

# The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

## "Marketing on the Internet - A New Distribution Channel"

Most of us are now somewhat acquainted with the Internet. Even if we don't use it ourselves, we most certainly know someone who does. Most of us who do use it, use it mostly for gathering information, however, some of us are even venturing to SHOP on the Internet!

Shopping for goods has definitely changed over the last one hundred years. Before the retail stores of today there were trading posts and markets, places where people gathered to sell their goods. Sometimes they may have had to travel for days just to sell their goods. And don't forget the wagon peddler, the forerunner of the modern door-to-door salesman. NO, we didn't always shop in stores!

Then there was the catalogue and then came the home-shopping network. Now there is the Internet. The fact is, someday all stores will be online! This is not to say we won't still be able to visit a retail location, but eventually we won't need to, they will ship us the product and if it is not suitable we will just ship it back. Much like the way Sears catalogue shopping has operated for years. Eventually, we may see the demise of many retail and commercial outlets because of this shift.

"So what," you say, "Has this got to do with me?" Well, if you want your business to be a strong part of the future, and you want to expand your markets, you may want to think about how you can sell or distribute your products or services on the Internet. What are you currently selling that could be sold over the Internet? If you are a retailer you could create an online catalog. Even services could be sold this way. Just list the service and a brief description of what it is. Or, you can start slowly, first by creating your website and providing information about your company, then later, you can add the items you think would sell most easily over the Internet.

There are several options available for website locations at minimal or even at no cost. However with the "no cost" sites, for no cost, your customers will have to deal with annoying pop up advertising banners. If you pay someone to construct your site, this could add up to a few hundred dollars or more. Wanting a unique website address may limit you as well from accessing free or inexpensive website locations. Research your local Internet provider, as well as others, to compare costs.

Things to think about when selling over the Internet are: How will customers pay? Credit card is often the simplest, so it will mean being set up to accept them. Be prepared to receive overseas orders or orders from the USA. What are the regulations for shipping your product to other countries? Who is the best company to use to transport it? How will you handle the sale of services to another country? Can you actually travel there to make a sale or does the customer come to you, such as in tourism?

Some businesses are definitely more readily suited to sales over the Internet, however it doesn't mean you shouldn't start looking into it, even if you don't think you are ready to go online just yet. Just remember if you want to increase the distribution of your goods to reach more customers than ever, you have the potential-through the Internet.

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0  
1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: [yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca](mailto:yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca), or access our Website at:  
[www.yebdc.ab.ca](http://www.yebdc.ab.ca)

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