
Bob Hacker

The Real Value of the World Wide Web

Bob Hacker started The Hacker Group, Ltd. in 1986. Since then, they have become the largest full-service direct marketing project house in the Pacific Northwest. They currently serve over 100 clients, both in the US and abroad. Their client base is concentrated in financial services, travel, real estate, high-technology, telecommunications, sports marketing, broadcasting and fundraising. Bob is on the editorial board of *Target Marketing* magazine and a frequent writer and speaker on direct marketing issues. Bob is a graduate of The Harvard Business School and the University of Washington.



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ABSTRACT

Bob Hacker asserts his views of what the World Wide Web is good for and what it probably won't affect. For instance, the web promises to give control of timing and content back to the recipient. Therefore the Web probably won't be of much value for new customer acquisition. Through the Internet, you can get instant access to information! Information that was considered proprietary only a few short months ago. You can find people on the Web; you can find sales prospects; you can refine sales presentations; you can discover how your competition thinks; there is valuable product and service information on the Web. It just might be the best way to distribute data and information. Just log onto a search engine and see what you can find!

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Introduction

What is the World Wide Web good for and why? The Web will gush information to those who look for it, but some things will not change. How will this phenomenon affect marketing and sales? Read on and discover Bob Hacker's views on the usefulness of the World Wide Web.

The Web, as a direct marketing tool, is suspect.

The direct marketing key to success for new customer acquisition hasn't changed much in the past 200 to 400 years. While the medium may change, the sender has always controlled the content and timing of all messages.

The Web promises to give control of timing and content back to the recipient. And it does. If they're not ready, they don't tune in. If they can't find you, they don't find you. If they're not interested, they double-click a hypertext link and *whoosh!* -- they're instantly connected to anywhere they want to go.

As a died-in-the-wool, unabashed direct marketer who makes his living controlling message and timing, I just can't believe that the Internet will be of much value for new customer acquisition before I die. The Web will generate some new business, but senior management will treat it like found money and still expect you to bring them even more customers and ever higher revenue.

The Web, as a spy tool, may be unsurpassed.

While the Web's value as a new business builder, at least for the foreseeable future, is suspect, there is real value on the Internet.

The Web is a fabulous research and intelligence tool. Through the Internet, you can get instant access to information that was considered proprietary only a few short months ago. Let me give you some examples.

Recruiting -- When you need people, you can find them on the Web. Don't search the many job

posting boards, search inside your competitors, vendors and allied companies. Many of them list key personnel and their responsibilities. The very helpful ones even give you an e-mail link right to the individual you might be interested in. You can recruit them without even making a long distance call. Is this great, or what! Try <http://www.huntgroup.com> to see what I mean.

Finding Sales Prospects -- Again, the Internet is incredible. Agencies and vendors often provide comprehensive client lists -- sometimes both present *and* past clients -- it's like manna from heaven!. Why build prospecting files of "likely buyers" when you can build prospecting lists of "proven buyers"? There are proven buyers listed at <http://www.direct2.com/direct2/>. See if any of them make sense for your company.

Refining Sales Presentations -- When you're pitching against another company, it's helpful to know who the competition is. Often a home page provides a lot of information you can use. You can discover how a competitor thinks and what their strengths and weaknesses are. They often show examples of their work. If their packages are expensive, you might present low-cost alternatives. Are they creative-driven? You might go in with a strategy-driven presentation. Are they weak in list strategy? You might push hard on your list planning capabilities. Try <http://www.kvo.com> for an example. You'll not only see their client and personnel rosters, you'll learn that one of the partners doesn't spend as much time around the office as he should because he's writing a book. Now why would they want to share that with their competitors?

Doing Better Work -- There is valuable product and service information on the Web. Products are fully described, including detailed features, advantages and benefits sheets. While a product group can give you great direction for their specific product or service, they often don't understand, or care about, other products or services offered by their company. The Web can help you get a broader view of the company's overall product strategy and

vision. Log on to <http://www.sybase.com> to see what I mean.

Fulfillment -- One of the main uses of the Web will be fulfillment. While the Internet may not be the right medium to persuade, it just might be the best way to distribute data and information. See <http://www.tektronix.com> -- the buzz is they think they can save about \$5,000,000 a year in fulfillment costs by using the Web.

Finding these was easy. I just logged on to Yahoo, one of the oldest and most comprehensive Web search engines. There was a lot more, try <http://www.yahoo.com> and see what you can find.

While the long-term potential of the Web is lost in the miasma, the near-term potential of the Web is clear. You just gotta log on and get wired. It's fast, it's cheap, and you can find things out today that were deep, dark secrets only a few short months ago.

Bob Hacker is President of The Hacker Group, Ltd., a direct marketing project house specializing in customer acquisition, cross-selling and retention with direct mail. They will never have a home page that lists clients or key employees. All the URL addresses in this article were checked and were correct. If they don't work now, that's the Web for you. You can reach Bob at 1-206-454-8556 or E-mail rchacker@halcyon.com.