

Internet *Schminternet*: The Top 7 Reasons Why the Internet Won't Help Your Business

With all the buzzword talk about social media and social networking I wanted to go back to something I wrote circa 1999 about the coming "influence" of Internet activity and importance it has to business in the future. It focuses on all this talk about the Internet becoming salvation for enterprise. Practically speaking though even now, aren't there other ways to engage the consumer just as effectively as the Internet? Perhaps even better than the Internet. Radio, television, newspapers...all of them have been proclaimed antiquated (or even dead) and yet they continue on strongly. Well, they continue on anyway. What I mean to say is, clearly I was ahead of my time when I wrote my article a decade ago. Then, as it is now, I think I was right on target...

From 1999...

Please read on as I share the top 7 (amongst many) reasons the internet, despite its supporters, can't possibly bring what it promises to business and companies. Besides the troubling fact that computers are incredibly slow (and there is not real improvement on the horizon) the Internet is dominated by time-wasting activities like chatting and forums. What reasonable business person would want to claim stake in that? Well, without further delay, I'll let my top seven reasons speak for themselves:

1. No access. How will customers ever find you?

The fact is that while there may be a slight increase in people buying personal computers, not a whole lot of people have them. And when they do get them, there isn't a whole lot to do. There are ugly ads everywhere from a small segment of rouge businesses that think they can make something of it. But ultimately, nobody will want to "click on" an ad when they don't even know the business or can trust that the business is even real. After all, when you go online do you ever click on unknown business ads or "links"?

At least when you walk into a store you can trust the flesh and blood sales person. You know they are dedicated to doing the job right. There is no trust issue like on the Internet where you could be talking to a sales person (probably not) or a two year old accidentally hitting the keyboard (more likely).

2. No speed.

Even if the user (now they are calling them surfers) wanted to click on you, it would take a short lifetime. Similar to trying to download music over the 1 hr. or longer period it currently takes, how do you expect a surfer to get to you through such a clumsy mechanism? The best way is to wait for people to pass by you in a prime location.

Non-proximity based marketing just doesn't make sense. First, the Internet requires the surfer to find you by *searching* for you. Second, it requires the surfer to know what they are looking for. Last I checked I thought that was our job – to convince the buyer they needed our product by getting them in our store. Then we'd let the experience take over, showing the selection and breadth of our products. All for the low 24 dollars per man labor costs. Not bad, if I say so myself. How could the web ever try to replicate that

experience of selection and low overhead? And at the crawling speeds it has right now...good luck.

Even if the Internet by some chance sped up to faster speeds, I don't think that the surfer is smart enough to enter the exact words they need to find exactly what they want. Consumers just don't work that way. They need assistance and personal help. Again – two things the Internet doesn't have.

3. No targeting.

Have you ever done a direct mail piece? It requires a lot of work. We have to segment the mailing into lots of specific people groups and change the wording a little to speak directly to the consumer target. Then we measure the results based on a couple weeks later when we start getting visitors into the store or start receiving phone calls. That kind of specialized effort is not only hard work, but very few people know how to do that well enough to drive great response.

To make that work for the internet, you'd have to be able to do the exact same thing...only you'd probably have to personalize, target and measure things faster than Direct Mail to make it worth it. I just don't see a world where you can speak to the individual surfer and measure the response rapidly. And then what would you do with that information anyway? Reply with targeted info immediately so that the surfer feels you are speaking directly to their experience? Keep dreaming...

4. No way to make money.

Here's a biggie for me personally. The Internet ain't no lemonade stand. In a store you can control pricing and make merchandizing changes in only a couple days. We can go from Easter sale to Mother's Day over a weekend. The agility of POP allows us to make some serious money by selling the things the consumer really needs...or sometime, with a gentle nudge *thinks* they need.

On the internet it takes several weeks to code and reprogram web pages to make changes. And even then it doesn't look good because the graphics online are just absolutely horrible. Unless you see better graphics and better agility for making changes, I just don't see how you can make any money online.

5. No privacy.

You've heard about that, right? Privacy. Customer's desire privacy above anything. Say there were even enough customers (forgive me, surfers) who were online in vast numbers. How would you keep their business transactions safe and secure? Online security amounts to rolling the dice. Unless there is significant improvement in security – like...well, I don't know because I am not a security guru myself. But, I am sure the internet isn't safe.

In stores, at least you are safe. There is no one to try to steal your information. Well, unless one of the clerks decides to copy your credit card slips or gets your address...and then lookout. But that's rare. Clerks are very trusted and rarely do that sort of thing.

6. People like to touch things.

Now we've come to one of the biggest objections for business use of the Internet. There is no chance that people will bypass the opportunity to touch the product they want to purchase. That's why newspapers, books and CDs will always be number one in consumer purchase minds.

People love to touch and feel the books they are going to read. I certainly can't fathom a world where this basic instinct is overcome and people begin buying music online instead of on cassette or CDs, or books through some sort of web store! If it did happen, I might change my mind. But that's like saying some day people will forgo the library for research in favor of searching for stuff online.

7. Waste of time online.

Chat, chat, chat. That's about it, isn't it? I hate to be so negative sounding but the Internet is like a big glorified phone. All people do is talk to each other when they could probably do a better job just picking up the phone. And, with the way cell phones are becoming better and better, one of the two will suffer. They can't both exist, right?

Anyway, I say *Internet Schmineternet*. I got plenty reasonable ways to get to my customers. I can mail to them. I can cold call them. But mostly I can enjoy them as they walk up to my prime location on a very large, busy street and welcome them with a warm smile. There will never be a replacement for the kindness I can show in person.

The Internet is a cold, impersonal machine that will never attract large numbers of surfers or allow for a real way to make money. And if you think that is possible, I say break a leg. As for me, I'll just tidy up my CD shop because when I open my doors, well...that is where the reason business will happen.

Back to Reality

Okay, so by now you've probably discovered that I was being a little disingenuous and glib when suggested that I wrote this article ten years ago. Fact of the matter is that I wrote it this morning...and no, I don't own a CD shop either. I wrote the article to prove a pretty obvious point for those of you who get it though. At the same time, it may have been a little confusing for those who don't. You may not believe this but there are businesses who do not engage the internet. And if they do, they do so with a shameful entry that shows little regard for the power of the Internet-based consumer. Poor design, no purchase functionality, lack of brand alignment. They are essentially using old rules for a new way, a better way.

The truth is it's time to get your act together and understand that without the Internet your business will eventually die. If you already do embrace the Internet, continue to improve upon it as your competitors will do the same, even if you don't. If you do not have a reasonable Internet presence for your company get one immediately. To not do so is to leave money on the table, both virtual and real.