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# Enterprise

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## Why SMEs Should Build Online Presence

By ARVIN YANA

Making an online presence is no longer a choice but a necessity in today's marketplace. Because 14% of the world population over the age of 15 are now online (and the figure rapidly grows by the day), companies without Web sites are said to be missing out on a number of marketing opportunities that used to be too expensive if not completely inexistent in the pre-Internet times. Now, any small enterprise can transact or interact with any clients worldwide using auto-responders and online payments, among others, and facilitate product delivery online. And with a professionally-designed website,



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in Metro Manila, Cebu City and Davao City (90%) said they used their Web sites primarily to promote their company and products to potential customers. Only 20% of them used their sites for e-commerce or selling products over the Internet, while 13.5% used their sites to collect visitors' information for the company's database. A small fraction of the respondents said they put up their Web sites to build some status symbol and for inter-office functions.

Respondents also cited convenience primarily with respect to increased accessibility to corporate information and services; the need to keep up with competition in the industry; consistency with their business develop-

ment and more permanent accessibility and readability (24/7 online hosting) than those via the other conventional media.

Investing in company Web sites does not only make things easy for business operators but also for their target clients as the Internet enables people to access information about certain products and services from the comfort, convenience and privacy of their own home. A page containing frequently-asked questions on a certain product, for instance, saves time both of the company and the client who would otherwise access product information through the telephone.

Web sites have evolved into being more interactive (and therefore more efficient) nowadays than some years before with some dynamic functionalities such as automatic product updates through the use of databases, automatic Web site content and image changing and the increasingly-common use of live video and audio streaming.

Lastly, a low-cost market research usu-

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a small business can have a "look" of being a large corporation. The Internet truly democratizes access to marketing technologies which could only be done by giant corporations before.

In the Philippines, majority of the Filipino small and medium enterprises (SMEs) use their Web sites primarily as electronic brochures more than as e-commerce research tools. According to a survey commissioned by The Asia Foundation (2002), SMEs with websites as surveyed

ment effort; and management drive as important driving factors developing Web sites.

More than what the respondents said, having a Web site provides an advertising platform which is considerably lower in costs compared to advertising on television, radio, magazines or newspapers. While it would take hundreds of thousands to run an ad on tv or on a broadsheet, Web development only costs as low as P5,000 depending on the requirements of the site, with far wider

ally in the form of questionnaires posted on a company Web site can quickly provide clients' feedback on a certain product, service or a marketing approach itself, enabling the company to shift strategies when needed.

There are a whole lot of reasons and business benefits why an SME, regardless of the nature of business and client demographics, should prioritize Web development among its management agenda. And there's no better time than now. ●