

# Make Your Web Site A Destination Worth Visiting

Scan competitors' sites for ideas; pay special attention to customer service

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

**H**ave you been to the Web sites of some of our competitors recently? They are no longer “general information” sites where you can go to see if they serve your area of town.

Franchise cable operators have put substantial time and energy into making their sites a “destination” for their subscribers. Their sites have become a great tool for marketing, product information, upgrading and even trouble shooting.

My company recently went through the process of upgrading its Web site and splitting it into two destinations: One for consumers, and one for our real estate clients. We spent a considerable amount of time and effort on the consumer side of our site to make it fresh, appealing and effective.

## Look Around

We combed through the sites of dozens of cable operators to see what we liked, what we thought worked well, and what fit into our business plan. We enlisted the guidance of many different members of our management team – in customer care, marketing, field operations and broadband support. We even spent time with our billing provider. And we brought in an outside expert to execute our vision.

The process was quite engaging. The biggest surprise was learning the importance of a cable company's Web site as an image-builder, as a communication tool and as a source of information. Our customer service representatives told me in meetings that they regularly get requests from new customers who want to sign-up online, or to do their research at our Web site before making their product selection.

## Educate, Upgrade, Fix Problems

All the more reason to devote more time to this assignment. If it works, you can educate your prospective customer, upgrade a current customer, or resolve a problem with an unhappy customer.

We set out to accomplish all three objectives.

There are a lot of features I liked in my exploration of our competitor's sites. For instance, Comcast has a continuously updating “content” section for news, sports, the markets and weather. Comcast also provides all TV and movie listings, and in a way that is easy to navigate. Comcast even makes it easy to order music downloads through its relationship with Rhapsody.com. Its Web site is also available in Spanish, which is a very smart distinction.

Cox does a nice job of using its site as a sales tool. There is a great deal of information about pay-per-view listings, and promotions of sports packages. Cox also provides detail regarding its on-time guarantee for service calls, and why cable is better than satellite. Oh, and my favorite feature is the Cox “Special Offers” button, which is a great way to up-sell on a new bundle. Of course, it can be changed at any time.

Charter's site is easy to navigate by product. Charter offers comprehensive yet understandable virus alerts and hoax alerts, which I feel is a great customer service. Charter also offers parental controls and easy contact for technical support.

I was not impressed with Time-Warner's Web site, although the company does make it easy for a business customer to log into the network. Other operators offer great features like maps, directions,

and product information – channel line-ups, pricing of services offered, and so forth.

## For Recruiting, Too

There are two other areas that impressed me during this process, both of which have become new additions to our site. Many cable operators use their site as a recruiting source for new employees – you can see new job postings, and you can submit your resume online.

The other great feature (which I actually like best) is online bill pay. You can view your bill at any time, have it emailed to you each month, and pay your bill by check or credit card. Some cable industry sources say that 5 to 10 percent of the customer base will check their account online rather than call your customer service center. This is more efficient for your customer, and cheaper in terms of your CSR costs.

So put some time into updating your Web site. Pay attention to what your competitors are doing, and modify their ideas to fit your own needs. The improved site can be a great destination for upgrading, servicing, and expanding your business. It will definitely improve your customer's experience with your company.

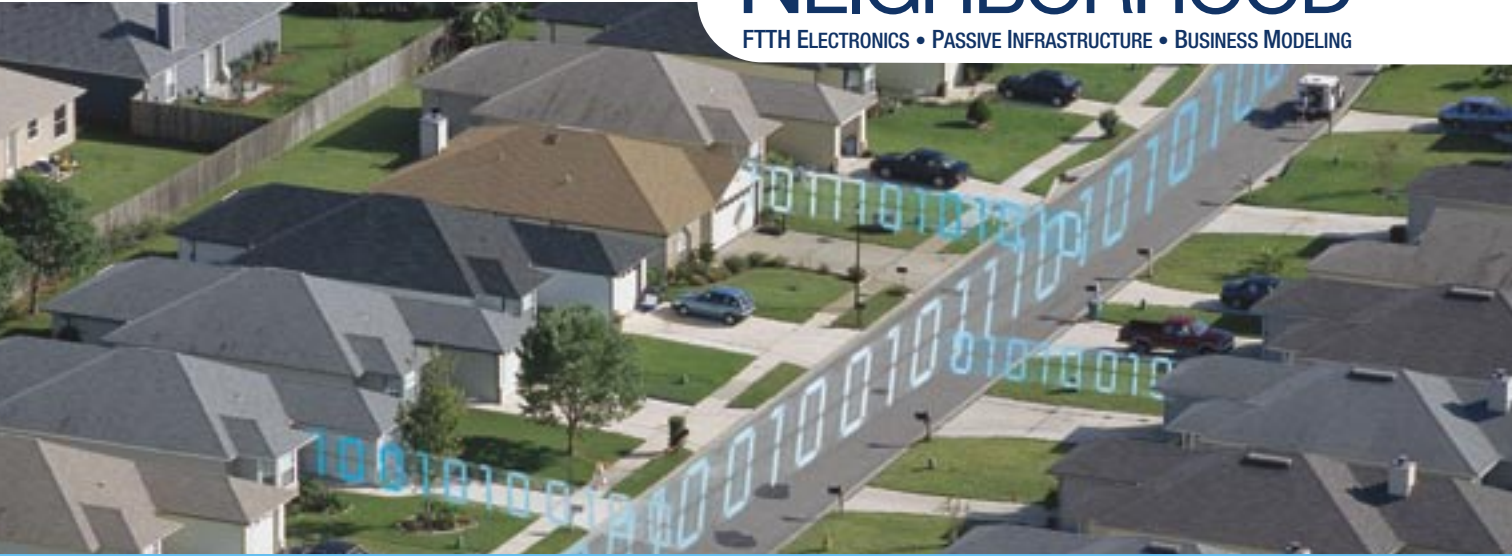
It already has with mine. **BBP**

## About the Author

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