

IN THE TRENCHES

BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Walkabout Travel Gear sells products through its Web site to adventure travelers. Its site lists products ranging from an all-terrain money belt to insect repellent. Located in a recreational vehicle in Moab, Utah, the business has been operated by entrepreneurs Brad and Gia Boyle since its launch in 1996.

Brad's hint for other small businesses building an online business is to keep it simple. "We never treated the Internet as a place to use flashy advertising, but see it as a tool," Brad says. Most of Brad's time in maintaining the Web site is spent adding new items for sale and creating links to travel information sites. The site also has a message board for people looking for travel partners.

"We wanted our Web site to be a reference source as well as sell things," Brad says. "We focus on the customer, and the site is a forum for them." The company grew 45 percent in 1999 and averaged almost \$250,000 from commissions on the products it sold. With no permanent employees, these entrepreneurs operate from a remote area that couldn't support a brick-and-mortar store.

Source: Tom Till, "Forge a Community of Customers," *MyBusiness*, March/April 2000, p. 34.



<http://www.walkabouttravelgear.com>

and the introduction scheduled for October 2001 was delayed by the September 11th terrorist attacks.

ICANN, however, does not register names; this must be done through a domain registration firm. Several domain registrars allow a search of the Internet to see if a proposed name is already taken. InterNic provides an Accredited Registrar Directory that lists ICANN-accredited domain registrars.

One U.S.-based registrar is Network Solutions (NSI). Figure 3-2, on page 70, shows the results of an NSI search on the name "longeneckermoorespetty.com." As you can see, at the time this book went to press, the name was available. NSI owns Root Server A, the primary top-level Internet server, which allows Web users to access a Web address anywhere in the world. NSI had the original, exclusive franchise—given by the federal government—to register domain names. Since the exclusive franchise ended in 1999, Root Server A has remained in control of the global distribution of new Web addresses. Occasionally, NSI allows visitors to stand next to Root Server A and pose for pictures.¹³

Another ICANN-accredited domain name registrar is Namesecure, whose Web page is shown in Figure 3-3, on page 71. Note that the registration costs listed are relatively low.

<http://www.internic.net/regist.html>

<http://www.netsol.com>

<http://www.namesecure.com>

Building a User-Friendly Web Site

First impressions are important, and high-quality Web design gives a small e-commerce business the opportunity to make a good first impression on each visitor.

The technical aspects of developing a Web site are beyond the scope of this chapter. Fortunately, there are many technical specialists available to help design and build a site. Our purpose here is simply to provide some useful tips about Web site design.



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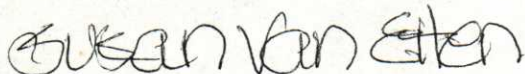
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