Insight into *Buying a new website*

"People think e-commerce is just people browsing, but there's more to it than that. More and more people are using programs and agents to shop for the best deal, and that's how they're going to be getting to your site."

Sir Tim Berners-Lee "father" of the Internet

Your first web site was probably a brochure on line with a few web based "widgets" to allow people to find out about you and fill in a rudimentary online enquiry form. As a management team you have realised that now there is a lot more available and you need to update, upgrade and invest in a new site. The challenge is that many of us are experts in our field or sector but we rely on our IT Department or ITC supplier to keep us up to speed with the latest Hi Tech "opportunities". This is why there are many business leaders who are disappointed with what they end up with. This document will give you an insight into the challenges faced when embarking on a new web based project.

The consequences of not managing your web strategy

You can invest in the web or you can use the web to invest in your business

If you don't have time to develop a properly thought out online strategy and you don't approach appointing web and IT vendors as being mission critical. You are preparing the way for your competitors to take more of your market share. You may miss opportunities to employ new talent or give customers and suppliers a misleading image of your business.

The components you may need to consider

First and foremost the technology must be the servant of the business process. Review the processes document them decide what you want to achieve. Set goals and targets. Put financial targets around investment and return. Then and only then can you engage the technical experts. REMEMBER the technology must always be the slave in support of the core business requirements. Don't let the IT "Guru" force you to bend to their latest fashion or bright idea. Stick to what you know best, <u>your business</u> and get them to use the technology to support you with your business goals.

Web sites present three challenges, the graphic design, the types of technology used plus integration to back office systems. Use three different specialist suppliers if necessary. If you don't have the ability to manage the technology outsource it. Ensure that the needs of your business plan are always at the forefront at all times.

Don't just consider your website as a sale's and marketing tool; use it to support the delivery of products and services. Provide customer support on line 24 x 7. Provide your customers with a login to a customer portal providing useful information; user guides, white papers etc. Add value to their experience and use every opportunity to cross sell and up sell to your customers

Getting it right:

- Don't delegate your on line strategy it's far to important.

- Review and understand your business processes from sales to cash. Then document them BEFORE engaging technologists

- Listen to what the IT guru has to say, they may have some good ideas, BUT you must be in the driving seat.

- Don't agree to anything that impacts negatively on your business model. If you don't see the return on investment don't do it

- Don't let the technology dictate what you do, insist that the IT team deliver what you, your customers and prospects need

- Your web site must be more than an online brochure. Use it to provide support to customers 24 x 7. Integrate it to your back office systems for increased efficiency

- Ensure that you drive people to your web site and then use it to create a demand for your products and services

- Look at your website as an ongoing operational tool, it shouldn't be a static part of your business operation.

- Use e-mail newsletters with embedded links to drive visitors to your site, where they will find useful fee information and exposure to your products and services

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So what does the <u>ideal</u> on line strategy look like?

- It will look like a business plan because that's exactly what it should be
- Research your suppliers and competitors web sites and consider how will you be different
- Identify and review your customers journey from initial sales enquiry to billing and collection
- Document the journey, review it and ask how can we use the online strategy to work smarter?
- Most web developers will talk about presentation (look and feel) and search engine optimisation (SEO). That's not enough. Integration to your back office systems, communication with prospects, staff, existing customers and suppliers are also mission critical components of your business model, so don't leave them out of your online planning.
- The plan should include what the online presence will deliver to your organisation, how you will "drive" prospects and customers to your site and the buy back time for your investment.

So what are the key questions that need answering

- A web site needs to remain current and be regularly updated to be effective so how are you going to manage the content?
- How will each team, division, "silo" or department be represented on the site?
- Is the way we do things now necessarily the way we should do them on line?
- What will our existing customers expect from our on line presence?
- How can you use the site to provide and improved customer service?
- The site is available 24 x 7 why not use it 24 x 7?
- How will the technology be supported going forward, who by and how much will it cost?
- Will I own the technology the intellectual property and the domain name (www. yourcompany.com)?

Selecting a supplier

- Only engage the technologist when you have developed and documented an online strategy. If you don't have time hire a consultant. Any cost you incur should be built into you pay back time.
- Don't let the technology suppliers write the specification, insist that they respond to your plan with a technical solution that complies with your business needs.
- Make sure you know where your site will be hosted, obtain a commitment for ongoing support and maintenance.
- Ask your colleagues how much they pay for an online presence. Decide on a budget based on return on investment over a period of time.
- Your online plan should have no compromises. You can always compromise when you start to match the budget to what is available in the market place. You may well be surprised; many technologies that only a few years ago were quite expensive are now low cost off the shelf modules.
- The right supplier will glue together existing software that they have written before or can buy off the shelf ready tried and tested. Beware of the supplier that is going to write every line of code especially for you.

REMEMBER it's your web site, based on your business processes supported by technology…………..

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