

Key Steps To Develop A Web Site

Agriculture Insights

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In the past few years, the Internet has become an important component of the business community. There is an estimated 165 million people on the Web, with the Web doubling in size every 50 days. The Federal Government reported e-commerce sales during the fourth quarter of 1999 at \$5.3 billion. With projections of over \$40 billion by the end of this year, the Internet may be an opportunity for your business to experience growth.

According to a recent USDA report, over 29% of farms are reporting Internet access. This trend is growing quickly, when looking at 1997's statistics of only 13% of farmers on the Internet. If your farm or business has considered starting a web site to tap into this growing market, now might be the time. As much of the agriculture economy is

struggling to remain profitable, a web site may help you reach new markets you may have never considered.

The Electronic Commerce Resource Center (ECRC) serves as a catalyst for small and medium sized businesses to adopt electronic commerce. The first step they recommend when considering a web site is to define the purpose. Researching your competitor's web sites is an excellent way to help formulate your own web site ideas. You may want to generate leads, provide information, provide customer support, or transact business. Your purpose along with the goals you want to achieve will help define the structure of your web site.

A second step is to determine your target audience. Analyze their demographics, geographic location, technical skills, etc. to

determine a usage profile. What does your target market want? Is it to purchase quality products and services, to save money, to save time, to obtain useful information? Through answering these questions you can continue to step three: develop a strategy for your web site. Your strategy may be to build brand identity, demonstrate products or services, educate your audience, facilitate direct responses or to just sell more product.

After your strategy has been developed, step four is to determine your budget. Your annual expenses in designing and maintaining a web site may range from a few thousand to \$100,000 or more, depending on what level of quality and service it requires. You must weigh these expenses against the potential revenue you may gain in new sales, advertising, timesaving, and customer satisfaction.

Step five is then determining the content of your web site based on your budget. Some considerations to offer on your web site are your company information, product and service information, address, contact methods, interactivity, an online catalog, a privacy policy,

purchase methods, search methods, security information and a site map. Once you have reached the point where you feel confident in what your business would like to offer on a web site, you can begin contacting web hosts and gain some proposals of costs. The web site www.thelist.com, is an excellent ISP pricing tool in which you enter your area code and gain a listing of comparable Internet Service Provider's in your area.

Upon deciding on your ISP, you may begin to construct your web site. Your ISP may be able to assist you in this process, or you may work with an independent web designer. It is important that you design a web site which truly meets your objectives and is customer friendly. There are numerous decisions to make such as selecting your domain name, structure, graphics, layout and speed of your web site in which your ISP and web designer will help you decide. Through working closely with a web designer they should be able to tailor a web site that best fits your

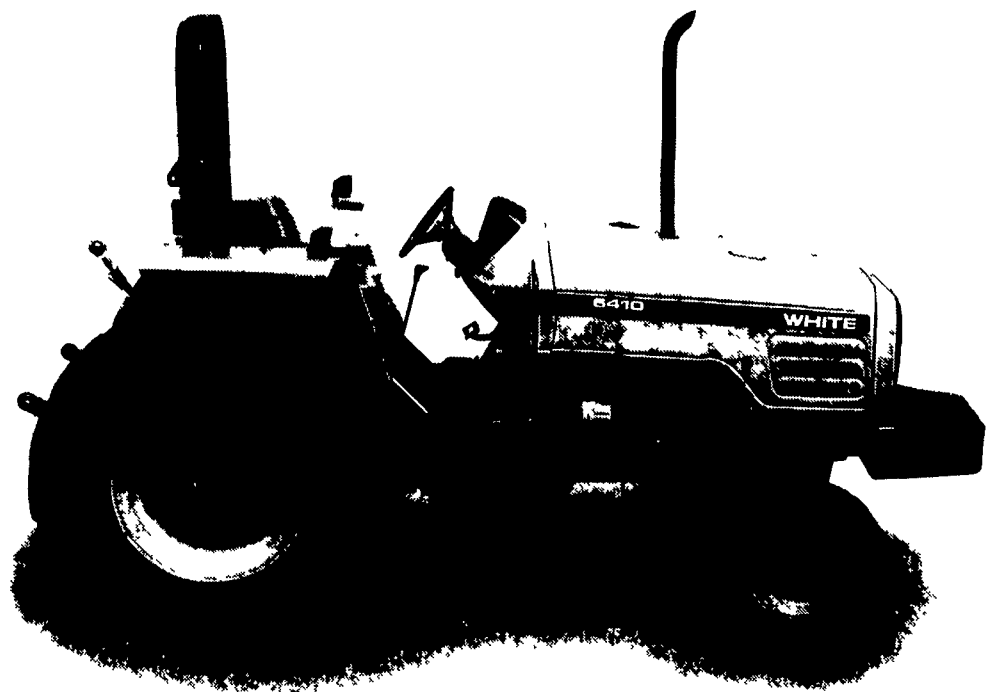
needs. In order to keep your web site fresh and up to date, maintenance is a key consideration.

Depending on the objective of your web site it may require constant revision to be effective. Schedule regular updates to content and incorporate feedback generated by customer suggestions. The more current you can keep your web site, the happier your customers will be and more likely to use it.

Your business may have the potential to grow in this new e-commerce industry. You must determine the exact fit a web site could have for your business and explore the venture as if it was any normal business decision. Proper planning is the key step in running a successful web site.

For more information on web sites, you may contact the West Chester Electronic Commerce Resource Center at 888-745-3748, your local Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Feel free to send your comments or questions by email to Brent Landis at blandis@lcci.com, or call him at 717-397-3531, ext. 62.

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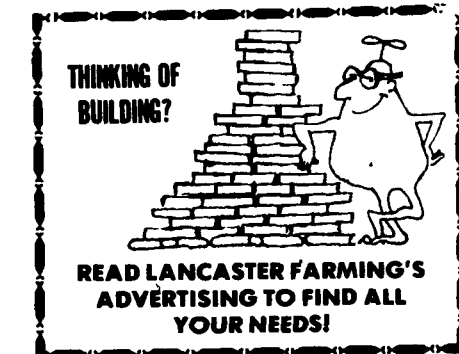
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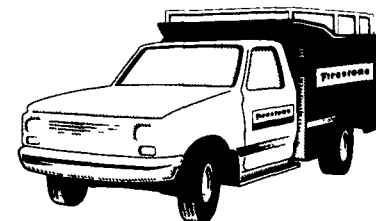
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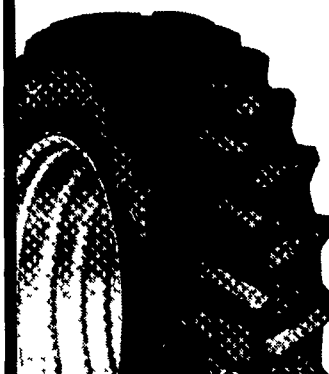


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