How Good Web Sites Boost Sales and Marketing

Post Press Releases, Exchange Data Online, Urge Experts at Carrier Logistics Inc. Conference

By Stephen Bennett
Contributing Writer

TARRYTOWN, N.Y. — A trucking company's sales and marketing efforts can always benefit from a judicious use of the World Wide Web, according to a pair of experts who spoke at a fall conference hosted by Carrier Logistics Inc.

Web sites are an essential tool for any business, and Paul DiModica believes every trucking company must have one to draw potential customers. DiModica owns Digital Hatch, a firm in Atlanta that specializes in training people to use information technology in sales and marketing.

An important way of attracting visitors to a site is to post press releases containing key words that reflect what the company does. The same words should appear in every press release, he stressed.

"Pick industry words that people use to find you," DiModica said. For example, if searchers type "distribution" to find your company, that word should appear prominently and frequently in company press releases so the search engine picks them up. Post all your press releases or your Web site and then submit those Web site pages to search engines . . . Those pages will get picked up very quickly."

Another effective technique for collecting sales leads is to offer free white papers that can be downloaded from the site, the only requirement being that visitors provide an e-mail address before being provided access to the paper.

DiModica listed basic features that every Web site should have, including the company's telephone number, "on every single page" of the site. The number should appear in the top right corner, positioned so that any page, when printed, will always include it. If the telephone number is too far to the right, it might not come out on the printed page.

"People do not like searching for telephone numbers," he said. "Make it very easy for people to find you."

DiModica also recommended "pay per click" (PPC) advertising offered by search engines as a marketing tool. The search engine guarantees that your company's small advertisement appears onscreen with the results shown for specific key-words. You are charged a fee only when a visitor clicks on the ad and is taken to your Web site.

A PPC search engine listing usually includes a title, typically the name of your Web site, or a short heading of no more than 50 characters. The listing also may include a description of your service or some promotional wording, maximum 200 characters, according to payperclickuniverse.com, an online guide to PPC advertising.

"The goal is to make it easy for people to find your Web site," DiModica said during CLI's three-day conference in late September.

Carrier Logistics Inc., based in Tarrytown, provides software tailored to the less-than-truckload, courier, local cartage, broker and logistics sectors of freight transportation.

The Web also can be the mechanism for exchanging shipping data between carrier and client.

At the conference, David Olson outlined the growing trend of using Web services in place of the traditional client-server setup to communicate with customers. Olson is director of enterprise solutions for Progress Software Corp., Bedford, Mass., which produces software to simplify the development and management of business applications.

Web services are meant "to come up with better ways to integrate the business systems of different companies or organizations," Olson said. "The idea is for a company to make its applications available to an outside system or solution, using the Web as the vehicle for communication."

For example, he said, Web services can enable the computer system of one company to receive and manage radio frequency identification (RFID) data from another company.

Use of RFID is growing in manufacturing, warehousing and distributing, which is forcing changes in logistics, Olson said. Citing Wal-Mart and Sears as examples, he said those retailers are now more than ever demanding integration of vendors' systems with theirs through Web services.

A logistics operation may receive large volumes of data from RFID tags associated with products or freight moving through warehouses and being loaded onto trucks.

"With all that data coming in," Olson said, "you've got to make some meaningful sense out of it." Web services can be used to track the goods moving through a distribution center and onto trucks, the kind of function that has come to be called "event stream processing," or ESP, Olson said. When Web services and RFID technology are combined, the resulting system can read a product, its case number and the pallet number and then present the data in meaningful form to the user, Olson said.

That kind of capability has implications for logistics planning and forecasting, Olson said, because the data are received continuously, in real time. A manager can see the status of a load, whether a truck is full and where it is going, among other details. The result is that the manager can react with immediacy.

"Not only can you improve quality of service," he said, "you can give customers peace of mind because you know where everything is at any point in time and can do something about it. You don't have to find out tomorrow morning that you've lost a truck." ◆