

Title:

Building a better Brick-and-Mortar with the Billion-dollar Web

Word Count:

760

Summary:

More than \$117 billion passed hands from Internet shoppers to Internet vendors in 2004, according to the statistical research firm comScore. That's billion, with a B. Compared to the year before, the figure represents a whopping 24 percent increase in sales. Compared to the early 1990s, when the Web was a questionable commercial venture, today's \$117 billion is proof-positive that the Web is the full-fledged money-making machine.

Keywords:

brick and mortar, retail, ecommerce, shopping, business

Article Body:

More than \$117 billion passed hands from Internet shoppers to Internet vendors in 2004, according to the statistical research firm comScore. That's billion, with a B. Compared to the year before, the figure represents a whopping 24 percent increase in sales. Compared to the early 1990s, when the Web was a questionable commercial venture, today's \$117 billion is proof-positive that the Web is the full-fledged money-making machine. It seems to be a big enough pie that any merchant with a Web site can cut out his heaping slice.

Not so fast. As any merchant who's tried to take a bite out of the Internet will tell you, turning a profit online is not as simple as throwing a few pages together. Professional Web sites cost big bucks for design, consultation, and upkeep. Either you have to hire a full-time editor or technician to manage your Web store, or you need to pay three-digit hourly rates to contract Web professionals. Then you have to face fees for Web hosting, broadband access, and IT maintenance.

Even after you expend all of this capital and launch your Web site, you're still not guaranteed anything. Your site will only be one among millions, if not billions. Yes, that's billions with a B again. The Internet, after all, is like a clear sky on a dark night. How can you expect a customer to pick your star out from among all of the others that shimmer for their attention?

On the Web you'll quickly learn that attracting your clientele—and building your

Internet-based business—is just as tough as it was when you first started your brick-and-mortar shop. It takes smart investing, creative marketing, a little luck, and a lot more know-how.

What's great about the business side of the Web, however, is that your old-fashioned know-how translates quite well on the Web. A great example is the timeless merchant adage: "Location, location, location." This saying holds true on the Web, too. You can place your store's site in a spot on the Web where no one will discover you, or you could position it on a "busy corner" on the Internet.

One such spot are online classified sites. These sites provide similar services as you would get from a newspaper classified. Sellers can place ads online that describe a particular product for sale. Buyers browse these ads and contact sellers when they're interested. Online classifieds, though, are far more dynamic. They allow a merchant to display dozens, if not hundreds, of their goods with pictures and descriptions. And believe it or not, some online classified sites allow you to do this for free. Yes, that's free with an F.

The benefits don't stop there. As a merchant on a classified site, you can enjoy:

- A store that never closes. Your goods are for sale 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The Internet never turns off.
- A mall of online shoppers. Think of a classified site as a virtual shopping mall, with your grouping of ads under your own virtual storefront. By having a storefront, this allows you to have your own web page and listings, under the umbrella of the classified site.
- A chain reaction of shopping. "Real" shoppers go to a mall to visit one store, but often they end up browsing through all of the stores in the mall. The same is true of virtual shoppers. Even when they visit a classified site looking for one particular thing, they're likely to "spill over" to your storefront out of curiosity. At the very least, it leads to advertising for your store; at best, business.
- An advantage over pure Web merchants. Your classified site will pit you against wily online vendors who only sell their wares on the Web. This is where your brick-and-mortar business comes in handy. It's proven that shoppers seem to trust online merchants that have a real address and a real store somewhere.
- A solution to the intricacies of the Internet. Many classified sites can

help with setting up your ads and with designing your storefront, providing you with instant IT IQ. For your buyers, the sites offer the security that Web shoppers demand to protect them from identify theft and fraud.

As mentioned before, many classified sites charge absolutely nothing for all of these benefits. The listings, the shopping traffic, the sense of business community, the advertising—you receive all of these perks for free. Oh, and don't forget your piece of the \$117 billion dollar pie.