

Grab Attention on the Internet

A Wizard

A month ago a client of mine asked me something. He manufactures a product which is in competition with the multinationals. The product required a 'pre-application finish' to be applied to it and he had tried a couple of methods, unsuccessfully. If he set up a website and called for help on a solution, would it be possible to get an answer?

The answer is no. The internet is like a jungle and setting up a website, in expectation of an answer, is a bit like putting up a poster on a tree deep inside a jungle. The chances of anyone seeing the tree, leave alone the poster, are remote. If the poster is to be seen, it must be put up in a place where people stop to read posters. Fortunately, there is such a place on the Internet. It is the Usenet.

One of the most popular service providers calls the Usenet an electronic community of people interacting with each other. It goes on to add that Usenet is, broadly speaking, the name given to a loose network of sites that carry Usenet newsgroups and Usenet news. These sites (called 'news-servers') involving thousands of computers worldwide, pass newsgroup postings back and forth, whereupon the users of these news servers can read them online.

The best way to find out about the Usenet is to browse through it. All the search engines (Altavista and Yahoo, to take two examples) have two alternatives in front of the search function. One is of course the World Wide Web which most people use most of the time. The other is the Usenet. If you type 'sale of books' as the keyword and do a search, you are offered a selection of postings by people wanting to sell books on various subjects. These are posted on various newsgroups, for example, rec.collecting; rec.hunting.dogs; rec.food.drink; rec.food.restaurants. Postings on a newsgroup like rec.food.drink and rec.food.restaurants are likely to be about books on wine. The term 'rec' stands for recreation. There are hundreds of newsgroups on various subjects. Usenet newsgroups are categorized into several large 'trees' each of which is broken down into more and more specific topical sub-trees.

Now back to my manufacturer client looking for information on 'pre-application finishes.' What he should do is look for a newsgroup that fits his product. One

problem is, of course, that the Usenet does not encourage commercial postings. But assuming that this is not the case with his query, he should then post his query on the newsgroup. This is simple and even someone having a shell account can do it without any problem.

To do this, you should access Deja News either through Yahoo or directly (www.dejanews.com). On doing this, you will see an icon called 'Post. On clicking this a 'From field will appear. In the 'From field, you should type your e-mail address. The 'Reply To' field should be left blank. Don't worry about making mistakes. The software will tell you if you're doing anything wrong. In a couple of minutes after posting it, you will receive a mail from Deja News. This is just to confirm that the message hasn't been sent by someone else who has forged your e-mail address. This mail must be returned after adding 'Please Post' in the 'Subject' field.

It is often advisable to post the same message to several related newsgroups. To take an example quoted earlier, if you have a wine book for sale, it makes sense to post it in both `rec.food.drink` and `rec.food.restaurants`. Usenets are friendly places. My cousin once saw a message in a Usenet offering a 1931 edition of Palgrave's Golden Treasury (a book of poems) for US\$250. He had a 1908 edition of the book which he thought was obviously worth much more. So, he posted a Usenet message asking how much the book was worth. Within two days he got two answers pointing out that Palgrave's had gone into many editions beginning from the middle of the 19th century and that there were zillions of copies in print. A 1908 edition, they said, was worth about US\$5.

The best thing about Usenet newsgroups is that they put you in touch with mailing lists. One of the replies I got told me to put myself on a mailing list by getting into <http://www.auldbooks.com/biblio/index.htm>. On doing so, I found myself getting hundred messages a day from people looking for rare books. So, readers, it is really worth putting your own billboards on this highway. This one is definitely going to get you that badly- needed response.

Tail Piece

Net Widens:

To go on the Internet is to be instantly global, but there is a bit of a problem — addressing. The site name defines which domain (those last three letters in the site name) or network the page is on. So far, there have been few domains available for commercial use — ‘com’ and ‘net’, for instance. This has led to conflicts because there is often more than a single legitimate claim to a name. To ease the situation somewhat, the Internet Society has approved a few other top-level domains. We should start seeing the appearance of endings like ‘irm’, ‘arts’ and ‘web’ over the next few months. And while the Web continues to grow in this part of the world, one of the better known Internet gurus complains that there are no clear guidelines which allow an individual his own first-level address.

The Fitnessite:

If you stuck around the Godfather, you’d have no choice but to keep fit. Jack La Lanne, known as the Godfather of physical fitness, has a site on the Internet—<http://www.jacklalanne.com>. Visit the site for a quick workout, for tips on how to stay fit or for the right diet. If you think you already know a lot about keeping healthy, you could even take the quiz worked into the site.

Win on the Web:

Win a trip for two to Hong Kong or a color TV! Sign up at <http://www.corpindia.com> for a contest organized by Microsoft and Express Computers. All you have to do is to visit the links on this page and choose the best site. And if you have your own site, you could even get it included as one of the links. The best site wins an Infinity Server from HCL.

An Express approach:

Maybe Federal Express’s Sri Lankan partner should take a good look at the FedEx page. The American courier has begun offering discounts to individuals who use the Internet to book its services. Currently, almost every courier company has a home page and a basic application that permits users and visitors to the site to track the location of a shipment.

India News:

For a cool site about India, visit <http://www.allindia.com> which, of course, is managed and hosted by Indians. The site is updated twice daily and is packed with news from around the country. There is also the usual share bazaar news, with clips on holiday destinations and other interesting places. 