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JANUARY 2004

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BUSINESS PROFILE



UK BUSINESS POINT

How does your Business penetrate new Markets, find cost effective reliable Suppliers and attract customers? It's an increasing dilemma for many Businesses, particularly the SME sector, as more and more Businesses and Customers discover the benefits of trading on the World Wide Web. The rapid growth of trading on the Internet continues apace, to such an extent that it is now inevitable that all businesses will need to trade actively on the Web to retain their competitive advantage.

In 2001 £100billion was spent in Europe via E-commerce trading, that is projected to rise to £1,150billion by the end of 2005. The increase in Web users and online buying is expected to increase by 20% over the same period. These factors are particularly relevant to the SME markets - what consumer would not use online trading if the cost of the same products were cheaper and more accessible than the local shops or hypermarket 30mins drive away, one hour wandering around the facility, and 15 mins queuing at the checkout? The latter factors make it inevitable that not to trade on the Web, is the quickest way to stand still for any Business - in any sector of the marketplace.

The dilemma of course is how do you conduct business on the Web? Finding reliable suppliers can be a hit or miss affair at the best of times, finding them on the Web, and connecting customers to the final product or service, is the stuff nightmares are made of. This is particularly true at a time when you are trying to establish your Business and new markets.

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Marketing your enterprise on the Web is increasingly difficult with so-called traditional methods of search engines, banner adverts, and 'death by popup' as your customer traverses the Web. All are increasingly being discredited by indiscriminate and obtrusive over use. However, the move onto the Web continues apace; by the end of 2004 over 50% of households will have the means to access the Web. That's potentially 50% of your Customers just a few clicks of the mouse away from using your competitor. A terrifying thought for any perceptive Business.

As if you have not got enough to do, now you have to grapple with Websites, E-commerce, ultra mobile customers, competitors with a low business cost-base undercutting you. This dilemma as a result of Internet trading, and its theoretical solution, has been increasingly discussed for many years. The generally agreed concept of collaborative network marketing whereby large groups of Businesses form extensive trading forums is widely held to be the way ahead for B2B Commerce, both on and off the Web. The problem until now has been to come up with a commercially viable business model to provide these services.

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