

by Charles Rubin

Myth #1 - You will reach millions of customers.

Having a site on the Web doesn't mean you'll automatically reach millions of customers, any more than having a book in publication means you'll automatically reach millions of readers. There may be millions of people capable of accessing Worldwide Web pages right now, but you'll have to promote your site through discussion group participation, ads, announcements, directory listings, e-mail, links on other sites, and off-line publicity before you'll attract a lot of visitors.

Myth #2 - You can set up a site and forget it.

Web sites aren't like print or broadcast ad campaigns, where you're married to a particular design and information package for months on end. When I see a site that hasn't changed in months, I wonder whether or not the company is still in business. There are too many new Web sites appearing every day for me or most Net surfers to return again to sites that never change. Your Web site had better change at least weekly. It should announce its changing features right at the top of the home page so even the most casual visitor knows he or she will see something new on the next visit. Plan for change when you plan the site, and think through the process of how it will be updated (and who will do that), and you'll end up with a site that people will visit again and again.

Myth #3 - Hits = Visits.

High hit counts contribute to the grossly inflated notions of the Web's magical ability to reach people. But your site will always get far more hits than it does actual human visitors. See my tip, "Hits Don't Equal Visits," for more information.

Myth #4 - The more graphics, the better.

When graphic designers take over a Web site, looks often triumph over accessibility. The prettiest site on the Web is useless if visitors with non-graphical browsers can't tell what it is or how to navigate in it. Too many sites are unfathomable even to graphical browser users who view them without loading the images. And even interested visitors won't wait to see what you're offering if they have to stumble over too many minute-long downloads as images load. Use small image files. Offer a text-only option at the top of your home page. And let visitors know how large big image files are so they can make an informed decision about whether or not to display them.

Myth #5 - Malls make shopping more convenient.

Web mall operators say that locating on their site is a plus, because their collection of stores attracts Web surfers. But while a physical mall brings in people because it saves time, Web malls don't offer nearly the same time-saving benefit. It takes no more time for me to jump from one Web site to another than it does to jump from one mall store to another. A mall that's a hodgepodge of companies is less interesting to me than one that features businesses or resources focused around a certain topic of interest, such as the Realty Net, Book Zone, and TV Net. There's enough disorganization and chaos on the Web as it is without having to go to a generalized mall to see more of it.

Myth #6 - Sounds and video are simple.

We hear lots of hot air about the multimedia nature of the Web, but Web sites have a long way to go before they resemble your TV set or even a CD-ROM playing on your PC. If you're expecting to point and click to listen or hear multimedia clips, you'll be disappointed. When software developers and content providers completely integrate video and sound player capabilities and overcome the lack of standards and bandwidth constraints for modem connections you might be able to use multimedia. But until then, video and sound files have to be downloaded, and they require a player utility in order to perform on your PC. Video files in particular can be multi-megabyte affairs that take many minutes to download. Further, there are different players for different PC platforms. The best Web sites that offer sounds or video also offer a selection of players you can download to ensure that you'll be able to experience the sound or movie on your PC, no matter what kind it is.