

Businesses tend to make some common mistakes...

1. ***Rushing in without a master plan.*** Companies are so dazzled by the prospect of establishing a Web presence that they lose sight of the original reasons for being there: Promoting product and/or service? Point-of-purchase sales transactions? Building a customer database? Soliciting customer feedback? Even though it's still difficult to assemble meaningful projections, it's still important to make a list of short- and long-term goals.
But don't go to the other extreme. It's better to experiment with a test site now, and make your mistakes while the medium is young and the audience still limited to a few million. Too many Web Sites are bottlenecked in committee meetings or stillborn while awaiting budget approval. A site can be established for a relatively small expenditure, and then tweaked and cultivated as needed. And thanks to the interactive nature of the medium, you'll know quickly what is and isn't working.
2. ***Appointing the wrong person to the task.*** In too many corporate board rooms, this week's VP of New Media is last week's marketing director who has never ventured past e-mail, if he's ever used a modem at all! "Invariably, when people from the Old School get handed this job, they try to fit this new technology into the same old pigeon holes," says Ryan Bernard, a Web consultancy in Houston. "They want to deliver their brochure over the Internet. What they really need to do is give customers a complete on-line transaction, from first peek to showroom tour to final handshake."
The solution: save money in the long run and subcontract Web design to the pros. "People who do not understand the mechanics of Web construction end up redoing their site endlessly until they finally get it right," says Bernard. "They end up paying for it a dozen times. Why not just hire someone who knows what they're doing, and do it right the first time?"
3. ***Failing to research the competition.*** Chances are whatever you're promoting or selling, there are already hundreds of sites devoted to the identical product or service. But don't be discouraged. Most Web sites going up now are really as a result of people trying to catch up.
4. ***Not appreciating the unique interactive aspect of the medium.*** "Many of the biggest companies still don't understand that it is not just a matter of slapping information up there with pretty pictures," says Bernard. "And just putting up a form does not really work unless the customer has some impetus to fill it out." But even those who comprehend that a Web page is not a display ad or a brochure still don't fully understand that interactivity is a two-way street. Soliciting customer feedback is only the first step. Be prepared to respond to e-mail. Our first goal is to get the audience to respond to you, but then it's a big mistake if you don't follow through and respond to them.
5. ***Being too commercial.*** Internet protocol dictates that you supply free information and entertainment first, and then ask for the sale. "The clients I have that offer something free -- a sample of some software, a book chapter, a collection of recipes, a cut off an album -- have 2 to 3 times the hit level that [other] clients have," reports Eric Ward of NetPost. "The trick is to lure customers by providing non-commercial hooks: information and services that they vitally need."
6. ***Disorganization.*** You're competing with hundreds of thousands of web pages for a customer's attention. If he gets lost or confused, he's gone. Snazzy graphics will make your home page memorable, but the only sites that entice customers past the front door are those that obey the first commandment of Web design: Content is King. And it better be easy to find. Make sure that the sale is never more than a click away. "If a customer can't navigate easily," notes Lewis, "he won't stick around."
7. ***Using unnecessarily large graphics.*** The single most frequently heard complaint is that those hefty GIFs take way too long to download, forcing visitors to beat a hasty retreat. *Simple, crisp, attractive icons* are the way to go!
8. ***Not supplying sufficient reason to return.*** Sites that fail to constantly update and revise their material run the risk of quickly becoming flame bait. "Spotlight 'What's New' and 'Coming Attractions' with special icons," advises Mark Kelly, marketing director in Los Angeles. "The most successful Web sites are like magazines... people go there to get the latest news about a particular set of products or a particular market. The customers will know they can always learn something new."
9. ***Forgetting to promote your Web site, on and off the Net.*** Negotiate reciprocal links with compatible sites, submit your site to Web directories, judiciously post notices in appropriate Usenet Groups, alert the trade and consumer press. And tout your site in all your corporate literature, and on your packaging. "
10. ***Overlooking the fact that it's a global medium.*** "There are Web pages now in French, Italian, Mandarin, and Czechoslovakian," observes Bernard. It's not a bad idea to offer translations of your contents in several languages. Make it possible for the remote user to click on a choice in their native tongue.

The biggest mistake of all, of course, is not to establish a Web presence.

We believe you should think of a web presence as an environment that can enhance communications both externally and internally between employees, customers, suppliers, and dealers.