

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Strategies

MARCH 5-11, 2010

IDEAS FOR GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

jacksonvillebusinessjournal.com ■ THE BUSINESS JOURNAL 17

SMALL BUSINESS TOOLS

jar•gon

Life•stream•ing

Lifestreaming was conceptualized in the mid-1990s by two Yale professors to reveal “a time-ordered stream of documents that function as a diary of your electronic life; every document you create and every document other people send you is stored in your lifestream.”

Online applications collect documents, pictures, videos and blogs from one’s various social media sites and aggregate them in one Web site. Most individual lifestreams are a montage of every public stream of information that individual thinks is relevant to share. Something like: “Here’s my life, what do you think?”

Businesses, however, might attempt to lifestream for different reasons. Aggregating a business’s daily, weekly or monthly activity into one collective site could benefit the business’s clients or customers. The clients would have a bird’s-eye view of the activities going into the servicing of their account. Business lifestreaming could also be very effective in marketing products or services such as a new product version (send pictures to existing owners for upgrade sales).

Some experts believe the “life” of the business, in terms of chunks of information — letters, documents, files and databases — organized into a centralized collection point could create efficiencies in the business as nothing has ever done before. Imagine eliminating computer hard drives and filing cabinets or getting rid of the storeroom archives. All the information has been lifestreamed.

— Robert Myers
Area director, Small Business
Development Center at the
University of North Florida

Building a successful Web site is a science

BY DOLLY PENLAND
CORRESPONDENT

Many small-business owners wrongly believe that just having a presence on the Web is enough to promote their businesses — an “if you build it, they will come” mentality. But a static site that amounts to no more than an ad doesn’t add value to the business.

This is especially important because only 8 percent of people look beyond the third page of search results, according to a 2008 Jupiter Research survey. Digital research site comScore Inc. reports Americans made 15.2 billion searches in January, with 65 percent of those conducted via Google. Yahoo! accounted for 17 percent, Microsoft Corp. 11 percent, and Ask Network and AOL combined for a little more than 7 percent of searches. With so much information and so many sites out there, small businesses must do whatever they can to stand out, attract traffic to their sites and make sales.

“There are literally tens of millions of Web sites coming on the Internet every other month,” said David Brown, chairman and CEO of Web.com. “As a result, if you just build a site and don’t use the science of optimization, you’ll probably be found deep in the pages, eighth or 80th. Search engine optimization is a science, but there’s some art to it, too. The science is understanding how the search engines, primarily Google but also Yahoo!, Microsoft and some others, determine relevancy.

“They determine relevancy based on things like key word density, how many times certain words are in your Web site, key word location on the home page, how many links to your Web site there are from other sites that are credible and how many links you have outbound to those kinds of sites, how often you are mentioned in blogs and what kind of information you provide that proves your relevancy.”

Good, useful content is key to ranking high in a search. For example, the Lime Leaf Thai Restaurant near Southside Boulevard not only has its lunch and dinner menus with prices on its site, but it also includes customer reviews.

“That helps with the Google search,” said Kevin Anderson, one of the co-owners of Lime Leaf. “We thought we could get a lot of exposure over the Internet. We found that [to be true]. We get a lot of people calling



Lime Leaf Thai Restaurant principals Vilayvanh Lovan, Songkhame Lovan, Kevin Anderson and Noi Anderson. Lime Leaf includes customer reviews as well as menus on its Web site.

or coming in who have checked out the Web site” when deciding where to dine.

A company’s Web site has to make a good first impression on customers. Quality images and content are a must. Once the professionally designed or at the very least professional-looking site is up, businesses must then promote it. The site should be listed in all promotional materials, in e-mail signatures, anywhere that markets the company.

“A Web site that is just sitting there by itself is not going to magically attract traffic,” said Obie Fernandez, CEO of Hashrocket. “There is a myriad of business directories online that give you the ability to link your Web site in different categories and to create profiles. Citycliq.com is an example. What they do is allow you to establish sources of traffic to your Web site. Another option is Google AdWords,” the sponsored links section next to search results on Google.

E-commerce functionality is also increasingly important as more people want to make secure purchases online. However, “less than 10 percent of small businesses have any e-commerce capability,” Brown

said. “For Web.com clients, 20 percent have e-commerce capability. As dismal as 2009 was in terms of retail sales, we saw growth in e-commerce spending, 4 percent year-over-year [nationally, according to comScore] where the rest was in contraction. It may not be for everybody, but there are unique things that small businesses do that we can optimize and help them sell those products through e-commerce.”

For those small-business holdouts that still don’t have a Web site — Ad-ology Research found that 46 percent of the small businesses it surveyed did not have a Web site — it’s time to get an online storefront.

“There are e-commerce platforms for those who think that e-commerce is unreachable for their small business,” Fernandez said. “You can create gorgeous storefronts for very little money. For instance, sites such as shopify.com have plans starting at \$24 a month with a basic package where your store is hosted in the cloud, so you don’t have to maintain anything or use a custom program.”

jacksonville@bizjournals.com | 396-3502

Bill creates corporation to promote travel to the U.S.

The tourism industry won its battle for the creation of a new public-private partnership to promote the U.S. as a travel destination.

The Senate approved the Travel Promotion Act Feb. 25 by a 78-18 vote. The House passed the legislation in November. The bill established the Corporation for Travel Promotion, which will run marketing campaigns to attract more international visitors to the U.S. and explain changing travel security policies.



Washington
Brief

Kent Hoover

The travel industry will provide up to \$100 million in funding for the new corporation, which is modeled after similar public-private partnerships on the state level. Foreign travelers to the U.S. will help pay for this travel promotion effort through a new \$10 fee. The corporation will receive no funding from U.S. taxpayers.

“This is a historic victory for the U.S. economy and the one in eight American workers whose jobs depend on travel,” said Roger Dow,

president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “The United States Congress has sent a clear message that travel is a high priority to our nation and that tangible steps must be taken to increase travel to and within the United States.”

The U.S. has experienced a decline in overseas visitors since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America and the travel security measures imposed in their aftermath.

The Corporation for Travel Promotion could bring more than 1.6 million additional foreign visitors to the U.S. every

year and add \$4 billion to consumer spending here, according to a study by Oxford Economics.

“This bill is a no-brainer,” said Sen. Mark Udall, D-Colo. “It will create jobs and energize our economy without spending a dime.”

For more information, go to www.ustravel.org.

Kent Hoover is the Washington, D.C., bureau chief of American City Business Journals.

jacksonville@bizjournals.com | 396-3502