

Small Business News & Notes

Holiday Shopping Season Is Around the Corner; Is Your Small Business Web Site Ready?

by Rich Riley

(NAPSA)—With the holiday season fast approaching, small businesses need to start gearing up now to establish or enhance their online presence.

According to Forrester Research, in the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas, online holiday sales will grow by 42 percent over last year's \$8.4 billion to \$12.2 billion (Forrester Research—Sept 19, 2003).

The Internet levels the playing field for small businesses that want to reach the ever-growing online shopping audience. According to a recent Harris Yahoo! Small Business poll, consumers shop online for these top three reasons: (1) shopping online is more convenient (2) there is a greater availability of unique gifts (3) better prices are available online.

The Internet incorporates solutions that enable businesses to get online, sell online and develop effective online marketing and promotional strategies to reach new customers and grow sales.

Here are a few tips for small businesses considering getting online:

- **Trust**—Similar to other mission-critical business solutions you depend on, be sure your online e-commerce provider has a strong reputation and history of high-quality service. Just like purchasing or leasing property for your offline business, your online site is your stake on the Internet. Be sure to sign up with



The Internet helps small business owners reach the ever-growing online shopping audience.

a provider who will be there for the long run.

- **Support**—Customer service is important for any business service and it's certainly true for e-commerce. What type of support does a provider offer? E-mail, phone, toll-free, 24x7? It's important to know that you will have access to e-commerce experts 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You need to have access to people who can help you make selling online as easy as possible.

- **Ease of use and flexibility**—Look for a service that helps you save time and money by providing everything from domain registration and hosting to inventory tracking and promotional tools. Additionally, look for a provider that is focused on ease-of-use, and offers free site building

tools. Many providers focus on services for highly technical small businesses, and if you are inexperienced with e-commerce services, you may find these challenging to understand and use. Identifying a provider with a full-service solution and a focus on ease-of-use will save time and money in the long run.

- **Marketing Resources**—Use online tools to promote your business, such as online directories and search engines. Including your online store or Web site in Internet search engines and directories is a simple and cost-efficient way to reach potential customers. Look for a service that offers comprehensive marketing solutions including product submit, pay-for placement product listings and search results, keyword ad tracking, yellow pages, business prospect mailing lists, e-mail marketing tools and search engine submission.

Rich Riley is the vice president and general manager of Yahoo! Small Business. Yahoo! Small Business (<http://smallbusiness.yahoo.com>) is a leading provider of services enabling small businesses to be successful online.

In a powerful one-stop shop, Yahoo! Small Business provides a comprehensive, easy-to-use suite of services that enable small businesses to get online, sell online and market online. Yahoo! Small Business provides services such as Yahoo! Web Hosting, Yahoo! Merchant Solutions, Yahoo! Domains and Yahoo! Business Mail.