

## **Does doing business on the Internet make you feel queasy?**

By Edward F. Nesta

There is a feeling that doing business on the Internet is 50% computer controlled, 50% human interaction, and sometimes 100% frustration.

Of course the Internet has changed the way we do business from an operations, marketing, and execution perspective while infusing some new terms and processes into the mix. I feel it is the terms, processes, and the cross industry external influences that are the cause of our frustration and that queasy feeling. The unknown, not being familiar with a concept or the pace of change will definitely make you feel uncomfortable, especially if you are trying to lead a business.

With respect to terms and processes, the now familiar 'e' before a word has done a very nice job of creating a larger than life feeling of the unknown and change, and this just through the addition of that one letter 'e' in front of so many concepts. Thus, does this account for a high percentage of the frustration that exists from people doing business via the Internet, or is there more?

Well, I personally do not believe that it is the 'e' words that drive a level of fear or frustration into our lives; I believe it is the fast paced changes that are happening across the Internet market space. Companies like Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, and News Corp. are all looking at acquisitions that will position them, or keep them at the forefront of the eCommerce evolution, and even these giants do not know where YOU the consumer will gravitate. News Corp. was one of the companies that set the 'e' business acquisition frenzy in motion with their purchase of MySpace in 2005 for US \$580 million.

During the '.com' era, it was the reactionary pressures caused by companies doing Initial Public Offerings (IPO's) every-other-day that forced companies to move in this direction before they were ready, and we know the result. Thus, the external influences of mergers and acquisitions will cause people to look over their shoulder or feel that the eBusiness arena may be bigger then they thought.

So, it is not how electronic we have become, but how tumultuous the business environment has become. This is especially true as companies wait for YOU to make your move and use the Internet to make some of the business deals profitable.

In the midst of all of this change there are companies trying to navigate doing business via the Internet, regardless if they are selling directly from their website (eCommerce), or just selling their image through their website, they are impacted by everything happening around them. In some cases companies may still be feeling the effects of costly business processes driven by Internet positioning (i.e. failed website launch or restructuring, change in network or webhosting management, or search engine optimizing not meeting anticipated expectations or perceptions).

The Internet markets are nowhere near mature in how business is to be conducted, and there may never be a common solution, except - change. The Internet does not lend itself to solutions that are a one-size-fits-all, it is too broad-based, and there are too many variables that exist.

If we have learned anything from the ".com" era, it was to not react, but that may be very hard to do. If you have aggressive owners or investors, or if you perceive that your business is falling behind your competition or within your industry, then you may have a tendency to react before you plan.

The 'Players' in the Internet space continually create new ways to draw in business. Their solutions are being bundled under the concept of Web 2.0 offerings (wikis, blogs, social networks, etc.), and if you add in optimizing solutions, which it seems every search engine optimizing (SEO) company is trying to crack the 'optimizing code' and market a new solution that you just have to install, the result is more change to deal with.

What is driving the 'Players' in the Internet space crazy is the unknown face and tendency of their customers in markets that are not driven by selling a specific product, but are driven by acceptance and adoption of trends or social movements. This is why there are so many solutions being developed and sold; they are hopeful that something will stick and that they can make some money from their Internet offerings to justify their mergers, acquisitions, or investments.

So, what do we do? Well, there are no single solutions, but in this case there is one constant - your customer. It always seems to boil-down to 'who is your customer,' and how well do you know them? This means that whatever you do should always factor in how a change to your business will affect your existing customer, as well as how it may draw in new customers. If your competition is doing something that works and you feel that you can adapt and advance the concept then do it, as long as it will work for your customer base. Keeping your customer first seems obvious, but be careful of the cool new technology solutions, as it takes, in some cases, a lifetime to win a customer and just minutes to lose one. So, don't add losing your one constant, your customer, to your list of business frustrations, or add to that queasy sensation.

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