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Marketing on the Web

WHAT WORKS, WHAT DOESN'T, WHY BOTHER?

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Ask most HVAC contractors who have a Web site to describe its value and you're likely to get a shrug and a puzzled look. Visit their sites and you'll understand why. In the rush to get a "presence" on the Web, most companies are missing the point and the power of this opportunity.

We've just completed a 6-month analysis of the potential value of Internet marketing for home comfort companies. We reviewed over 40 Web sites and surveyed several hundred contractors. We brought in some of those 'techno-geeks' we once laughed at as AV nerds in junior high school. (Today, these guys seem poised to take over the world.)

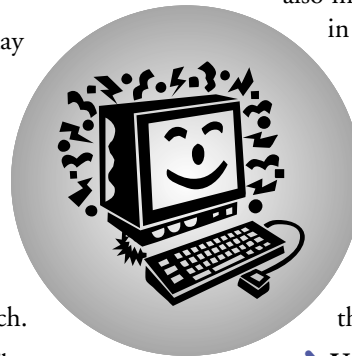
Then we studied how service companies in other industries are using the Internet to find prospects and build better relationships with existing customers.

Our conclusion: Done well, Web sites can be a valuable asset for improving customer loyalty and communication, selling HVAC services and yes, even acquiring new customers. And as more Americans become "Net-friendly"—a process that's growing exponentially each year—their value will only increase. (By the way, older people now make up one of the fastest growing categories of Web users—21% of Internet users are 55 and over.)

Unfortunately, most Web sites, even the pretty ones created by professional designers, aren't done well—at least in a **marketing sense**. Most are not having nearly the impact that they could. But that's not the fault of the medium.

Think of it this way: On Thursday nights, you can watch ER or 48 Hours. If you just looked at the ratings for 48 Hours, you'd conclude that no one watches television. But the truth is, given the alternatives, few people find 48 Hours entertaining or interesting enough to watch.







So it is with HVAC Web sites. They can do a lot of useful things. But if the programming doesn't serve the audience, people will just tune out.



HOW YOUR WEB SITE CAN HELP YOU!

Your Web site gives you the opportunity to attack many marketing issues in a rapidly growing part of the market and lets you do it relatively inexpensively.

It's a perfect tool to:

-  **Educate your customers about your products and services (and stimulate demand),**
-  **Position your company as an area leader and show the value-added elements of your business,**
-  **Deter customers from switching to another company,**
-  **Develop stronger customer relationships and trust,**
-  **Improve customer communication and**
-  **Help turn prospects into sales.**

WHAT WORKS?

The key is to think like a customer or prospect and apply that approach across the board. Here's how:

→ **First, focus on becoming a valued information resource.** This builds credibility and will give them a reason to become interested in your company and to explore the "brochure" component of your site.

→ **Make it easy to navigate your site.** The faster they can explore your site, the more likely they are to find what they want and recognize the value you're providing. It also makes it more likely they'll return in the future.

→ **Engage your visitors.** Web sites are not like print ads or brochures. Research shows that Web users have shorter attention spans. Present your information for easy reading, develop graphics that download quickly and make the site interesting.

→ **Update the information so they'll come back.** Frequent exposure is important in any marketing effort.

→ **Promote your site.** Make it easy for Web users to find you. Start by putting your Web

address wherever you put your phone number. Then get creative.

WEB USE IS GROWING FAST!

It's not that every customer is searching the Web to find the right HVAC company or learn more about heating and cooling. But more and more people are turning to it at critical times of decision—when they are thinking about buying replacement equipment, changing companies, adding new equipment, getting on a service plan, etc.

Where new homeowners might have once looked through the Yellow Pages to identify possible dealers, now they are looking increasingly on the Web. Where they might have left questions unanswered rather than call the company, they can now browse the information anonymously, at their convenience.

Little of this would matter if the future weren't so clear. More than 13% of American homes are now online, a number that has doubled in just 12 months (and it's expected to grow even faster this year). In fact, traffic on the Internet is doubling every 100 days. Almost a quarter of all Internet users search for information daily. 44% of them search weekly.

The sooner you start making this work for you, the faster you'll put distance between yourself and competitors.