Poor Richard's
TOP 100 TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS ONLINE

Some of the Best Advice
from the *Poor Richard's* Series

We've gathered together 100 of the best tips from the *Poor Richard's* series of geek-free, ebusiness books in a quick, easy-to-follow format. *Poor Richard's Top 100 Tips for Doing Business Online* contains tips for:

- Improving your Web site design and content
- Attracting more visitors to your Web site
- Using other people's Web sites and ezines to promote your site
- Measuring your results

The tips are excerpted from the following books in the *Poor Richard's* series and offer a small preview of the information contained in the books.

Poor Richard's Web Site by Peter Kent

Poor Richard's Internet Marketing and Promotions by Peter Kent and Tara Calishain

Poor Richard's E-mail Publishing by Chris Pirillo

Poor Richard's Building Online Communities By Margaret Levine Young and John Levine

Poor Richard's Internet Recruiting by Barbara Ling

Poor Richard's Creating E-Books by Chris Van Buren and Matt Wagner

Poor Richard's Home and Small Office Networking by John Mueller

Poor Richard's Branding Yourself Online by Bob Baker (Available July 2001)

Poor Richard's Web Site News, a free email newsletter written by Peter Kent and distributed to more than 60,000 subscribers. To subscribe visit http://PoorRichard.com/newsltr/

To order books in the *Poor Richard's* series, visit http://TopFloor.com/ or call 877-693-4676. They are also available through your favorite bookstore or online retailer.

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Note: This document contains bookmarks for each tip. To view Bookmarks in a PDF document, go to the Window pull down menu and select "Show Bookmarks." To quickly jump to a tip, just select it's bookmark.

20 RULES FOR BETTER WEB SITE DESIGN

1. Make Sure the Visual Elements Reinforce Your Company or Brand Identity

The essence of your company can most likely be summarized using words; but your identity is also accompanied by many intangible qualities. Brands are as much about attitudes, feelings, and emotions as they are about factual information. The overall look of your Web site must support these defining factors. Is your brand identity best served by hard edges or softer, rounded shapes? Do primary colors capture the company philosophy or would earth tones be a better match? Experiment and find the right fit before settling on a design scheme.

2. Forget Cool, Think Useful

You can't compete with TV, you can't compete with movies, you can't even compete with entertainment Web sites. Luckily there's no *need* to compete, though, because what really counts is making your site useful, not cool.

3. Lead Visitors Where You Want Them to Go

While your content may fulfill the needs of your visitors, your site design should guide them naturally to the places you want them to go. For instance, before visitors can download a sample chapter of a book, they might be shown a page that makes them aware of the full-length version and how to order it. Determine your goals and find a way to deliver value to your visitors while also getting what you want.

4. Offer Clear, Limited Choices

Some Web sites are so cluttered with navigation bars, banner ads, links, promotional blurbs, image maps, and the like, it's difficult to choose what to do first. Make it too hard for your visitors and they may decide to go elsewhere. Decide what information is most important for your visitors, particularly on your home page, and resist the urge to add more information.

5. Let Visitors Know What Your Site is About

The worst thing you can do is promote your Web site, get curious people to take a first look, and confuse the heck out of them when they arrive. View your home page through the eyes of a new visitor. Does it spell out exactly what you offer and what your brand stands for? If not, redesign it so it does. Also, remember that many people will arrive at your site through a secondary page, especially if they hear about it through a search engine or recommendation. Therefore, every page needs to explain what your site is about.

6. Avoid Long, Scrolling Pages

Sites overdo page length on both sides of the issue. Some sites make visitors scroll through endless reams of announcements, news items, articles, and more—all on a single page. The solution is to break things up. As a general rule, design with one item or concept per page. Provide a menu to related pages. On the other hand, don't break things up too much. Some experts contend that Web pages shouldn't be any longer than one screen length. As a result, many Web sites force readers to hit a Next button and wait for a new page to load before they can continue reading a relatively short

article. If the content on a single page takes up only two or three screens, it's easier to do a little scrolling than to keep hyperlinking to more pages.

7. Use Simple, Clean Layouts

Basic is better when it comes to Web site design. That doesn't mean your site has to be boring. Your goal is to keep your pages clutter free, using lots of white space to allow visual breathing room. Have fun with your page layout; but make sure every design choice you make helps you communicate your brand identity.

8. Keep a Consistent Theme Throughout

Most designers start by creating the home page, since that's the page most people see first. That's a smart move as long as you carry the home page's look and feel throughout the rest of your site. Wherever the navigation menu is positioned on your home page, make sure the menu is in that same spot on every other page. If you use a fuchsia-colored border under the logo on one page, use fuchsia on all pages. Got it?

9. Think Big—Type, That Is

Along with creating a simple, clean design, you also want a site that is easy to read. Don't make surfers squint to absorb your information. Make it as easy as possible for people to get the details they want. Avoid putting small text on colored or busy backgrounds.

10. Use Color Tastefully and Sparingly

Color is a funny thing. Used properly, color can have a good impact. Used irresponsibly, it can look ugly, scream "amateur site, run for your life," and cause thousands to get queasy instantly. Make sure your Web site color choices lean more toward the former.

11. Provide Navigation Along the Top, Left Side, and Bottom

When people surf the Web, they love to slip and slide from site to site and page to page. Make sure each of your pages has easy-to-find navigation options along the top and bottom of the page. When visitors come to the end of an article, don't make them scroll all the way back up to the top to get to their next destination. Most well designed pages also have menu options in a left column. In this column, you can either duplicate the navigation options you offer at the top and bottom or create a separate set of links to pages directly related to the content on that page.

12. Adhere to the Three-Click Rule

Many experts advise that any piece of information on your site should be no further than three clicks away from your home page. I suggest you go further and limit the rule to two clicks. Think of your home page as the first level. All pages you provide a link to from the home page would be considered the second level. Any additional pages you direct people to from the second level would be considered the third level. Third-level pages are two clicks away from the home page. Don't create pages that go any deeper than the third level, if you can help it.

13. Stay Away From Autoplay Sounds

For some reason, many Web site owners love heaping musical ditties on visitors the minute they

arrive. It may seem like a good idea; but autoplay sounds take extra time to load. They can also come blaring out of someone's speakers when he or she least expects it, for example, at work near the boss's office or at home when the baby is sleeping.

14. Check for Browser Compatibility

The most common Web browsers display pages in pretty much the same way; but there are variations. The last time I checked statistics; close to 80 percent of Internet users listed Microsoft's Internet Explorer as their browser of choice. You definitely want to make sure your site is designed to accommodate Bill Gates' favorite browser. However, Netscape Navigator is still used by a significant number of people, as are many other, lesser-known browsers. Try to view your Web pages using different browsers to make sure everything displays correctly. Three sites that can help you determine the browser-friendliness of your pages are **Net Mechanic** (http://www.netmechanic.com/maintain.htm), **Web Site Garage** (http://websitegarage.netscape.com/), and **AnyBrowser.com** (http://www.anybrowser.com/).

15. Update Your Site Often

While your goal should be to make your site appealing to first-time visitors, you also need to give visitors good reasons to return. Keep your site fresh by adding new content on a regular basis. That doesn't mean you should make radical changes to your design all the time, but you can add new articles, products, giveaways, and so on.

16. Go Easy on the Gizmos.

Though the free-enterprise system is trying hard to make it one, the Web is *not* currently set up to be a multimedia entertainment center. I once heard morning radio jock Howard Stern joke about how he waited an hour to download a movie clip that eventually played in a grainy frame about two-inches wide. He suddenly realized that in the next room was a life-size TV hooked up to 120 clear-channel cable stations. Why do people continue to squeeze basketball-size media files through a connection the size of a garden hose? Your visitors will reward you if you chill out on the special effects and don't force them to download dozens of plug-ins to view your pages.

17. Make Good Use of Page Titles

This is a simple but often-overlooked design tip. The words you put between the `<Title>` and `</Title>` tags show up at the top of your visitor's browser. Those words are also indexed by many search engines. Make sure they describe the specific page, your name, and some reference to your brand image. Commercial HTML editing programs generally provide an easy way to insert page titles.

18. Stick With Standard Link Colors

Certain standards have developed on the Web. One of those standards concerns the colors given to various types of hyperlinks. Blue is used for unvisited links, red for an active link as it is being clicked, and purple for links that have been recently visited. With all the skepticism that exists on the Internet, your brand will benefit by providing your visitors with some surfing standards they can count on.

19. Use Hyperlinks, Especially Within Your Site

One of the most appealing aspects of the Web is its interconnectivity. Some of the best sites encourage visitors to bounce around from page to page within the site—or even section to section on the same page. One article can reference a topic covered in another article. Instead of plainly stating, *You'll find more information on Labradors in my FAQ on hunting dogs*, make the words *FAQ on hunting dogs* an active hyperlink that takes the reader straight to that page.

20. Conduct Informal Usability Research

Once you've come up with a site design plan you're happy with, invite a few friends over who know little about your planned site. Have them visit your home page. Ask them to tell you what the site is about; then ask them to browse around and click what interests them. Observe the pages they go to and which navigation links they use to get there. Next, give them specific tasks: Place an order; subscribe to the newsletter, and so on. Note which steps come easily and which ones reveal obstacles. This isn't rocket science; but this kind of casual research will help you find your site's strengths and weaknesses quickly.

5 QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR SITE

1. Find and Fix Broken Links and Other Errors

There are a number of online services that can check your site for problems. You can set these to run automatically on a schedule, and to send you a report. The checkers can do various things, from checking links to spell checking and HTML checking. Most of these services provide free demo reports, by the way—they'll check a few pages, maybe even 100, on your site and send you the report so you can see what you'll get when you sign up.

LinkAlarm: http://LinkAlarm.com/
Doctor HTML and RxHTMLPro: http://www2.imagiware.com/
NetMechanic: http://www.NetMechanic.com/
Web Site Garage: http://websitegarage.netscape.com/
Tucows Library: http://www.tucows.com/
Dr. Watson: http://watson.addy.com/
And more ...
http://dir.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Data_Formats/HTML/Validation_and_Checkers/

2. Make Sure Your Site Looks Good in All Browsers

One of the biggest frustrations for anyone creating Web pages is the fact that what looks fine in one browser may look terrible in another. It's an unfortunate fact that not all browsers are equal. How, then, do you avoid problems? Really the only way to be sure is to check your work in different browsers. Which? Well, there's the problem. There are so many different browsers, versions of browsers, and operating systems, that there's no way you'll be able to check all the possibilities.

NetMechanic at http://www.NetMechanic.com/ has set up a service called Browser Photo. This service tests your pages on 14 different browser/operating system combinations, a combination of AOL, Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, WebTV, and Opera (including 11 different Explorer and Navigator versions), a variety of different screen sizes, and three different operating systems: PC, iMac, and WebTV.

3. Add a Heading or Tag Line to Your Name Plate

The name of a product or a company is rarely in itself a compelling marketing message. Therefore you should hardly ever head a Web page with the name of the product or company. Instead, craft a compelling statement of the benefit someone gets out of buying the product or doing business with the firm. After that hook you can introduce the identity of the Web page's sponsor.

4. Include a Guarantee and a Privacy Statement

If you're selling something on your site, a guarantee will help take away the feeling of risk. If you're a smaller, relatively unknown company you need to establish credibility fast. Offering a guarantee will increase orders more than it will cost in returned items. You also should include a privacy statement when asking visitors to provide information, namely their e-mail address.

4 EXCELLENT ENHANCEMENTS FOR YOUR WEB SITE

1. Add a Search Engine to Your Site in 10 Minutes

Here's a system you can use to add a search engine to your site with just a few minutes work. The system provides search reports, so you can see what visitors are searching for; automatically generated site maps (a "tree" showing the relationship of pages); automatically generated What's New lists; and scheduled re-indexing. You can omit certain pages, or even parts of a page, from the search, modify a page's ranking, and so on.

There is one catch. When a visitor to your site is using the search system, ads will be displayed on the results page. If that's okay with you, visit http://www.FreeFind.com/ to see how it works and to sign up for service.

Here are two other similar services:

Atomz: http://Atomz.com/
SearchButton.com: http://www.searchbutton.com/

2. Run Auctions at Your Web Site... With Free Software

Have you considered setting up an auction program at your Web site? I ran into an open source program recently for managing auctions. "Open source" software is free software—you can use it without paying for it. It's software that is created by programmers who come together—in a metaphorical sense, because often these programmers never meet each other, or even talk with each other on the phone. The interesting thing about Open Source is how it develops almost organically. Programmers add things that interest them—instead of having a long-term development plan, the program develops in an unforeseen direction, dependent on the whims of the programmers involved. The program in question is **EveryAuction**, and you can find it here:
http://www.everysoft.com/auction/

3. Add "Viewlet" Content to Your Site ... Free

Viewlets are little Java-based animations that can be used to demonstrate a process of some kind. At the **Qarbon.com** site http://www.Qarbon.com/ you'll find viewlets demonstrating how to use AOL menus and tools, how to work with Web browsers, how to use PowerPoint, how to work with Linux, and so on. (At the moment they're mostly used for demonstrating software, but you could put any kind of images into them to demonstrate any process, really.)

As the viewlets are Java applets, they won't work in all browsers, but they will work in most: Internet Explorer 4.0, Netscape 4.06, AO1 4.0 and later on MS Windows (unfortunately they won't work in Mac versions of Netscape until Netscape upgrades its Java support for the Mac).

Creating viewlets is very easy. Qarbon.com provide a special tool to help you drop images into the viewlet and add your own text callouts; you can use voice-overs, too.

4. Set Up a Discussion Group on Your Site

Many Web sites use discussion groups (also known as a bulletin boards, message boards, and sometimes a Web forum) as a way for people to discuss your products or simply as a service to people—a way to attract them to your Web site. For instance, setting up a discussion group for people interested in emus is one way to make your emu-lovers' site stand out. A discussion group can

be part of an overall package that makes a site popular with a certain group of people, just one more element that attracts people to your site and keeps them coming back. You can even set up several groups for different purposes; once you've set up one, it's quite easy to set up another.

Here's another way to use a discussion group. Set up a weeklong discussion with a celebrity or well-known person in your field. Your emu site might invite a successful emu farmer, a music site might invite a musician, a company selling software might invite the author of a book about their software, and so on. For one week, or however long this person is willing to take part, people can visit your site to pose questions and read the celebrity's responses.

There are a number of ways to create discussion groups. FrontPage has a wizard that helps you build one. If you're not using FrontPage, you might use a utility service to set one up—there are a number of places that will allow you to build discussion groups at their sites, and link into them from your own so that it appears to be part of your site. Here are a few such services:

Cybersites, http://www.cybersites.com/
Delphi, http://www.delphi.com/
eCircles.com, http://www.ecircles.com/
EdGateway, http://edgateway.net/
EVine, http://www.evine.com/
Excite Communities, http://www.excite.com/communities/
FriendFactory, http://www.friendfactory.com/
InterClubs, http://interclubs.com/
JointPlanning, http://www.jointplanning.com/
Lycos Clubs, http://clubs.lycos.com/
Network54, http://network54.com/
Yahoo!—Clubs, http://clubs.yahoo.com/

8 ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD *ALREADY* BE DOING TO PROMOTE YOUR WEB SITE

1. Publish an E-Mail Newsletter

But why distribute an e-mailed publication instead of (or alongside) putting up a website? Think about your own web surfing habits. Do you visit new sites everyday? Do you visit sites frequently? Which sites do you frequent most often? Which sites are most interesting to you? What do those sites provide to you that is of value? These are the things to keep in mind when you go to design your own page, and/or your own e-mail publication.

When individuals visit any given web page, they might stay there for 10-20 seconds before their attention span fades away. Either their attention is drawn to something else, they click on another link which leads them away from your site, or they simply get bored. So, your first (main) page needs to have enough information to entice that user. Unless you have something worth returning for, they're probably never going to return. Sure, they might bookmark it, they may even put a link to your site on their own web page, but the chances are slim that they're going to keep coming back to you regularly.

However, if you can show visitors what you have to offer up front and get them to subscribe to your e-mailed publication, then you're going to have them as captive audience members until they decide to unsubscribe. You don't have to count on them to revisit your website at all; they're going to receive your e-zine whether or not they're online when it arrives in their e-mailbox. Get them to join, and then send them on their merry way.

2. Offer Free E-Mail Courses

Once you write and set up an email course, it becomes an incredibly easy and effective way to promote your site and your products. An e-mail course is a short series of lessons delivered, of course, by e-mail. Interested students sign up by sending an e-mail to an autoresponder address of your choice. To set one up, you'll need to use an autoresponder service that has follow-up message capabilities. Many autoresponders that come with basic Web-hosting packages are often of the one-shot variety. That means the autoresponder will send only one return message and that's it. You can either ask your Web host if it offers a multiple-message option, or you can use a free online autoresponder service, such as

> **GetResponse.com**, http://www.getresponse.com/
> **SendFree**, http://www.sendfree.com/
> **FastFacts.net**, http://www.fastfacts.net/

What type of material should you offer in an e-mail course? The best source of ideas is the list of articles you have written or are thinking about writing on your area of expertise. Let's say you're a wedding planner and you just wrote an excellent article called Five Steps to Planning a Memorable Wedding Reception. Each step consists of at least three or four paragraphs. Instead of offering this wonderful advice as another free article, split the steps into five lessons to be delivered via an e-mail course.

To go the e-mail course route, simply insert the wedding reception planning steps into your autoresponder files and instruct the system how to deliver them. Lesson one will always be delivered instantly whenever someone sends an e-mail to ReceptionPlans@autoresponder.com (or whatever your

autoresponder e-mail address is). You determine when follow-up lessons are sent. You could send one lesson every day for five days or send them every other day to spread the course out over 10 days. If your course requires recipients to do a week of activities between lessons, you'd have the autoresponder send out messages seven days apart. The beauty of autoresponder e-mail courses is that, once they're set up, all these messages are sent to interested people without any effort on your part.

3. Submit Articles to other E-Mail Newsletters and Sites

It should be easy for you to position yourself as an expert that other Webmasters and e-zine editors will want to expose to their audiences. You should already be creating content for your own site and newsletter. While you may decide to make select portions of your content exclusively available through your own vehicles, most of your content should be freely shared with the world. I'm not talking about material you write that's sold in books and other formats; material from those projects should be reserved for paying customers. What we're addressing now are the many articles, columns, and tips you publish with the sole intent of spreading them far and wide.

Why will Webmasters and e-zine editors be interested in the free content you have to offer? Here are some of the reasons:

- E-zines need quality content that inspires subscribers to open their e-mail and read it.
- Web sites need useful content to draw first-time visitors.
- Webmasters need to update their sites constantly to get return visitors.
- Good content is hard to find.
- Experts on specialized topics are even harder to find.
- Most marketers offering free content are turned down because they fill their articles with self-serving hype.

Starting today, begin viewing your written expertise as a valuable, in-demand commodity you can use to help others while meeting your own needs. In return for the use of your material, Webmasters and e-zine editors give you access to their audiences—the type of exposure that plants mental seeds that will soon sprout into full-blown recognition of you and your brand identity. When your articles, columns, and tips carry the right type of author attribution, this exposure will also motivate thousands of people to subscribe to your e-zine and visit your Web site.

Here are a few places to announce that you have free articles available:

Ezine Articles, http://www.ezinearticles.com/
FreeSticky.com, http://www.freesticky.com/
Idea Marketers, http://www.ideamarketers.com/

4. Set up an Affiliate Program

There are two sides to the affiliate game. Most people are playing the game by signing up with affiliate programs, then linking from their Web sites to the site running the affiliate program ... hoping to make money in the form of commissions. It's very easy to get started, and hundreds of thousands of people have already done so. Amazon.com claims to have 400,000 affiliates (or "associates," as they call them), for instance.

Of course there's another way to play the affiliate game ... you can set up an affiliate program yourself, linked to a shopping-cart system, then recruit other Web sites to send business to you.

One of the largest directories of affiliate programs on the Web, AssociatePrograms.com, lists just

2694 different programs. Of the millions of businesses operating on the Internet, just a few thousand have managed to not only set up a shopping-cart system of some kind, but to also integrate an affiliate program into it.

Why? Because it's difficult to do so. There are a number of programs available to help you do it (a few are listed in the Links page mentioned above), but in general they are either expensive, or complicated to install ... or both. Some e-commerce systems have very crude affiliate systems, systems that require, for instance, that you add each affiliate by hand. You really need a system by which affiliates can sign up for themselves—everything should be automated.

If you're looking for a good affiliate program, you might check out **AffiliateTracking.net**, http://affiliatetracking.net/. It's a great little program, with features such as these:

- Automatic affiliate signup and assignment of affiliate links
- Affiliate statistics page, so affiliates can see the number of click throughs, sales, and commissions
- The ability to pay commissions based on click throughs, sales, or "sub affiliates" (when an affiliate signs up another affiliate)
- A series of reports and tools to help you track who you owe and how much you owe
- You can specify how many days an affiliate "owns" a visitor that the affiliate site has directed to your site (if the visitor buys from you after the expiration period, you don't owe the affiliate a commission)
- Each time an affiliate order is logged the system can, if you wish, send a notification to the affiliate and to you
- A payment tracking module, to help you pay the correct commissions
- A mail system for sending an e-mail to all the affiliates at once (great for announcing special promotions!)

5. Giveaway E-Books

Free e-books are growing in popularity on the Internet for good reason. Here are just a few things you can do with a free e-book:

- Give it away from your site.
- Convince other Web sites and e-zines to give it away.
- Offer it as a freebie for new e-zine subscribers.
- Give it away to your current subscribers as a token of your appreciation.

Give your e-book an attention-getting title and fill it with lively information that focuses on your specialized area. By encouraging your fans to share your free e-book with others, your brand identity may spread faster than a chain latter. The following sites are e-book directories, e-book search engines, or sites that in some way compile lists of available free e-books. Visit them and get your title listed.

Bizinfocenter.com, http://www.bizinfocenter.com/free-ebook-directory/
eBook Directory, http://www.ebookdirectory.com/
Ebook Giveaways, http://www.ebookgiveaways.com/
EBooks Portal, http://ebooks.searchking.com/
Ebook Shop, http://ebookshop.bizland.com/
Free-eBooks.net, http://www.free-ebooks.net/

6. Participate in Mailing Lists and Discussion Groups

Mailing lists allow a group of people to exchange messages with each other in such a way that everyone participates. Messages are delivered by e-mail. Discussion groups are more like static online bulletin boards. Both present an opportunity for you to promote your product or services. However, it is very important that you post properly; you will not benefit by posting blatant advertisements. Here are a few rules to follow:

Before you start posting messages you should "visit." Unless you take a look, you don't know for sure the slant of the group.

Create a good signature. The signature is the block of text at the end of a message that says something about the person who sent the message. Signatures are often used to carry little promotional ads, and this seems to be more or less accepted, as long as the signature isn't too large. Be sure to include your URL, email address of an autoresponder (many people still have slow Internet connections and prefer to receive information via email), the email address of a real person to which questions can be directed, and a reason for people to visit your site.

Do not post messages that *directly* sell something. Pure ads (Buy! Buy!) irritate people. "Ads" in which you give people something are usually acceptable.

Do not post the same message over and over again. If you do so, your chatty announcement turns into a blatant ad. That doesn't mean you can't remind people about your Web site. You can announce new services now and again.

7. Enter your Site to Win Online Awards

Awards started off slowly. There was a *Cool Site of the Day, The Top 5% of All the Sites on the Web*, and so forth; but Web site awards have exploded. There's a *Cool Site of the Second*, for crying out loud, a site devoted to cataloguing the best "page not found" errors online, awards for Best Dog Sites—there are all kinds of awards available.

As you might guess from the fact that there are so many awards, they're not quite as meaningful as they used to be. Reams of meaningless awards can be bought for the price of a few e-mails. Some sites will give you awards simply if you link to them. You probably want to avoid these; they don't do you or your site a lot of good.

On the other hand, there are some great awards that can have a big effect on traffic. We'll point you to some good ones, and, if you really want to learn about every available award, we'll give you some links to those too.

Submitting Your Site

The most popular awards get lots of nominations. You want your nomination to stand out even before an editor looks at your site. Keep these rules in mind when nominating your site for an award:

- Abide by the guidelines for submitting your nomination. If they want a 50-word essay in purple text, give them a 50-word essay in purple text. And don't nominate your site for an inappropriate award—your consumer-protection cat-litter site will not be served by winning a "Cool Dog Site" award, and you'll waste everyone's time by nominating it.
- Create a precise description of the site that you can send with your nomination. Make sure it's free of spelling and grammar errors.
- Double-check, triple-check, quadruple-check the URL you submit! You don't want it to be

incorrect.
- If your site requires anything for optimum usage (like RealPlayer, Shockwave, and so on.) make sure the editors know about it. (You don't want them to visit and then leave because they don't have the right software to make the most of it.)

Really Good Awards

Might as well start at the beginning. Let's look at some particularly useful awards.

Project Cool, http://www.projectcool.com/sightings/ is a great award, but it's not for sissies. Make sure you're good, and darn good, before you submit here (and if you have a pornographic site, a site glorifying crime, or a site that's just a link list—don't bother). Project Cool judges sites on the basis of content, use of the Web as a medium, and well-thought-out navigation. Once you've submitted your Web site, explore the rest of the Project Cool site. You'll find some great resources for site developers and a community for people who build Web sites.

USA Today Hot Sites, http://www.usatoday.com/life/cyber/ch.htm are won by a wide variety of sites—new search engines, educational resources, media, or whatever; but they all have a lot of great content, and more than occasionally a good sense of humor. The USA Today technology editor chooses the sites on the basis of content and appearance, sites that "push the envelope," and etc. If you do win a USA Today Hot Site award, your site has a chance to be listed in the offline, print version of USA Today—another great perk, probably more valuable than the Hot Site award itself. Regularly reading the USA Today Hot Site Awards gives you a good feel for what's out there and can point you to some sites that are making great use of online technologies.

Yahoo Picks of the Week, http://www.yahoo.com/picks/. When Yahoo really likes a site, it puts a pair of sunglasses next to it in the directory. It also lists its favorite sites in the "Pick of the Day." There is an e-mail address at the bottom of that page, so you can suggest your site as a Yahoo pick. Get mentioned in Yahoo! What's New, and the number of visitors to your site could skyrocket.

Netguide's Internet Sites of the Day, http://www.netguide.com/. Each of NetGuide's various subject guides has a Site of the Day. Go into each guide and look for an e-mail link to submit your site. These are the guide subjects: Computing, Entertainment, Health, Internet, Living, Money, News, Shopping, Sports, Travel, Women, and so on. If you're really lucky, eventually you may end up in the overall Net Guide.

Lesser-Known Awards

There are literally hundreds of Web-site awards, and it would take another couple of books to list them all. Unfortunately, a lot of them aren't worth the electrons on which they're printed. Anybody can make a little banner for an award, but that doesn't make it useful! Furthermore, an award that's impressive to your target audience—that Yak Stalking Site of the Day award, perhaps—is meaningless to a different group of users.

You're going to have to judge a lot of awards for yourself. Some are not going to do you any good, yet some specialized awards may turn out to be well worth having. There are a couple of enormous directories you can use to check out what's available:

Awards Emporium, http://www.momsnetwork.com/aemporium.shtml
Awards Sites!, http://www.awardsites.com/
Website Awards, http://websiteawards.xe.net/

8. Advertise in E-Mail Newsletters

We're not talking about spam. We're talking about advertising to people who have signed up to receive e-mail for some reason. There are essentially two types of e-mail advertising: opt-in lists and e-mail newsletters.

Opt-in lists are lists of people who have signed up to receive advertising. Some people sign up for "I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine" plans. In other words, they agree to receive e-mail in return for something else. For instance, a company may hold regular drawings, giving away computers to the winners. To be included in the drawing, participants must be on the company's mailing list. Of course, the problem with this sort of list is that the people who sign up may have no interest at all in receiving the e-mail, and may delete it without reading it. All they want is the chance to win a prize.

The other reason people sign up for opt-in e-mail is because they have a genuine interest in getting information. For instance, hundreds of thousands of people who are trying to learn how to do business on the Internet have signed up to receive e-mail about doing business on the Internet, in the hope that some of the mail will lead them to information and services that will help them.

The other form of advertising is in e-mail newsletters. In this case people subscribe to a newsletter and, if it's a good one, continue to receive it because they find it useful or entertaining. The newsletter has ads embedded into it. If it's a plain-text newsletter, the ads are plain-text ads—generally six or seven lines, about 65 characters wide. If the newsletter is an HTML-mail newsletter, the ads may be banner ads or some other kind of graphic.

To find newsletters to advertise in, see these directories:

Advertising.com, http://www.advertising.com/
Direct E-mail List Source, http://www.copywriter.com/lists/
E-Zine Ad Source Directory, http://www.ezineadsource.com/
Lifestyles, http://www.lifestylespub.com/
MeMail, http://www.memail.com/
Places to Register Your Email Newsletter special report
http://www.poorrichard.com/freeinfo/special_reports.htm

4 PROBLEMS WITH E-MAIL ADVERTISING

E-mail advertising really can work. E-mail advertising is getting a good reputation these days, as people realize that it can be affordable and effective, but not all e-mail advertising is such a great idea. There are four main problems to watch out for:

1. Classified Ad E-Mails Don't Work

Some newsletters sell classified ads. You buy a few lines and your ad runs along with scores of others. These ads almost never work. Few people read these ads—in fact many of these newsletters probably aren't read at all, having been subscribed to in order to enter a drawing. Even if they are read, people tend to quickly scroll past the classifieds.

If you can find a newsletter with cheap classified ads, go ahead and try it. Create a doorway page to track incoming visits and see how many people hit that page. Probably very few. Remember, the best way to place an ad in a newsletter is in the editorial content, separated from any other ads the newsletter may be carrying. The better the content and the fewer ads in the newsletter, the better your ad is likely to work.

2. Ads Sent Solo to Opt-In Lists Don't Work

E-mail message ads sent by themselves to opt-in lists probably won't work well. If the message carries nothing but an ad, people will read the subject line, and unless it's a *really* good subject line, just delete the message. Remember, people are flooded with e-mail, so they're using the Delete key a lot.

3. E-Mail Advertising Isn't Always Cheap

Some opt-in lists are way too expensive. We looked at a number of opt-in lists recently and found that prices seem to be from as little as eight cents up to as much as thirty cents a name. Eight cents per name is a CPM of $80, which is toward the high end for banner advertising. Thirty cents a name represents a CPM of $300!

Can you make money at those rates? In many cases the answer is clearly no! It may be possible if you're selling a high-cost item. For instance, if you are selling Web-hosting services and expect each customer to bring you $300 in the first year, you may find it effective. If you're selling a book that costs $19.95, however, the chance of you making money with this sort of advertising is slim to none. It's quite possible to find advertising in newsletters at much lower rates. The CPM for targeted newsletters is often around $35, but rates can be much lower, around a dollar or two.

4. The "Real Numbers" Issue

The numbers problem is tricky, and right now, there's no easy answer. If you buy advertising in a newsletter, how do you know you're getting what you paid for? If you pay for 50,000 subscribers, how do you really know that you're getting 50,000, and not 40,000—or 10,000? We can tell you that some newsletter editors are inflating their numbers … at least, that's the rumor among newsletter editors, and after all, it makes sense that some would be doing so. It's too easy to get away with.

Right now most newsletter-advertising money is being spent on faith; people are simply taking the seller's word. In a lot of cases numbers are inflated. Many list owners probably don't clean their lists often, for instance, and a large list can quickly build up thousands of bad addresses.

6 TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITHOUT SPAMMING

1. Don't Stay Silent

The very first thing on your list should be to get in touch with all your service providers to let them know what you plan on doing. This list includes (but is not limited to) your local ISP, on whom you rely for your Internet Connection; your Web site host, who is most likely running your mail (POP3) server; and your list host, which will be the company that enables you to distribute your e-publication (as well as provide subscription database storage). You need all three of those providers supporting you 100 percent of the way. Just about every legitimate e-mail publisher has been wrongly accused of distributing junk e-mail messages. Instead of contacting you directly, offended users will probably get in touch with any or all of your service providers. If your service providers know you and trust that you're not doing anything on the sly, they're going to defend your position and inform the whistleblowers that they are incorrect in their assumption. My providers have gone to bat for me more than once, and that kind of support is priceless.

2. Don't Impose

Don't force yourself into user's Inboxes unless they invite you first. Remember, the Inbox is a very sacred place to them. Wait for them to sign up for your e-publication. The easiest (and best) way to get subscribers is to publicize the offer on your Web site, and let related Web site and list owners know what you're doing.

3. Don't Buy

A database of qualified subscribers cannot be purchased—that's a fact. If anybody tells you otherwise, he doesn't know his lips from his belly button. Your money will be better spent on other things (like advertising, marketing, and/or candy bars). People who sell e-mail address databases are often referred to as list brokers. Believe it or not, this business is very lucrative (and legitimate).

4. Don't Use Certain Words

In the subject line of a message, a few words, characters, and conventions tip me off to the message being spam: money, sex, girls, free, opportunity, sale, power, powerful, new, invest, investment, maximize, profit, buy, and special are the words (in no particular order); dollar signs and exclamation marks are the symbols; and if the subject line is written in ALL CAPS, I delete it without thinking twice. As an added measure for optimal recognition, I strongly suggest inserting the name of your company and/or publication in the subject line of a message before writing anything else.

5. Don't Hide

In your own e-mailings, use your real name, if possible. Not only will it show your subscribers that you're easily accessible, but it will also make them aware that you're a "human being" and not just another employee in the cold, corporate world. If using your real name is too much to ask, then make one up. There's nothing wrong with a pseudonym, as long as you use it consistently in conjunction with your e-publication.

6. Don't Invite Removals

Personally, I throw the unsubscribe directions at the bottom of every mailing. It's out of the way, but not completely hidden; it's the last thing users would read in an issue. Why invite them to remove themselves from your mailing before they even have a chance to read it? You're indirectly telling them that your stuff isn't worthy enough for their Inbox. Nothing could be further from the truth, I hope.

5 POINTERS TO SCORE MORE POINTS WITH YOUR E-MAIL COURSES

Multipart e-mail courses can be more powerful than online articles and e-zines because customers give you permission to contact them repeatedly in a concentrated period of time. If you deliver high-quality content in your follow-up mailings, you have a real opportunity to embed your brand image quickly. When setting up the individual messages of your course, keep these five points in mind and you're sure to score more points with your students.

1. Use Consistent Subject Headings

If your first lesson carries the subject line "Search Engine Ranking Tactics: Day One," don't use "More Search Engine Tactics" for the second lesson. Be consistent and use "Search Engine Ranking Tactics: Day Two." Readers will recognize your course much more easily when the lessons are consistently labeled.

2. Start with a Short Reminder Notice

At the top of each e-mail message, tell recipients why they are receiving it. Especially if your segments are delivered days apart, this notice will remind people that they requested multiple mailings from you. Believe it or not, some people will forget and accuse you of sending spam. A simple notice like this should do: "This message is part of the five-step Hula dancing course you recently signed up for. Enjoy!"

3. Include Your Course's Title and an Author Byline

Reinforce the name of the course and what the reader is about to absorb. Using the same wording that's used in the subject line would be ideal. Right below the lesson title, put an attribution like "by Fred Jones—The Geometry Geek" or "by Penny Smith, author of 50 Ways to Cheat Your Lover." In other words, get brand identity established early in each message.

4. End with a Teaser for the Next Lesson

Always conclude your lessons with a line such as, "Tomorrow, I'll reveal the five things the IRS doesn't want you to know about medical deductions. See you then." Create some excitement and give your readers another reason to look forward to the next segment of your course.

5. Include a Final Brand-Building Blurb

Use the end of your message to once again squeeze in a brand-related message. For instance, I might include a final blurb that reads, "Brought to you compliments of Bob Baker and The Buzz Factor. For more resources, tips, and tools on how to promote your band or record label, visit http://www.thebuzzfactor.com/. Have a question about today's lesson? Send Bob an e-mail: bob@bob-baker.com."

10 TIPS FOR WRITING ATTENTION-GETTING ARTICLES

1. Craft a Strong Title

The title you attach to an article can mean the difference between it being widely read and completely ignored. Which is more appealing: Tax Tips for Individual Filers or Nine Things the IRS Doesn't Want You to Know? What about How to Have a Successful First Date compared to First-Date Maneuvers That Will Have Him Begging for More?

2. Address Problems *and* Provide Solutions

Readers are attracted to articles that promise to help them reach a desired goal; but articles that tell people how to avoid or overcome a problem are even more in demand. What solutions can you provide to help them deal with problems?

3. Provide Ordered How-To Steps

How-to articles are one of the most popular formats. Let readers know what procedure to take to get from point A to point B.

4. Supply How-To Details with Your What-to-do Advice

Too many how-to articles tell readers what to do without telling them how to do it. You'll impress a lot more people with your articles if you go beyond simply telling them obvious, surface-level facts. Your true expertise will shine in the details you provide.

5. Use Concrete Examples and Quotes

You'll get your points across more forcefully by providing examples to back them up. Regularly weave in a combination of personal anecdotes, stories of other people's experiences, and quotes from people who can validate the tips you offer.

6. Include Relevant Links

As you write each section of your articles, ask yourself if there's a place you can send readers to get more information. You don't have to supply a link in every paragraph, but most articles you write should contain at least a couple of online resources.

7. Avoid Jargon and Twenty-Dollar Words

Too many beginning writers feel they need to write to impress. Don't use twenty-dollar words when a fifty-cent word will do just fine. If you clearly communicate your expertise and truly help your readers, they will be plenty impressed.

8. Keep Sentences Short

Try to keep many of your sentences short. Sometimes, very short. Like this. Readers process your ideas more efficiently when you keep your sentences on a leash.

9. Make it Personal

Speak directly to your readers through your articles. Have a personal conversation with them. You're not reciting a thesis. You're chatting it up with someone who shares similar interests.

10. Self-Promote Sensibly

Too many experts gratuitously weave in awkward plugs for their products and services for no other reason than to promote themselves. Concentrate on giving your readers what they need to know. If your article's topic is focused on your area of expertise, readers will think you're cool even if you don't go out of your way to point it out.

6 RULES FOR WRITING GOOD E-BOOKS

1. Good Writing is Essential For a Good E-Book

First things first, and this might seem trivial: You want an e-book that's as good as a printed book, which means you want something that is just as well written. Before you write your e-book, study the nuts and bolts of professional writing. Read a few writers' guides, practice your writing skills, and sign up for a writing course or two.

2. A Good Editor is Worth a Thousand Misspelled Words

A good edits job versus a bad edit job can make of break your book, whether it's printed or in electronic format. Having no edit at all is likely to kill it completely. So hire an editor or get a friend to be your second set of eyes.

3. Don't go Overboard With the Hyperlinks

Since your book is online, and not just printed, you should consider adding certain online features such as hyperlinks. However, consider this before you venture in and add a gazillion hyperlinks in your document: It's easy for people to get lost or confused if there's too much bouncing around within a book. Jeff was reading a book online and the page he was reading was filled with underscored words, each one a hyperlink to another page in the same book. As he got to each one he wasn't sure if he was expected to click on the hyperlink so as to understand the rest of the chapter. "Click here or you'll be confused" was what it seemed like, although it wasn't clear. So he clicked the first one and ended up on another page somewhere in the book, and that page was filled with hyperlinks. Soon it felt like he was surfing the whole Internet, bouncing from page to page and getting completely lost, yet staying within the one book. It was frustrating. He eventually realized the people who made the book thought it would be nice if the every word that had any relation to another page of the book were hyperlinked to that page. But the truth is it made for a very messy, unmanageable book. So here's the moral: Don't go overboard on the hyperlinks. You might think you are doing your readers an extra service, but really, you aren't.

4. Make Sure Your Book is Still Useful When Printed

Another tidbit about the online experience is this: Make sure your e-book is still useful when printed. Plan that eventually it might find its way into a printed medium, whether it's your consumers' own home printers or an actual print publication with a first run of 10,000 copies. If you add hyperlinks where the user is required to click, or if you refer to the hyperlink without giving the address, you could have a problem when it's printed. Have you ever printed up a Web site? You might see something like this: Click here to send me mail.

Go ahead, click it. Obviously you can't if you're reading this on a printed page. But the online version has my e-mail address hidden behind it. What's my e-mail address? When the page is printed it's gone and nowhere to be found. A better approach would be something like this: If you want to send me e-mail, my address is jeffcogs@yahoo.com.

The e-mail address is clickable in the online version, and for the print folks, it's clearly written out.

5. Don't Just Save the Files for the Printed Version in Hypertext

The same book that had too many hyperlinks also had another problem: It was clear the publisher had simply taken the files for the printed version of the book and saved them in a hypertext format, adding a gazillion hyperlinks. Whoever did the deed overlooked a problem, however. The whole thing was arranged in order by page, with no notion of chapters. There were statements such as See the next chapter for more information all over the place. And wouldn't you know, this time ... there was no hyperlink! So how could one get to the next chapter? There were no chapter headings, nothing, only page after page after page. In other words, there was absolutely no way to know where the next chapter was. All you could do was read on and hope to one day see it on the side of the road.

6. Watch Your References

In an e-book, it's okay for the author to refer to what someone just read in the preceding paragraph. But because of the possibility of repagination, it's best not to refer to the next page or the preceding page. Instead, refer to section and chapter headers. It's also unwise to refer to images by their position in the text. Don't say, "The figure to the right shows—." Instead number your figures and refer to them by number.

8 REASONS TO CREATE YOUR OWN ONLINE COMMUNITY

1. To Discuss a Topic That No One Else is Discussing

If there's no online community discussion about your favorite topic, start one! Say you collect antique glass insulators and you'd like to talk about them, but there's no one else in town that shares your interest. You can bet that there are folks on the Internet who do!

2. To Provide an Online Way for an Existing Community to Get Together

An online community can be a great way for your extended family, your church, your club, or another existing group to communicate. Several Web sites are specifically designed to allow families or alumni groups to form communities.

3. To Create a Community With Your Own Personal Style

As the creator and manager of an online community, you can make the rules and set the tone of your group.

4. To Market a Product or Service

A Web site is a good first step for marketing online. But providing an online community can help, too. Your community can be directed at the types of people who might want to buy from you. If you demonstrate that you are knowledgeable, provide helpful information, and don't use a hard-sell approach, people will get a good impression of you and your products.

5. To Provide Support for Customers of Your Product

If you sell something or provide a service, you can let your customers support each other, and support them directly, via an online community.

6. To Convince People of Your Way of Thinking

Got an opinion? You can create a community to discuss it and to try to convince people that you are right. However, if you are too strident or don't allow other people to express their opinions, no one will stick around to listen.

7. To Share Experiences with People

If you've got a medical condition, family problem, or other life situation; you're fighting with a particularly stupid computer program; or you're dealing with some other situation, you can find other people who are in the same boat. You may have some useful advice for them—or they may have some for you.

8. To Make Money

The manager of an online community can make money by selling ads that are displayed to subscribers. But remember—no one will come to see the ads unless you have useful and interesting material to offer!

8 WAYS TO MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS IN MARKETING AND PROMOTIONS

You're spending a lot of time and energy, and perhaps even money, to promote your products and services on the Internet. How do you know if it's all working? How do you know which bits are working and which are not? How can you measure the results of your efforts?

One of the nice things about operating on the Internet is that it's possible to track things much more closely than you could in the real world. There are tools you can use to see when people are talking about you, how people are arriving at your site, which sites are linking to you, and so on. This information can be useful if used properly, or a great distraction if not.

1. Check Your Search Engine Position

Want to know how you're showing up in those search sites once you've been added? There are independent services that focus solely on showing you how you're doing with the search sites. Check the following Web sites for more information.

MetaMedic: http://www.northernwebs.com/set/setsimjr.html
MyRank: http://www.myrank.com/
Position Agent: http://www.positionagent.com/
ScoreCheck: http://www.scorecheck.com/
SmartAge SiteRank: http://www.smartage.com/rank/
WebPosition: http://www.webposition.com/

2. Using Your Hit Logs

Most Web-hosting companies provide logs. Some companies e-mail you a log regularly; with others, you have to go to a specific Web page to view your logs. If you want more statistics than your Web-hosting company provides, you can add your own logs programs. These programs can tell you things like, visitors by country, top requested files, monthly statistics, and server errors. The following are some programs to check out:

AccessWatch: http://accesswatch.com/
Net.Analysis: http://netgen.com/
Web Page Access Counters and Trackers (A list of programs and services):
http://adbility.com/ba_counter.htm

3. Looking at the Referrer Report

Most logs will contain a referrer report or something similar. Take a look at it; it can be a great way to find out where people are coming from.

When a browser sends a message asking for a Web page, the message includes information saying where it found the link; it sends the URL of the page containing the link the visitor clicked. (Of course if the visitor typed the URL into the browser's location box, no referrer information is sent.) This information is saved in the log. As in the previous report, only the top referrers may be saved, so if you have a busy site, some of the referrers that brought you few visitors will drop off the bottom.

You can often find interesting stuff in these logs. You may find sites linking to you that you hadn't found any other way, and even if you use some of the other methods in this chapter for finding out

who's linking to you, the referrer report shows you something more important. A link is nice, but much more important is a link that is actually sending visitors to you.

Note: Your Referrer Report Won't Be Complete—Because privacy issues are becoming more important these days, not every visitor to your site will have a referrer. Some firewalls, for example, block referrer information from being sent to a site. Accept the information in your logs as helpful but not complete.

4. Backlink Checking

Another way to check your results is to find out how many people are linking to you. The referrer report shows one method—or rather, it shows you the 100 or so links that are sending the most people to you; but backlink checking gives you the same kind of information.

Here are a couple of examples of how to backlink search—at AltaVista and Google:

> **Google**—Use the link special syntax, like this: *link:http://www.poorrichard.com*.
> **AltaVista**—Use the *link:* keyword (we talked about AltaVista's keywords in Chapter 2, *What You Need Before You Start*), like this: *link:poorrichard.com* . (Don't include the *http://* bit. Don't even include the *www.* bit; you may reduce the number of hits if you do.) Of course you'll want to omit links to the page from the same Web site. You can do that by using *-host:,* like this: *-host: poorrichard.com*. So the complete search string would be link:*poorrichard.com -host:poorrichard.com*.

You'll find that you get some good results, a few great results, and a few results that aren't any good at all; but you will get enough that you'll find some places that would look good with your site linked to them.

Here's a really neat little service you can use to automate this backlink process: **LinkPopularity.com** (at, you guessed it, http://www.linkpopularity.com/. This site has a form into which you enter your URL—or the URL of some other site you'd like to check up on. The system does a backlink search at AltaVista, HotBot, and InfoSeek at the same time.

You can use backlink checking to see who's linking to your site and what they're saying about your site. Maybe they're saying, "This is a great site!" If they are, drop them a note and thank them. If your site is just part of a list, don't worry about it. Just check to make sure everything's spelled correctly and send a note to the site owner if it's not.

While backlink checking, look for other promotional opportunities. Perhaps a site reviewed one of your products … ask if it'd like to review another. If you have an affiliate program, ask if the site would like to sign up. Maybe you can find sites to do drawings. There are many ways you can work with sites that have linked to you, so keep an open mind.

5. Using Automated Search Utilities

If you're looking for ways to track changes to search engines and Web sites, the Web has a few great resources for you.

TracerLock http://www.peacefire.org/tracerlock/ is a free service, sponsored by Peacefire, which allows you to monitor AltaVista for the occurrence of up to five sets of keywords.

Each day TracerLock will search AltaVista for pages that matched your search term and were indexed exactly three days previously. If there are results, the first ten will be sent to you in an e-mail. TracerLock only searches AltaVista, but AltaVista has a big database. If you want to track your

company, this is an excellent addition to your toolbox.

The Informant http://informant.dartmouth.edu/ works a little like TracerLock, but covers a lot more ground. Here's what happens. First you have to register (the service is free) and specify how often you'd like to receive search engine updates—once every 3, 7, 14, 30, or 60 days. Next, you specify three queries—sets of words where you'd like to find all the words in the set (an AND query) or any word in the set (an OR query). We don't recommend using OR queries unless the keywords are unusual. For each query, you'll have the choice of searching Excite, AltaVista, Lycos, or Infoseek. After that you'll be given the option of monitoring five specific URLs for changes—that is, The Informant will take a look at these pages to see if any of them have changed, and inform you if so.

Now, at the interval you specified, The Informant will find the top 10 Web pages that are most relevant to your keywords. If there is a new page in the top 10, or if any of the pages in the top 10 have changed, you'll get an e-mail. It'll also look at the five pages you specified to see if there are any changes.

Since The Informant checks out only the top 10 pages at each search engine, you won't get the comprehensive results that you'll get with TracerLock, but you have more search engine choices and you can monitor specific URLs. (Hey, they're both free, so there's no reason you can't use both services.)

SpyOnIt http://www.spyonit.com/ doesn't specifically query search engines; instead, it tracks changes to particular pages. You can use this resource to check on competitor's pages, check on pages important to your industry, and so on. You give it your e-mail address and tell it the URLs to watch. SpyOnIt can alert you to page changes in several different ways, including by pager or instant messenger.

Of course you can also use this system to track changes in the search engines for you. In a different browser window, enter a query on a search engine—like AltaVista—and click the Search button. After you get the results, you'll see a strange-looking URL in the URL location box at the top of your browser.

6. Employing Web Clipping Services

Perhaps you have more money than time. In that case, you should check out the for-pay Web-clipping services, such as:

CyberAlert http://www.cyberalert.com/ uses a combination of software and human review to conduct a daily search for topics (keyword sets) on feeder sites (any searchable Web entity—general search engines, online databases, specialty search engines, and so on). The clippings generated by this service are gathered, sorted, and the duplicates eliminated. They're saved in an in-box accessible to you when you log in to the Web site.

CyberScan Internet Clipping Service http://www.clippingservice.com/ has a per-clip fee of $1, but its base rates are much lower than CyberAlert (and you can limit the number of clips per report that you receive). This service searches the Internet for the keywords you specify and returns clips to you every business day, weekly, or monthly via e-mail, fax, Federal Express, or postal mail. CyberScan's costs start at around $200 depending on the services you want and the frequency with which you want to be sent clippings.

A variety of other services offer online monitoring. Check these:

   EgoSurf, http://www.egosurf.com/

> **EWatch,** http://www.ewatch.com/
> **URL Minder,** http://www.netmind.com/
> **Webclipping,** http://www.webclipping.com/
> **Yahoo!—Clipping and Monitoring Services**
> http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Business_to_Business/Corporate_Services/
> Public_Relations/Clipping_and_Monitoring_Services/

The services and sites described in the previous list can search mostly the Web, but can also search Usenet in certain cases as well. Many search engines, including AltaVista offer searches of Usenet, but there are tools that are specifically designed to search mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups. See the next section for more information about mailing lists and newsgroups.

7. Monitoring News Groups and Mailing Lists

DejaNews is probably the most famous newsgroup-searching tool. A number of Web search sites also provide the ability to search newsgroup messages, too. Yahoo, for instance, allows you to search newsgroup messages … but in fact it simply links to DejaNews to actually carry out the search.

DejaNews, http://www.dejanews.com/usenet/, offers access to over 80,000 newsgroups, with simple searching and advanced searching that allows you to search archives all the way back to 1995 (though at this writing archives before May 1999 are not available). You can even specify a particular newsgroup to search, and search for messages from a particular e-mail address or with a specified subject line. You can register on DejaNews to get free Web-based access to newsgroups, and a free DejaNews e-mail account.

It's difficult to find out what's being said about your products in mailing-list discussion groups. If you had the time, you could check with individual groups. Many groups have archives, often stored at a member's Web site. If there are one or two important mailing-list discussion groups that you track, you can search those archives now and then. **Topica** in particular (http://www.topica.com/) is a must-see for searching mailing lists.

8. Checking Offline Publications

Some Internet tools are useful for tracking what's being said in offline publications, too. Plenty of free and pay resources are available, and even the pay resources are reasonably priced. The free ones usually track only a few weeks' worth of news. The pay services, not surprisingly, track much larger collections of news.

Free Tools
Several search engines offer tools for tracking news in offline media. Excite and Northern Light are two of the biggies.

Excite's NewsTracker http://nt.excite.com/, tracks the news from around 300 online newspapers and magazines. You can do a search from the NewsTracker site or you can set up a clipping service that allows you to track up to 50 different topics (your company name, the name of your industry, competitor names, etc.). Every time you log in to NewsTracker, you'll be able to access your customized clipping file.

Northern Light http://www.northernlight.com/news.html has a premium search service that allows you to search through publication articles for a fee (we'll discuss that in the next section), but its "Current News" service is free. The Current News service searches through a two-week archive of

news from over 50 sources, including newswires and press release wires.

There are several other free places online where you can search through news archives:

InfoJump, http://www.infojump.com/
HotBot: News Channel, http://www.newsbot.com/
MagPortal, http://www.magportal.com/
Moreover, http://www.moreover.com
Newshub, http://www.newshub.com/
TotalNEWS, http://www.totalnews.com/
News Hunt (a collection of links to newspaper and other publication archives)
http://www.newshunt.com/

15 TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL NETWORK

A successful network will allows you to communicate more efficiently with your employees, manage your Web site and promotional activities from the road, and save time and effort so you can focus on other aspects of your business.

1. Spend time deciding whether you really need a network.

While a network is a highly practical tool for most small businesses, it turns into financial nightmare for others.

2. Design your network carefully.

The more time you spend looking at various needs before you spend any money, the less money you'll waste on items you didn't need in the first place.

3. Be prepared to work at your network.

No one is going to offer to perform the required work for free and consultants are extremely expensive. Relying on your own abilities is one way to reduce the total cost of the installation and ensure you can maintain the network once installed.

4. Always look at your needs before you decide on software.

Use the software as a basis for other items like the operating system and hardware.

5. Don't bite off more networking that you can chew.

A network you don't complete is money wasted. Even a small network will save money and you can always expand it later if necessary.

6. You don't need to have a vast knowledge of computers to repair system problems.

Consultants fix many problems with careful observation and patience, not with technical expertise.

7. Networks require consistent care.

Perform maintenance tasks as often as required to assure worry free operation.

8. Always look for the low-cost solutions to your networking problems.

For example, alternative networking technologies provide flexible networking support for home offices and other small networks.

9. Use the right networking technology for the job.

An infrared connection works great for line-of-sight applications, like transferring data from your laptop to your desktop machine, but won't work for other applications.

10. Avoid getting a central server unless you need one.

Peer-to-peer networks operate efficiently and cost less to maintain than client/server networks do. However, once you do decide on a client/server configuration, ensure you spend enough to create a workable network.

11. Allocate bandwidth wisely.

Don't allow users to waste bandwidth on collaboration or video applications unless the user needs these applications to perform useful work. Make sure all users will have the bandwidth required to get their work done and that you keep some bandwidth in reserve for future needs.

12. Purchase an uninterruptible power supply

Consider an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) as cheap insurance against lightning strikes and power outages. The data you save may be your own.

13. Look for the best deal when buying software.

Sometimes last year's product contain all of the features you need and at bargain bin prices.

14. The best password is easy to remember, yet hard to guess.

Making passwords long and hard to remember only encourages users to write them down—something that crackers just love to see.

15. Computers don't understand or care that you're frustrated.

Getting angry with a will only wears you out and thwarts any effort at repair.