

# Supplier Strategies for Web Success

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For what seems like a business eternity now, we have been hearing about the importance of a corporate website. Some people say having a website is absolutely critical to your success while others suggest that – depending on the industry – a website can be a nice addition to a marketing plan, but isn't a make-or-break prospect.

*Engine Builder* magazine has had a strong Internet presence since 1998. Our content-rich website is visited very often (in 2010 we had 728,000 visits from 630,000 unique visitors who looked at pages on our site 1.3 million times) and ranks consistently high in Google's search engine.

The number of visitors to our website has increased 22 percent year-to-date and the number of page views has climbed 32 percent. How have we achieved this?

We've implemented a carefully designed series of steps to build our Web presence:

- We port and polish each one of our headlines for maximum impressiveness;
- We use only high-octane fuel in our website search engine to make it run smoother;
- To make pages load as smoothly as possible even on older computers, we care-

fully machine our website to a mirror-finish 13 Ra;

- We're currently in the process of supercharging our servers to maximize our speed with heavier-than-anticipated Web traffic;

- Each of our Web pages is hand-assembled in an environmentally controlled clean room; and

- We run each feature and column on our in-house Internet dyno to guarantee power and impact.

Of course, none of that is true. We haven't used any fancy imaginary tricks to build our website over the past 14 years – we've been able to maximize our presence by doing things the same way we've grown our magazine over the past 48 years: by providing content that helps our readers and suppliers grow.

Many of those same suppliers are justifiably proud of their Internet presence as well. To find out some of the keys to developing and implementing a website, we spoke with the six sponsors of this special Suppliers Website Directory. Today, engine builders' primary source of information is supplier ads in targeted trade publications – but further detailed research on product information is often done through supplier

websites.

How can suppliers make sure those searches are fruitful? Tom Jensen, Internet business consultant and owner of Veridean Technologies Solutions, says that while website design projects are often started just because business owners feel they need a site, they quickly find the REAL goal of the project is often much more challenging.

"Many business owners ask 'How much will it cost?' and 'How long will it take?' when starting a Web project, says Jensen. "However, the first priority should be to define your online expectations: what are you trying to accomplish with your website and how can you use the Internet to better interact with your customers?"

Jensen says you can think of your website as another, albeit virtual employee.

"If you were going to hire a new salesperson, chances are you would have expectations for how that person will interact with potential customers, whom he or she would target, and what he or she would promote. You also would give consideration to what marketing tools you would provide and the person's appearance when representing the company. As your only employee working all day, everyday, your website deserves the same consideration."



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“Since we implemented our website more than 10 years ago, it’s changed to include more depth, more information and better graphics,” say Scat Enterprise’s Craig Schenasi. “The website is very important to our marketing efforts now and moving forward.

Schenasi says education is Scat’s main priority. “Our goal, of course, is to educate our customers and end users on our company, our new products, technical information and our entire product line.”

Many of us can remember when fax technology was exciting – a multi-page document could be transmitted across the country in a matter of moments! Now, of course, moments is too long and if it isn’t instant, it’s too slow.

Jack McGinnis, Dart Machinery, agrees that expectations keep changing, so the most effective Web sites must as well.

“The website is very important because people have come to expect more or less instant access to information. Making it easy for your customers to get answers to their questions is vital,” says McGinnis. “The Web is the medium people turn to right now. It’s always on.”

Bob Davis, Sunnen Products says meeting those expectations can be challenging. “Consumers have high expectations when looking for information or shopping on the Internet. It is very expensive and time consuming to keep the website fresh and

up-to-date with current Internet operational standards. We are committed to do so but it is a challenge to do so.

Davis believes, however, that meeting that challenge and keeping his company’s website fresh is smart business, even in a traditionally “older” market such as this.

“Many within the industry believe end users still prefer paper catalogs and won’t order via the web site. Analytical data disproves this over and over again. Our engine rebuilding customers use our online order function at a higher percentage than the other industries we serve,” Davis says. “We try to think about how business will be conducted in the future, not just today.”

Mike Pfau, from Jasper Engines & Transmissions, agrees on the importance of information accessibility. “Our website provides us with tremendous reach to individuals and businesses. It also allows our installer and fleet customers to conduct business online at their convenience and allows 24-hour access to a wealth of information on our company and products. It provides information that we could not otherwise make available logistically or from a cost standpoint.

Pfau says, more than just information, the growth of the internet means legitimate business opportunities can be shared as well. “It allows us to communicate product information to a large audience of vehicle owner and then allows them to locate an installer near them. Our E-

Commerce Portal for installers and fleets provides an additional means of making it easy to do business with us.

Eric Smith, from Smith Advertising, echoes that in today’s global online business world, Web site are very important and it is the center of all marketing activity. “It is the best way to connect and have a presence 24/7 365 all around the world,” he says.

Smith, whose company is responsible for maintaining Melling’s Web presence, says online growth shows no sign of diminishing in importance.

“Moving forward, Melling.com will continue to be a very important part of our marketing plan. We put high priority on making improvements, additions, and updates to it based on how site viewers are using it and what they expect to be on there,” Smith says. “In fact, since everything online can be connected, a good quality website is just one part of your online marketing program.

Smith points out that Facebook has 750 million users, Twitter has 250 million users, and YouTube receives millions of page views per month. Because of these staggering numbers, using these other online platforms in an integrated marketing plan is essential.

“Web site now have to be considered a part of your online ‘Marketing Circle,’ by which I mean this,” explains Smith:

- Your website can show links to your Facebook Pages, Twitter Profiles, and

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YouTube Videos

• Your Facebook Page updates can provide link to articles and pages on your website and to your videos on YouTube

• Your “tweets” on Twitter should always have a link to lead the reader to somewhere: your site, a video, a trade show event listed on your page, etc!

“Connecting all of these together is very important,” Smith says.

Ted Hughes, of MAHLE Clevite says he recognizes the challenges he and his counterparts face in meeting these rapidly changing expectations.

“The biggest challenges come from staying current with the always changing technology. For example, the electronic world is now moving to Social Media – more people visit Facebook every

day than Google. This poses a challenge as it is an all-new place that we need to worry about getting information distributed to. Combine that with new technology in electronic commerce, and we have our hands full.”

Hughes says that, despite these hurdles, the Web is a boon to his business.

“Our Web Site is more important now than it has ever been – and will continue to grow in importance. It is the easiest and most economical way of delivering information to both our customers and the general public – always updated in real time.”

## Know Your Online Goals

Jensen believes a strong Web strategy will focus on two key objectives: traffic generation and conversion.

“Traffic generation is all about getting as many folks as possible to visit your site. Many businesses wait until their site is completed before looking at how to drive traffic. However, identifying traffic sources early in the process can help define the components of your website,” he says.

In other words, if you need email addresses in order to make communication via newsletter a part of your marketing plan, a means of collecting e-mail addresses should be prominent on your website.

“Conversion,” explains Jensen, “is simply the process of taking Web visitors and converting them into customers. Your website’s ‘flow’ (the specifics of how you are going to get visitors to call or buy) is much more important than the ‘look,’ but a winning website will blend these two aspects into a single experience. Determine your most significant competitive advantage and be sure it is used both subtly in the website’s presentation and more obviously in the information you place on your valuable ‘home page.’”

And most importantly, explains Jensen and others, make it easy to contact you or easy to buy. Don’t hide your street address, your phone numbers or your email address – place it all in a highly visible location on every page. Overall design reflect those abilities.

## Growth Potential

“Your website can truly help grow your business by reaching potential customers 24/7,” says Veridean’s Jensen. “Often this is the first impression customers will have of your business.”

Of course, the first impression is just part of the program – having a site that is impressive a second or third time (and even more) is the real goal. And to a man, our Supplier Sponsors recognize the moving target that is the ideal Internet site.

“The Sunnen website, like most websites, is a work in progress and we are never totally happy with it even though we have been told many times by our customers that it is one of the best in the industry,” says Davis. “We are constantly updating it, adding pages and features and improving functionality.”

Hughes agrees. “Complacency is a recipe for failure. Just when you get it where you want it, something changes and you’ll be playing catch-up again.” **EB**

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