempt to merge subscribers with subscriber ID's for renewal information, something went awry. Many readers did get their magazine, albeit a little late. Your January issue should have had correct information. If you did not get your December issue, please e-mail [scotts@ebizinsider.com](mailto:scotts@ebizinsider.com) and we'll get one right out to you.

Good comments and questions!

Let us hear from you! Write to:  
[scotts@ebizinsider.com](mailto:scotts@ebizinsider.com) **eBiz**

# Designing for Search Engine Optimization



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*Simply put, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) attempts to increase the visibility of a given website in search engines and enhance its value to visitors through page design, consistent tagging and focusing content on core keywords. According to Wikipedia, “In 2007 Search Engine Marketing is stronger than ever with SEM Budgets up 750% as shown with stats dating back to 2002 vs 2006.”*

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There’s been a lot of talk about Search Engine Optimization (SEO) throughout the years. The term “Search Engine Marketing” was only coined in 2001, but already SEO has become a major component of any successful e-commerce operator. There have been many different techniques that have been used over the years, some have held fast while others have fallen far from grace (remember keywords the same color as the background?). One technique that has stood the test of time: an SEO plan.

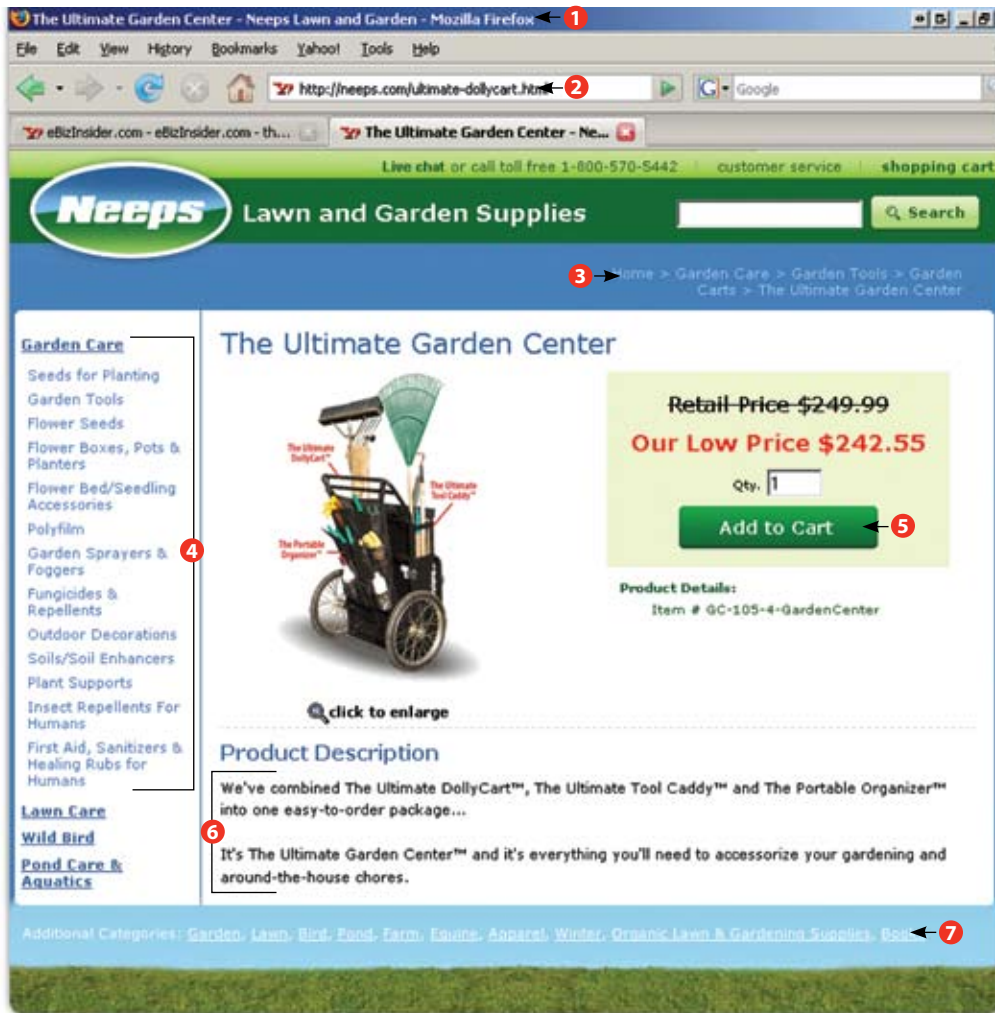
## **One Page at a Time**

To help with your SEO plan, here are a few things that you should consider. First, focus in on one page at a time. I’ve found many store owners who will spend the majority of their time concentrating on getting their item pages ranked for general terms. That’s not a terrible strategy and will work for some keywords and products, but it’s not a strategy that you want to use for every product on your store.

General terms are actually more effective for section pages than item pages. For instance, if you were looking for an office chair, a general term (e.g. “office chair”) would get you to the section page with office furniture. Once the shopper is on the section page, then you can be more specific to lead them to item pages. At this point the key word changes from the general “office chair” to something more specific, like “Office Max Leather Office Chair.”

## **Choose Your Words Carefully**

After choosing which page you want to start with, spend some time trying to figure out which keyword or keyword phrase you want to optimize for. This is your landing page. It’s important that you focus in on one keyword to maximize the effectiveness of this page. When I mention effective keywords, I’m talking about keywords that convert.



people directly to an item page, you'll want your content to drive people towards the call to action, or in this instance the Add to Cart button. If your driving people to a section page, then you'll want to drive people towards your most profitable product(s) in the category.

And this is the point in which you sit back and watch the orders come streaming in. Ok, that's enough sitting! It's time to start working on the next page. In reality, SEO is a lot of work. But done right, you can reap some healthy rewards.

Additional design and programming elements like those in the item page (left) can boost SEO. They include:

- 1 A page title that includes the product name and site name. A search-engine friendly URL
- 2 Even if you have no idea what neeps.com is, you know the product contains a "DollyCart™".
- 3 Breadcrumbs and Text-based navigation
- 4 help search engine spiders by making related pages conspicuous. Image alt tags
- 5 not only help those using screen readers, but allow images (which can't be picked up by search engine spiders) to be represented. Custom descriptions
- 6 provide spiders more content-rich information. Related items
- 7 provide more links for spiders to index next. eBiz



By Kurt Illian  
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Get in the habit now in using conversion rates to determine the effectiveness of your marketing, whether it's SEO, PPC, E-Mail or other.

Let's look at your website now. When adding your keyword to your page, you want to optimize your Title Tag, Meta Description, H1 Tag (Page Name), Links and of course the Content. You want to provide relevant, focused, and detailed information about the specific product or category, working in your keyword here or there. Don't over-do it. Instead, use it sparingly, or more importantly, naturally.

Content is King. The phrase might seem over-used in blogs, books and seminars, and for good reason. It's true! Content doesn't just improve your SEO rankings; it also helps improve your conversions as well.

Once your text has been optimized with your keywords, you'll want to determine the best call to action. If you're driving

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# Invest in Your Image with Good Public Relations

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*“A good reputation is more valuable than money.”*

—Publilius Syrus (~100 BC)

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Publilius Syrus couldn't have said it any better if he'd said it today. Be it e-commerce or retail, in the world of business there is nothing more valuable than your reputation. Building and keeping a good reputation is good PR, or Public Relations. Because of the value it ultimately brings to a company's bottom line, Public Relations should be a part of every business marketing plan.

Public Relations is the practice of managing the awareness of an organization within one or more groups. It can be as simple as increasing the public awareness of a company's human side, or as complicated as dampening the bad publicity surrounding a breaking news story about the company. Image counts, and good PR puts that image in its most positive context.

One example of a famous public relations crisis was the Tylenol crisis in the fall of 1982. Extra-strength Tylenol had been laced with cyanide, causing seven people from Chicago to die. When the story hit the media Johnson & Johnson had to launch a public relations campaign in order to save their reputation and their company. They launched a line of tamper-proof containers, and made sure their improvements received prominent coverage in the news. As you can tell by the shelves at the local pharmacy the PR worked, and Tylenol still covers the shelves in the pain relief section.

Everyone from Johnson & Johnson to your local mom and pop store use public relations; no matter what they may call



it. Large companies have problems with the public saying the wrong things; small companies have problems getting people to say anything. We're all trying to get our message out and have the public like us.

Fundraising for charitable or non-profit organizations is a superb form of Public Relations; your company can generate positive news headlines by helping worthy causes. For example, have your company hold a talent show to raise money for the local hospital. This shows care and concern, and will make people think more positively about your business. Other ways to create positive PR are via sponsorship of other non-profit organizations, and/or sponsorship of scholarships.

Community awareness is essential to any campaign designed to improve your community image. No matter what you are selling, you need to communicate one thing; that you are contributing to the community. This should be a subtext in all of your advertising and the main thrust of your PR efforts.

Another way to raise public awareness is by placing your company representatives at various events that dovetail with the services your company provides. If you have a chance to increase the awareness of your company, it's a good image investment. Selling diamonds? Look into bridal shows. Selling sports equipment? Find a local attraction, like high school football playoffs. Selling car parts? Look into car shows. Even brochures and fliers, done well, will increase your company's awareness. If you can combine a demonstration about your product with your fliers, you can vastly increase the awareness in your company.

When you first started reading this you may have thought: "I don't have the time for PR; that's for Fortune 500 companies;" or, even, "I can't afford public relations." Don't think of PR as an expense; think of it as an investment in something invaluable: your reputation. You see, even all those years ago, Publilius Syrus was right! **eBiz**



By Kim Good  
kimg@ebizinsider.com

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BY  **SOLIDCACTUS**®



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# Boundary Scanning: Putting on Your P.I. Hat

## How to Scope out Your Online Competition

*Welcome. You've got competition.*

Boundary-scanning is an age-old method of scoping out the competition. For instance, if you were opening a restaurant, one of the first things you'd likely do is start eating out at all the other local restaurants. How is the service? Do they have specials? Is the place clean? Is the food tasty? How varied is the menu?

The same techniques can work when it comes to opening or operating an e-commerce business. You have a world of research at your fingertips when you land on a competitor's webpage. If you suspect that a competitor is outperforming you, spend some time on their site and figure out where you can improve. You can also find weak points in the competitor's service to learn where to put your strength.

**Remember:** It is important to stand out and be unique with your own e-commerce venture, so use competitors only as a reference and learning tool, not as a place to get content and ideas.

Here are some boundary-scanning tips to use when checking out the competition:



## Scan the Website

Do a web search to seek out competitor sites, specifically sites that have higher rankings than yours. Checking out a competitor website may seem like a no-brainer, but you have to look below the surface. Just because the site may have a cool logo or look flashy does not mean it functions well or makes for an easy shopping experience. Spend some time going through the site, click around. Are the products easy to find? Are the product descriptions—descriptive? Assume the role of a consumer. Jot down your likes and dislikes. See where you may have an edge. Share your findings with your web developer and find out more about features you'd like. Ask questions, too. The competition may have a feature that looks great, but decide if it would benefit your site.

There is a great tool called MarketLeap at [www.marketleap.com](http://www.marketleap.com), which allows you to compare your link popularity with up to three other URLs.

The About Us and Career Pages on any e-commerce site can be very telling. The careers page can give you a glimpse into the size and growth of the company. Are they hiring? The About Us page can give information on the history of the company, where their roots are, what other companies they may own, what professional associations they have and more.

## Make a Purchase

You may not want to give your competition money, but think about it. If you purchase from your competitor, you will be rewarded with some great information. You will participate first hand in the total shopping experience from that website. You will get to see how smoothly the transaction goes, if the order arrives when promised and in what condition and how the item is packaged. If you want to delve further into the investigation, return or exchange the item and see how that

process works as well. As a bonus, you will get an up close and personal look at a competitor's item.

## Call Customer Service

How is the competition treating your customers? Call the customer service line with a question about a product. Ask a question where the answer is provided on the website just to test the rep's knowledge. Customer service is a crucial link between website and consumer and something you should provide at the highest level. So, see how your competition is handling it.

## Check Social Networking

Check MySpace, Facebook, Digg, blogs, etc. to see how active your competition is in social media. In this more laid back atmosphere you may find some great information such as gossip, customer feedback and news.

## Add a Google Alert

Get real-time updates on what your competition is up to. Add their name to your Google Alerts. This will provide you with information from various news outlets and blogs.

Of course, the goal in e-commerce is to build your brand. However, having a handle on what the competition is doing and how they are doing it will provide important information and better enable you to improve your business. **eBiz**



By Donna Talarico  
[donnat@ebizinsider.com](mailto:donnat@ebizinsider.com)

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up to

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off

“

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”

Derek Kleinow - TigerGPS.com

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# What's the Big Deal with Diversity

Diversity. Remember that topic? It seems that all the buzz about diversity which seemed to appear in every business publication in the earlier part of the decade has quieted down a bit. Maybe that's because most of the major corporations have jumped on the diversity bandwagon. With 98% of the Fortune 250 actively promoting their diversity on their websites and in their policies/trainings, diversity seems to pale next to whatever today's sexier topic seems to be.

## ■ Ways to Embrace Diversity

Create a "Diversity Statement" and include it in your employee manual.

Allow employees flexible dates for religious holidays.

Set a "Zero Tolerance for Intolerance" policy.

### **Sample Diversity Statement:**

ABC Inc. is committed to hiring and promoting the most qualified persons into available positions.

ABC Inc. provides all applicants and employees with equal opportunity in recruitment, selection, appointment, promotion, training, delegation, discipline, and separation.

ABC Inc. shall foster a work environment that is fair and impartial in all of its relations with all persons, regardless of race, color, religious creed, age, sex, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, AIDS or HIV status, veteran status, or non-job related disability.

ABC Inc. shall make every effort to hire and promote minority groups and women and to involve them in every level of employment and decision-making.

ABC Inc. will make reasonable accommodations to meet the special needs of qualified applicants or employees.

ABC Inc. will not tolerate any type of harassment including sexual harassment and will take all steps necessary to prevent any and all harassment from occurring.

ABC Inc. believes that the full benefits of diversity will come only when we adopt an attitude of inclusion. We must welcome every individual as a respected member of the team who contributions are critical to the success of our organization.



By John Dawe  
johnd@ebizinsider.com

So the 500 biggest companies in America are on the right track. Great. Now, what about everybody else? Diversity is important to small business, too. There are a variety of things small business owners can do in the area of diversity. But, before we get too far into this – there are many definitions for diversity, so for this article let's agree that we're talking about groups of people who share a specific interest. Let's also add a condition that the group we're discussing has some degree of social liability. That means that another group could discriminate against them or exploit them. Agreed? Good.

**Diversity and Your Organization.** Take a look at your organization and see where opportunities are to embrace diversity. Setting the culture of diversity has helped our company succeed. In fact, you could make the case that we were diverse before we were a company and that we became a company as a result of that diversity. Here are some ways to make your organization more diverse!

**Get Management to Buy In.** As with setting any precedent – it starts at the top. Your executive management needs to embrace diversity. Setting a strong diversity policy and a "zero-tolerance for intolerance" is an important step.

**Encourage Employee Participation.** Allow your team members to attend diversity events. If your company has enough employees, create a volunteer diversity council. It's an important part of employee satisfaction. Even one day a year where each employee brings in an ethnic food to share is a step in the right direction.

**Keep Diversity a Part of Your Marketing and Web Presence.** Show your employees' photos on your webpage, and include your diversity statement on your "about us" page.

**Encourage Supplier Diversity.** When possible, use minority-owned businesses to show your commitment to diversity outside your company, too.

**Think Outside the Diversity Box.** It is a fact that, in business, embracing diversity and inclusion provides advantages that increase your company's competitiveness. When it comes to segmenting by market, many times you're actually dealing with diversity. A good test for this is to ask the question, "Has the group I'm targeting been made fun of in a situation comedy or on a Late Night talk show?" I'll explain.

For example, you're probably not going to see ads for winterizing windows in this magazine. It's not the correct market. On the other hand, you might expect to see an

ad for optimizing Microsoft Windows. Why? eBiz Insider is using diversity targeting. eBiz Insider is tagged as the magazine for e-commerce professionals, therefore we know the majority of readers are power computer users. You could also make the assumption that many readers are self-proclaimed geeks, or are at the very least "geekier" than the general population.

Speaking of which, Geeks aren't protected from discrimination under any federal or state laws and there are plenty of examples of geek exploitation out there. Think of the film "Revenge of the Nerds" or the sitcom character Steve Urkel. Are there jokes about geeks on "The Daily Show" or "The Tonight Show"?

Remember, Diversity is more than race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. It's about differences and celebrating what defines our individuality. **eBiz**



By John Dawe  
johnd@ebizinsider.com

More diversity resources available online at [www.ebizinsider.com](http://www.ebizinsider.com)

## ■ Recruitment & Retention

### Recruitment:

If you are actively seeking to attract a diverse workforce, your advertising should extend beyond traditional recruiting sources. You will want to branch out with your recruiting efforts into ethnic publications, community centers, colleges, church groups, and local career office apprenticeships, scholarships to target, employ, develop and grow both local and non-local applicant pools. Offer relocation assistance, this will help attract a larger

audience. Advertisements should include a reference to being an equal opportunity employer.

### Retention:

Educate and train your employees by promoting diversity. Have fun activities such as ethnic food and dress and custom days. Create staff bios with photos to showcase everyone's diverse multi-cultural backgrounds. Conduct information sessions to educate your staff about strategic workforce plan and workforce diversity

initiatives. Keep processes and policies consistent across teams so one person is never singled out. Encourage and facilitate team members to support and respect each other, accept differences and accept diversity. Be understanding of each other. If you create an environment in which people enjoy going to work, retention will never be a problem. **eBiz**



By Ed Stanchak  
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# Sexual Harassment— An Introduction to a Delicate Issue

Whether a company has 2 employees or 200, sexual harassment is an issue every employer must face. Removing sexual harassment from the workplace is critically important. Learn how it is defined, how to prevent it and what to do if it occurs.



## Harassment Defined

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature [...] when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”

*According to the EEOC, the following also applies to sexual harassment:*

[http://www.eeoc.gov/types/sexual\\_harassment.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/types/sexual_harassment.html)

- The victim or the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser can be the victim’s supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.

- The harasser’s conduct must be unwelcome.

## The Cost

Victims of sexual harassment can experience stress, humiliation, depression, loss of self-esteem, damage to reputation and career, declining work performance, increased absenteeism and other effects. Sexual harassment can also seriously damage a company with decreased morale, staff turnover, declining productivity, increased health care costs, damage to the company’s reputation and legal costs.

## An Ounce of Prevention

The most effective way to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace is to prevent it from occurring. The EEOC advises employers to be proactive.

“Employers are encouraged to take steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. They should clearly communicate to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. They can do so by providing sexual harassment training to their employees and by establishing an effective complaint or grievance process and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains.” ([http://www.eeoc.gov/types/sexual\\_harassment.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/types/sexual_harassment.html))

## Have a Policy

All companies should have a clear and comprehensive sexual harassment policy in place and should distribute the policy to all employees. Individual state law may also require the company to post additional notices in the workplace.

*Some integral elements of an effective policy:*

- A definition of prohibited harassment.
- Procedures for employees to report improper behavior, also identifying the appropriate individuals to whom an employee is to direct a complaint.

- Language establishing sexual harassment as a disciplinary offense, reserving the right to terminate an employee who is found in violation of the policy.
- Non-retaliation language. Dismissing or demoting an employee who has registered a complaint is improper and illegal. If the employee can establish a connection between a complaint and retaliatory response, an employer can be found liable.

## The Company Response

If a complaint of sexual harassment is reported in the office, the company must act. Both the complaining employee and the employee being accused of acting improperly must have the opportunity to tell their side of the story and no determination should be made until a full investigation is completed. False or inaccurate accusations can have extremely serious effects on innocent employees.

If it is determined that harassment took place, corrective action must be taken immediately. Depending on the circumstances and the company policy, such action might include a written reprimand, removal of authority, suspension, or even termination. All actions should be recorded in the employee’s file and an official record should be created detailing the investigation and the subsequent action taken.

## What’s Next

The employer should then look to reaffirm the company’s policy and conduct additional training if necessary. If it is determined that sexual harassment did not occur, that determination should be properly recorded and communicated to all involved parties.

No matter how diligently a company tries to prevent sexual harassment, it can still occur. Companies should have the right policies and procedures in place in order to best prevent incidents and to deal with any that may arise. The liability is too great and the potential consequences are too significant to ignore. **eBiz**



By Jonathan D. Tenenbaum, Esq.  
[jont@ebizinsider.com](mailto:jont@ebizinsider.com)



Vance Selin

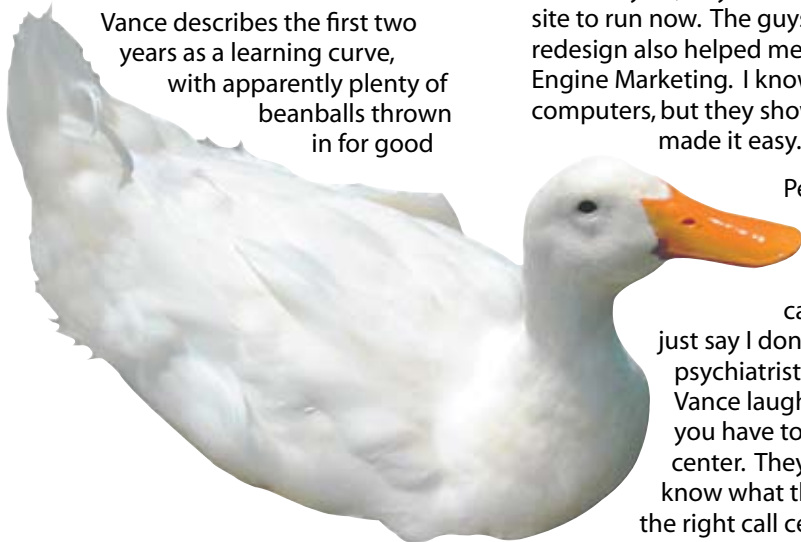
# Doing Something Right at **COUNTRY** TRADE DAYS.com

*“With the improvements our sales are up more than 60%. But the best part is the repeat business. It’s cool when they buy and then come back. It says you’re doing something right.”*

—Vance Selin, CountryTradeDays.com

Countrytradedays.com is where you go for relaxed elegance. The site features a wide variety of thematic and quality dinnerware, glassware, lighting, bedding, rugs, picnic baskets, plaques, even stained glass windows. Quiet, beautiful things for the home. “It’s not cheap, but it’s classic and comfortable,” says Vance Selin, who launched his first-ever venture online in 2004. Now countrytradedays.com features 2,000 products.

Vance describes the first two years as a learning curve, with apparently plenty of beanballs thrown in for good



measure. “I’d never done retail,” Vance recalls. “There were lots of mistakes. It was a real struggle.”

In 2006 Vance decided that if he was going to be successful he needed help. He started on the Y-store Forum, found advice he could trust, and did a redesign of his site, incorporating several new features. He added Product Reviews, Blogs, Snap Shop, Custom Check-out and took the big plunge by signing up with a call center.

“All the features helped shoppers navigate the site and buy more easily,” says Vance. “The customers really like the Snap Shop feature. The more information people have, the more comfortable they feel. Product Reviews and Blogs help build the credibility of the site with shoppers and obviously Custom Check-out smoothes out the critical last phase. Once the changes kicked in, I could see the difference in every meaningful area.”

Countrytradedays.com has seen nearly double the visitors of a year ago. Page views are up, conversions are better and Vance reports many more repeat customers. “Sales are up more than 64% over last year,” says Vance. “This is a fun site to run now. The guys who did my redesign also helped me with Search Engine Marketing. I know zip about computers, but they showed me how and made it easy.”

Perhaps the biggest change was the addition of a call center. “Let’s just say I don’t see my psychiatrist nearly as much,” Vance laughs. “Seriously, you have to get the right call center. They have to really know what they’re doing. With the right call center, suddenly

the feel of your company changes. We’re a small company, but people think we’re big because of the call center. And because the call center people know my products and my company, they reinforce the big company experience and small company reliability. My customers even talk about how nice they are.”

For a guy who claims to “know zip about computers,” Vance is embracing the changes to countrytradedays.com with enthusiasm. His new additions share a general theme of bringing shoppers ever-closer to a real shopping experience in cyberspace. “We’re adding Recently Viewed Items, Multi Add to Cart, and Tabs,” says Vance. “I can see where each of these features can help my business specifically. People like to retrace their steps when they shop in the real world, why not in my store? We all want more information, so Tabs are very effective. And anything which helps conquer shopping cart abandonment is a good idea. There are lots of features out there that really aren’t worth the effort and expense. That’s where your design team has to look after you.” Another new feature is the Gift Idea section which changes for holidays and special occasions with a range of birthday gifts. “Lots of people mean well, they just need a couple of suggestions,” he says.

Countrytradedays.com is doing very nicely, thank you. The site is a feast for the eyes and contains wonderful additions for any home. If you visit the site and decide to engage in “live chat,” that’ll be Vance on the other end. He likes to get the feedback directly when possible. Tell him hello!

**eBiz**



By Kevin Lynn  
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# What is Good Graphic Design?

The essence of good design is the creation of contrasts in an effort to convey meaning. Above all, design is in place to offer solutions. This is the fundamental difference between design and art. A good design should definitively answer certain questions. What was the objective?

How did the finished design project visually work to solve that objective?

Did the work convey meaning?

On the web, where literally thousands of websites just like yours pop up every day, many store owners feel originality is a must in order to attract an audience. This process usually begins with some sort of visual design. It is important to understand what elements work best in visual design in order to successfully set trends and create a unique user experience.

There are some sure fire ways to conclude if a given design is going to be relevant in your given industry. The graphic/web designer should follow basic principles of design.

### 1. Contrast

Different elements should be clearly different from each other. Strong contrast lets the eye flow more easily along the page. Contrast helps organize information. One obvious way to achieve contrast is through typography, but contrast can equally be defined with rules, color, textures, spacing between elements and shapes. Good contrast will separate main areas on a page. Through deliberate control of contrast, the designer can draw attention to particular elements of focus.



### 2. Repetition

Repetition is an inevitable design principle. Without some repetition, designs lack a unified and cohesive feel. Strong, repetitive elements help to organize a page visually. The principle of repetition states that you repeat some aspect of the design throughout the entire design. Repeating elements across pages creates consistency and visual unity. Repetition reminds you that you are still on the same website.

Repeating certain elements on a page is a visual trick designers use to control a

reader's eye and guide the reader down the page. This is also used to add visual interest. The more interesting a page looks, the more likely it is to be read.



### 3. Proximity

Be sure to group related items together so they are seen as one cohesive group. Groups of non-related elements can confuse the customer. Close proximity creates the image of one visual unit. There should also be good use of white space to help separate and announce each individual unit. Sometimes going against the principle of proximity can be used as a design tool, but generally the fewer unrelated items per page, the better.



### 4. Alignment

Alignment is the arrangement of elements so that the natural lines (borders) they create match up as closely as possible. The lack of alignment is probably the biggest cause of unpleasant-looking documents. Everything on the page should align with other elements even if these elements are physically distant from each other. Alignment accomplished via typography works best when there are no justified lines. Centering or justifying lines of text create jagged vertical edges which make it hard to read. Often a page which doesn't

feel very sharp simply lacks alignment. Our eyes seek order; it calms us.

### 5. Flow

If the website(s) feel stable, natural and comfortable, then the designer has accomplished flow. The best way to determine flow is to notice how your eyes move across the design. If they are zig-zagging then flow has not been accomplished.

There are other design principles to keep in mind. Emphasis, similar to hierarchy, should be defined to show importance and significance. Balance should show visual weight on the page(s). A well-balanced design creates the notion of stability and is perceived as being comfortable and appealing.

Last—and least—is the artistic side of design. I rank the artistic value of a site last because even the most beautiful designed project will not appeal to everyone, but when proper design principles are in place the appeal becomes more natural and universal. The designer, client and user may not all have the same emotional relationship to the design, but they should all agree on the principles above. If they do, it's a good design. **eBiz**



By Chris Pawloski  
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# Starting an Affiliate Program

## — A How-to Guide



### Part I of III

Affiliate Marketing can appear confusing and even intimidating. Which network do you align with? If you work within a network, how much commission do you offer? How do you integrate it technically and on a marketing level? Other questions include the type of ads, the ad message, the type of affiliates that are right for your program and how to attract them and control of your brand. Over the next few issues I'll offer insights to ease any worries you may have as you make the leap into the Affiliate Realm.

#### **What is Affiliate Marketing?**

Affiliate Marketing works on a cost-per-acquisition model. You pay only when you make a sale!

It is crucial to partner with "Affiliate Publishers" who will promote your site and products through ads, text links and product links. Their incentive is the commission on the sales they send your way. The better targeted their campaign, the better your sales and the higher their commissions. Best of all, you set the



commission rate to maintain your profit margins. Your virtual sales force only gets paid when it performs!

### Go Independent or Join a Network?

You may work through an affiliate network, or manage and track your own program.

Managing and tracking your own affiliate program is a bad idea because it is so time-consuming. It can be extremely labor intensive and requires detailed tracking, plus you have to pay each affiliate at the end of the month. With a few affiliates this is doable. However, if you expand the reach of your brand with hundreds of affiliates, paying them can turn into a full-time job.

By utilizing a network, you gain the advantage of real-time tracking, automated affiliate payment, and quality affiliates who can help promote your product.

Simplify and go with a network. Your mind should be on your business, not managing your affiliates.

### Choosing a Network

Networks are numerous, but there is a cream of the crop. Linkshare, Performics and Commission Junction are the industry leaders of affiliate marketing networks and each has its own merits.

**Linkshare** (<http://www.linkshare.com>) carries many Fortune 500 clients, numerous quality affiliates and a patented tracking technology not based on cookies. Robust analytics provide the information necessary to adjust to the changing business climate and deliver. This network is often left to the "big boys" because it requires a significant investment as well as network exclusivity.

**Performics** (<http://www.performics.com>) has a lot to offer. With an extremely quantitative interface, you'll gather more data than you will ever use. They have an efficient promotional link management service, OrangeLinks. It delivers daily customized live links directly to the affiliates, making it easier for them to

promote your products. Two additional benefits are their required contact name and e-mail for every affiliate, plus the ability to schedule promotional links. Planning just got easier!

**Commission Junction** (<http://www.commissionjunction.com>) offers a user-friendly interface with quality reporting and tracking, mailing capabilities, and many top performing Super Affiliates. The dashboard provides an account snapshot with a virtual pulse of your program including earnings, trends, account balance, and network announcements. To help clients understand Affiliate Marketing, they have established Commission Junction University (CJU). CJU offers online tutorials for Merchants and Affiliates of all skill levels. It also goes offline with the CJU conference where partners can meet face-to-face to discuss strategies and learn about industry trends.

**Yahoo Stores Owners Bonus:** While many networks require technical installation of the tracking pixel, the Commission Junction network integrates with the entry of a simple 6-digit number on the back-end of your Yahoo Store!

### Final Advice

Whatever you decide, independent vs. network, Performics vs. Commission Junction, remember it's about choosing what is right for your overall business and financial objectives. So, weigh your options, commit to the decision and be prepared to give your program time to grow. Affiliate Marketing is not exclusively about increasing revenue, it's about establishing partnerships that work for both the Merchant and the Affiliate.

*(Next Month: Part II will discuss how to set up and integrate your new affiliate program with your existing marketing efforts, as well as common missteps and how to avoid them.)* **eBiz**



By Michelle Pushefski  
[michellep@ebizinsider.com](mailto:michellep@ebizinsider.com)

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# UPS, They've Done it Again! And FedEx too!



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*As consistent as the swallows returning to Capistrano or the buzzards to Hinkley, Ohio, our friends at the shipping companies celebrated the New Year with yet another hefty price increase...*

---

This annual ritual forces business owners to re-examine their shipping policies each year and find ways to pass on these additional costs to the customers.

On average, UPS and FedEx raise their rates 5% a year and continue to tack on fuel surcharges. In 1994, shipping a 5lb. bag of pet food from Pennsylvania to California cost about five-dollars. Today, that price is nearly double and rising.

I'm going to tell you things the shipping companies don't want you to know. I promise they will save you money!

### The Power of Negotiation

If you're paying published rates to ship packages, stop here, pick up the phone and immediately call your account rep. NOBODY pays published shipping rates. UPS, FedEx, and DHL are all fighting for your business, so play one against the other to negotiate a discount schedule.

Provide your account reps with a breakdown of how many packages you ship to each of the shipping zones and the weights the majority of those packages. They're going

to ask for the breakdown to do a study, so have it ready.

Ask all three carriers to make proposals. Most will offer a flat discount across all weights and zones and some may include varying discounts based on zones and weights. Then ask for an additional performance discount that takes off an extra point or two if you meet package commitments.

When they come back with proposals, it's time to negotiate. Play one company off the other to learn just how deep they'll go to get your business.

If you ship many oversize packages and get whacked with OS surcharges; they can be negotiated to a lower rate or adjusted to a different weight tier.

### Service Refunds

Did you know that if an air package doesn't arrive on the specific day by a specific time, you can get a refund for the shipping cost? Air was always a guaranteed service, but now carriers are doing it with ground as well. There are cases where the carriers

won't pay the refund, for instance if the package is delayed due to weather. However, the majority of late packages can be claimed.

Most carriers offer reports either online or in their software that publish "exceptions" – packages that did not meet service standards. Take the time to call those packages in and ask for a refund if they were delivered late. Carriers are on time 98%, the remaining 2% is money in your pocket.

If you ship a lot of packages, there are third party companies that will do the recovery for you, but they usually take half of the proceeds.

### Insurance

This is perhaps the biggest rip-off in package shipping. By default, each package you ship is insured for \$100. Is additional insurance worth it? If you've ever filed for a refund for a package that was damaged or lost, you know what a headache it is and carriers usually won't pay anything close to the value of the package. Paying for additional insurance is your decision, but in my opinion it's an unnecessary expense that you will hardly ever have to use.

### Rate Shop

Just as you shop for the best discounts, rate shop among all three before shipping. Many times you will see that one carrier is less expensive than another for a certain weight or zone. There are some third party shipping software programs available that allow for rate shopping. Software provided by the carriers don't allow this feature, but with a little creativity or the introduction of a third party system, you can save money by rate shopping on a per package basis.

### Don't become complacent

Shipping rates will never go down, so be diligent. If you have significant changes in shipping volume (upwards of course) that is not seasonal, renegotiate your rates immediately, don't wait for your contract to be up. Most carriers will do a one year contract with discounts, review it each year and shop the carriers.

*UPS, They've Done it Again! continued on page 18*



If you're paying published rates to ship packages, stop here, pick up the phone and immediately call your account rep. NOBODY pays published shipping rates.

### Resource Links

[http://multichannelmerchant.com/opsandfulfillment/ship/combat\\_rate\\_increases/](http://multichannelmerchant.com/opsandfulfillment/ship/combat_rate_increases/)

[http://multichannelmerchant.com/crosschannel/packagedelivery/five\\_tips\\_lowering/](http://multichannelmerchant.com/crosschannel/packagedelivery/five_tips_lowering/)

# More Hints for Savings on Shipping



As a supplement, please find below some other ideas I've researched which will help you pinch the all important shipping pennies....

AFMS Logistics Management Group's Managing Director Rick Collins explains, "The announced rate increases of 4.9% for Ground and 6.9% for Air from FedEx and UPS masks the true impact for many shippers. The base rates may average the announced increases across the board; however higher zone express shippers could experience increases in the 9%-10% range. Additionally, surcharges are increasing up to 20% in some cases. Surcharges for irregular and large packages are up 8.3% to 12.5%. Commercial remote add-ons are increasing 7.1% and residential fees are up 5.4% for Ground."

Shipping prices will continue to rise with oil prices. As a result, merchants must consider strategies for cost-cutting. Here are some options to consider:

- Look for ways to use USPS to your advantage.
- Consider package weighing, and remove any inserts if they push the package into a higher bracket.
- Investigate any savings you might accrue by opening a second warehouse to put you closer to a

segment of your customer base.

- If you plan to use free shipping as an incentive, re-evaluate the value of the minimum dollar order and how it may affect your transportation costs and see if it must be increased.
  - Review whether you should specify shipping charges for certain heavy and oversize products.
  - Beware of the \$6.15 Ground residential minimum charge.
- When considering various marketing and merchandising strategies, make it part of your overall plan to increase the average order value so that your shipping cost does not appear as such a large percentage of your smaller to average-sized orders.
- Review your policies for giving free freight on return merchandise. It may be a policy you can change.
- Consider contracting the services of an experienced transportation consulting company to teach you where to look for savings. If you're a big enough concern, you may want to hire an internal specialist dedicated to lowering your costs.
- Another factor to assess is how important your account is to the local shipping depot or hub. It is often the case that smaller accounts are actually more important than management might realize, given their relative volume.
- Zone skipping. This might be a better option for your business if cost is a bigger factor than delivery time for your residential shipments. A carrier will sort your packages and haul them to the closest post office and the Postal Service will deliver the packages. This can improve your delivery time over

that of standard USPS delivery at a cost that is less than standard FedEx, UPS, or DHL residential shipping.

- Hundredweight or multi-weight pricing often applies for shipments of multiple packages to a single location. Under hundredweight pricing, multiple packages being shipped to the same destination are rated as a shipment at a rate per pound instead of a rate per package equation unless the rate per package is less expensive. Express shipments greater than 100 lbs. and ground shipments exceeding 150 lbs. are eligible for hundredweight pricing.
- Manage your surcharges. Certain surcharges are higher for residential packages because of the standard residential and fuel surcharges. Address correction charges can be especially costly at \$5 per package for ground shipments and \$10 per package for express shipments. Also, many lightweight shipments in larger boxes, such as clothing, are often subject to dimensional weight charges, which take package dimensions as well as weight into account.
- Consider contracting with one provider for all your shipments. DHL, FedEx, and UPS usually provide increased incentives based on the volume of revenue and shipping you do with them. These are in addition to standard discounts which shippers provide and are meant to encourage you to use one provider for all your shipping. These earned discounts can be more difficult for seasonal shippers to achieve, but you can make your case. If you are a seasonal shipper, be sure to discuss your situation with your account representative to ensure that an adequate earned discount program is designed for you based on your particular activity. **eBiz**



By Scott Sanfilippo  
scotts@ebizinsider.com

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# Tech Corner:

## Integrate Google Apps to Streamline Your Tech Communications

When Google launched “Google Apps” in August 2006, it was a revolutionary solution for small business. Apps ties together document management, calendaring and e-mail powered by Google’s powerful Gmail system, yet the information Google provides at <http://google.com/a> is fairly sparse. Here’s how to integrate your Google Apps to improve productivity.

### Choosing an Apps Package

Google offers standard and premium versions of their apps package. The premium version costs \$50 per year per user and each user has 25Gb of storage (versus 6Gb). The package allows conference room and resource scheduling, dual delivery (in case you have another mail server), allows you to migrate your current e-mail into Gmail and connects your current enterprise network with Google Apps via a special API. You can also turn off the adwords showing up on your e-mail accounts if you use the premium version. If you’re currently using standard Yahoo! Mail, Hotmail, etc. and have only a few users on your account, start with the standard package and upgrade later.

### Domain Integration

Integrating your Google Apps into your domain is simple. Create a CNAME record in your domain or upload a text file to the root of your domain. For website operators who don’t have access to upload files to their root directory (such as on the Yahoo! Store platform), use the control panel’s advanced settings on the site’s domain. This stops unscrupulous competitors from sending e-mail on your behalf.

### Account Setup and E-mail

First, set up an administrator account (like admin@ystore.com). Use this to create

other accounts and/or designate other administrators. Set up accounts for each e-mail user and also set up e-mail aliases and lists.

Use an alias if the same user may receive several different e-mails. If Joe is going to receive e-mail for sales and customer service then you might create an account for joe@ystore.com and add aliases for sales@ystore.com and service@ystore.com).

If you have an e-mail address where multiple people must receive messages, use lists. You can also have non-domain e-mails on each list. BE CAREFUL whom you put on lists, because messages sent to e-mail lists on your account are not moderated. I wouldn’t, for example, create a list for dropshippers@ystore.com. If spammers learn that, you’ll be responsible for all your drop shippers getting spam. Not good. (FYI: The “premium” edition integrates Postini’s customizable junk mail filtering system.)

### Google Documents Feature

Google Apps integrates Google Docs pretty flawlessly. You can create documents, spreadsheets and presentations and share them within your domain and outside. You also can create files in Microsoft Word, Excel, or Powerpoint and easily convert them to share on Docs. You can set files to be read-only or changeable by other users. Docs will create a changelog, so you can go back in time and show revisions by others. Great for collaboration.

### Google Calendar

Google Apps Calendaring feature allows you to manage your time online, as well as coordinate meetings and events with team members. You can schedule a meeting and see the availability of others. Calendar will also notify you of upcoming appointments

by sending reminders to your mobile phone via SMS/Text Message.

### Integrating with Software

**E-mail:** Google Apps e-mail incorporates with most e-mail programs (like Outlook and Thunderbird) via an IMAP or a POP3 connection.

**Docs:** With Google Docs, it is not directly possible to sync, but DocSyncer (<https://www.docsyncer.com/>) will do that job nicely. It’s free (for now).

**Calendar:** With Google Calendar, you can use GSyncIt (<http://www.daveswebsite.com/software/gsync/>) to connect your Outlook and Google Calendar. You can also use gCalSync (<http://www.gcalsync.com/>) to sync your PDA/Mobile phone’s calendar.

### Summing Up

Google Apps may or may not be for you. If you are using a large enterprise network, the seamless integration of servers for e-mail, documents, and scheduling may be better. However, it will cost you a couple thousand dollars to install and maintain and be limited to your network. It will also take maintenance time and requires intermediate server administration skills. Google Apps takes a bit of getting used to and doesn’t have as many bells and whistles, but the price is extremely competitive.

Google Apps can be accessed using almost any Internet-enabled computer, using any modern operating system, anywhere, including many web-enabled PDAs. **eBiz**



By John Dawe

[johnd@ebizinsider.com](mailto:johnd@ebizinsider.com)

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