

Is a Web Page Advertising or Is It Content? And Why Should We Care?

Since the user always has a choice, the best "advertising" on the Internet is an invitation to the receiver to do something or learn something.

If you expect your Web page to advertise your company, product, or service effectively, part of the challenge as you construct it is learning to think in a different box. In fact, the term advertising as we currently understand and use it, is a misnomer when applied to the Web. Advertising as we presently define it in the bricks and mortar world is a push process — a product message is "pushed" at a passive receiver through print, broadcast, and other assorted mediums. The consumer has little interaction with the message and little control. Advertising of this type is an intrusive process, even though it is possible to turn the page or mute the sound.

Invite the User In

On the Internet, the procedure of communicating a product message is based on pull. An effective Internet page is constructed of content and context and "pulls" the user through its message.

Since the user always has a choice, the best "advertising" on the Internet is an invitation to the receiver to do something or learn something. Club Med's site (<http://www.clubmed.com>) invites you to find out more about "Life as it should be" — its tagline combined with a gorgeous picture of a snorkler enjoying a crystal blue ocean.

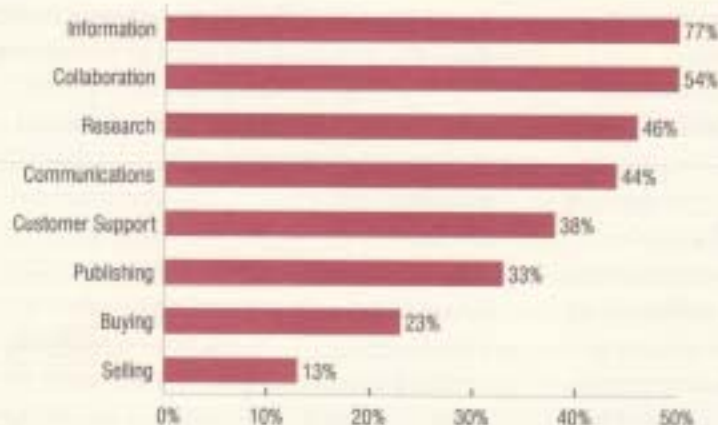
Clicking on the picture transfers you to a menu of choices, and clicking on Villages immediately takes you to a clickable map with sites from which you can choose. Click on a destination and a picture and description of the Club Med Village appears. From there you can access a reservation line. (At present, it is an 800 number, but there are plans to have online access.) There is also a section about Club Med's history and the philosophy that guides the company.

Even if you have no immediate plans for a vacation, you take away from the site a clear understanding of what Club Med is offering in the way of vacations, an idea of where the villages are, and something about why this company is unique in its market. All of that information will be used when making a purchasing decision.

Involve Consumers in the Process

"Advertising" on the Web is also about context and process. When you use the Internet to promulgate a message you do not do it by concentrating on pictures of the product. You need instead to create a process that your audience can use to understand your message. You need to provide a way for them to construct their own understanding of your product. It is an important part of that all essential "pull."

WWW Business Usage



Source: CommerceNet



Who's Developing "Brand" Web Sites?



"Advertising" on the Internet requires new thought processes and a different type of creativity and skills.

MCI's Gramercy Press site (<http://www.mci.com/gramercy/intro.html>) entices you into its message by involving you in an ongoing drama about business at Gramercy Press (billed as the world's first virtual publishing house). Clicking on the first picture takes you to Darlene, the receptionist, and clicking on her office computer brings up a screen that explains e-mailMCI. Other clicks enlarge the pictures on her wall or take you into the hall to another member of the staff's office. Clicking on that person's office yields information about other MCI services. This site informs and also adds entertainment to the mix. Users build their own knowledge of MCI as they navigate the site.

Another approach is the menu of services that the 1-800 FLOWERS home page (<http://www.800flowers.com>) offers users. You can sign up to be reminded about important dates, find sample messages that fit any occasion to use on cards, order presents to be delivered at future dates, and e-mail the gift expert for suggestions about what is appropriate for your gift. There is also information about caring for flowers and a section on the lore of flowers. Visitors to this site come away knowing that 800

Flowers has solutions for their problems — a well-proven technique for acquiring a customer and selling products.

Think About the Web as a Door-to-Door Sales Opportunity

The Internet is a direct sales medium something like the Fuller Brush man — able to talk to everyone individually. Businesses can explain their products one-on-one to their customers and potential customers. That message can be tailored to meet the needs of each consumer because the consumer can choose exactly what parts of the message will be looked at. The user decides how much information to take away from the site. Furthermore, that information is easily updated and available instantaneously to the consumer whenever needed.

The FedEx home page (<http://www.fedex.com>) allows users to access facts about FedEx and its services, track their own package through FedEx's system, or find out the cost of sending a package. Visitors to this site work one-on-one with FedEx to use its services and come away feeling that they have been personally served.

Conclusion

Taken all together, these principles add up to a much different advertising model than the one used for print or broadcast. "Advertising" on the Internet requires new thought processes and a different type of creativity and skills — rather like moving from playing one-dimensional Tic Tac Toe to playing the same game on a three-dimensional board. Simply translating print or broadcasting ads into a Web page on the Net is not enough. To create a successful Internet presence a company needs to recast its advertising strategy to take advantage of the unique pull of the Web and the communication tools the Internet offers. ■