

SUCCESSFUL SELLING

To succeed in retail e-Commerce, you need an angle, preferably an angle that isn't easy for others to duplicate. Examples where e-Commerce can be successful are:

- Businesses that control the supply of product, eliminating competitors or increasing their cost.
- Businesses that deal in products so obscure nobody else wants to be bothered. For this kind of business, the Web can open a worldwide market.
- Businesses that have specialized knowledge difficult to acquire but necessary to sell the product or for use or enjoyment of the product. This takes careful handling because you can't just place this knowledge on your Website. A competitor will link to your site as his information resource and say "Make your selection here, then come on back to Al's Discount Widgets to get the lowest price!". The round trip takes only seconds.
- Established businesses who operate associated e-Commerce sites as a convenience to customers who already know and trust them.
- Businesses offering immediate gratification through a local presence. For instance, companies with a local delivery service allowing them to deliver your order in a matter of minutes (some of these are already in operation).
- Businesses that have low overhead, deliver nothing but the Web pages themselves or downloaded material and use free or low cost network advertising. The porn industry has this worked out really well.

IMPLEMENTING AN E-COMMERCE WEBSITE

E-Commerce sites are designed and implemented the same way as any other Website, a process explained in our article Building a Commercial WebSite, but involve special considerations.

The top consideration is security. Don't neglect it. Many sites have ended up notifying thousands of customers that their credit card information had been compromised. Not only must you carefully configure the security options in your software (especially for Microsoft products which default to an unsafe state) you must monitor security bulletins for each of the products you use and install patches whenever they are posted.

The next biggest consideration is that your hosting service (unless you host your own site or co-locate) supports the full range of e-commerce features you require. You will probably also link to outside engines for such things as fraud detection, credit card clearing and even your shopping cart.

Software for implementing e-commerce is available from many vendors, at prices ranging from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands of dollars. As always with software, what you pay doesn't necessarily reflect the quality of what you get.

Keep in mind that e-commerce on any scale is expensive, so you must intend to do enough business to make it worthwhile. Your e-commerce site must be promoted and advertised at least as intensively as for a physical store.

Chatting on the Web

A web chat is a system that allows users to communicate in real time using easily accessible web interfaces. It is a type of internet online chat distinguished by its simplicity and accessibility to users who do not wish to take the time to install and learn to use specialized chat software. This trait allows users instantaneous access and only a web browser is required to chat. Users will always get the latest version of a chat service because no software installation or updates are required.

Web Chat Software

The following are standalone chat servers:

IBM Same Time

IBM Same time is a client server application and middleware platform that provides real-time, unified communications and collaboration for enterprises. Those capabilities include presence information, enterprise instant messaging, web conferencing, community collaboration and telephony capabilities and integration. It is sold by the Lotus Software division of IBM.

Because IBM Sametime is middleware, it supports enterprise software and business process integration (Communication Enabled Business Process), either through an IBM Sametime plugin or by surfacing IBM Sametime capabilities through third party applications. IBM Sametime integrates with a wide variety of software, including Lotus collaboration products, Microsoft Office productivity software and portal and Web applications.

The following are web front ends (requires *e.g.*, IRC chat server):

CGI: IRC (Perl, Ajax)

CGI: IRC is a CGI program written in Perl that allows access to IRC via a web browser. It is designed to be flexible and has many uses such as an IRC gateway for an IRC network, a chat room for a website or to access IRC when stuck behind a restrictive firewall.

CGI:IRC will work in most browsers, including text based browsers such as Links. To make full use of most of the available features, a newer version is essential; older browsers will work, but CGI IRC will use a single windowed interface instead and the names list will not update as quickly.