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e-People

by Willie Favero

Once upon a time (before e-time), in a land not too far away (years away from e-land), people (e-people didn't exist yet) actually left their homes to shop. They would drive in automobiles for minutes, sometimes even hours, just to purchase (not e-purchase) something at a store housed in a physical building. In this same ancient time, companies used sales people to call on perspective clients (perhaps we'll have to say e-clients now?) to convince them to buy their products. And advertising (soon to be replaced by little pop up windows and banners) meant print, radio, and if you could afford it, television. How primitive!

Today we are much more civilized. Rather than driving ten minutes to a store, we spend four hours surfing the web for that one special item. Sometimes, and fortunately not that often anymore, we even end up paying more, since our cost includes shipping. That's not even the craziest part. Some of us have forgotten how to shop in real time. Recently when I needed an electronic gizmo, I found I had absolutely no idea where to buy one other than the Internet.

We are becoming, or in my case have become, e-people. We are part of that quickly growing segment of society so attached to our computers that e-business didn't come fast enough. When we want to make a purchase, communicate with someone, sell something, invest, look up facts, find directions - the first thing we do is turn to our computers. We cannot even imagine going somewhere without it. Imagine being able to buy those last minute birthday gifts without missing a single e-mail. (Remember years ago when you wouldn't leave the house because you didn't want to miss a phone call? Same thing, only worse!) We have been waiting for it for years. I know I am completely hooked because I even take my notebook on vacation, just in case!

Of course, the transition to e-world hasn't been easy for all of us. Some individuals with e-people potential still have trouble making the big move over to the e-business game. Some of them explain to you that they just can't use a credit card over the Internet because they are afraid their card number might be stolen. But these same people have no problem giving their credit card number to someone over the phone. Worse yet, they

probably think nothing of handing their credit card to a waiter or waitress when paying for dinner or a drink. Their server disappears for an hour, with their card in hand, and they think nothing of it. Bottom line for me: if the site uses a secured server, I'll trust it. Other folks having transitional problems are those who still need to touch, feel, listen, smell, etc. These things are pretty difficult to achieve over the Internet.

Who is most likely to succumb to e-business? You would probably guess those of us already "in the industry." You may be surprised to learn that is not often true. I deal with a lot of people who do what I do yet have no interest in conducting any business over the net. Of course, some of these folks still think the world is going to collapse on January 1, 2000. No, look for the folks who have been on the fringe of e-business for years, even before the Internet became so popular. These are the people who have been buying mail order through catalogues for years. Or they may be the ones who get hate mail from their U.S. Postal Service carriers each fall when they have to deliver all of those catalogues. And let's not forget the groups who have been buying it from television for years.

To become a successful e-person, you will have to invest in essential hardware: a computer and a printer. The computer for obvious reasons, but the printer is really important. You need it to print the confirmations from all of the purchases you will be making on-line. You will also need it to print web page image to bring downstairs to show someone so she doesn't have to come up to your computer room to look at the monitor (at least in my case). And let us not forget printing all of those important e-mails! It takes no time at all for your mail folders to consume your entire hard drive. You may also need some kind of FAX capability. Although everyone likes to advertise they are on the Internet (or net enabled), you will soon realize that after choosing all the items you would like to purchase, you may end up with a screen you must print and FAX to complete your transaction. Many items have gone un-purchased when I reached this part of a web site. I find the extra steps frustrating and a waste of my time. After all, I'm on the Internet to streamline these processes. When I land at this web page, I will not return to this particular web site again.

If you are truly an "over the top" type of e-person, you will need:

- Pentium III MMX notebook computer with 256Mb memory and a 6Gb hard drive (so you can access to the Internet 24 hours a day),
- a fast modem (56K at least) or better connection,
- at least three phone lines
- some way to connect your modem to your cell phone,
- scanner (comes in handy when you don't have a FAX machine. You scan in the document and then use your FAX software to send it out),
- color printer and a B/W laser printer,
- digital camera,
- extra hard drives,
- some backup mechanism,
- a high quality portable CD player with head phones (you need something to do

when you're waiting for some of those pages to build),
- CD R/W to create your own CDs,
- a tower at home with at least 30 gigabytes of disk storage to keep all the stuff you don't want on your notebook but feel it is important enough to save,
- and a portable alarm clock (to wake you just in time to post the last bid for the item you covet at the on-line auction site).

For the everyday consumer, e-business could bring impulse buying to an all-time high. Think how much you can purchase in a short time by simply clicking on an item rather than running from store to store at the mall. Sometimes you don't even need to know how much you are spending. You can store you credit card number at the seller's server (or in a profile on your machine) and just click, click to make purchases. I have a setup like this for purchasing CDs. Just click on a few dozen of your favorite CDs, verify the shipping address, verify that you want to use the credit card on file, click submit and in three to five days a stack of CDs arrives at your front door. You do, however, need to come up with the explanation for this latest of many arrivals.

Then there are the real time auctions over the net. You bid and bid, mail out the money orders, then try to figure from whom you just bought this stuff. Of course, this is really a unique business. The seller will not even think about sending out the product you just purchased until your payment arrives and the check has cleared. Yet we the buyer seem to think nothing of mailing our money and completely trusting the seller to send us what they claim they have to sell.

In any discussion about the Internet, we cannot forget those television ads that list a URL at the end. A good portion of these web sites have nothing more than the TV ad repeated, sometimes even less. These are examples of companies wanting to jump on the Internet bandwagon and not having a clue how to do it. You need to sort through these companies to find the few that actually have something to offer. And of course there are web sites that disappear every day. How many times has someone told you about a great web site which, when you try to access it, you see only a 404.

E-business had been a mainstay of my buying existence long before the term was ever coined. I first bought junk from on-line services back in the early 1980s. My travel schedule keeps me on the road rather regularly. What better way to kill time in a hotel room than to complete my Christmas, birthday, and miscellaneous shopping? You will need to pay extra for some kind of mailbox service where you can ship all your stuff. You do not want it mailed to your home and sitting at your front door waiting for you to arrive home from work at 7:00 pm. Especially when you happen to live outside Houston, where the summer temperatures can reach 800 degrees Fahrenheit at the height of an August day.

It should be clear by now that I have become an out of control e-person. If you're not sure if you are an e-person yet, or more importantly, if you want to recognize the first signs that you are becoming an e-person, check out this partial list. If you find yourself agreeing with my list and even adding to it, you may be beyond e-people. You should

probably seek immediate help.

- you find yourself saying, "can you just e-mail me?"
- you no longer exchange phone numbers, you exchange e-mail addresses and home page URLs
- when someone talks about updating their address book, you assume they mean the one in Netscape or IE,
- you no longer read books,
- you go on-line rather than watch TV,
- you miss dinner because you are reading your e-mail,
- you belong to more than five forums or newsgroups,
- you instantly know what time it is in any one of ten time zones,
- when someone tells you they have a picture for you, you ask if it is in JPEG format,
- you refer to the first three letters of a web address as "dub, dub, dub, dot O,"
- your favorite comment is "I figured it out before my kid!"
- no matter what someone tells you about, your immediate response is "Can I get to it on the Web?"
- you brag about being on CompuServe in 1983.

If we have e-people, then it only stands to reason that we will eventually have e-families. What are the first symptoms of an e-family? Asking your eight-year-old how to install that new device you just bought. Having your 11 year old ask you for a credit card number so she can order a T-shirt and the latest video from the Pokemon web site.

Between the media and this article, you are probably getting tired of seeing and reading "e" everything. Get used to it - it's here to stay. E-mail, e-business, e-commerce, e-transactions, e-payment, e-trading, e-farming, e-banking, e-solutions, e-business intelligence (can you believe this one even has an abbreviation, e-BI) e-this, e-that, and finally, portals! Didn't the Starship Enterprise once go through a portal?

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