

# BRIDGES OF MORRIS COUNTY...

MORRIS COUNTY  
**BUSINESS** Life



## Reports of the Internet's death have been greatly exaggerated

By John L. Picard

**The New Customer Connection** – Some people have looked at their stock portfolios and declared that the Internet is dead. Smart marketers know that now that the hype has faded, the Internet can be put to work with powerful purpose as a persuasive tool to connect, sell, educate and serve customers. If you don't already have a "digital customer connection," now is the time to make the leap. If you already have a website or use e-mail, then it's time to revitalize.

**Make the Web Real** – Many websites are simply "brochure-ware" – some sales literature slapped onto the site. But it can be much more than a glorified brochure. Often there is no strategy or consideration as to how the customer experiences the site. Many clients are building or revamping sites to make them integral components of their sales and service strategies.

**It's Not About the Gadget Ratio** – As the web matures, clients have moved away from images of dancing products. To establish web connections that drive new business and retain customers, they're developing sites with substance that enhance business connections. A banking client delivers current rate information and an ability for customers to access account information on a 24-hour basis. An accounting firm manages a special event including everything from invitations to distributing photos as "thank you" notes to attendees. A construction company supplements its corporate selling pitch and uses the web to drive "the close" and show they're more established than prospects realized.

**Five Ways to Upgrade Your Site NOW** – Consider five key questions:

- (1) What needs drive people to the site? (Does it answer their questions?)
- (2) Can they easily find what they need? (Many sites are tough to navigate for answers. The rule is "three clicks away at most!")
- (3) Is the site current? (How impressive is one last updated in 1998?)
- (4) Does the site create dialogue or a powerful experience? (Forget imagery gimmicks – the trick is to make a personal connection, like a great ad or sales pitch.)
- (5) Is there a call to action? (An offer to buy your product, to initiate dialogue or to request something that fulfills a need are examples.)

**Get Them (Drive Traffic) and Keep Them (Stickiness) at the Site** – Though the web has its own jargon, the rules are still the same as any business. Rule number one is you need people to get to you (the site) and stay long enough to do business. For existing customers, the tools to drive traffic are equally important. Make one-to-one connections by combining tools, i.e., e-mails, broadcast messages, instant messenger, web newsletters or digital holiday cards. The point is to keep connected to your customers and use your knowledge about them to drive them to the site.

**An Engine for Growth** – For prospects, you can use the same techniques, but the trick is, how do you let them know you exist in the first place? Our clients' sites have key words built into their programming called "metatags." Search engines look for these words to find your site and tell people about it. Some of the best engines are Overture, Google, Yahoo, Ah-ha, Findwhat and 411. These sites also sell "placements on their site" positions. For pennies or sometimes dollars, you can have customers coming to your site every time they look up key words related to your business. (Hint: Make it specific and local or you'll get more traffic and less buying than you can imagine.)

**Bottom Line** – It's never too late to harness the power of the Internet. All you need is a strategy with the right tools to build and nurture your customer relationships.

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