

Patience turns web clicks into revenue

**EXPERT
ADVICE**

■ An occasional series seeking answers for entrepreneurs.
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BY ANDY HENION
ahenion@mbizreview.com

Hoping to expand her custom jewelry business beyond craft shows, Hilda Seiler set out to create a website and sell her wares online.

But after taking a couple web-design classes and spending hours on her computer, the effort fizzled and Seiler hired a professional.

"I know how to be creative but I don't know the ins and outs of the technical stuff," said Seiler, who operates Bead-a-Bing out of her Troy home.

Although building an e-commerce website can be dizzying – and expensive – it's increasingly recommended as a smart investment for small businesses looking to grow sales.

An estimated 67 percent of the 135 million American adults who use the Internet buy products online, according to a recent survey by Pew Internet and American Life Project in Washington, D.C.

In addition, 78 percent of Internet users said they research a product or service online before buying it. So even retailers that don't sell merchandise online should at least market their goods on the web to get customers in the door, experts say.

Christine Chubenko, a Royal Oak web developer who built Seiler's site, said e-commerce websites should be attractive and informational, giving prospective buyers a good impression of the company and product.

Hiring a web developer to design and develop an e-commerce site can

cost \$3,000-\$15,000 or more.

There also are fees for registering your domain name, securing a web host provider, and setting up and operating the "shopping cart." Expect to pay \$200 a year or more for these fees, Chubenko said, and be wary of hidden costs in the form of floating rates and monthly minimum fees.

The biggest concern with e-commerce is security, Chubenko said. Because credit card or banking account numbers are given, the information must be encrypted to protect both the buyer (from identity theft) and the seller (from hackers). Some companies charge extra for fraud protection.

A web developer can set up your online payment system or you can use a company like PayPal. Some companies require that you buy annual tech support, which Chubenko recommends.

It can take a year for an e-commerce site to show results – and that's with proactive marketing of the site, Chubenko said. It's important to get your site registered on major search engines such as Google and Yahoo; the Pew survey found that 84 percent of Internet users rely on a search engine to find information.

In Seiler's case, www.beadabing.com was finished in April and she's hoping to get the word out about her business.

"I'm kind of disappointed that I haven't had very much in sales yet," she said. "But I have to get my name out there. It's going to take time."

■ *Andy Henion covers emerging business for Oakland Business Review.*



Chubenko

Bead-a-Bing

Location: Troy.

Owner: Hilda Seiler.
Issue: Needed a web presence, but didn't have the technical know-how to build and maintain a site.

Expert: Christine Chubenko, web developer.

Location: Royal Oak.
Advice: Watch out for hidden costs and be patient. It typically takes a year for an online site to translate into sales.