



ALEC J. PACELLA


It's a Brave New World

Super Bowl XXXIV, played in January 2000, will long be remembered for two things. First, it was a terrific game, with the St. Louis Rams defeating the Tennessee Titans, thanks in part to a touchdown-saving tackle on the final play. And second, it occurred at the height of the dot.com era, with a record 17 Internet companies collectively spending over \$36 million for their respective 30 seconds of fame during the big game.

As I look back over the subsequent 10 years, I am amazed at the pace and integration of technology, not just within the real estate industry but in daily living. My next couple of articles will focus on this concept from a few angles. This month, we will have a Q&A session on websites while next month we will tackle many of the ancillary channels, such as blogs and social/professional networking sites.

For this month's column, I have asked my friends at DeVore Technologies to

share their expertise. DeVore (www.devore.com) is a leading IT training, development and integration company. In addition to designing the web site for an entity that I'm affiliated with (www.sbequities.com), their clients range from Lockkeepers (www.lockkeepers.com) to Cleveland Area Board of Realtors (www.cabor.com) to Cleveland's Coca-Cola bottling (www.clevelandcocacola.com). Below is a list of common questions about web pages, followed by DeVore's response.



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AP: How do I know for sure if I need a web site? And why is it so important?

DT: Two words – Yellow Pages. If you or your company has or would consider advertising in the Yellow Pages, then you need a web site. Today, people spend considerable time in front of their PCs. If they want to purchase a car, look at a home or find someone to walk their dog, the Internet is the most likely place they will start. Having a web presence enables viewers anywhere in the world to access your site at any time. The goal of most web sites is to get more business and nothing else but a web site can provide this much potential exposure. A good web site will enhance the company's image, boosting credibility in the process. This is where design becomes important. A well-executed site, with supporting written content, can go a long way in driving more business.

AP: What is the best way to start the process of building a web site?

DT: Start small. A web site, in its most basic form, should do three things for your client: (1) professionally explain who you are, (2)

professionally illustrate what you do, and (3) professionally direct who and how to contact. It's the "professional" part that can quickly add up if you are not careful. Logos, themes and custom graphical components can significantly add to upfront development costs. Even a small site can cost thousands of dollars in an effort to get that professional look. A popular way to save money is to take advantage of Wordpress (www.wordpress.com). Wordpress is a collaborative site where people contribute page designs and

functionality. There are near limitless choices to choose from – some are free and some cost a small fee. But almost all will provide that professional look for your web site at a fraction of the cost to design from scratch.

AP: What should I expect during the design and development process?

DT: Whether using Wordpress or a custom design, you will inevitably need to seek out a web design firm. As with any professional service, ask for a quote. For small sites, most firms can



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provide an estimate after a meeting or phone call. Once you have selected the firm, ask for a timeline. In most cases, design and contenting are tasks that involve contributions by both parties. To keep the process moving, be aware of the items that you are responsible for providing.

AP: How complicated is it to keep my site up-to-date. Do I need a programmer?

DT: Today, it is not necessary to have a programmer/webmaster on staff to keep site content current. The

revolution of content management systems (CMS) has empowered most site owners with an interface to make these changes. My suggestion here is to discuss the CMS option with the company designing your site. Most can provide demonstrations of systems that they support and you can then determine what makes sense for you. Definitely do your homework here, as CMS vary widely. Some are simple but restrictive while others are complicated but broad-reaching. It's all about the fit for you.

AP: What are the different options to host my web site?

DT: There are two items to consider when discussing hosting – domain name and content storage. In both cases, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of choices. So let's start with domain name. You want to pick a reputable registrar, such as Network Solutions, Register.com and GoDaddy. Once you've selected a registrar, make sure that if the design firm registers your domain name for you, they make you or your company the administrative contact on the domain. Once the domain name is in place, it's time to pick your host. If you are just starting, stick with a local provider if possible. Most local providers have programming and/or talent that can offer quick support if a problem arises. Finally, don't forget email. Any domain can have email associated with it, so you can replace the Gmail/Yahoo/other freebie email that used to be on your business cards with a "real" domain email extension. A domain email, coupled with a solid web site, adds significant creditability to your presence in the business market.

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Daus, You Know?

GETTING WELL SOON The medical segment continues to be a rare bright spot in the investment world. Last month, another medical property changed hands. St Vincent Medical building, just outside of downtown, traded for \$8.8 million. It was previously sold in 2007 for \$5.6 million. —AP

AP: What are some current trends in web site development?

DT: As mentioned above, Content Management System (CMS) is a hot topic. It empowers users to manage their own sites, which is the clear preference today. Another trend is integrating the use of Social Media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, as well as the use of blogs.

AP: Not to steal next month's thunder but how has the growing popularity of blogs, social and professional networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) impacted web sites?

DT: There is certainly a lot of buzz around social networking, but careful thought should be given before entering these waters. Facebook, Twitter and the like require constant upkeep, with some experts recommending updates as frequently as once a day coupled with multiple tweets each day. That's a lot of time. Less needy alternatives are blogs and email marketing efforts. Blogs can be posted up at your convenience and are effective at driving traffic back to your site. Email marketing, with products like Constant Contact, eNewspress or MailChimp, are effective at keeping your name in front clients and can do wonders for your name recognition.

Web sites continue to evolve and have become the centerpiece of most company's branding and marketing. If you already have one, now is a great time to give it an overhaul. And if you don't have one, it has never been easier (and cheaper) to get started. Similar to the Titans' Kevin Dyson, the last thing you want is for your company to be to be one yard short of a touchdown. **P**

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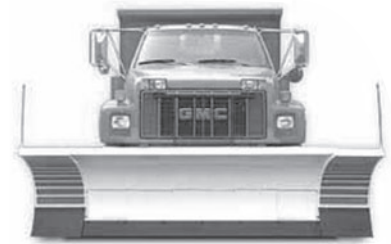
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