

By Hal Theiste

**Set Realistic Goals for Your Web Site**

The advantages of having a business web site are well documented. For some potential customers your site is the first place they will gain awareness of your company. From there the opportunities are boundless. Even if you don't think of your business as being involved in e-commerce, having a website enhances your image as well as your coverage in the marketplace.

An effective web site is one that fits your business needs and meets the informational needs of potential customers. It should make it easy for visitors to become customers. Your business web site should:

- Be current. Make regular changes to the home page to sustain the interest of regular visitors.
- Be easily located using the major search engines (Google, Yahoo and MSN).
- Have working hyperlinks to other relevant sites, such as trade or professional associations whose members are potential purchasers.
- Have a "grabber" on your home page. If the visitor does not stop within three seconds, you have probably lost them.
- Be easy to navigate. The files and graphics should be small enough that most visitors can download them quickly. Links within the site should make it easy for a visitor to get back to your home page.
- Offer customers and prospects material that will help them understand your products / services and their potential value.
- Be a secure site if you are conducting e-commerce on it.
- Personalized or customized information for various segments of your market.
- Use cookies or other features to capture information about your site visitors and their buying habits without costing them significant time.
- Offer customers an easy way to contact you with questions or feedback without having to leave the site. AND – Demonstrate follow through with a timely response to each contact.

You want your web site to work for your visitors if your larger goal is to maximize your business potential. Every now and then step back and become the person you'd like to visit your site. And remember – Every successful business has a winning personality. A website has no personality, but it reflects the personality of the business behind it. Make sure your site shows your business's personality to the world!

To learn more of the many dimensions of marketing, and how to apply them to your business, contact the Sandhills Chapter of SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business". SCORE is a nationwide nonprofit association of experienced business people who provide free and confidential business counseling to small business owners. The

Sandhills Chapter is very active in counseling, mentoring and presenting free business seminars. For a counseling appointment contact the Chapter via the web at [www.sandhillsscore.org](http://www.sandhillsscore.org) or at 910-692-3926.

In addition to counseling by appointment, the Sandhills chapter of SCORE has members available for drop-in service from 10am to noon every Tuesday at the Moore County Chamber of Commerce building on Hwy 15/501 in Southern Pines.

If you are interested in helping with these activities your call also would be welcome. You can reach the Chapter via the web at [www.sandhillsscore.org](http://www.sandhillsscore.org) or at 910-692-3926.

Remember – send your business questions to me at [contact@sandhillsscore.org](mailto:contact@sandhillsscore.org) and don't forget to provide a way to contact you. I may not be able to answer all of them in this column but every one will receive a personal answer from one of our Sandhills SCORE counselors!