



MEETING TIME AND LOCATION

March 9, 2006, dinner (or just come to network) at 7:00 PM, presentation at 8:00 PM.

Denny's Restaurant
3315 N. Scottsdale Rd.
Scottsdale, AZ

PRESIDENT 'S MESSAGE

by Vaughn Treude

Web Marketing for Consultants, part One

Many new and aspiring consultants wonder what would be the best way to market their services. Traditional advertising is not usually a good fit for a consulting practice. Advertising in the print and broadcast media can cost many thousands of dollars. And it makes no sense to advertise to the public at large, 99% of whom will have no interest in specialized technological services.

That's why the Internet has become such a popular marketing tool for consultants and

other small business people. For the small price of hosting a web site, a small business can have its promotional materials out in a place where the entire world can see it. But millions of other people are doing the same thing. The big problem is not to get the message out there, but to get people to see it.

Fortunately the World Wide Web is by its nature interconnected; this is why Tim Berners-Lee chose the name in the first place. When browsing the web, people tend to follow links from one page to another. The ideal situation is to have links to your own site on well-known, frequently visited sites. Most of these valuable links require money.

One approach is to buy advertising from popular web sites. Globally popular sites such as aol.com would be both too costly and too general. Local news or business sites, or special-interest for a related field, would still be expensive but perhaps worthwhile, depending on your business. Web advertising comes in many forms, including banners, sidebars, pop-ups, and streaming video, all of which provide a link to your site. As with traditional advertising, the variables are cost and effectiveness. A typical Internet ad may get clicked on by one percent of the people who view it, with one percent of these viewings leading to an

actual sale. Consequently, most types of web advertising aren't suited to small, narrowly focused businesses such as a consulting practice.

A popular, and much less expensive, approach is to list your practice in a directory. Some are general directory sites, which include links to sites of all types, which are organized in categories by human reviewers. Some directory listings are free, such as the Open Directory Project at dmoz.org. The most famous for-profit directory site is yahoo.com, which charges \$299 per year for businesses to be included in their directory. This is cheap publicity, but be warned - if you neglect to follow their site guidelines, Yahoo may reject your site without a refund. Another problem is that professional services are a very small part of a general directory. A person looking for engineering talent may not know where to look.

There are more specific directories. The IEEE-USA site (ieeusa.org) has a Consultants' Database, which IEEE members can join for \$79 a year. There are other groups that exist primarily as directory services, such as the Software Contractors' Guild (scguild.com), which is only \$20. We in the Phoenix Area Consultants' Network have a directory on our own site, ieeepacn.com. All of these allow professionals to post resumes, with links to their own web pages if desired. They have the advantage of being specific and narrowly focused, with far fewer entries for the prospective customer to search through. On the other hand, people need to know that these directory exist, which is not a problem at well-known, widely-advertised sites such as Yahoo.

My own experience with web-based professional directories has been largely disappointing. I've had listings with all of the above sites except for Yahoo, and have never gotten work from any of them. I did have one contact from the IEEE-USA site, which was for an expert witness job for which I was unfortunately not qualified. (To be fair, I only ran the IEEE-USA listing for one year.) The problem with directories, I think, is a subset of the problem with web marketing itself. The directory sites must do a good job of marketing themselves, or they will not be very valuable.

There is however, one other significant factor in web marketing – the search engine. The widespread use of search engines allows consultants the theoretical possibility of attracting customers to their sites without paying for the privilege. In practice, setting up your site to take best advantage of search engines is not an easy task. That will be the subject of next month's column.

Vaughn Treude

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

by Clark Jones

Wow! Vaughn actually got an article to me early this month. Unfortunately, though, he doesn't, at this writing, know who is going to be our speaker. I plan to send a second, follow-up message when Vaughn informs me of the speaker and planned topic. Last

month's "surprise" speaker, Deek Harrison, speaking on hydrogen vehicles, was good, but I certainly wish I would have known in time to send out a note to the other mailing lists that I'm on. I suspect we would have had a better turnout.

I still hope to have my "upgrade" for the "ping-pong-ball catapult" ready to show. I've been quite busy the past few weeks, and so it is still not complete as I write this.

One comment about Vaughn's subject: "timeliness" is a very important factor in marketing. I just saw an ad (thanks to my Tivo) for an event last weekend – hmm, not much chance that I'll be attending that! (OK, I was already busy with the WNS.) I am, however, looking forward to seeing Vaughn's next column.

Clark

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