

# How to Direct-Market Farm Products on the internet



**How To**

# **Direct-Market Farm Products on the Internet**

**United States Department of Agriculture**

**Agricultural Marketing Service**

**Transportation and Marketing Programs**

**Marketing Services Branch**

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Why Direct-Market on the Internet?</b> .....	<b>2</b>
The Internet Is Becoming Accessible to a Wider Audience.....	2
The Internet Helps Marketers Meet Consumer Demands.....	2
Internet Consumers Are an Audience That Farm Direct Marketers Would Like To Attract .....	2
An Increase in Business Pays for the Cost of Using the Web.....	3
<b>Developing a Marketing Plan</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Identify Internet Marketing Objectives .....	4
Consider the Uniqueness of Farm Direct Marketing.....	4
Consider the Costs .....	5
Decide on the Right Type of Web Site.....	5
Consider Listing in Internet Directories.....	7
<b>Researching the Market</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Investigate Consumer Demand .....	10
Where Can a Producer Research Internet Marketing? .....	11
<b>Setting Up and Marketing the Web Site</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Meet Needs and Learn Habits of Internet Users and Consumers .....	14
Select a Domain Name with a Marketing Message.....	19
Use All Available Means To Increase Web Site Traffic and Attract Customers To Buy.....	20
Consider Suggestions on Developing a Good Small Business Web Site .....	23
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix A: Experience of Farm Direct Marketers on the Internet</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Entertainment Farming/Agritourism .....	26
Farm Market and Pick-Your-Own .....	26
Lookout Farm and Market .....	27
Farm Market .....	27
Mixed High-End Outlets: Farmers Markets, Restaurants, and Mail Order .....	28
Direct Marketing as a Secondary Outlet .....	29
Mail Order .....	30
Farm Vacation Association .....	30
Floral Sales Direct to Consumer .....	32
<b>Appendix B: Suggested Reading and Training</b> .....	<b>33</b>
Articles and Publications on Internet Marketing for Farmers.....	33
Books .....	33
Software.....	34
E-zines and Information Sources.....	34
Selected Sources of Technical Information on Web Site Development .....	34
Selected Sources of Information on Web Site Marketing.....	35
Selected Sources of Information on Small Business Web Sites .....	35
Reference Web Sites .....	35
Training .....	35
<b>Footnotes</b> .....	<b>37</b>



# Executive Summary

Farm direct marketing on the Internet provides many opportunities for producers to expand their existing businesses. Internet technology is similar to opening a branch store or having a billboard. It can be used to improve customer service, educate consumers, and save valuable resources such as time and money.

Farm direct marketers should consider the various ways in which they can adopt the Web and adapt it to the uniqueness of their farm or ranch. Producers can have a Web site to sell or promote their products or can be listed in online directories. E-mail can be used to communicate with customers and distribute newsletters. Before beginning direct marketing on the Internet, producers should develop an Internet marketing plan with specific objectives that fit in with the needs of the business operation as a whole.

This publication provides basic information and suggestions for direct farm marketers on selecting and tailoring a Web site to meet their marketing needs and goals, including:

- Reasons for considering using the Web for direct farm marketing
- How to develop a marketing plan
- How to research the market
- How to set up and market the Web site

References are cited to enable producers to undertake additional research on Internet marketing. Feedback from producers who use the Internet is included to demonstrate the challenges and the benefits of using this marketing tool.



# Introduction

The number of Internet users shopping online has skyrocketed in recent years. Of the estimated 168 million Internet users 16 years of age and older in the United States, approximately half (56 percent) say that they shop online. In contrast, only 31 percent of U.S. Internet users were shopping online in 1998.<sup>1</sup> Projected U.S. consumer spending for online retail purchases during the 2001 holiday season was \$11.9 billion, up from \$9.1 billion in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

With these statistics in mind, farm direct marketers may consider marketing their products on the Internet. They may ask:

- How can having a Web site improve a farm direct marketing business?
- Where can a producer research market information to make a decision about Internet marketing?
- How are producers marketing on the Internet? What is the cost? How did they get started using the Web?
- How much money do farm direct marketers make selling on the Internet?

The objective of this publication is to provide basic information to farm direct marketers who are interested in selling their products via the Internet or simply using a Web site to publicize their farm or products. References, largely from the Internet itself, are cited to enable producers to undertake additional research.<sup>3</sup>

This publication provides information on issues that should be considered before farm direct marketers decide to use the Web to sell or publicize their products. It also contains tips on how to research the Internet market, set up an Internet site, and market products on the Web. Feedback from direct farm marketers who use the Web is included to provide real-life experiences in using the Internet as a new method to sell or publicize products.

The material in this publication reflects and has been generated from common sources of information on e-commerce. Additional information was developed after speaking with several producers who have begun using the Internet as a method of marketing. Their experiences allowed the more generic material to be considered and tailored to the particular needs of farmers. Drafts of this publication were used in presentations at various conferences so that the material could be tested and revised accordingly.

Not featured in this publication are instructions on the technical aspects of Web site design and construction. Many publications offering detailed technical information and instructions are available from sources such as local libraries, bookstores, and the Internet itself. Recommendations on additional reading are included at the end of the publication.

While every attempt was made to include up-to-date information in this publication, readers should keep in mind that the Internet and its use are rapidly changing and that data on Internet usage and demographics are constantly being updated; e-mail addresses may no longer be valid, and Web site addresses may have changed. Since data and demographic research become quickly outdated, this publication makes recommendations on how and where producers can undertake their own research.

*Note: This publication and the U.S. Department of Agriculture do not endorse external Web sites. A reference to a non-USDA Web site does not imply the endorsement of the Web site's content or services. Any Web site referred to in this publication is provided only as an example, the use of which is at the sole discretion of the user.*



# 1

## Why Direct-Market on the Internet?

As the number of Internet users shopping online continues to increase, surveys of Internet users and feedback from customers are providing additional reasons for using the Internet for farm direct marketing.



**Adapt to new consumer preferences and demands**

### The Internet Is Becoming Accessible to a Wider Audience

As computers become less expensive, greater numbers of consumers are going online. Internet users are becoming increasingly more representative of the mainstream U.S. population, which was formerly dominated by high-end consumers. This trend indicates that a wide range of consumers will be shopping on the Internet.

### The Internet Helps Marketers Meet Consumer Demands

As farm direct marketing in the United States evolves, producers must find new ways to adapt to new consumer preferences and demands. Consumers are demanding the convenience of shopping online. They are increasingly viewing the Internet as a tool with which to gather product information or compare prices for a wide range of products. They are also expanding their purchases in product areas such as home and garden, and food.

Currently, most Internet consumers purchase nonfood products such as books, CDs, and airline tickets online. However, online shopping potentially increases the diversity of a shopper's purchases because it is an easy method of buying a product not produced in the consumer's region. For example, a consumer may purchase salsa while on vacation in New Mexico and want to purchase more after returning

home. If what the consumer perceives as an "authentic" or "quality" product isn't available in the local supermarket or gourmet food store, the Internet provides a method of purchasing directly from a known or reliable source.

### Internet Consumers Are an Audience That Farm Direct Marketers Would Like To Attract

Most surveys of farmers markets and other farm direct marketing outlets find the customers to be older with above-average education and a higher income.<sup>4</sup> Data about current Internet consumers provide a similar profile:

- Of Internet users, 41 percent are college or post-college graduates.<sup>5</sup>
- During 2001, the typical Internet user had an average annual household income of \$49,800. This is down from \$62,700 in 1996 but still exceeds the U.S. average of \$40,816.<sup>6</sup>
- According to CyberAtlas<sup>7</sup>, the average age of Internet users is increasing over time, and it currently stands at 35.2 years.
- Young adults (aged 25-34) are the biggest online shopping group, with 55 percent buying online during 2000. Consumers aged 35-44 represent the second most active market, with 45 percent. Those aged 65 and over are the smallest market, with only 10 percent buying online during 2000.<sup>8</sup>

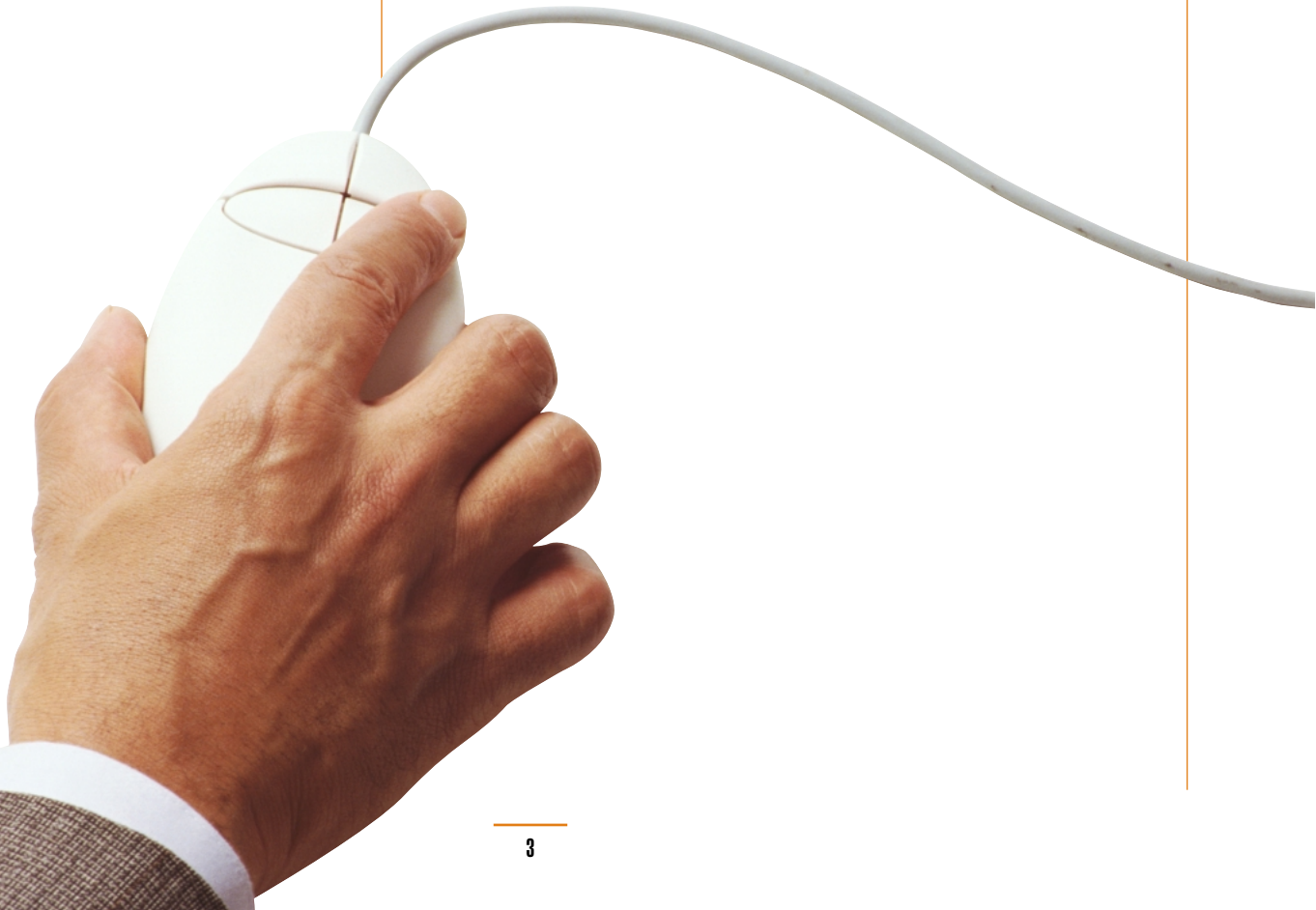
## **An Increase in Business Pays for the Cost of Using the Web**

According to Verizon, the number of small businesses that created a Web site to establish and promote business increased 123 percent from 1999 to 2000. The report also notes that 55 percent of small businesses online have either broken even or completely paid for the cost of their site as a result of an increase in business. Another 57 percent felt the site was easy to create, giving the process a score of "7" on a scale of 1 to 10.<sup>9</sup> Note that more than half of these small businesses found site development easy.

Initial feedback from farm direct marketers who use the Internet has been positive. Direct marketers using the Internet report that getting started was neither expensive nor time consuming and that marketing on the Internet has increased their exposure to customers (appendix A).



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## Developing a Marketing Plan

**F**arm direct marketers who already have an offline presence can integrate that presence into their existing market strategy.

### Identify Internet Marketing Objectives

Before getting started, it is important for marketers to identify Internet objectives and determine what can be gained by direct-marketing farm products on the Internet. Effectively using the Internet can be similar to having an additional staff person to assist customers, a billboard, a full-color brochure, or even a branch store.

*Internet objectives may include one or all of the following:*

- Save time
- Save labor
- Save money
- Save materials
- Advertise
- Sell product

### Consider the Uniqueness of Farm Direct Marketing

Food and agricultural products can pose particular challenges for Internet marketers.

#### ■ Shipping

Since products are generally delivered through the mail when they are ordered online, they must be able to withstand being shipped. Shipping is often an issue with products that require careful handling or controlled temperatures. Also, agricultural products with expiration dates cannot simply be stored until they are ordered.<sup>10</sup>

If shipping fresh produce is a problem, producers may wish to consider developing processed or value-added products. The Internet can provide a market for jams, honey, dried herbs, and baked goods. Special occasions and holidays can also present opportunities for marketing via the Internet.

#### ■ Seasonality

Consumer shopping online is seasonal, just as it is offline. According to Emarketer, U.S. consumers spent \$12.5 billion online during the 2000 holiday season (fourth quarter), a 71-percent increase from the 1999 holiday total of \$7.3 billion.<sup>11</sup> Total 2000 online buying was only \$37 billion. This means that one-third of online shopping takes place during the fourth quarter of the year. Thus, at a time when there are minimal local fresh fruits and vegetables available in the North, consumers are doing most of their spending. This presents many marketing opportunities for producers in the Southern United States. Value-added producers in the North can take advantage of the buying spree as well by offering gift baskets.

### ■ Convenience, Versus Personal Connection.

Many people use the Internet to save time and find additional product information. The reality is that shopping on the Internet for small farm products may be more convenient but does not save a significant amount of time. Further, many people like shopping at farmers markets, farm stands, or pick-your-own operations (PYO) because they want to be close to the farm or farmer. Farm direct marketing customers like to have a personal connection that, unfortunately, is minimized if a consumer buys online. Much can be done to personalize Web site shopping and marketing, but many farm direct market customers will be unwilling to give up their traditional activities.

### Consider the Costs

In developing an Internet marketing plan, it is important to consider costs. How much additional product would have to be sold to have an Internet effort break even or make money? A marketing plan should be backed by strong and reasonable financial planning.

According to *The Wall Street Journal* (April 18, 2000), only 38 percent of Internet retailers are profitable. Not everyone who visits a Web site will buy something. Although conversion rates (the percentage of shoppers who actually make a purchase) vary from one retailer to another, the average online shopper-to-buyer conversion rate is 2.7 percent.<sup>12</sup> This means that there are only about 3 buyers out of every 100 people who visit a Web site.

It is important to set aside time to do comparison shopping for an Internet provider, Web site hosting, hardware, software, and/or services.

Many of the producers who describe their Web sites in this publication (appendix A) either created their own Web site or bartered to have someone do it for them. With minimal instruction, many people are capable of designing and maintaining a simple site.<sup>13</sup>

Farmers are required to do most of their Web updating and e-mailing during their busiest periods. Thus, it may be necessary to find an assistant. Internet marketing can be handled by a teenage son or daughter, a student, or someone wishing to supplement his or her income. Bartering with a customer is another way to acquire inexpensive Internet help.

Professional designers can also offer constructive help in setting up an effective Internet site. Before proceeding, however, marketers should investigate costs and references to ensure that the designer is capable of creating an approach to the Internet that fits in with their overall marketing plan and is appropriate for the business.

### Decide on the Right Type of Web Site

There are several different ways to direct-market on the Web. A producer or farm can maintain an individual Web site or be listed in an Internet directory. No one solution is right for all. Producers must, therefore, ensure that the solution fits in with their overall marketing plan, with their objectives for using the Internet, and with their resource constraints. For example, some producers may want to use the Web site for information: to list PYO hours, product availability at a retail farm store, or dates and times for groups to participate in on-farm agricultural tourism events.



**In developing an Internet marketing plan, it is important to consider costs.**



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How producers use the Internet depends on the type of products they are marketing. Some, who have products that can be easily shipped such as honey, dried herbs, or jams, will need Internet ordering capabilities on a Web site. But, producers who emphasize the freshness of their products (e.g., vine-ripened tomatoes) may not find it possible to sell easily via the Internet or may find the necessary capital investment to develop proper shipping materials cost prohibitive.<sup>14</sup> Further, high shipping costs to the consumer for heavy products (e.g., maple syrup) may also discourage sales.

There are three primary types of Web sites that an individual producer can choose to develop.



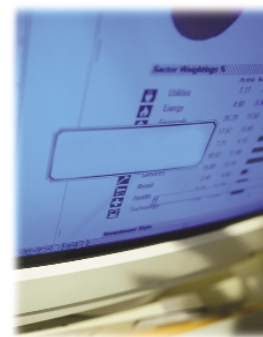
**There are three primary types of Web sites that an individual producer can choose to develop.**

**Web site to transact sales:** Iott Family Farms uses its Web site, [www.tomatoes.com](http://www.tomatoes.com), to market tomatoes and apples. In this case, the Iotts developed the Web site for the sole purpose of selling products. An online order form allows customers to purchase products that are then shipped using packaging designed exclusively for Internet sales.

**Web site to distribute information:** Marino Lookout Farm and Market uses its Web site, [www.lookoutfarm.com](http://www.lookoutfarm.com), to promote the farm and give information to consumers. No selling is done via the Web site.<sup>15</sup> Instead, Paul Witham says the Web site is used to “support our efforts, if not generate sales.” The Lookout Farm Web site has information on its u-pick operation and organic farming plus recipes, events, kid’s club, and more. One of the interesting techniques used on the Web site is printable “online coupons,” which offer monthly “exclusive savings for our Web visitors.”

**Web site to transact sales and distribute information:** A combination of these two objectives is South Face Farm’s Web site, [www.southface-farm.com](http://www.southface-farm.com). The Web site contains both a mail or fax order form and information, such as a menu for its “sugarhouse restaurant.” The Web site generates sales as well as attracting people to visit the farm. South Face Farm’s Tom McCrumm notes that there are many objectives in operating the site, such as “increased visibility, direct sales, and information and directions to [the farm’s] tourism-orientated sugarhouse operation.”

In addition to the three types of Web sites described above, there are many other avenues that can be explored. For example, Steven Fistere started the Web site [www.farmathome.com](http://www.farmathome.com), which offers a delivery service in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Products come from his family’s operation as well as from surrounding farms that cooperate on the project. Locally produced fruits, vegetables, and processed products can be ordered online and will be delivered the same day.



**An online order form allows customers to purchase products that are then shipped using packaging designed exclusively for Internet sales.**

## Consider Listing in Internet Directories

Producers who are not yet ready to invest in their own Web site may wish to list their operation with one or more of the directories available on the Internet. Some Internet directories charge for their services, while others do not. Internet directories offer a range of options and target different groups. Producers should consider the benefits as well as the costs of using these services.

**Commercial Internet Directories:** An example of a commercial Web site is [www.smallfarms.com](http://www.smallfarms.com), which provides services for small producers who wish to direct-market their products on the Internet but who may not have their own Web site or even a computer. For a fee, the [smallfarms.com](http://www.smallfarms.com) Web site allows producers to list “what they offer,” “[where/how] products [are] available,” and contact information. Glenn Oshiro, manager of [smallfarms.com](http://www.smallfarms.com), developed a Web site “for small farmers and ranchers that was low cost, that would be effective whether or not the farmer had a computer, that would focus on crops the farmer is currently producing, that would be a reflection of the variety of foods American farmers and ranchers produce, and ...[that would allow] the farmer and buyer to discuss the qualities of the product(s).”

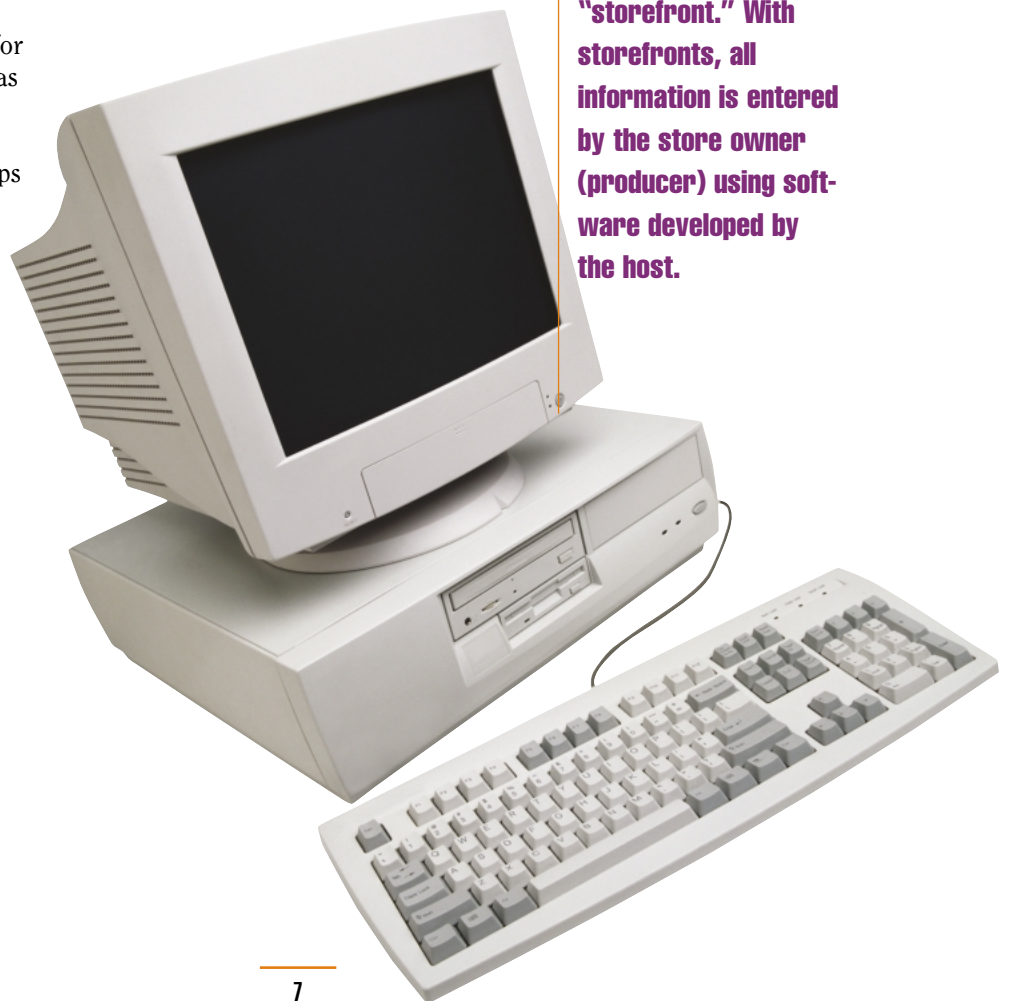
A similar Web site, [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org), was developed by the Ocean Group in collaboration with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. This Web site is a “not-for-profit venture to sprout and grow a definitive and reliable ‘living’ public directory of small farms nationwide, and in so doing to provide people with direct contact to farms in their local area.”<sup>16</sup> While this service is free the first year, membership fees are collected in subsequent years.

Another option is a “storefront.” With storefronts, all information is entered by the store owner (producer) using software developed by the host. This is simpler than using Internet software such as FrontPage to develop a site. An example of a storefront is Yahoo! Store ([store.yahoo.com](http://store.yahoo.com)), which allows a producer to have a small store with 50 items for \$100 a month. In the case of a storefront like Yahoo! Store, the producer must have a

merchant account with a credit card processor and must pack and ship the items sold. The storefront is, as the name implies, a place that hosts a store, but the producer must maintain it. For many producers, there may be more cost-effective options. Others might argue that the simplicity of a storefront enables them to concentrate on other issues and that being on a mall-type Web site gives them improved exposure.



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**State Department of Agriculture Internet Directories:** Some State departments of agriculture offer Internet directory listings. Massachusetts, for example, has extensive Internet listings. The Web site [www.massgrown.org](http://www.massgrown.org) lists approximately 18 categories including flowers, strawberries, roadside stands, PYO, cider mills, and Christmas trees. The listings are free and contain links to a producer's individual Web site if there is one.

Other examples include the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets' Web site, [www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/FFGSearch.asp](http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AP/FFGSearch.asp), which features a free searchable database for producers, and the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Web site, [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com), which offers not only a directory, but also free Web pages for its producers.

Many other States offer similar listings; producers may contact their State departments of agriculture for more information.

**Other Internet Directories:** There are a number of groups that have Internet directories. A grower association is an example of a group that offers an Internet directory for its members. The Vermont Maple Promotion Board has a Web site ([www.state.vt.us/agric/mindex.htm](http://www.state.vt.us/agric/mindex.htm)) that contains information on maple syrup production for consumers as well as information on how to order by mail or visit a sugarcane.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Vermont Maple Promotion Board, technical assistance (such as simple Web site

design) and Web site hosting were made available to the State's grower associations by the Vermont Department of Agriculture at no cost. (The group has since begun hosting its own Web site [www.vtmaple.org](http://www.vtmaple.org).) Associations may wish to contact their State departments of agriculture to find out if they provide similar services.

Some producers may find that working with a grower's or farmers market association may be an effective way to get information on the Internet. Although this potentially reduces the cost per grower, it takes from the producer the ability to design a Web site according to individual desires. However, it can prove to be an agreeable arrangement. For example, American Farmland Trust's (AFT) FRESHFARM Market Web site includes links to individual producers' Web sites. Under a "Who's there and why" section, people can learn more about the farmers and "meet them" ([www.farmland.org/Farmland/files/states/who.htm](http://www.farmland.org/Farmland/files/states/who.htm)). This type of arrangement is agreeable to all parties; AFT promotes its own market, and producers can promote their on-farm enterprises.

The Rural Coalition ([www.ruralco.org](http://www.ruralco.org)) recently developed "The SuperMarket Cooperative" ([www.supermarketcoop.com](http://www.supermarketcoop.com)), an online cooperative for small producers. The SuperMarket database will "enable producers to share information on products and their availability for purposes of promotion over the Internet." It includes the use of an online catalogue and a virtual CSA (Community Supported Agriculture).

**Other Internet marketing ideas:** Maintaining a Web site may require excessive time and/or money and may not increase a producer's profits. If that is the case, e-mail may provide an acceptable alternative.

**E-mail newsletters** – A producer with a CSA only and with all subscriptions sold may question the need for a Web site. If a Web site is not needed to promote the CSA, Internet marketing can still be a viable option.<sup>18</sup> Assuming that most (if not all) of the producer's shareholders have e-mail, instead of



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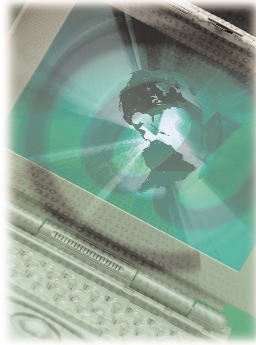
mailing out a monthly or annual newsletter, the newsletter could be e-mailed, thereby drastically reducing time, effort, and cost. Color photographs of the farm could be added as “attachments” at no additional cost.

**E-mail address everywhere** – A producer’s e-mail address should be displayed on all business cards, promotional materials, bags, signs, etc. This provides customers an easy and inexpensive means of contacting the producer. Frequently asked questions (e.g., hours of operation, directions, production methods) might be addressed in a “ready to be sent” draft.

**E-mail lists and updates** –An e-mail update is similar to a newsletter but shorter and more focused. For example, a PYO producer might develop a weekly e-mail update describing its hours of operation, directions, availability, etc.



**instead of mailing out a monthly or annual newsletter, the newsletter could be e-mailed, thereby drastically reducing time, effort, and cost.**



**A producer's e-mail address should be displayed on all business cards, promotional materials, bags, signs, etc. This provides customers an easy and inexpensive means of contacting the producer.**



# 3

## Researching the Market

Farm direct marketers can become inundated with information when searching the Internet for marketing information. By setting a few simple goals, the time required for research can be greatly reduced. Answers to the following questions can serve as a guide:

### Investigate Consumer Demand

- What are the characteristics of my customers? Consider age, ethnicity, gender, income, hobbies, and where they live.<sup>19</sup>
- What do I know about my customers' interests, values, and behavior patterns?
- What are the attitudes and perceptions of my customers?
- What do my customers want or expect from my product or service?

*The next step is investigating the "typical" Internet user or customer for comparison:*

- How close does the profile of the "typical" Internet consumer compare to my current customers?
- Are most of my customers already on the Internet? Do they use e-mail? Do they shop on the Internet, or do they use the Internet as a source of information and entertainment?
- Is this an opportunity to attract a new type of customer?

*Information collection pertaining to existing customers and Internet use can be conducted informally. At farmers markets or a retail farm stand checkout, customers can be asked questions such as:*

- Do you use the Internet?
- Do you have e-mail? What is your e-mail address?
- If you use the Internet, what do you use it for? Information? Entertainment?
- Is there something that could be placed on a Web site that you would find interesting or helpful? (e.g., Would it be helpful if I listed product availability?)



**Are most of my customers already on the Internet? Do they use e-mail? Do they shop on the Internet, or do they use the Internet as a source of information and entertainment?**

Leading and open-ended questions should be kept to a minimum (e.g., What could I put on my Web site that you would like?).

Care should be taken to distinguish between a Web site and e-mail. For instance, if a consumer says, “It would be helpful if you posted product availability for your PYO on your Web site,” the producer could follow up by asking, “Would it be more helpful if during the season I sent a weekly e-mail update on product availability?” While some consumers may prefer not to receive a large amount of e-mail, others may find it more convenient than visiting a Web site.

Feedback from this type of questioning should not dictate decisions; rather, it should be cautiously used to assist in the decision-making process, keeping in mind that a producer may unknowingly bias results. For example, only asking those who shop during “slow hours” may result in interviewing a certain type of customer, such as retired persons who are able to shop weekday mornings but may be less likely to be online or Internet shoppers.

Producers should “surf” the Internet to find competitors’ Web sites. This may be one of the best methods of conducting research and getting ideas. Producers who have Web sites and whose operations are not located in the same geographic area may be more willing to share information about their site than local competitors.

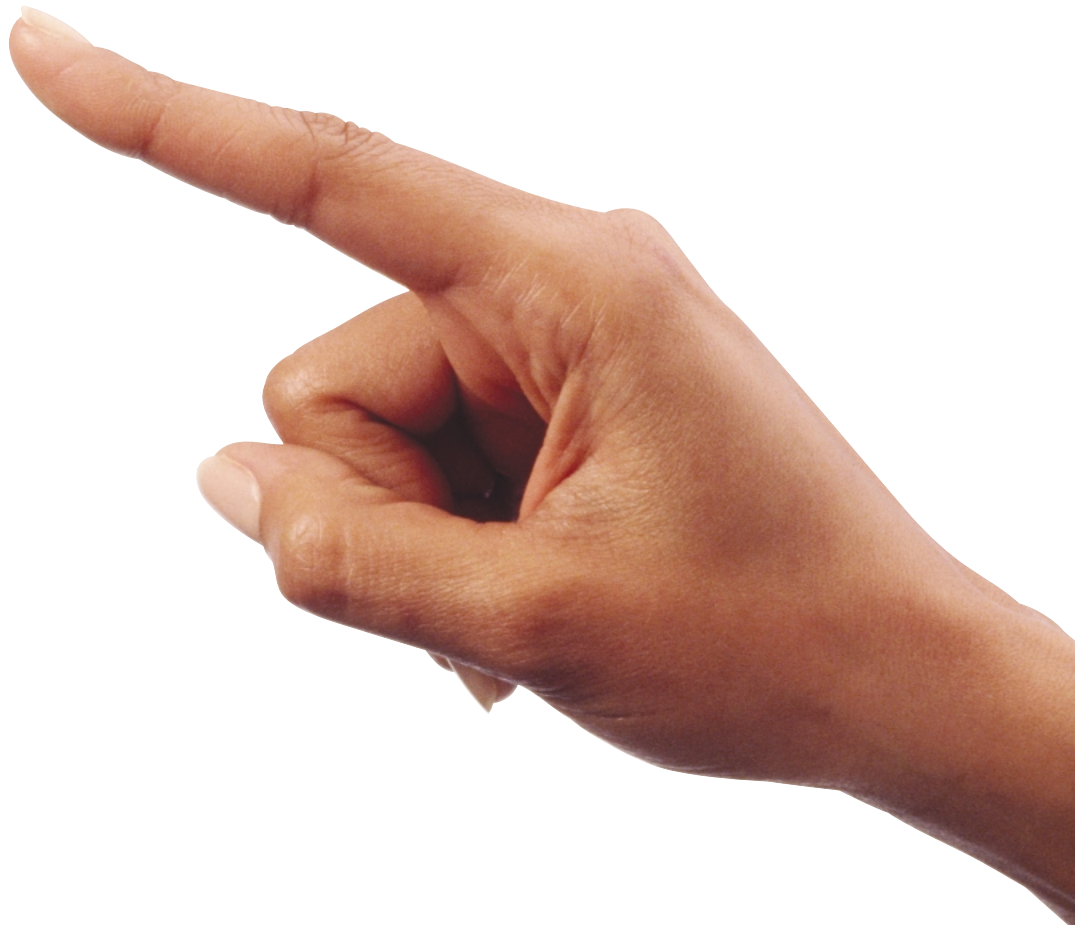
## Where Can a Producer Research Internet Marketing?

One of the greatest advantages of conducting market research is that most, if not all, of the information that a producer needs is available on the Internet at no cost. There are many Web sites that contain valuable information about Internet consumers. Many of the free Web sites are cited within this publication, and others are listed at the end.

It is easy to become either overwhelmed or inundated by the amount of consumer demographic data and Internet marketing ideas available online. Most of the Web sites listed below offer free e-mail newsletters.<sup>20</sup> Generally, they are sent out daily and are fairly brief so as to allow the user to stay on top of trends.





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# Internet Web Site Resources: Consumer Demographic Data

<p><b>Web site address</b></p> <p><b>Contents</b></p>	<p><b>GVU Center, Georgia Institute of Technology</b></p> <p><b>www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/</b></p> <p><b>GVU's user surveys listed by year and each has a table of contents. Information available on age, gender, and occupation of Internet user.</b></p>
<p><b>Web site address</b></p> <p><b>Contents</b></p>	<p><b>CyberAtlas</b></p> <p><b>cyberatlas.internet.com</b></p> <p><b>Compiles information from various sources. Has search engine and short articles listed by date of publication. Includes links to original sources.</b></p>
<p><b>Web site address</b></p> <p><b>Contents</b></p>	<p><b>Emarketer</b></p> <p><b>www.emarketer.com/estats/</b></p> <p><b>Though Emarketer charges for many reports, the "estats" section is free and contains short articles containing demographic information.</b></p>
	<p><b>The Web site should load quickly. "According to Relevant Knowledge, the average home Internet user spends nine minutes a day waiting for Web pages to download which adds up to nearly 55 hours of waiting annually."</b></p>
<p><b>Are most of my customers already on the Internet? Do they use e-mail? Do they shop on the Internet, or do they use the Internet as a source of information and entertainment?</b></p>	

<b>Web site address</b>	<b>Open Market</b>  <a href="http://www.openmarket.com/intindex/index.cfm">www.openmarket.com/intindex/index.cfm</a>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>Open Market's "Internet Index is an occasional collection of facts and statistics about the Internet and related activities." An interesting short read that gives a snapshot of Internet trends.</b>
<b>Web site address</b>	<b>NUA Internet Surveys</b>  <a href="http://www.nua.ie/surveys/">www.nua.ie/surveys/</a>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>Contains some articles appropriate for in-depth research.</b>
<b>Web site address</b>	<b>Wilson Internet</b>  <a href="http://www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket/demograf.htm">www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket/demograf.htm</a>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>Has some interesting articles on demographics, but articles on Internet marketing tips (i.e., site design,content) are more interesting.</b>



**According to Verizon, the number of small businesses that created a Web site to establish and promote business increased 123 percent from 1999 to 2000.**

**The convenience of shopping from home should be emphasized; e.g., "No need to go to Florida, we can bring sweet oranges to your doorstep!"**





# 4

## Setting Up and Marketing the Web Site

Any Internet initiative should be viewed as a never-ending and constantly evolving project. A solution that works today may not work in 2 years. Perhaps the business will expand and need to take on a new form. Whatever the case, choices made today can be modified later. The producer is in charge of how his or her business uses the Internet. In setting up and marketing a Web site, the following objectives should be kept in mind:

### Meet Needs and Learn Habits of Internet Users and Consumers

Buying habits: Consumers are more inclined to buy products they know and for which they can easily compare prices.

Data: In August 1999, an estimated 31 percent of Internet users in the United States were regularly purchasing online.<sup>21</sup> The most common purchases were:

<b>Books</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>CDs</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>Airline tickets</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Small gifts</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Computer hardware</b>	<b>3%</b>

Implication for setup/marketing: If consumers are not already familiar with a product, producers can make them feel a sense of need by educating them about the product, offering a money-back guarantee, or providing a free sample of the product.

Buying habits: A growing number of new online shoppers are looking to the Internet as a method of buying a wider range of products.

Data: In May 1999, purchases by new online consumers broke down as follows:<sup>22</sup>

Category	Percentage
<b>Home and garden</b>	<b>15.0%</b>
<b>Gift</b>	<b>12.5%</b>
<b>Entertainment<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>12.2%</b>
<b>Apparel</b>	<b>12.0%</b>
<b>Consumer goods<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>10.3%</b>
<b>Food and wine</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
<b>Computer goods</b>	<b>9.4%</b>

<sup>a</sup>includes books, music, and videos

<sup>b</sup>includes department stores, health and beauty, and pharmaceuticals

Implications for setup/marketing: Holiday or other specials encourage consumers to consider a product at a time when they are already purchasing a number of items and may be looking for unique ideas. A “first-time buyers” section with an explanation of the site contents and description of shipping rates or security policies can be helpful in attracting people who are new to Internet purchasing as customers.

Buying habits: “Nearly two-thirds of Internet users have used the Internet to research online purchases but have yet to buy over the Internet.”<sup>23</sup>



The most frequently cited barriers to Internet purchases are:

Barrier	Percent reporting
Pricing	77%
Potential return hassles	67%
Credit card concerns	65%
Privacy issues	58%
Navigation difficulty	35%

Implications for setup/marketing: It is critical to ease fears and personalize the buying and selling relationship. Like all customers, Internet customers don't want to be "taken." It may be difficult to gain a customer's trust because the producer may be unknown to the customer and/or may be located some distance away. Credit card concerns are always present. One study found that, "6 million Web users who reported fraud or misuse of their credit card represent 7 percent of online consumers."<sup>24</sup>



**A growing number of new online shoppers are looking to the Internet as a method of buying a wider range of products.**

There are many ways to address these issues at no cost to the producer. For example:

- **Trust:** Since a consumer may not be aware of how reputable a producer or operation is, noting on a Web site the producer's membership in a chamber of commerce, certifications, and enrollment in State department of agriculture programs can promote trust.
- **Pricing:** Price breaks on shipping could be offered if the consumer purchases a certain dollar amount, or shipping could be included in the cost of the product.
- **Potential return hassles:** A "no hassle" return policy can boost sales.
- **Credit card concerns:** These concerns can be minimized by having a secure server or by offering consumers the option of faxing their order.
- **Privacy issues:** If the producer does not intend to sell customers' e-mail addresses, that policy should be clearly stated on the Web site.
- **Navigation difficulty:** It is important to test and retest a site before going live. The site should be tested using different modem speeds, browsers, and pixel (monitor) settings. Asking a few customers to try the site and provide feedback can also be helpful.



**Holiday or other specials encourage consumers to consider a product at a time when they are already purchasing a number of items and may be looking for unique ideas.**

**Buying habits:** Internet consumers place a high value on convenience and information.

**Data:** NUA Internet Surveys show there are several reasons why consumers shop online:<sup>25</sup>

- 30% - Convenience of shopping from home**
- 25% - The 24-hour nature of online shopping**
- 18% - Internet enables pricing of goods most efficiently**



**The convenience of shopping from home should be emphasized; e.g., “No need to go to Florida, we can bring sweet oranges to your doorstep!”**

**Implication for setup/marketing:** The convenience of shopping from home should be emphasized; e.g., “No need to go to Florida, we can bring sweet oranges to your doorstep!” How best to market the concept of convenience will depend on the nature of the business. For example, if a producer’s prices are competitive with a local supermarket, the producer could list his or her prices and those of the local supermarket and mention that the “local farm produce” is not only less expensive but also fresher and of better quality.

**Buying habits:** Most Internet customers are not spending large amounts of money while shopping online.

**Data:** NUA Internet Surveys report that 52 percent of Internet customers spent less than \$100 online in July 1999. Forty-seven percent of female shoppers spent more than \$100 online while only 23 percent of men did the same.<sup>26</sup> Women are clearly bigger spenders. According to CyberAtlas, the typical size of online retail transactions is:<sup>27</sup>

<b>Price</b>	<b>Percent of transactions</b>
<b>Less than \$10</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>\$10-49</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>\$50-99</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>\$100-499</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>\$500-999</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>\$1,000-9,999</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>\$10,000+</b>	<b>4%</b>

Sales in the “less than \$10” category are yet to take off. The study cited by CyberAtlas also found that “Fewer than 2 percent of all retail sites sell products costing less than \$10”<sup>28</sup> and that women are more price conscious when shopping online and tend to buy a wider variety of products; however, since most products sold on the Internet are items like books, CDs, computers, and airline tickets, these data may not reflect sales of food or agricultural products.

**Implications for setup/marketing:** Some Web sites are geared mainly toward women. In the case of farm direct marketing, having children’s activities on the Web site and advertising on-farm children’s activities or recipes such as healthful snack ideas for children may be useful in targeting this audience. Since individual orders cannot be expected to result in huge sales, the producer should focus on developing customers who are repeat buyers. Customer loyalty (repeat purchases and referrals) is the key driver of profitability for online businesses.<sup>29</sup>

**Internet habits:** The average Internet user does not spend hours surfing the Internet. In fact, the amount of time spent reading a single page on an Internet site is fairly short, just a little over a minute.

**Data:** Average activity for an Internet user during the month of November 2001 was:<sup>30</sup>

<b>Number of sessions per week</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Number of unique sites visited</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Time spent per week</b>	<b>3:18:26 hours/minutes</b>
<b>Time spent during surfing session</b>	<b>33:08 minutes</b>
<b>Duration of a page viewed</b>	<b>00:54 minutes</b>

Implications for setup/marketing:  
 A producer has little time in which to make an impression on the Internet. A careful balance must be found between providing information and enticing the consumer and not overwhelming the reader. A Web site that seeks to sell products should provide brief and concise information so the consumer is persuaded to purchase. However, providing too little product information may cause customers to shop elsewhere. Whether selling a product or educating customers, a “click here for more information” button can be helpful.



**A careful balance must be found between providing information and enticing the consumer and not overwhelming the reader.**

Internet habits: Internet users put the highest priority on content. Content does not necessarily mean “high-tech” graphics; it means reliable and detailed information. “Slick” Web sites are not necessarily what consumers want.

Data: The following factors influence repeat visitors to a Web site:<sup>31</sup>

<b>High-quality content</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Ease of use</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>Quick to download</b>	<b>58%</b>
<b>Updated frequently</b>	<b>54%</b>
<b>Coupons and incentives</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Favorite brands</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Cutting-edge technology</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Games</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Purchasing capabilities</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Customizable content</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Chat and bulletin board software</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>6%</b>

*Similar research<sup>32</sup> asked which type of product or service feature would increase the likelihood of purchasing more products or services over the Internet in the future. Respondents answered:*



**Internet users put the highest priority on content. Content does not necessarily mean “high-tech” graphics; it means reliable and detailed information.**





Consumers use a variety of sources to find Web site addresses but use search engines most frequently.

Feature	Percent of Internet users
Free product delivery	98%
On-time delivery guarantees	95%
No sales tax	91%
Coupons/promotions	83%
Toll-free customer assistance	68%
Live, online customer assistance	62%
Customer reviews or recommendations	62%
Helpful hints for colors, sizes, etc.	58%
Free gift wrapping	58%
Gift suggestions	46%

Implications for setup/marketing: A direct marketing Web site should provide sufficient up-to-date information to inform the user. A site that isn't maintained can be extremely frustrating for a consumer. A Web site should be easy to use and should download quickly, regardless of connection speed. The fact that pricing, delivery, and other options affect customers' interest in purchasing products from the Web site should be taken into consideration.



Although registering with a search engine is important, ensuring that the Web site is "high" in the search results is even more important.

Internet habits: Consumers use a variety of sources to find Web site addresses but use search engines most frequently.

Data: The most used sources for Web site addresses are:<sup>33</sup>

Search engine	57%
E-mail messages	38%
Web sites	35%
Word of mouth	28%
Magazine ads	25%
TV commercials	14%
Periodical articles	11%
Vendor catalogs	11%
Newspaper ads	9%
Banner ads	7%
Radio ads	2%
Mail ads	2%

Implications for set up/marketing: Although registering with a search engine is important, ensuring that the Web site is "high" in the search results is even more important. Web site development tools are available to assist the producer in ensuring that the Web site is "high" in the search results. If entering keywords such as "apple and Pennsylvania" into a search engine results in the Web site being listed as the 100th result, the search engine registration should be revised.<sup>34</sup>

Web site address should be placed on any correspondence (written or e-mail) and on any promotional materials (flyers, ads, signs at a farmers market).

## Select a Domain Name with a Marketing Message

*Choosing a domain name (URL) is an important step in defining and promoting your Web site. A domain name should be:*

- Short
- Easy to remember
- Easy to spell
- Meaningful
- Professional
- Sending a marketing message

For example, information on Washington State apples can be found at [www.bestapples.com](http://www.bestapples.com). The domain name is a marketing message in itself.

As a fictitious example, while existing customers may know Mrs. Johnson's maple syrup and "johnsonsmaplesyrup.com" is easy to remember, "vermontsweet.com" is a catchy phrase that might attract new customers. A business can have more than one domain name and one site can automatically redirect customers to another one.

Free Web site hosting services can offer cost savings. However, the tradeoff may not benefit an operation. It can sometimes result in an undesirable Web site URL (e.g., [www.anothercompany.com/~your-company](http://www.anothercompany.com/~your-company)). Customers' reactions may be, "How reliable, trustworthy, and viable is a company that can't afford or won't use a unique URL?" or "How much do they care about their online business?"

An easy way to see what domain names are available is to visit a domain name registration company such as [www.register.com](http://www.register.com) or [www.networksolutions.com](http://www.networksolutions.com) and enter an ideal URL to see if it is available.<sup>35</sup> Many domain names have been bought by brokers, speculating that someone will eventually want a particular URL. A first choice may not be available. It is generally more expensive to buy a name from a broker than to develop a unique URL. Family, friends, and customers can provide help in developing catchy phrases. A contest among customers may also prove helpful. Examples of unregistered domain names are listed below.

Unregistered domain names as of November 15, 2001:

[www.freshfarmmarket.com](http://www.freshfarmmarket.com)  
[www.fromthetree.com](http://www.fromthetree.com)  
[www.vermontsweet.com](http://www.vermontsweet.com)  
[www.sweetestcorn.com](http://www.sweetestcorn.com)



**A Web site that seeks to sell products should provide brief and concise information so the consumer is persuaded to purchase.**





## Use All Available Means To Increase Web Site Traffic and Attract Customers To Buy

*Additional ways to attract people to a Web site include:*

- *Using links from other Web sites* – It is helpful to find links from the Web sites of other farms, chambers of commerce, associations, State departments of agriculture, directories, newspapers, and tourism sites. Links are an excellent means of bringing traffic to a Web site from another Web site. Sites that link to a Web site can be found at [www.linkpopularity.com](http://www.linkpopularity.com). Competitors' sites may also contain useful links.
- *Using links from local individuals or businesses* – There may be other local individuals or businesses with Web sites. Trading links or bartering for a link should be considered. For example, a Web site selling produce might link with a local dairy. This increases a “buy local”



**Putting the Web site address everywhere – Advertisements, signs, stationery, and pens are good places to display a URL.**

message or theme. Linking with the Web sites of friends and neighbors can also be beneficial. A personal reference from friends or neighbors (e.g., “the guy with the best tomatoes in the county”) can be valuable in attracting customers to a Web site.

- *Putting the Web site address everywhere* – Advertisements, signs, stationery, and pens are good places to display a URL. Word-of-mouth communication with customers is another effective way to promote the site.
- *Personalizing the e-mail signature* – An e-mail signature that includes a personal name, business name, phone number, mailing address, e-mail, Web site URL, and a catch phrase can be extremely helpful. Not only does it provide this information to the recipient of the e-mail, but, if that person forwards the e-mail to someone else, the next person will also receive the information.
- *Using an e-mail newsletter* – Newsletters can be registered at [ezine-universe.com](http://ezine-universe.com).
- *Using electronic postcards* – With the expenditure of little money or effort, Web site visitors can send e-greetings (e.g., with a picture of produce or an animal).
- *Sending postcards* – A holiday, special occasion, or “fall harvest” card, thanking customers for their business, serves to remind them about the site for holiday shopping. Cards can be sent electronically, but paper postcards and greetings that show a Web site can also be used (an example can be found at [www.wbcards.com](http://www.wbcards.com)).
- *Calling the local newspaper or sending a press release* – Local news agencies are always searching for stories. A “human interest” story or a business-related item will provide free publicity for the Web site. An article on “farmers and technology” attracts attention, particularly if the site is new and unique.
- *Registering on search engines* – Any Web site should be well listed.<sup>36</sup> “Meta tags” can be used to improve search engine listings.
- *Bidding on keywords on search engines* – This idea is for serious Internet marketers who are willing to pay money to advertise their site.<sup>37</sup> Correctly targeted, buying key words can be an effective marketing method, even for a small producer.
- *Buying banner ads* – This is another useful tool for marketers who have an advertising budget for their Web site.<sup>38</sup>
- *Encouraging word of mouth* – Customers should be encouraged to forward e-mails received, bookmark the site, and tell their friends about the farm.
- *Using reliable, informative, useful content that builds trust* – It is important to consider what information can be offered that would entice customers to visit the Web site and then persuade them to buy something. The content should be appropriate for the target niche market. A “how to” section (e.g., how to store the fruits and vegetables you produce), questions and answers (e.g., “how can I tell if a watermelon is ripe?”), or answers to frequently asked questions (e.g., Sustainable agriculture is...) are a few ideas to consider.
- *Providing helpful information* – Having the ingredients list and nutrition information as part of the product description for processed food is a convenient feature for all customers, especially those with food allergies.

- *Providing directions online and/or posting a map* – Free maps are available at Web sites such as [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com). Written directions from various points or major towns and roads should also be included.
- *Making the site Interactive* – Free Java script is available for use on a Web site (e.g., script that says “Welcome back to the farm, John!”).<sup>39</sup>
- *Keeping the site up-to-date and fresh* – Having specials that change weekly or monthly and rotating features on the opening page can add to the interest of the site.
- *Stressing good prices* – Listing competitors’ prices and comparing prices with those of supermarkets, as well as stressing quality and freshness or the importance of retaining money within the community, can be extremely effective marketing tools.
- *Having printable coupons* – Examples include: “10 percent off your next purchase at the farm-stand” or “free child’s hayride with adult’s paid ticket.” In this way, a producer can combine an online marketing strategy with an offline marketing strategy.
- *Adding free samples when sending a product* – Sending, along with the regular order, a sample of a product that the consumer might also be interested in can boost sales. For example, when sending a jar of one flavor of honey, a sample of another flavor of honey or a piece of honey candy could be included. Free samples are a good way to build loyalty and differentiate a business from its competitors.



**Free samples are a good way to build loyalty and differentiate a business from its competitors.**

- *Highlighting easy return policy and guarantees* – An offer of “100 percent satisfaction guaranteed or your money-back,” coupled with a fair and simple return policy, builds customer loyalty.
- *Adding personalized service* – Allowing customers to send products as gifts by providing gift cards with personal messages and gift wrap is an excellent way to please the customer while adding value to the purchase.
- *Providing special sections on site* – A special section devoted to gifts can be provided on the Web site. Along with an item description, there might be a statement such as “customers who have bought this have also enjoyed...” with a link to another item (e.g., with information on maple syrup, there could be a link to pancake mix). This kind of statement can be backed up with actual sales information. Complementary items can also be recommended.

- *Announcing a contest* – Contest ideas include holding a raffle for people who sign up for e-mail mailing lists or having a best-recipe contest. (This is also an excellent way to obtain original content for a site.)
- *Involving children* – By asking parents for the names, dates of birth, and e-mail addresses of their children, a producer will be able to send them birthday cards.<sup>40</sup> A “kid’s e-mail club” is another way to involve children.
- *Adding pictures* – Digital cameras are easy to use, and pictures can be uploaded to the Web site. Pictures should be updated regularly. Customers might be asked to e-mail pictures from farm visits. A good way to personalize the Web site is to have a section that describes and contains pictures of the people behind an operation. A good example of this is at [www.tomatoes.com](http://www.tomatoes.com).



**Adding personalized service – Allowing customers to send products as gifts by providing gift cards with personal messages and gift wrap is an excellent way to please the customer while adding value to the purchase.**



**It is important to find something unique that might motivate customers to forward the URL of the Web site to their friends and family.**

- *Collaborating with groups that “visit” (e.g., school groups)* – A page on the Web site, such as a downloadable or online activity (e.g., quiz or coloring book) that a teacher can use in the classroom or assign as homework can be an effective marketing tool, especially if used in conjunction with a visit to the farm.
- *Becoming an expert* – Becoming an expert on local produce or local/regional farming issues, issuing press releases, and participating in local radio and TV talk shows will increase the producer’s public visibility. The content on the Web site should reflect the producer’s status as an expert.
- *Looking at other Web sites* – Taking time to look at other Web sites can be invaluable. A range of businesses should be reviewed in terms of size and what they sell, with attention to what works well, what is eye catching, and how the desired impressions can be implemented?
- *Trying something unique* –
  - One Web site ([www.pigbrother.co.uk](http://www.pigbrother.co.uk) or [www.friendlyfarmfoods.co.uk](http://www.friendlyfarmfoods.co.uk)) by a British farmer features short videos of his pigs (“Pig cam”) in their various stages of growth and activity. The site recently ran a voting game based on the popular TV show “Survivor.” Web site visitors voted the pigs out of the pen and were eligible for prizes. Some profits were donated to rural and farm charities.
  - “Corn cam” and “soybean cam” allow Web site visitors to see corn growing ([www.iowafarmer.com/corncam/corn.html](http://www.iowafarmer.com/corncam/corn.html)). “Corn cam” sells t-shirts advertising its Web site.

- At [www.goathillfarm.com](http://www.goathillfarm.com), Web site visitors can e-mail a goat at [oldgoat@goathillfarm.com](mailto:oldgoat@goathillfarm.com).

It is important to find something unique that might motivate customers to forward the URL of the Web site to their friends and family. Although PigCam may seem ridiculous to an adult, it could be fascinating to an 8-year-old child living in an urban area. Many digital cameras will record a short video (including sound). There are many simple options.



**A good way to personalize the Web site is to have a section that describes and contains pictures of the people behind an operation.**

## Consider Suggestions on Developing a Good Small Business Web Site

There are several important factors to consider in developing a good small business Web site.

- **Download time:** The Web site should load quickly. “According to Relevant Knowledge, the average home Internet user spends nine minutes a day waiting for Web pages to download which adds up to nearly 55 hours of waiting annually.”<sup>41</sup>
- **Niche:** Most producers are not seeking to be the next Amazon.com. Instead, they should strive to be a good small business on the Web site. They should find a niche and focus on that target market.
- **Customer service:** For small businesses, particularly farm direct marketers, personal relationships with customers are critical. A recent study showed that 42 percent of the 125 top e-commerce Web sites either took longer than 5 days to reply to customer e-mail, never replied, or were not accessible to customers via e-mail.<sup>42</sup> It is important to ensure that contact information is listed on every page and that all inquiries are responded to in a timely manner. Respecting customers is essential to developing their loyalty.
- **Clear benefits:** The benefits to consumers should be clearly presented. Customers should be told why they should buy from the Web site.
- **First Impression:** It has been said that “you only get one chance to make a first impression.” The first page of the Web site should captivate customers and make them want to read more.
- **Easy navigation:** The site should be tested to ensure that it is easy to use. A customer should be able to reach any part of the site in two clicks.
- **Other sites:** Other Web sites should be reviewed to determine how they organize their products, if they use dropdown menus or just list categories, and the level of difficulty in finding a product.
- **Site maintenance:** Statements like “under construction” and “coming soon” are frustrating to customers and should be avoided. A Web site is a work in progress, and not everything needs to be up at once. It is also important to ensure against having broken links on the Web site.
- **Contact information on every page:** Contact information should be included on every Web page. Every page should also contain a button or link to “Order now.”
- **Easy payment options:** It is important to consider various “shopping cart” options before choosing a service or software.
- **Innovation:** The advantage of being small is that the marketing message or methods can be easily adapted or changed.



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# Summary

According to a recent study by America Online and Roper Starch Worldwide, nearly half of Internet users say the medium is becoming a necessity, and almost three-quarters use it to make better buying decisions.<sup>44</sup> The Internet offers many opportunities for farm direct marketers who are willing to develop an Internet marketing plan with specific objectives and then select and tailor a Web site to reflect their needs and goals.

When customers send e-mails, it is important not only to answer their questions, but also to ask questions in return. By creating an e-mail “dialogue” with customers, it is possible to get more of their attention and, hopefully, dollars. Approximately half of the time spent on marketing should focus on developing and retaining existing customers. If they have bought once and were satisfied, it will be easier to get them to buy again.

Using the suggestions presented in this publication, producers will be more informed about setting up a Web site that successfully meets their marketing objectives and will avoid many of the common startup mistakes and problems. Because Internet marketing is changing rapidly, however, no marketing plan should be “set in stone.” Modifications should be based on customer feedback and new ideas from other Web sites.

## Appendix A: Experiences of Farm Direct Marketers on the Internet

There are a growing number of farm direct marketers on the Internet. The objective of this section is to show the diversity of their opinions and experiences. Just as every farm is unique, so also is the experience of every producer on the Internet. The following information demonstrates that there is no one generic experience because producers have different objectives and resources.

This section contains e-mail interviews with farm direct marketers with Web sites who were contacted as a result of media attention they received or through informal meetings at conferences. Thus, not every producer was asked every question. The accounts are presented in random order. Since Web sites are constantly evolving, the descriptions below may not reflect the current Web site.

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## Entertainment Farming /Agritourism

[www.arrowheadacres.com](http://www.arrowheadacres.com)

Dave Morin,  
Arrowhead Acres,  
Uxbridge, MA



**A**rrowhead Acres decided to build a Web site “to let the world know we exist.” The site provides information about the farm’s agritourism activities such as hayrides, petting zoo, pumpkins, Christmas trees, and outings and functions. The Web site uses numerous pictures to entice customers, and prices are clearly posted. There is no selling on the Web site; the objective is to lure customers to the farm.

Dave Morin notes that “We have several products and we have entered them in many search engine keyword lists. That is what you do for the promotion of a Web site.” When asked how he determines whether it is a good decision to maintain the Web site, Morin responded, “We ask customers how they heard of us and by far the Web site and Yellow Pages are in the lead.”

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**Online ordering available?** No. Prices for products and services listed.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “My first one page site was free and set up by a coworker for me. My 2nd more elaborate site cost me a gas grill for my son who was learning how to set them up.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** ”

Now between annual fees and maintenance/upgrades it probably costs \$500 per year for a moonlighter who maintains it.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “Keeping the site current with all the changes that we make in our business.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “Hire a professional Webmaster from the start. Get in or be passed by – it is definitely the trend.” Also, “...there are outfits out there that will charge thousands of dollars for the same thing that someone else will put together for

hundreds. Unfortunately, much of the agricultural community is inexperienced in the Cyber world and could be taken for a financial ride. My Webmaster moonlights (from a full-time Web design company) with his own Web business and provides tremendous value for the dollar, but I have had companies try to sell me inferior services costing many thousands.”

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## Farm Market and Pick-Your-own

[www.birdhavenblueberry.com](http://www.birdhavenblueberry.com)

John Pipiras  
Bird Haven Blueberry Farm,  
Southampton, MA



**J**ohn Pipiras decided Bird Haven Blueberry Farm needed a Web site because “There is much interest in small farms. I wanted to be in the forefront. Shake the tree and see what falls out.” He markets the site by sending information to any organization that can help with advertising such as CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), which promotes western Massachusetts’ local products.

Pipiras notes that “‘personal,’ ‘community,’ and ‘neighbor’ are key words in the small farm business. My customers certainly get that when they visit our farm and they love it. I believe a farm and its character and values can and must extend into the Internet Web site.”

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**Online ordering available?** No.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “3 months. I did it myself.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “Just the cost to be on the Internet anyway. About \$24/mo.”

**How do you determine whether it is a good business decision to maintain the Web site?** “My Web site looks like it

was made by a farmer. It shows how much we love our farm. When I send it to any organization that can help either financially or by promoting local produce, I get a favorable response.”

## Lookout Farm and Market

[www.lookoutfarm.com](http://www.lookoutfarm.com)

Paul Witham,  
Marino Lookout Farm and Market,  
Natick, MA



*Witham notes that there were many reasons for wanting to build a Web site, “mainly though to reach a broader market and be able to disseminate information about our operation more easily.”*

*The site can be used to publish the farm’s apple picking schedule and gather names for mailing lists. Since the farm’s marketing strategy is geared primarily toward families, there are kids club events, exotic animals, and train and stagecoach rides to help entice people to visit. In turn, families are the target audience for the Web site.*

**Online ordering available?** No.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “We produce the site in-house. Our only fees, which are minimal, are for hosting and domain registration.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “A few hours a week, about \$50 per month.”

**How do you “market” the Web site?** “It’s included in all our advertising (newspaper, radio and other venues...anywhere and everywhere). We aggressively submit to all search engines and pay for listings in some

local, high-traffic Web sites. This fall we’re doing our first banner ad campaign on one of these sites.”

**How do you determine whether it is a good business decision to maintain the Web site?** “We’ve been getting about 200 unique visitors a week, many of whom have been signing up for e-mail alerts and kids club mailings. We see this as great, targeted marketing and definitely worth the investment.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “It’s still such new territory that there were some initial reservations by some. Each week, however, it’s becoming more and more of an

important part of our overall marketing. The main ongoing challenge, of course, is just maintaining and updating the site so content is fresh and timely each week.”

**If I could do it all over again I would...?** “have done it earlier.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “Best advice is to begin immediately and allocate time and resources toward Internet marketing. It’s only going to become more important.”

## Farm Market

[www.upickvermont.com](http://www.upickvermont.com)

Kim Antonioli,  
Adams Farm Market,  
Williston, VT



*Adams Farm Market’s objective in having a Web site: “We are constantly trying to develop new ways to reach more customers. Although our area is growing very quickly with ‘urban sprawl,’ we are also experiencing some new competition from large chain stores that undersell our prices on a daily basis. We are trying to offer our loyal and new customers a service that they will not find at the grocery stores.” Therefore, their current target audience is out-of-State family and friends as well as customers in the store. In the future, they hope that word of mouth, as well as registering on search engines, will assist in publicizing the site. Before developing the site, they were not in the catalog business.*

**Online ordering available?** Yes, with secure server. Information on paying by check or calling toll-free number also provided.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “We actually tried to hire a ‘contractor’ but found that for our needs we could do it without expens-

es through my brother who has just graduated from UNH [University of New Hampshire] with a business degree. He has written all of our HTML [Hypertext Markup Language] code and we all had a hand in the design and layout.” They also developed a flyer to hand out to cus-

tomers and send to family and friends that cost \$350 to print.

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “Once the site is running it will not need to be maintained unless we decide to change anything (no cost), but to



use a shopping cart service (for security purposes) it costs approximately \$300 per year.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “Keeping the site current with all the changes that we make in our business.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “Look around first at what companies have to offer (shopping cart services, Web site services, setup costs). Also check out existing sites and get a general feel of how you would like your site to look.

Having a rough layout before bringing the idea to a contractor (or doing it yourself) will make things go a lot smoother.”

## Mixed High-End Outlets: Farmers Markets, Restaurants, and Mail Order

[sylvaninfo.net/drinkingswamp](http://sylvaninfo.net/drinkingswamp)

**Bob Stolman and Jeff Brooks,**  
Drinking Swamp Farm,  
Haynesville, VA



*“The objective of the Web site was a tool for our existing customers and ‘net surfers’ to scroll through our products and place orders. It enhances our visibility besides the farmers market we presently attend. With the emergence of fresh, chemical-free goat cheese as a major ‘new exotic high-end food’ we wanted to offer our expertise of exquisite hand-crafted artisan products to a wider audience.” They are also continually developing new products and in the last year have added a full line of gourmet food items including goat cheese ravioli, goat cheese quiche, spanakopita, and other products.*

*Stolman and Brooks were aware of the type of consumers who buy their product and whether they were on the Internet. “Our audience is the enlightened food aficionado who is current with the emerging food industry and products. Our audience is also the group of citizens with an above-average amount of disposable income for luxury items as well as those searching for healthier alternatives to factory-produced...cheese... We knew through experience who our customers were and were not. We had attended many farmers markets and flea markets to sell our products and found that the markets in the upscale communities supported our efforts but those at flea markets and fairs didn’t have the discretionary income to pay the prices we charge for hand-crafted, one-of-a-kind cheeses.” They advertise the site mainly through flyers that they hand out to customers as well as listing with many search engines. They also promote the site through their newsletter and by word of mouth.*

**Online ordering available?** Ordering is available via e-mail. A toll-free number is also provided.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “If the question is to be interpreted as how much did we spend on sight development, the answer is zero. Our Internet server is also a friend who loves our cheese, so they helped get it set up and taught me how to run it. For cheese, of course!”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “No money, but time I couldn’t say, most likely about 4 hours a month average to maintain it when I have the time, but being a 2-man operation with one hired hand there isn’t enough time to spend on the site as I would like.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “I guess the biggest challenge is finding time to update as often.”

**Approximately what percent of sales come from the Internet?** “Less than what we wanted and most likely because we don’t take credit cards at this point. However, since many of the orders are for existing customers who then place e-mail orders and pick up at the market or have the products shipped, I would guess about 20 percent.” This is up from the year before during which about 10-15 percent of sales came from the Internet. However, Internet sales increased after they were contacted by many upscale restaurants, gourmet food shops, and large chains seeking to buy their product.

**How do you determine whether it is a good business decision to maintain the Web site?** “Since it costs us nothing monetarily it is a good decision to have our name wherever we can. We can evaluate sales by asking people calling or e-mailing the farm where they heard of us and we track it that way.”

**How do you get repeat business/build customer loyalty/make it a “personal” connection?** “By making sure that every customer or potential customer is treated as though they are the most important customer on the planet. It is our belief that we are here on this planet to be of service to others, thus this is a mere extension of that philosophy. We also see to it that each customer is given courtesy phone calls as well as ‘freebies’ in each order with our compliments to please try something new and give us their opinions. They then feel part of the total operation and not just a customer whose money we want.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “The advice I would give to anyone starting out is to make sure you get it right the first time, for you need to get the site up and going and then make minor changes as time permits but not a total overhaul, for then customers have no clue as to what you really stand for.”

### Direct Marketing as a Secondary Outlet

[www.austinfarm.org/homegrown](http://www.austinfarm.org/homegrown)

**Willie McKemie,  
McKemie Homegrown Farm,  
Dale, TX**



*McKemie’s primary customers are Austin area grocery stores, although they also sell on the farm and at several area farmers markets. They decided to build a Web site because of the availability of a low-cost host. Their target audience is existing farm site customers, and they use the site to “solicit farm visits and inform customers of availability.” One of the goals of the site was to cut down on phone calls, newspaper ads, and mailings.*

*McKemie’s site has several unusual characteristics. There is a “What’s new” section, which is a diary of recent events on the farm. There is also an “About us” section which gives a short description of the farm, describing soil quality and crops raised.*

*Acutely aware of Texas demographics, McKemie offers most of the site in both English and Spanish.*

**Online ordering available?** No.

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “\$100/year plus one hour of my time per week.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “Do not have high hopes. Do not make large expenditures.”

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## Mail Order

[www.emuoilbymail.com](http://www.emuoilbymail.com)

Jeanne Summerour, NGF, Inc.,  
Dawsonville, GA



**S**ummerour decided to build a Web site to have a direct referral. “It also affords an inexpensive way to introduce new products. We sell a product (emu oil) that is provided through vertical farm integration. We feel it is the surest way to make a profit.

The primary target is people interested in natural products. Summerour notes, “This decision was based on the increasing consumption by this audience.”

**Online ordering available?** Yes, with secure online server.

How much money and time initially invested? “Not a lot. I did hire a contractor to design and maintain the site. I believe the first two years...total expense...is around \$300.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “I paid for it upfront. I simply check it everyday and fill orders.”

**How do you “market” the Web site?**

“We are also Corporate Sponsors of the American Emu Association so we get some hits that way. We purchase advertising in an online magazine and that generates most of our traffic.”

**Approximately what percent of your sales come from the Internet?** “Three percent.”

**How do you determine whether it is a good business decision to maintain the Web site?** “Until we have more experience with this form of marketing, I cannot answer honestly. I paid upfront so I do not have a monthly reminder of what this is costing. I also have myself to blame for not generating more traffic because I haven’t taken the time to become computer/Internet savvy.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “Not all orders are legitimate. We take credit cards and some people go through the process of ordering just for fun. They make up information. I also would like more per-

sonal contact with the follow up but feel like I am intruding by sending a follow-up e-mail.”

**How do you get repeat business/build customer loyalty/make it a ‘personal’ connection?** “We sponsored an Internet survey that defined several target areas. We now have a mailing list (U.S. Postal Service type) that will allow for direct mail. This is a lot more than e-mailing but it also allows the person to simply discard it if they are not interested without feeling “put upon.”

**What advice do you have for producers considering getting into Internet marketing?** “Learn more about the Internet, search engines, generating traffic. Everyone has a scam or a plan to sell you and you need to know what is legitimately good for YOUR business.”

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## Farm Vacation Association

[www.pafarmstay.com](http://www.pafarmstay.com)

Marcy Tudor,  
Weatherbury Farm,  
Avella, PA



**M**arcy Tudor, President of the Pennsylvania Farm Vacation Association (PFVA) said that she decided to start a Web site because she thought it would be a “great marketing tool.” Its goals are to increase bookings at its member farm vacations and to make other farmers in the State of Pennsylvania aware of the benefits of membership. The site was initially funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

**How much money and time initially invested?** “The site went online in May 1997. Beginning in December 1996 (when I personally first went online) I began surfing the net, looking at (mainly) bed and breakfast sites. I found a site I liked and e-

mailed the developer. At our April 1997 [meeting], the membership approved the idea. Each member had to send in 2-3 pictures and a write-up. As president of the association I had to keep things moving and check out the pages as the

developer finished them—either e-mailing the farm and letting them know or sending a print copy to the farms that were not online. I would estimate that I spent at least several hundred hours, perhaps as much as 500 hours. The site cost \$1,650 + \$35 for domain registration.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?**

“Farms that want to have anything other than minor text changes pay for them. (The association pays for the initial web page for each farm). Farms either e-mail or write me with the changes which I mail to the developer. He makes small changes at no additional charge. Changes take me no more than 5-10 hours per month.”

Our monthly fee is \$25, which includes hosting (and the small changes mentioned above).

Within the past several months, we added a page on membership to the web site. We have not yet received the bill—but I expect it to be in the \$75-\$100 range. (The developer's charges have increased somewhat.)”

**Cost to members?** During 1999, “A listing on our Web site and the monthly ISP [Internet service provider] charges are part of our \$200 membership fee.” When asked again in January 2001, PFVA was charging new farms without a stand-alone Web site \$100 to develop one on the PFVA Web site. The \$100 fee is approximately equal to PFVA's development cost. However, all of the farms that joined during 2000 had their own Web sites.

**How do you market the site?** “The site address is on all our brochures and press releases (we mail 400 press releases quarterly). As Farm Vacation is a rather unique idea, we get our press releases picked up quite well and often a newspaper will spotlight a local farm vacation in a feature story (and usually includes the Web site address).

We also have several displays in visitors centers throughout the State of Pennsylvania. (The visitors centers also have our brochures available through a central warehouse.) The Pennsylvania Travel Council (of which I personally am a board mem-

ber) has also been very helpful in getting us coverage. They recently set up a marketing opportunity with a central Pennsylvania food chain with a farm theme (\$45,000 in paid advertising) that Farm Vacation (and our brochures with Web address) was part of. They also fax all our legislators information about the availability of the PFVA brochure.

I personally went to the annual visitors bureau legislative dinner last year and spread the word. Our secretary has sent brochures to all the county extension offices (hoping to attract new members) and to all the visitors bureaus throughout the State. The mailings include a postcard to ask for more brochures and several have already responded.

We also give our members brochures to pass out not only at their farm vacation but in the community (e.g., bookstores, antique malls, etc.)

The officers of the association (and members at times too) speak at different functions—mainly those aimed at making farms aware of the farm vacation opportunity.

I have signed the PFVA site up at every search engine I could find, many lodging directories, agricultural and tourism Web sites. Interestingly, the majority of these were free. According to Alta Vista, there are 115 links pointing to PFVA; Infoseek lists 65 and HotBot more than 200.”

**How do you evaluate success?** “Besides the customary site statistics, I think our members' enthusiasm says it all. When I first mentioned the Web site, there were a lot of farms who were very dubious. Within two months, the most dubious farm was calling and asking if they could link to this site or that site.

In fact about 75 percent of our farms are now online. And the most dubious farm told me recently that they were going to break down and not

count computers as their enemy (and that is a direct result of the guests they are getting through the Web site).

**An indication of sales figures?**

“Personally, I know that 80 percent of our new business at Weatherbury Farm comes from the Internet. Although we are listed in a number of sites, folks most often remember (if they can) that they found Weatherbury Farm through the PFVA site.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site?** “I think the Internet opens up farm vacations to a whole group of what I call fringe farm vacation types (those who probably would not have found farm vacation without the Internet)—in general, these folks seem to have more false expectations than others (petting zoo, Holiday Inn-type rooms, activities available on the farm). I personally try to address these issues on my own Web site, [www.weatherburyfarm.com](http://www.weatherburyfarm.com), and urge all of our member farms to do the same on their PFVA Web page.

The second challenge applies only to those farms that have listings other than on [pafarmstay.com](http://pafarmstay.com)—and that is to find out exactly where folks heard about you (i.e., which Web site directory). I am personally going to put Extreme Tracker on my Web site so I can find how people are arriving at my site.”

**How do you get repeat business/build customer loyalty/make it a 'personal' connection?** “[pafarmstay.com](http://pafarmstay.com) has what I think is a very welcoming home page. We urge each of our member farms to give visitors copies of our farm vacation brochure and urge guests to visit other farm vacations.”

**If I could do it all over again I would...?** “have done it sooner!”



## Floral Sales Direct to Customer

[www.bobstropicals.com](http://www.bobstropicals.com)

Bob and Esti Grinpas,  
Bob's Tropicals,  
Kapaa, HI



### Why did your operation decide to build a Web site? What is your objective?

“We thought that we had a unique, quality product which would be of value to people on the mainland, and we wanted the magic of Hawaii to stay with our product all the way to the ultimate consumer. Also, we thought that the consumer might be willing to choose our products over a competitor’s products in order to support our earth-friendly/sustainable agriculture farming practices. So, we felt that our products were appropriate for marketing on the Internet. Our objective is to consistently receive 100 Internet orders per week.”

**Who is your target audience? How did you decide this?** “We think that anyone looking for a unique gift, whether for business or personal reasons, or for something beautiful for their own home or business is our potential customer. But, what separates us from our competitors is the fact that we take great effort to use the same farming techniques used by farmers producing certified organic food products. We don’t grow food and we have not applied to become certified as an organic grower, and so we call our practice ‘Earth Friendly.’ We think we get a product with better color and shelf life, and something our customers might prefer to handle and display in their home or business. And we think that there are a lot of people

out there who care and would prefer to support earth-friendly farming practices.”

**Were you already in the mail order/catalog business?** “Yes, we were doing some advertising and promotion.”

**How much money and time did you initially invest?** “We paid about \$800 to get the original site up and going, and a significant amount of our own time as well. We continued to spend probably about \$300-\$500 per year improving the site for about 3 years. We just put up a new site which cost us a lot more, but which I think is in a different league and has a lot of features which we think will be very helpful, like administrative tools, database, and programs which we can use ourselves, on a daily basis. And the new site is more convenient for our customers, it recognizes them and makes it very easy for them to place new orders and to track delivery of orders themselves.”

**How much money and time does it require to maintain the Web site?** “Right now, with the new site just going up, it is taking a lot of time. We are working out a lot of bugs and developing a lot of new features, both on the front side and back side of the site. It cost about \$5,000 to get the new site up, and I expect it will cost at least \$1,000 per year to continue developing the site. We also paid about \$150 for our encryption/key security system, about another \$150 for the Cyber Cash set up, and a monthly fee of about \$25 for the Cyber Cash. Additionally we are paying \$150 per month for services to keep the site coming up well with the search engines. The hosting of the site and related services is an additional \$45 per month, but this is for premium services and could be done with less if you are willing to have your server going down. I would add to this that with the kind of site we have now, we felt we needed to have a high-speed access to

make the best use of the site. To do that we needed a router (\$220), a \$350 installation, and a higher monthly ISP fee, by about \$25/mo.”

**How do you “market” your site? How do you “get the word out”?** “As I said, we have a service which does things to keep us up with the search engines; additionally we do some linking, particularly with sites with an organic or earth-friendly bent, like redjellyfish.com. We also do some key word bidding. Perhaps our most effective thing is the time-honored: customers telling other customers and our customers’ friends seeing the product.”

**Percent of sales from Internet?** “This is very seasonal. Right now, our Internet sales are about 20 percent, but during Valentine’s Day they were about 90 percent.”

**What are the challenges of having a Web site/doing Internet marketing?** “It is and probably will continue to be in a rapid state of development and you have to keep working with it.”

**How do you get repeat business/build customer loyalty/make it a “personal connection”?** “We are a very small operation and Esti does most of our customer relations and she does a great job of taking care of our customers. We guarantee all of our products and we will replace a box or refund the purchase price in order to keep our customer happy and coming back to us. We track every order with our FedEx computer and Esti is on the phone to make sure that our boxes are delivered on time and to the right destination. Of course, we make sure that what gets put in the box is the highest quality product.”

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# Appendix B: Suggested Reading and Training

## Articles and Publications on Internet Marketing for Farmers

- *Internet Marketing of Food Products.* Articles written by Dr. Greg White, University of Maine (such as “Commercial WWW Site Appeal: How Does It Affect Online Food and Drink Consumers’ Purchasing Behavior?”), can be found at [www.ume.maine.edu/~specfood/papers.html](http://www.ume.maine.edu/~specfood/papers.html).
- *National E-Team.* A national land-grant university design team organized by the four regional rural development centers to promote research and outreach education associated with electronic business issues. The National E-Team Web site offers curriculums, research activities, and links. [www.ext.msstate.edu/srdc/e-team](http://www.ext.msstate.edu/srdc/e-team).
- *“Internet Marketing for Farmers.”* Washington State University Cooperative Extension. [www.metrokc.gov/dchs/csd/wsue/agriculture/PDFs/internetMrkt.pdf](http://www.metrokc.gov/dchs/csd/wsue/agriculture/PDFs/internetMrkt.pdf).
- *“Mail Order the Modern Way.”* Small Farm Digest, Volume 2, No. 2, Winter 1999. [www.ree.usda.gov/agsys/smallfarm/sfd/](http://www.ree.usda.gov/agsys/smallfarm/sfd/).
- *“Using a Web Site To Keep the Attention of Your Customers.”* William Lester, Professor, Department of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University, Smart Marketing, January 2001. [aem.cornell.edu/special\\_programs/hortmgt/pubs/smartmkt/index.htm](http://aem.cornell.edu/special_programs/hortmgt/pubs/smartmkt/index.htm).
- *“A Great Idea: San Rafael Farmers’ Market Weekly E-mail Newsletter.”* From the USDA Farmer Direct Marketing Web site Newsletter, June/July 1999. [www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/news\\_06\\_99.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/news_06_99.htm).
- *“Direct Marketing of Farm Products Via the Internet: A Survey of SmallFarms.com Members.”* T. Ball and Y.L. Duval, Department of Agricultural Economics, Washington State University. Research in progress. For more information e-mail [ylduval@yahoo.com](mailto:ylduval@yahoo.com).
- Food Marketing Institute E-Business Center. [www.fmi.org/e\\_business](http://www.fmi.org/e_business).

## Books

There are probably far too many books written on Internet marketing. Internet marketing “gurus” come and go quickly. Thus, the recommendation of the day may be outdated within a year or two.

In general, the best books are no more than a year or two (at most) old. While ordering books online is easy, offers the greatest number of choices, and may contain written reviews, there is something to be said for going to a book store or library and being able to skim through a book before purchasing it.

*Recommended books: Relationship Marketing on the Internet: Creating One on One Bonds with Prospects and Customers and Keeping Them Forever*, Roger C. Parker, Adams Streetwise, Adams Media Corporation, 2000.

*World Wide Web Marketing: Integrating the Web into Your Marketing Strategy*, Jim Sterne, Wiley Computer Publishing, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999.

*Digital Darwinism: 7 Breakthrough Business Strategies for Surviving in the Cutthroat Web Economy*, Evan I. Schwartz, Broadway Books, Random House, 1999.

*An IBM Guide to Doing Business on the Internet*, Kendra R. Bonnett, McGraw-Hill, 2000.

## Software

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) offers a free CD-ROM, "Build Your Own Business Website for Free." The CD-ROM, cosponsored by ALLBusiness.com, bigstep.com, and the SBA, provides the information and tools to create and manage a Web site market online, sell products with secure e-commerce, promote events, display a portfolio, send e-mail newsletters, and more. The CD-ROM is available at all SBA Business Information Centers and other selected offices.

Additional information on the CD-ROM, system requirements, and how to order a copy can be found at [www.sba.gov/viewers/freecdrom.html](http://www.sba.gov/viewers/freecdrom.html).

## E-zines and Information Sources

E-zines are like magazines and newsletters that are posted for free on the Internet or mailed to an e-mail account. E-zines, like books, run the gamut from being useless to entertaining to enlightening to useful.

Many companies are using e-zines to attract business. However, e-zines are often littered with advertisements. It may require patience to weed through the commercial aspects of e-zines and ignore the sales pitch. However, the free content is often worth the effort.

*Selected sources of e-zines or free online e-commerce guides, publications, and/or information:*

[www.bestezines.com](http://www.bestezines.com) - Listings of e-zines.

[www.clickz.com](http://www.clickz.com) - Internet marketing articles on a variety of topics.

[www.ecommercetimes.com](http://www.ecommercetimes.com) - E-commerce articles on a variety of topics.

[www.ecomresourcecenter.com](http://www.ecomresourcecenter.com) - Articles that explain the basics of Internet marketing. A good site for additional technical and marketing information.

[www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com) - Information on Internet consumer demographics.

[ezine-universe.com](http://ezine-universe.com) - E-zine directory.

[www.knowthis.com](http://www.knowthis.com) - A marketing "virtual library."

[www.promotionworld.com](http://www.promotionworld.com) - Information on promoting a Web site.

[www.sellitontheweb.com](http://www.sellitontheweb.com) - Information on developing an online business.

[wilsoninternet.com](http://wilsoninternet.com) - Information on doing business on the Internet.

## Selected Sources of Technical Information on Web Site Development

[www.linkpopularity.com](http://www.linkpopularity.com) - A free online search service that will instantly provide number of links in a Web site.

[www.bignosebird.com](http://www.bignosebird.com) - Free Web site developer resources (e.g., help with HTML).

[www.freegraphics.com](http://www.freegraphics.com) - Links to sites with free graphics to enhance Web sites.

[www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~farmnet](http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~farmnet) - Ohio State University's "Farming the Net." Contains articles such as "Understanding the Basics of Web Page Construction," "Personal Computer Recommendations," and "Selecting Your Internet Service" by Ohio State University Extension.

## Selected Sources of Information on Web Site Marketing

“*Tips for Increasing Web Site Traffic*,” Dr. Ken Wolfe, Agricultural Development Center, University of Tennessee Cooperative Extension. [www.utextension.utk.edu/adf/pdf/adf35.pdf](http://www.utextension.utk.edu/adf/pdf/adf35.pdf).

“*The Internet as a Marketing Tool*,” Dr. Glen Muske et al, Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service. [agweb.okstate.edu/pearl/agecon/marketing/wf566.htm](http://agweb.okstate.edu/pearl/agecon/marketing/wf566.htm).

“*Business to Consumer E-Commerce: Selling on the Internet*,” Mississippi State University Extension Service. [msucares.com/business\\_assistance/homebusiness/ecommerce.html](http://msucares.com/business_assistance/homebusiness/ecommerce.html) .

## Selected Sources of Information on Small Business Web Sites

[www.onlinewbc.org/docs/market/sell\\_online.html](http://www.onlinewbc.org/docs/market/sell_online.html) - “*How To Sell Your Business Online*,” Small Business Administration, Online Women’s Business Center.

“*The Real Cost of Business Web Development*,” Earl Claus, The Oklahoma Electronic Commerce Connection. [www.okec.org/Resources/Howto/webdevcost.htm](http://www.okec.org/Resources/Howto/webdevcost.htm).

## Reference Web Sites

Plant Tech, [www.techweb.com/encyclopedia](http://www.techweb.com/encyclopedia) - Provides information on e-commerce terminology.

The Internet Public Library - [www.ipl.org](http://www.ipl.org).

The WWW Virtual Library - [vlib.org](http://vlib.org).

## Training

There are many potential sources of local free or low-cost Internet training. E-commerce and/or Web site programming (e.g., FrontPage or HTML) courses can be quite helpful in developing an Internet marketing plan.

*Information sources include:*

- Friends, neighbors, other producers
- State departments of agriculture
- County or State economic development boards/offices
- Extension educators
- Community colleges
- Small Business Administration - Almost all State SBA offices offer free or low-cost training. SBA office locations can be found at [www.sba.gov/calendar](http://www.sba.gov/calendar). SBA also offers online courses ([www.sba.gov/classroom](http://www.sba.gov/classroom)).

*Selected regional programs:*

- Access Minnesota Main Street [www.extension.umn.edu/mainstreet](http://www.extension.umn.edu/mainstreet)

Access Minnesota Main Street connects small to medium-size businesses to the Internet, e-commerce, and global trade. The project teaches business people from six Minnesota communities about the potential of e-commerce to dramatically increase access to resources and to expand their available markets.

- Internet Masters (Colorado) [www.internetmasters.org](http://www.internetmasters.org)

From the Web site: “The Colorado Internet Masters Program is an educational and civic volunteer program of the Colorado Rural Development Council, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Small Business Development Centers, Colorado Rural Technology Program, and partners. The program is modeled after the Master Gardener program and is expanding throughout the United States.

The Colorado Internet Masters course is a unique opportunity to expand a community’s knowledge of and skills for employing the world’s newest frontier—the Internet. It provides civic-minded individuals with a masters course on how to use the Internet. Those who complete the course become ‘Certified Internet Masters’ when they apply and share some of what they learn with others in their community through fulfillment of their 30-hour volunteer requirement.”

- Internet Masters (Missouri) [outreach.missouri.edu/imaster](http://outreach.missouri.edu/imaster)

Similar to the Colorado Internet Masters Program.

- Oklahoma Electronic Commerce Connection [www.okec.org](http://www.okec.org)

“The Oklahoma Ecommerce Connection (OKEC) seeks to encourage the use of e-business tools and empower Oklahoma companies with the information necessary to move into the world of networked commerce.” OKEC offers in-service training, online resources, advisors, symposiums, and forums.

#### Internet Marketing Training

- *“Internet Marketing: Food and Fiber Products”*

For those interested in a more academic approach to Internet marketing for food products, Dr. Greg White teaches an online class, “Internet Marketing: Food and Fiber Products” (REP 466).

“This course examines both the growth and evolution of electronic commerce and issues and techniques for integrating the Web into business marketing strategies. It will emphasize the marketing of consumer goods, particularly, food and drink products.”

Course objectives include monitoring the evolving technology of the World Wide Web as it applies to marketing, integrating Web marketing into the overall marketing strategy of a firm, assessing the content and structure of Web sites relative to business goals, applying the capabilities of Internet technology to commercial Web sites, and evaluating the performance or success of an Internet marketing program.

More information on the course can be found at [webct.umaine.edu/public/REP466/index.html](http://webct.umaine.edu/public/REP466/index.html).

- *“University of California Berkeley Extension - Certificate in E-Commerce Business and Technology”* [www.unex.berkeley.edu/cert/ecomon.html](http://www.unex.berkeley.edu/cert/ecomon.html)

The Certificate in E-Commerce Business and Technology is now also available online. The University of California Extension's online course format incorporates an online “lecture,” combining an instructional narrative with audio, illustrations, and interactive exercises. In addition, 60 minutes of video case studies, developed for this program and available over the Web, give students a real sense of the physical and operational sides of virtual businesses.

#### Entrepreneurship Training

- *“Tilling the Soil of Opportunity: NxLevelL Guide for Agricultural Entrepreneurs”*

This is an intense multisession program that covers all aspects of an agricultural enterprise. Additional information can be found at the NxLevelL Web site ([www.nxlevel.org](http://www.nxlevel.org)).

- “My Own Business, Inc.”

This nonprofit organization offers free online entrepreneurship training.

Information about the course and the curriculum can be viewed at [www.myownbusiness.org](http://www.myownbusiness.org).

The curriculum includes a section on e-commerce, which can be viewed at [www.myownbusiness.org/s8/index.html](http://www.myownbusiness.org/s8/index.html).



# Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing AOL/Roper Starch Cyberstudy.
- <sup>2</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Gartner G2.
- <sup>3</sup> In cases in which this publication quotes information from a Web site that cites research from a second source, both sources are mentioned so that the producer can look for additional information either on the cited Web site or from the primary source.
- <sup>4</sup> Information on farm direct marketing consumer case studies can be found in USDA's *Farmer Direct Marketing Bibliography 2001*, [www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/bibliography.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing/bibliography.htm).
- <sup>5</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing data from the Graphic, Visualization, and Usability (GVU) Center at Georgia Institute of Technology ([www.gvu.gatech.edu/user\\_surveys/](http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/)).
- <sup>6</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing InsightExpress and U.S. Census.
- <sup>7</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing data from GVU.
- <sup>8</sup> [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com), citing data from The Conference Board and NFO Worldwide.
- <sup>9</sup> [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com), citing Verizon ([www.verizon.com](http://www.verizon.com)).
- <sup>10</sup> [www.ecomworld.com](http://www.ecomworld.com) (search articles for "Wild Oats") discusses the challenges of "Wild Oats" online experience.
- <sup>11</sup> [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com)
- <sup>12</sup> [www.drebiz.com](http://www.drebiz.com) newsletter, citing [www.nua.ie](http://www.nua.ie) research.
- <sup>13</sup> "Suggested Reading and Training" in appendix B offers some recommendations.
- <sup>14</sup> In the case of Iott Family Farms ([www.tomatoes.com](http://www.tomatoes.com)), significant capital was spent on developing the correct packaging to facilitate the shipment of their products since, if a customer receives a box of damaged tomatoes, he or she will not buy from the producer again. Not every producer has surplus capital to risk developing packaging.
- <sup>15</sup> During 2000, they did begin to offer holiday cards and Asian pears for online purchase. However, their primary objective is information distribution, and online sales are handled through [www.modern-marketplace.com](http://www.modern-marketplace.com).
- <sup>16</sup> Vermont engages in several activities with its grower associations. In this particular case, 17Vermont also has a "maple by mail" brochure that is made available in print form. This brochure was made available on the Internet through the Vermont State Department of Agriculture Web site. While producers pay to be listed in the directory, they benefit from the print version as well as the Internet link.
- <sup>18</sup> Many CSA consumers are overwhelmed by the amount and variety of produce they receive. A Web site could host recipes (from the producer and shareholders) for specialty items or "what do I do with these?" products. Information on storage or preserving could also be offered. An "online" community of the shareholders could strengthen the CSA since subscribers frequently never meet each other.
- <sup>19</sup> For example, "According to Scarborough Research, 47 percent of American adults with Internet access make online purchases. However, in Washington, DC, 60 percent are shopping online; only 37 percent are doing the same in San Antonio, TX, Orlando, FL, and Lexington, KY." Source: [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com).
- <sup>20</sup> Additional recommendations of free e-mail newsletters, frequently called e-zines, are listed in appendix B under "Suggested Reading and Training."
- <sup>21</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing CDB Research, August 1999.

- <sup>22</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing BizRate ([www.bizrate.com](http://www.bizrate.com)), May 1999.
- <sup>23</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Intermarket Group.
- <sup>24</sup> CyberAtlas, [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing a study conducted by Louis Harris & Associates ([www.louisharris.com](http://www.louisharris.com)) for the National Consumer League ([www.nclnet.org](http://www.nclnet.org)).
- <sup>25</sup> [www.nua.ie/surveys](http://www.nua.ie/surveys), citing CDB Research.
- <sup>26</sup> [www.nua.ie/surveys](http://www.nua.ie/surveys), citing CDB Research.
- <sup>27</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Active Media ([www.activemedia.com](http://www.activemedia.com)).
- <sup>28</sup> This is fairly logical, considering the nature of online retailing. It would not be very cost effective for a consumer to buy something for less than \$10 and then have to pay shipping. This does not mean that producers should exclude items that cost less than \$10 as consumers may purchase several of them to make a more sizable purchase. However, creating products like “gift baskets” may be an effective means of marketing less expensive products.
- <sup>29</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Bain & Company and Mainspring.
- <sup>30</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Nielsen/NetRatings.
- <sup>31</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Forrester Research ([www.forrester.com](http://www.forrester.com)).
- <sup>32</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Anderson Consulting Research.
- <sup>33</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com), citing Forrester Research ([www.forrester.com](http://www.forrester.com)).
- <sup>34</sup> Read “Suggested Reading and Training” (in appendix B) for resources on search engines.
- <sup>35</sup> A full list of domain name accredited registrars can be found at [www.internic.net/regist.html](http://www.internic.net/regist.html).
- <sup>36</sup> Read more about this from the sources listed in appendix B under “Suggested Reading and Training.”
- <sup>37</sup> Read more about this from the sources listed in appendix B under “Suggested Reading and Training.”
- <sup>38</sup> Read more about this from the sources listed in appendix B under “Suggested Reading and Training.”
- <sup>39</sup> Read more about this from the sources listed in appendix B under “Suggested Reading and Training.”
- <sup>40</sup> While children might not always be supervised while on the Internet, it is important to ensure that they have their parents’ permission before they provide any personal information, including an e-mail address.
- <sup>41</sup> [www.techtv.com](http://www.techtv.com).
- <sup>42</sup> [www.techtv.com](http://www.techtv.com), citing Jupiter Communications.
- <sup>43</sup> See “Suggested Reading and Training” (appendix B) for more information.
- <sup>44</sup> [cyberatlas.internet.com](http://cyberatlas.internet.com)













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