

# eBiz Insider

the magazine for e-commerce professionals.

## Why “SMALL” is BIG in E-commerce

Why Corporate Giants  
Are No Threat on the Internet...

—By Kevin Lynn

- ◆ AdWords Editor:  
The Best PPC Tool You're Not Using
- ◆ Manage Your Online Reputation
- ◆ Holiday Prep Checklist
- ◆ E-mail Subject Line: Prime Real Estate

Read this issue and enjoy summer's e-commerce glow. Or skip it. Sweat it out. Your choice...!

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July 2008 Volume 2 • Number 7

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By Scott Sanfilippo,  
Editor in Chief

# Knowledge is the Key

you attended? Good for you if you were at the conference, but if you weren't—why not? As an e-commerce store owner, it is your responsibility to stay on top of the latest industry trends and keep your site on the cutting edge. I will tell you that someone from Solid Cactus attends *every one* of these meetings. We think they are a required attendance for serious e-commerce players.



Solid Cactus co-founders Joe Palko, CEO, and Scott Sanfilippo, President are ready to share their knowledge with the participants at the Internet Retailer Conference.

I had the pleasure of attending the Internet Retailer conference last month in Chicago. It's a great opportunity to meet and talk to e-commerce store owners from around the country. Being the inquisitive type, I cut right to the chase, asking them about their business and how their sales are doing during these turbulent times. The majority I spoke with has not seen much of a change in sales, but one thing remained constant among everyone – they're nervous about the upcoming holiday season. They *should* be nervous.

The fourth quarter of the year will be the trifecta – gas at record highs, a weak dollar and a presidential election. These three ingredients will be the determining factors as to whether we have a good or bad holiday season and unfortunately, we can't control any of them. But you can control your store and your customer and in order to be successful this season, you have to take control now. Take the first step by reading Sean Gove's article inside.

Speaking of the Internet Retailer conference; let me ask you. How many of

Don't look at a conference like this as a trade show where you walk around like a Halloween filling up your bag with tchotchkes. The trade show floor is only a small piece of the conference experience. The most important component to these meetings are the information sessions that are held throughout the events. Just like our Boot Camps, these sessions provide you with invaluable information that you can take back and use to better your business. It is especially true in e-commerce where things change and trends develop at a much greater rate than in conventional business.

Knowledge is key. You owe it to yourself, your customers and your business to put a couple days aside and attend.

We'll be there! **eBiz**

## Letters to the Editor...

Q. Why does my website look different in different web browsers such as Internet Explorer and Firefox? I thought code was code and it would look the same regardless of the browser.

—Brandy F. – Wasau WI

A. Brandy, the answer is simple; not all browsers are created equal. You're right when you say "code is code" but how that code is interpreted by browsers is the way things look different. For example, fonts may render differently or at a slightly different size, pixel spacing may appear differently or table layouts may have slightly narrower spacing. The best thing to remember when designing, especially e-commerce stores, is that home users, for the most part, use Internet Explorer. It's the default browser on their machines, and many don't change it. Firefox is for the more advanced user who wants an alternative from IE – programmers love it! And then there's the Mac. Design your site and your store for IE first and other browsers second, but remember, you can never get 100% compatibility no matter how hard you try.

Q. I've been considering doing a postcard campaign to my customers, am I wasting time or should I stick to e-mail.

—Dawn S. – Lakeland, FL

A. Dawn, contrary to the rumors, print is not dead! Print advertising remains a viable and lucrative advertising medium. Print works and print sells! When we had our pet supply division, I did postcard campaigns with special offers all the time. The cost is low and the return is big. A well designed mail piece will be worth its weight in gold. ModernPostcard.com offers a complete printing and mailing solution that is very affordable – check them out.

Good comments and questions! Let us hear from you! Write to: [scotts@ebizinsider.com](mailto:scotts@ebizinsider.com)

**eBiz**

# AdWords Editor:

## The Best PPC Tool You're Not Using

If you've advertised on Google AdWords, you probably have a wish list of features that you'd like to see. Perhaps you'd like bulk bid changes and an easier way to remove duplicate keywords. Well, Google already provides a tool that allows advertisers to do the above and much more. The tool is the AdWords Editor. Editor is fast, it's functional and best of all—it's free!

No matter how big or small your account, AdWords Editor can work for you. Whether you manage million dollar campaigns or a \$500 monthly budget, the AdWords Editor can help. The Editor is a standalone software application that allows you to work on your accounts offline, automatically saving your work until you are ready to post the changes into your account. This is helpful when you are building accounts, as you shift keywords around and finalize your structure. It's also useful when optimizing campaigns, as you can review all your work before finalizing any major changes.

The AdWords Editor is the fastest way to move keywords, ad text and even whole ad groups. You can copy and paste any area of the account that you want to move, such as an ad group you'd like to test on the content network. Google's best practice for advertising on the content network is to keep content in a separate campaign. This is great for tracking purposes, but is also time-consuming. Editor reduces it to simple copy and paste!

Perhaps you aren't looking to duplicate any of your keywords for testing. Perhaps your problem actually is duplicate keywords. It is common to find keyword duplications

across ad groups and campaigns in most accounts, particularly as the account grows. The problem with unintentional duplicates is that the traffic is split between the two keywords. If one keyword is converting at a fantastic rate, the duplicate keyword could be a drag on your bottom line. AdWords Editor contains a duplicate keyword finder, which lists duplicates across campaigns. Once you find the duplicates, you can download cost and conversion data directly into AdWords Editor to help you find and remove the non-performing keyword.

Downloading data on your account is the most common use of AdWords Editor. Once you've downloaded cost and conversion data, the Editor has the power to sort by cost, conversions and much more. Do you have a number of keywords falling off the first page of search results? Filter by average position and boost the bids on all these keywords at once. Are you looking for keywords that have never converted? Filter them out and pause them all at once! AdWords Editor makes optimization a snap with its advanced sorting and bid changing features.

Once you've used AdWords Editor to get your Google campaigns into top shape, you can actually use it to quickly import your account into Yahoo! and MSN as well. Most online advertisers use outlets beyond Google, so the teams at Yahoo! and MSN have taken advantage of the AdWords Editor's ability to export accounts in spreadsheet format. With a little adjustment, you can save hours of work and import campaigns directly from

Google to Yahoo! and MSN.

While you can edit just about any aspect of your AdWords campaigns in the Editor, there are several things you cannot work on through AdWords Editor. These include:

- Ad scheduling
- Ad rotation
- Position preferencing
- Demographic bidding
- Video, audio and print ads

If you use any of these advanced features, you will have to work through the web interface rather than AdWords Editor.

The few things you can't do in the AdWords Editor are blown away by the list of all the things you can do. Search marketing professionals regularly utilize it for the speed and ease with which it allows you to make changes across all three major search engines. The more you work in AdWords Editor, the more uses you'll find for it. With so little to lose and so much to gain by trying this free, flexible tool, isn't it time you tried AdWords Editor for yourself?

For more information, or to download AdWords Editor, visit:

<http://www.google.com/support/adwordseeditor/bin/static.py?page=about.html>  
**eBiz**



By Jean Lloyd  
[jeanl@ebizinsider.com](mailto:jeanl@ebizinsider.com)

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eBizInsider.com will help your business run better with timely, relevant and easy to understand e-commerce information.

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Our **FREE FORUM** is the perfect place to ask questions and fish for answers from experienced e-business owners.

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**implement input**

Apply eBizInsider.com Free advice to your store and watch your business grow!

**celebrate success!**



# eBizInsider.com

the official magazine of  **SOLIDCACTUS**®

# E-mail Subject Line:

Prime  
Real  
Estate

---

*“50 characters are all that stands between you and a successful e-mail campaign.”*

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How can that be? Simply put, most recipients use the subject line to decide whether to open or delete an e-mail. A good subject line can get your e-mail opened, but a bad subject line can get you flagged as spam. Unfortunately, a bad subject line can kill a campaign.

Subject lines are *the most important aspect* of your e-mail marketing effort. Forget about the eye-catching layout, beautifully crafted words, or the out-of-this-world promotion you're offering. If customers don't open the e-mail, all that glitz, glam and hoopla is for nothing.

Writing a great subject line is no small challenge. Just how do you provoke a recipient, in 50 characters or less, to open your e-mail? Ask yourself, "what's so great about my offer that would make me open this e-mail?"

For instance, would you open an e-mail that contains the subject lines:

*"Free Vacation"*  
*"Getaway Sweepstakes"*  
*"Newsletter"*  
*"This is not spam"*

The subject line makes it obvious the e-mail is spam. To get your e-mail read, follow these tried-and-true tips for writing e-mail subject lines:

- 1. Keep it short and sweet,** 50 characters or less, with spaces. That is typically the maximum which most e-mail client's subject boxes display. Be sure that an important word isn't going to be cut off if it does run more than 50 characters.

2. **Be specific.** Vague subject lines are a waste of prime real estate. An example of this would be "eBiz Insider July Newsletter." This tells the reader absolutely nothing about what they can expect to read inside. Instead, invoke the reader's interest: "eBiz Insider: Tips for Writing Powerful Subject Lines."
3. **Don't ask for too much in the subject line.** The goal is to get people intrigued. If you give them too much information or seem too aggressive you risk turning them off. Terms such as 'register' or 'buy now' simply don't work.
4. **Personalized subject lines.** Show your customer you know them by personalizing the subject line based on the user's product or content preferences, interests, past purchases, web visits or links clicked.
5. **Create a sense of urgency.** Set a deadline: "Order by midnight tonight;" "Last day to ensure Valentine's Day delivery."
6. **Don't mislead.** Don't stretch the truth in the subject line or promise more than the e-mail can deliver.
7. **Be consistent.** Continue the conversation with your customers. Be sure once you've started the open dialogue not to suddenly stop or miss large spans of time.
8. **Free is not always bad.** You can use "free" in a subject line. Just don't make "free" the first word, use it in conjunction with an exclamation point, or spell it in all caps. People still respond to "free" and it will show in your open rates.
9. **Think before you type.** Take time to consider the most important aspect of your e-mail before you write the subject line. Write several versions and weigh the pros and cons of each. Then run them by a colleague to ensure they are as witty and compelling as you think they are.
10. **Write the subject line last.** You don't write the conclusion before you spell out the entire plot, do you? Once you've written the content decide on the most compelling topic and highlight it.

**11. Watch out for spam filters.** Once you've chosen your best two or three subject lines run them through a spam filter to identify spam-like words or phrases.

**12. Test, test and test.** When you have chosen the two strongest, yet different style subject lines, test them. Split your list in half and use a different subject line for each. Your responses will show which style subject line works best for your clientele.

You will be most successful if you write subject lines that tell the reader exactly how they are going to save money or save time by opening and reading your e-mail. Just remember, when writing the subject line put yourself in the client's shoes. If that subject line showed up in your inbox today, would you be compelled to open? **eBiz**



By Michelle Johnson  
michellej@ebizinsider.com

# E-mail Marketing Works

*Let Solid Cactus design & manage your next successful e-mail marketing campaign.*



**Solid Cactus offers professional solutions to maximize your permission based e-mail marketing campaigns, including:**

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- ➔ **Reporting & Campaign Management**  
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# Staying Schooled

## A Guide to E-commerce Education

In any industry, it is crucial to keep up with the latest trends, buzz and how successful companies are, well, successful. In the ever-changing landscape of e-commerce, it's even more important to stay current.

*There are many ways to gain more knowledge:*

- E-commerce Magazines & Ezines
- Marketing Research Reports & Whitepapers
- Conferences & Summits
- Forums & Communities
- Trade Publications based on your specific area

We recommend tapping the following resources to stay schooled in e-commerce.

### **Internet Retailer**

The Internet Retailer show in Chicago in June is king at educating those in E-commerce about industry trends. Their monthly, glossy print magazine is free and all content is available online as well. IR also offers various newsletters that blast out daily, usually a grouping for top stories





based on a certain theme, such as SEO or news from IR500 etailers.

In addition to daily updates and a monthly print magazine, IR also publishes the annual Internet Retailer Top 500 Guide-- the 2008 copy was just released last month. This report highlights the Top 500 E-commerce sites and provides a detailed analysis of average order size, search engine rankings and conversion rates. There is a reason these 500 sites are raking in the most dough from online shoppers. Learn from them. The IR Top 500 Guide is \$65.

The 2009 IR show will be in Boston, so mark your calendars.

### Website Magazine

*Website Magazine* is a free print and web magazine aimed at helping people run successful online businesses, increasing traffic and in general keeping people updated on the latest industry trends. The magazine is divided into basic areas and offers forums, a daily blog and an archive of past articles.

### E-commerce Times

The E-commerce Times network of news sites keeps readers informed on the latest news in E-commerce and technology. Updated daily, it offers news on big players in the industry, as well as e-commerce trends. Its main page offers the headlines on its sister newsletters, too. E-commerce Times also features various white papers that pertain to e-commerce, as well as an archive of past news stories. The online resource also can be delivered via e-mail. Visit [ecommercetimes.com](http://ecommercetimes.com) to read up.

### Search Marketing Standard Magazine

[Searchmarketingstandard.com](http://searchmarketingstandard.com) focuses solely on online marketing and in fact, is the leading publication in search marketing. Search Marketing Standard, which also has a print version, has a very clean and well-organized website with resources divided into a dozen important categories.

### Marketing Sherpa -

Have you ever heard of Marketing Sherpa? If you haven't, you are missing

out on one of the best e-commerce resources available. Marketing Sherpa provides numerous research and reports for a variety of industries, but pertaining to e-commerce, they really excel. Its annual report, The E-commerce Benchmark Guide is considered by many to be the e-commerce bible. If your developer has never heard of Marketing Sherpa, run away.

In the 2007 report, there is data from over 1900 e-commerce sites, survey results from over 2400 online shoppers, heat map studies which show how the eye looks at a website and in the mix of lots of content, there are hundreds of charts and graphs. This guide shows why people buy online and most importantly, why they don't buy online. No etailer should be without this annual guide. For that data contained in Marketing Sherpa's report, the \$279 investment pays for itself.

### Industry Events

E-commerce folks can really rack up the flyer miles by attending the many events happening each year. Solid Cactus just spent most of June at these shows, including IR and Ebay Live.

Remember to look outside e-commerce for conferences. Many shows are specific to your vertical industry you sell, for example, pets, gifts or electronics. Attending an annual pet product show can show you what others in your vertical are doing.

### Forums

Reaching out to your peers in the industry is a great way to keep up with trends. There are dozens of forums out there and our favorite, the forum at [ebizinsider.com](http://ebizinsider.com) has been getting quite a bit of buzz lately.

### What Are You Reading?

Share your ideas and suggestions at the Ebiz Insider Forums. **eBiz**



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

Sign up today  
and receive  
up to

50%  
off

“  
LivePerson.com was able to categorize our e-mail and our chats. We feel as if we can provide substantially better service to our customers and reduce our operating costs. Plus we have a treasure of information about our customers that we can use in real time to help them decide on products, think about new products and overcome their reluctance at the checkout. For us it was worth the investment.”

Derek Kleinow - TigerGPS.com

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LIVEperson

Serious e-commerce begins with the holidays and getting ready for the holidays begins now. You know what's at stake. Verisign reported 2007 internet holiday sales were up 25% over 2006. This year your holiday season is even more important. Still ahead are more increases at the gas pump which will ripple through the economy like a cold shiver. So, plenty of shoppers are looking to the internet instead of heading for the malls. How do you get this crucial market shopping with you?

The following guidelines will help you maximize sales.

## Holiday Prep Checklist

### Get Inside Your Shopper's Head

Millions of people are just like me. We know the internet is fast, so we procrastinate and shop late.

### How can we market to this type of consumer?

- **Hit the pain.** Remind them why they're online. Display a graphic on your homepage that says:  
*"Avoid the lines and shop with us online! Check out our money-saving holiday specials..."*
- **List your offers.** Make sure your deals connect with your customers.

- **Sell their wallets.** Consumers don't want to pay for gas or shipping costs. Whenever possible, offer free shipping.
- **Reassure them.** Guarantee delivery if offers are made before a certain date. Guarantee delivery with express delivery options.
- **Offer Services.** Offer free gift wrapping and cards with a personalized message. This saves last minute shoppers some time and is nearly universally embraced by—men.
- **Match prices.** If there's a better bargain, match it.
- **Use flash.** Flash increases consumer confidence and draws attention through movement. Flash allows you to fit more into a small area without crowding.

### Merchandise

Start tracking products and trends now. Find out what the big guys in your industry are doing. Feature the hot items prominently on the homepage. Showcase deals in a holiday-themed section.

- **Sell suggestively.** Feature gifts for Mom, Dad, Him, Her, etc.

### Market!

All roads involve search engines.

- **Pay-per-click** remains the best way to get people from the search engines to your store. You can control when your ads are displayed, what is displayed and where the visitor lands when clicking the ad.
- **Comparison Shopping Engines (CSE's)** such as Google Products (formerly Froogle), Nextag, Shopping.com, etc. are increasingly popular. Feed management tools get your products in the engines and provide ROI analytics at a product level. One example is FeedPerfect by Solid Cactus.
- **Affiliate programs** are typically pay-for-performance; you only pay if they deliver. Arm these programs with holiday graphics and banners showcasing your specials.
- **The best customer is a regular customer.** Personalize a special coupon code for "preferred customers." Giving

your regulars an exclusive deal goes a long way.

When mass e-mailing, make sure you have the following:

- **E-mail programs maximize delivery.** Exact Target, Got Campaigner Pro, etc. block spam. Companies trust the e-mail coming from them and more e-mail will reach your intended recipients.
- **Use well-designed HTML e-mail,** but don't make it a mirror image of your homepage.
- **Personalize.** Start the e-mail with "Dear <first name>, as a valued customer of <your store name>..." then go into your offers, showcased items, gift suggestions, etc.
- **Call to action.** A sign saying "start shopping" or "don't wait another minute—click here" often work.
- **Be consistent.** Touch the pain of shopping offline, tell people why they should shop with you, create urgency and have a call to action. Put this message on every page (remember, more people land on the inner pages than the homepage.)

### Be Creative on a Shoestring

- **Hold a contest.** Have visitors submit names, e-mail and mailing addresses for a chance to win a product (make it valuable!) delivered to them, gift-wrapped, before the holidays.
- **Use the list that you just created for holiday shoppers.** E-mail everyone if they "Shop now for the holidays—Guaranteed delivery if the order is received by 12/xx Midnight." Show case your offers and don't forget the call to action.

### Inspire Customer Confidence

Offers and pricing won't matter if people don't trust you. Dispel their fears up front.

- **Identity theft.** Install a "click here" link to explain your site's security. Yahoo! Store owners should explain why its encryption is important to consumers. Carry your site design and branding through the shopping

cart and carry your security messages through checkout.

- **Fly-by-night operations.** Your “about us” page should eliminate these concerns by including your mission statement, how long you’ve been in business, your location, your customer service goals, a picture of your building and the people who work there. Let customers see who you are.
- **State your policies.** Shopping cart abandonment often results from the charges at checkout. Explain shipping and tax charges. Explain your exchange and return policies.
- **Bad customer service.** Make toll-free numbers and contact information prominent on every page of the site and have enough people on those phones. Some online shoppers still need to place orders by phone. Make sure they can.

- **Testimonials.** A customer’s words speak loudly—showcase glowing reviews on every page.
- **Product reviews.** Big guys like Amazon are using product reviews for a reason. Amazon praising a product they’re selling won’t be nearly as convincing as a customer saying the same thing.

#### Prepare the Team

Higher volumes require more people. Most merchants increase customer service and fulfillment staff 25% during the holidays.

- **Get your people now** so you won’t have to scramble when you need them. A \$50 employee bonus for hooking a friend up with a job is a good incentive.
- **Train them well.** They should know your shipping and tax policies, your values for customer service and answer product questions. Make sure they have cheat sheets for gift ideas, can

handle price matching and know your promotions. Sales through in-bound calls will mirror the knowledge of your customer service staff.

Live chat can cut down on customer service calls and allow reps to handle multiple customers with simultaneous chats.

#### Get Started Now!

Prepare your website, offers, marketing strategy and customer service now for fewer headaches, unexpected problems and potential disappointments. **eBiz**



By Sean Gove  
seang@ebizinsider.com.

## Don't let the holiday rush sneak up on you.

The holidays are just around the corner. Don't wait 'til the last minute, get ready today with a redesign of your store!

We have all new packages to fit your budget, including features such as:

**Mini Cart, Product Reviews, Login, Snap Shop**  
...and more!

Make sure your site is ready in time for the holiday season.

**Call Today!**

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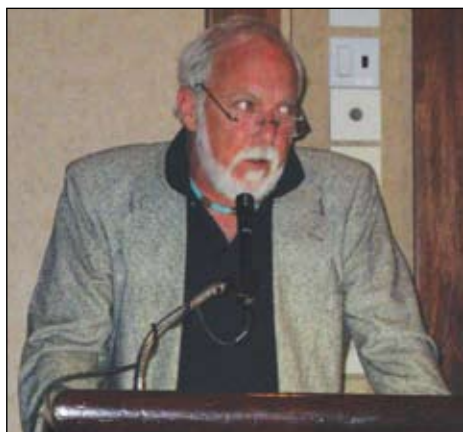
# Why “SMALL” is BIG in E-commerce

I thought I was on a roll at a recent Solid Cactus Boot Camp. I was holding a seminar, extolling the virtues of the “new marketing,” encouraging the attendees to spend less time and money on advertising and more effort on public relations where the advertising is free. Sadly, one person in the audience rained on



my parade. She sells aftermarket parts for an auto maker and she was scared because the car manufacturer was initiating its own big push in e-commerce. She assumed the car maker, with its budgets and billions and warehouses full of parts would soon roll right over her. She asked, when the sleeping giants awaken and discover the Internet, how can small companies possibly compete against "the big boys"?

Let me sum up my answer in two words: WITH EASE!



The simple fact is you have a tremendous advantage over the larger, richer, slower brick-and-mortar companies now lumbering into e-commerce. I have worked for big corporations in marketing and advertising. I know what they do well and where they are deficient. They go with what they know. They go with size. Which makes sense, because that's their strength. However, size is no advantage in the nimble world of e-commerce. Your strategy and tactics are just as valuable as theirs and arguably more valuable because in e-commerce, the focus is on small. Trust me; you have nothing to fear from "big." Below are 7 reasons why smaller is better when it comes to internet marketing and sales.

**Reason #1:** Now the big boys are playing by YOUR RULES!!!

Never forget the defining law of e-commerce: equality. No matter how rich they are, everyone gets the same one home page. GeneralMotors.com with its international brand gets the same one page in cyberspace as, say, MotorGenerals.com with their home office space. Their billions mean nothing. Their work force means nothing. In that strangely egalitarian

*Why "Small" is Big in E-Commerce  
continued on page 14*

# Turning "SMALL" Strategies Into Tactics...

Your home page is so much more than that place where you make your first impression. Your home page—and by extension your website—functions as your brand, your PR page, your on the floor sales assistant, your informal coffee klatch, your listening post, your backyard fence and it demonstrates your unique relationship with your products and services.

This is your chance to separate yourself from the universe of competition out there. How many sites sell what you sell? How many can beat you in some important metric, be it price, delivery, selection, name brand or something else? With everything that is stacked against you, why will customers buy from you? *Because they like you.*

*Because they like you.*

There are several areas on your site where you can connect to your customers.

## The Home Page

This is a great place to show your love of your products. I'm thinking of the car parts lady here. Sure the auto maker has more parts, but who cares about the cars more? Show us you care. Post a collage of pictures on the banner of classic cars. Find movie scenes with the cars in them and feature them on your site. Show people you know the difference. Let them know you care.

Under the "about us" section, how many of you take advantage of your own unique story? Engage us; tell us how you got into the business. It is always a great story and it is always unique. TELL IT!!! Make us care. Get us to like you. We will NEVER like the giant auto company. But we might like a lady who loves those cars.

## Product Descriptions

Search engines reward you for being interesting. They reward you for saying unique things about your products and services. This is where you can get people interested in you. The one thing you must not do is copy other people's copy. The search engines will index your copy and compare it with other copy from other companies. The more you copy other people and don't say it in your own original style, the further you'll slide down the rankings. This is where it is crucial that you be yourself.

The Peterman Catalogue from TV's "Seinfeld" is a great example. Peterman offered the

same products as other publications, but the product descriptions were so original and entertaining that people couldn't wait for their Peterman catalogue to arrive. It helped their sales. Learn the lesson. Be interesting. It will affect your rankings on the engines, which you *know* will boost sales.

## Product Reviews

Product reviews are a great place to improve your search engine rankings and learn from your customers. K9HealthSolutions.com started receiving reviews of a barely-known supplement called Dinovite. As the reviews came in the sales spiked and so did their search engine rankings. Now the company is expanding their line of supplements.

Remember! People put the word "reviews" in their search information. Be sure to feed the engines while you're communicating. And who is more believable—a fellow shopper or the company shilling for itself. Big companies will reach out with automatic e-mail. You have the advantage if you reach out personally.

## Blogs

Blogs establish your commitment to your business and its products and services. It's a great way to share industry-related issues with people who might share your passion. Give them a platform and then reward that participation, even if it is only with positive comments.

*Remember!* Google indexes everything. Fresh copy will count with Google and we have many clients who have seen a spike in their rankings after installing the Blog option. If you have a blog, use it!

## Summing Up

You have the tools on your website to become more human to your shoppers than the big boys will ever become for their shoppers. Cyberspace may seem huge, but e-commerce allows you to speak to one shopper at a time. You can reach out on your home page, with product descriptions, reviews and even blogs. As you build your website, pretend you're talking to just one person, just one customer. If you do, you'll realize the truth of e-commerce. *Smaller is better!* **eBiz**



By Kevin Lynn

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world of the Internet, you are *exactly equal*. Advantage—you.

**Reason #2:** You are more motivated...

They may have millions, or even billions. Is that an advantage? The larger a company becomes, the more layers they have in their organization. With more layers come more people, each one less invested in the outcome any single process. I'll explain. Imagine an order comes in to your business and also to a larger one. You have yourself watching every step from the moment the order comes in until a sale goes out. How many people do they have? One for each step of the sales chain? Can that larger process care about the customer as much as you can? Do they have as much invested in a correct order or a happy customer? Can they possibly be as nimble and sensitive as you are? Of course not. They think customers come by the thousands and "someone else" ultimately takes care of them. You know better. They can't possibly appreciate what they're doing as much as you appreciate what you're doing. Advantage—you.

**Reason #3:** You are more fluid.

Or to put it another way, their bowels are cast in concrete. The larger the organization, the harder it is to get anything done and the longer it takes. Everything requires a meeting and almost nothing gets decided at just one meeting. In large organizations, everyone wants to make sure the "right" people are invited to a meeting or a decision-making moment. Everyone is afraid to proceed because they're worried to make a step out of place. It's no surprise that automakers still need years to solve the gas mileage problem. Imagine how many meetings (and how many years) it took to agree there is a problem! You don't have such worries. At least, you shouldn't... Advantage—you.

**Reason #4:**

They never EVER have good ideas.

My father spent his entire life in corporate America. One of his favorite phrases of indictment was: "A camel is a horse, designed by a committee." In other words, once you start voting and altering and changing, you can screw up almost anything. It happens in advertising every day. I know—I write their ads! Large

companies are forever calling me back after an ad submission and they always say, "Kev—we love it. We just want to change two things." I know before they tell me. They want to "change" the one thing that made the ad interesting and the one thing that made it funny, thereby guaranteeing that it won't be either interesting or funny. Basically it comes down to this statement.

The majority NEVER makes the right decision, in *anything*. This gives you and your little autocracy a HUGE advantage over the larger, slower—dumber people you're competing with.

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*When the sleeping giants awaken and discover the Internet, how can small companies possibly compete against "the big boys"?*

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**Reason #5:** When someone has a good idea—they don't stop until they screw it up.

You don't have to look very far to see a wonderful advertising idea that has morphed into something grotesque. My current favorite is the AFLAC duck. When the duck first appeared, the quack sounded like the company name and it was brilliant. AFLAC sales soared and the duck became an instant favorite. In that first ad, the duck was in the park, where ducks belong, listening to two guys talk about insurance. The duck quacked "AFLAC!" and the ad worked. How the ads have changed. It's clever when a duck quacks on cue in a park. It's something very different when it ends up in your bed, on a roller coaster or behind the wheel of a race car. That isn't clever, it's stupid.

As a side point on advertising, you have an advantage there, too. Traditional mass advertising costs vastly more and is less effective than ever. But remember we're dealing with corporations, where they think BIG. Whom do you think gets the most attention from corporate? The guys spending millions on TV ads using movie

star voices or the newcomers, the folks in the basement grinding away on the internet? Advantage—you.

**Reason #6:** You listen. They don't.

Think about that. When a customer calls you, it counts. When they complain, you pay attention or you're out of business in a hurry. But when companies get big, who's listening then? Or is it more likely that whoever hears a complaint will file a well-meaning report that higher-ups might read in a day, or a week, or never? The speed with which concerns are addressed varies inversely with the size of the company fielding the calls. The bigger the company, the longer and slower the process of seeing and dealing with customer issues... Advantage—you.

**Reason #7:** You know the Internet shopper better than they do.

Big companies often commission demographic surveys because they have lots of money. But do they bother to read or heed them? This is a serious question. Many large companies think it's enough just to do the study. Even if they do read the surveys, is it an advantage over what you have? You have a *pulse*. You can feel your business and the industry beyond. Can't you? Can't you feel which promotions are working, which products are selling and which services are more popular? You have that sense *because you are smaller*. You listen to people more closely and their business counts more to you *because you are smaller*. You can react quickly and change quickly to profit from mini-spikes in activity *because you are smaller*. You know the internet at a gut level better than the big boys *because you are smaller*.

The big boys are playing in your court by your rules. You have the advantage in cyberspace. That's the good news. The bad news is you can't use the big boys as an excuse for not winning. They're not better, just bigger. You have an edge in every other area. **eBiz**



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# Daring to Take that First Vacation

So, you've worked hard. You've put in the time and effort and now your online business is running smoothly, orders are steady and sales are up. But you are tired. You've been burning candles at both ends for two years straight without a break. The 80 hour weeks have finally caught up with you and you've got a chance to take a 7-night Caribbean cruise. You know you need this break, but what are you going to do with your online store in the meantime?

## Planning the Great Escape

It's happened to all of us at some point in our online careers and we have all survived a week away from home base. But first, you have to get to the point where you believe you can survive leaving your business with "others." Before you escape, do some business planning so that you'll be comfortable with someone else minding the store while you're embedded in the conga line on the Lido deck.

## Haste Makes Waste

Shutting down your online store while you're away isn't an option, so now your priority has to be to find someone who can keep the orders coming in and going out. You have two basic choices and each comes with positives and negatives. A plan

may seem obvious; this is the moment when many small business owners will decide to hire their first employee. Not so fast! You don't want the tail wagging the dog here. Hiring staff changes your business forever. This is an important change and for many businesses an inevitable one, but it is not a change you make in a rush or because you're forced to make it. Any new hire is going to need training and you have to learn to trust that person. After all, your business will be in their hands while you're away. If you're not ready to become an "employer" just yet, you're left with Plan B, also known as "friends and family."

I am not a big fan of hiring friends or family members, but in a crunch they may be your best resource. Just make sure that whomever you select is capable of the basics—taking some phone calls, answering e-mail and getting orders out the door. Other business functions should be able to wait for your return.

## Keep It Simple

Here is a checklist of tasks your temporary assistant should be able to handle:

- Pulling orders off your website and entering them into your order management system
- Answering the phone during your normal business hours
- Providing customers with product information

- Entering phone orders and processing credit cards
  - Picking, packing and shipping product from your warehouse
  - Answering customer e-mail
  - Handling returns and exchanges
- Now here's a checklist of things you should do to make your assistant's job easier:
- Show them how to use your voice mail and telephone system
  - Write explicit instructions on how to do things (pull orders, charge cards, ship a package, etc.)
  - Write a FAQ—a list of frequently asked questions that customers may ask during a call or e-mail
  - Leave a list of usernames and passwords for your website and order management system
  - List emergency contact numbers in case they have to reach you

We all need a break every now and then; it refreshes us and inspires us to think up the next big venture that will allow (dare we dream?)—2 weeks vacation next year! And after all, isn't that the real point of working? To live? E-commerce never stops and neither should your business. By choosing the right person to run things while you're away, you can relax and enjoy the fruits of your labors knowing your "baby" is in capable hands. **eBiz**



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# Manage Your Online Reputation

**It can happen without any warning.**

Right there in the Google rankings, just below (or just above!) your e-commerce site's listing in the search engine results pages (SERPs), is a defamatory blog post about your company or a dreaded listing on RipoffReport.com. Yes, your site is ranked highly, but bad publicity can be just as harmful as not showing up in the first ten pages.

When I talk to clients about search engine optimization (SEO), I am



frequently asked “How do I make them stop?” Sadly, in most cases, you can’t. However, you can do several things to lessen their negative effects.

SEO concentrates on increasing a site’s organic (non-paid) rankings. Good SEO encourages shoppers to click on your listing and come into your store. A results page stacked with negative mentions works against that goal. While you can’t make those mentions disappear, there are several strategies that a savvy e-trepreneur can use to bury these negatives or turn them into a benefit:

### ‘Vanity’ Searches

Learn who is talking about you. Google your company and if you’re closely associated to the brand, Google yourself. Do it frequently, to keep on top of what the Web is saying about you. Set up a Google Alert (<http://www.google.com/alerts>) for your brand to stay on top of any negative mentions. Google Alerts sends regular e-mail updates of relevant search results with an ‘as-it-happens’ frequency, which lets you respond quickly.

### Clean Up Your Act

If you have an embarrassing teenage LiveJournal or regrettable YouTube videos, take the content down, close those accounts and use Google’s Webmaster Tools to request that the pages be deleted from the index (Tools > Remove URLs > New Removal Request).

### Respond, Respond, Respond

If you’re the target of a blog post bad-mouthing your service, leave a comment addressing the situation. Explain your position, offer a resolution if necessary and – most of all – apologize if it’s warranted. Take a potential black mark and turn it into good public relations. Even sites like RipoffReport.com allow businesses to submit a rebuttal. RipoffReport won’t publish a retraction, but your efforts could lead to a negative post’s removal or a glowing follow-up about how you treated the customer. The real benchmark of customer service is not that there are no problems, but how you address them.

## Inspire Confidence, Inspire Conversions

A good way to win over the wary is by implementing user-generated content. Customers are more willing to trust their peers, so features like Customer Reviews and Testimonials carry a lot of weight when it comes to evaluating the quality of your store. A fellow shopper is more believable than an ad.

### Bury the Competition

Unfortunately, too many searchers view a negative headline and let it register. The only way to prevent this is to move the bad headlines off the page. Crowd the site with positive mentions that may keep criticisms buried on a lower page, or give pause to searchers inclined to move on, by increasing your online visibility.

### Fresh Content

Google “queries for freshness,” searching for content that is not only relevant to a search but which is also recent. Maintaining a blog on your store’s domain is a good way to promote fresh content if you can keep it updated 3-5 times a week.

## Social Media

Social Media outlets like Digg, Wikipedia, YouTube or even Facebook can all create Web pages with the ability to rank highly in Google results pages. Google seems to love Digg in particular, so developing a presence in its community can be a great way to promote your business. Social media can drive traffic to you through these outlets once you establish yourself as a reputable source of information.

### Protect Your Rep

The anonymity of the Internet makes it an ideal sounding board for the dissatisfied, whether they have legitimate gripes with your company or not. And unfortunately, the web never forgets – even ‘facts’ that aren’t true. Customer trust is vital to e-commerce, so promoting your brand, reaching out to customers and keeping potentially damaging search results out of your SERP turf will all help you put your best foot forward when customers come looking for you online. **eBiz**



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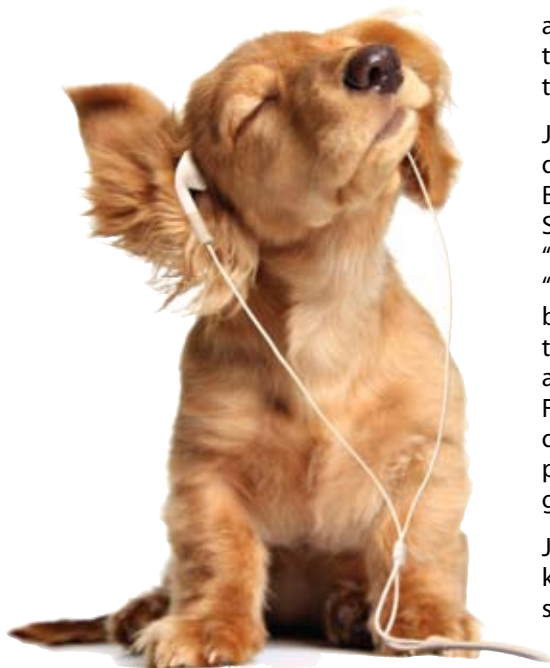
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# Fast growth and changes for FUN DOG FRED

*“We did a business plan, but we’ve already blown it away. Success has come so quickly that we’ve grown much faster than we thought.”*

—Dave Jones, FunDogFred.com

Fundogfred.com was inspired by a desire to be in e-commerce, a “total” love of dogs and an interest in design. Dave Jones was fascinated by the possibilities and promise of doing business online. “I had no idea about e-commerce,” laughs Dave.



Business is grooving for FunDogFred.com!

“I just knew I wanted to do something online. So I did lots of research first.” Jean Jones had design experience and a desire to meet new people. “I knew how I wanted fundogfred.com to look,” she says. “The site is fun and so are the people who call. Dog lovers are nice people.” Predictably, the couple has two dogs of their own. “They’re great testers,” says Jean. “The only problem is; they want to keep every toy they like.”

Fundogfred.com is where you come for the latest in dog fashion with designer dog clothes, trendy small dog carriers, designer dog collars, designer dog leashes and hip dog accessories. In addition they offer gourmet dog treats and specialty dog grooming products, fun dog bowls and dog feeders. Fundogfred.com is over 1,000 products, many of which are rapidly filling their basement. “We bought a wide range when we first started,” Jean recalls. “Now we’re narrowing our product lines and going deeper. We never expected this. We’re much busier than I ever thought we’d be at this point.”

Jean enlisted the help of a graphic designer and built fundogfred.com herself. But the couple had already decided on Solid Cactus to bring their vision to life. “I’d read about Solid Cactus,” said Dave. “I knew about their history. I knew that before they ever went into website design, that they’d started theferretstore.com and several pet-related e-commerce sites. For us it meant they not only knew about design and e-commerce, they knew about pets and pet stores. We figured we’d be in good hands.”

Jean sent her design to Solid Cactus. “We knew how we wanted the site to look,” says Jean. “We sent it to them and they nailed it! I liked the fact that it was a team effort from Solid Cactus. We had different people handling different

aspects of our site.” It was a basic package but the results have been immediate.

“As you can imagine, dog products are very competitive,” says Dave. “It’s difficult getting customers to find you when you’re starting out. Solid Cactus took over our Pay-Per-Click and made us instantly visible. We went from 3,000 page views in February to 60,000 last month. That’s a big jump in a short time.”

With growth come changes and Dave is already thinking ahead. After all, when you ‘blow away’ your business plan, it can mean lots of extra work. “We’re adding Cactus On Demand,” says Dave. “We’re getting busier and we know we want help with our back-end order management.” Jean has changes in mind, as well. “We’re adding Testimonials, as well as Customer Reviews and Blogs,” she says. “A satisfied customer is always the best advertising and I like interacting with our customers. I like dog people. I think blogs are a good way to let people get to know us a little better.”

This is a first venture into e-commerce for Dave and Jean Jones, so far so good. “I love what I’m doing,” says Jean. “I love the interaction with the customers and helping them; I love my vendors. I spent a long time identifying great products and companies before we ever opened our business and I stand behind them. Most of all, of course, I love dogs and dog products and that makes everything easier.” She’s also happy with Solid Cactus. “When we were designing the site I called them all the time,” she laughs. “They were always very helpful and very patient. That’s important when you’re starting out.” **eBiz**



By Kevin Lynn

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# Testing, 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...

## Test Your Store Across Multiple Browser Configurations and Screen Resolutions

After you get your store back from your developer, who performed a 100 point QA inspection, what is the first thing you should do? If you said test, test, and then test some more, you are correct. It is a fact that computer code is rendered differently for each browser. It is essential that you test to be sure all of your functions show up on each browser. However, today there are a seemingly unlimited number of browser configurations along with a large array of screen resolutions—testing is a big job and can be a headache. Still, if you aren't testing on the most popular browsers, you may be segmenting your audience.

Perhaps you're asking yourself, "Do I really need to run right up to my kids' room and test my site on their PlayStation Portable?" Probably not. Luckily there are only a handful of popular browsers used by the masses and if you have those covered, you are off to a great start. Internet Explorer, Firefox and Safari are the 3 most popular browsers and 1024x768 reigns supreme for screen resolution. The affordability of flat screen LCD monitors has caused the bulky CRT monitors to become much less prevalent and any PC bought in the last 2 years should be preloaded with IE7. Mac's native browser, Safari is gaining in popularity, but it is still less than 10% of the market. However, some of you will have the customer who uses Netscape 4 and isn't afraid to tell you that your site is broken and impossible to order from when using their computer.

If a customer reports an error on your store there are a few pieces of information that you should get from them.

1. Have them explain the error. Often times what your client is describing as an error may be user error. User error that frequently repeats itself should be examined carefully. Any

error that is more than an isolated incident should be forwarded to your developer.

2. What page were they on when the error occurred?
3. What actions led up to the error?
4. What Browser were they using?
5. What version of the Browser were they using? Updates are frequent and are often required. (e.g. Firefox 3 had a zero day update that fixed a potential vulnerability. This came less than 24 hours of the initial launch.)

If you can obtain that information, you can get a better understanding of whether you have a true issue on your hands or if the problem is a one off instance. Any customer confusion should be treated seriously, but you shouldn't hold your web developer accountable for a customer who accessed your store using last century's technology.

If you only had to worry about 3 browsers and one or two different screen resolutions, what a wonderful world this would be. Sadly, it's not that simple. Microsoft and Apple are at war for customers and they are fighting it with updated operating systems. As a result, now you need to worry whether your customers are using Windows Vista or Mac OS X Leopard. If you have gotten this far and are feeling so overwhelmed you're ready to give up, you may want to have someone take on the task of compiling all of these different operating systems, browsers and screen resolutions. Sites like Gomez.com offer "Capture Services" which will allow you to test pages of your site across a long list of combinations.

If all of this browser talk has you ready to run for the hills, don't let it happen. Testing across a range of browsers

is crucial to your business. The bad news is, the number of browsers and configurations is endless and you'll never test all of them. The good news is, if you cover the major browsers you'll be ahead of the game - for today...

For more information, visit some of the resources listed below. In addition, don't forget to check the newly launched Firefox 3 and IE 8 scheduled for release later this year.

### References for Browser & Screen Resolution Statistics:

[http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers\\_stats.asp](http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp)

<http://marketshare.hitslink.com/report.aspx?qprid=0>

<http://www.thecounter.com/stats/> eBiz



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# The Basics

Okay, so you have a great looking website, a flawless mission statement for your business, a vision of the who, what, where and when to accomplish your vision. Now, how do we get your target audience driven to your site in order to create that most valuable goal – CONVERSION?

One of the most important things that you need to do is find various sources of traffic and drive them to your site. This means it is crucial to understand that relying on just one source of traffic visiting your site will not bring the success that helped to spawn your e-commerce dream in the first place. So what can you do to make sure that, not only do you get the traffic that you are targeting, but also that you do not lose traffic?

Let's get down to it and make a list of The Basics. There are several specific steps which you can take to gain the advantage on the competition and get the traffic and conversion that you know you so richly deserve:

**1. Have a clear marketing plan.** Write, yes, WRITE with paper and pencil (with eraser) the many and varied avenues that you can reach your target customer. The paper and pencil are important. By actually writing out your plan,

you will be able to see the goals you have identified right in front of you. You can convince your mind of your goals and will be more apt to act upon them. You can place that piece of paper in conspicuous locations where you'll be more likely to see it than if it's buried on some computer file. If you're having trouble finding the avenues to reach your target customer, ASK. Use resources to find out what those avenues are. Ask the people who know or have been down similar trails before. Use your mentors, consultants, friends, partners, and web designer.

**2. Turn the plan into action.** The most effective ways to this 'secret,' also called marketing, should be spread out within the marketing plan you have come up with harnessed in the way of a marketing campaign. Here are the most effective ways of marketing your site and driving your target audience to you:

- **Blogging.** Establish yourself as an expert in the field. A blog lets you update people on developments

in your industry (and their field of interest). This is good indirect promotion of the quality of your site.

- **SEO (Search Engine Optimization).** Concentrate on content-rich copy. Do NOT copy and paste from manufacturers. Use your own descriptions.
  - **Pay-Per-Click (PPC).** Paid advertising is a fact of life. Contact experts for help in this very tricky and expensive aspect of marketing.
  - **Social Networking.** Also good for indirect marketing and general promotions.
  - **Creating free content (White Papers).** People trust experts. If they trust your expertise, they are more likely to buy from you.
- 3. Stay Current.** Keeping your website 'tweaked,' 'tuned up,' loaded with the latest effective features and regularly redesigned are essential in keeping your customers coming back. Think of

it as redecorating a brick-and-mortar store. It keeps your site looking fresh for your repeat customers. It also impresses those all-important first customers.

Isn't it ironic how you thought that creating that dream web store was tedious and frustrating, yet now creating conversion seems to be what keeps you up at night? The reason is because conversions, sales and offering the better mousetrap are the main reasons you went into business online to begin with. It was your initial dream to create entrepreneurial success. Now your site is running. Now comes the rest of your e-commerce life. So, have that clear plan, apply the plan, and listen to suggestion and keep your site fresh and up to date. Apply the 'basics' and DRIVE your dream! **eBiz**



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# Tech Corner:

## A Penny Saved...

The theme across the board in e-business these days is figuring out ways to streamline operations, cut costs, make better investments and make sure you're getting what you're paying for. We're all taking a closer look, not only at increasing the business coming in and squeezing the most out of the new technology, but also decreasing the expenses we need to operate.

It can start with simple things, like taking a second look at the familiar. For example, a few weeks ago I was having problems with my cable box, so I spent an hour on the phone with the company explaining that it had just stopped working. In the process I went over my bill with the representative and discovered that I had been overcharged about \$168 over the past year for services I didn't have. So, this month, let's look at some money-saving technology tricks! Now, a couple bucks here and there doesn't make a difference in the big picture, right? WRONG! Remember "A penny saved is a penny earned." We're not dealing in pennies anymore, are we?

**1. Telephone Service:** A few months back I wrote that Voice-over-IP (VoIP) was the "in" thing for savings and it's still true. A Vonage line for \$25 a month gives you unlimited calls anywhere in the country. It's loaded up with all the features you'd ever want and sure beats out the traditional plain old telephone service, provided by the phone company and accompanied by its many surcharges and taxes.

**2. Cell Phones:** If your company issues cell phones for its employees, you might want to look at the option of moving to providing employees with reimbursements and having them use their personal phones instead of the costly company option. In addition, consider moving to a share-plan for multiple phones on your account.

You'll also want to make sure you have a company cell phone usage policy and that all lines that you're paying for are trimmed of all the bells and whistles. For instance, if your employees want to text, let them pay the extra \$20 to have it.

**3. Internet Service:** Make sure you're getting what you're paying for. If you're on a cable or DSL line, make sure you're doing speed tests, shopping around and that you're being very conscious of when your service contract expires. If you're a home-based business, you probably will get a better rate if you purchase the service under your home, and don't mention the business side of things. You can then reimburse yourself from the business account.

**4. Remote Employees:** Back in January I wrote about the virtual office. Now lots of businesses are facing the same issue. With the price of gas up \$4.00 a gallon plus, now might be a good time to give your employees' wallets a break and implement a good work-from-home policy. Remember, you *will* have to deal with some loss of control over your workforce. Put controls in place to ensure productivity is maintained and that you aren't

actually spending more time and money accommodating the needs of the employee in the long run.

### 5. Use new and emerging technologies:

Now, more than ever, online shoppers are looking for the best deal. They're actually slowing down and checking prices on multiple sites and searching for the best price. How can you compete?

- Get your products in the comparison shopping engines (CSEs) using [FeedPerfect.com](http://FeedPerfect.com).
- Streamline your workflow and operations with Cactus on Demand Order Management [CactusOnDemand.com](http://CactusOnDemand.com).
- Know where your shipping costs are going with Solid Cactus Shipping Manager <http://www.solidcactus.com/sc-shipping-manager.html>.

We're all in business to succeed, to do better today than we did yesterday. Remember, while we work to increase the income, decreasing the outgo accomplishes the same end. **eBiz**



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