



Emerging Manager Monthly, February 2007

StreetSavvy MarketerSM

Wednesday, February 7, 2007

A Word About Web Sites

How important is a Web site to your marketing message? It's not only essential, it's critical. It wasn't so long ago that Web sites were positioned as a "storefront," an online alternative to a bricks-and-mortar location. No longer. In today's global economy, the Web site is a business tool, a way of reaching out 24/7/365. People want information on demand. You've got to give it to them. First, some history. In the mid-1990s, when the big push to Web sites occurred, the savvier businesses posted at least a few pages online, generally brochureware. In effect, they simply recycled their traditional marketing materials. It was the same story, same content – and it worked, and to a degree, still does. But because today's Web sites are much more interactive, they demand greater sophistication. The good news is that there are Web site developers, many of whom specialize in financial services, who can help you get the job done – and at a reasonable price.

It's easy enough to get online today by buying a template, which can cost as little as \$500. But in the case of money management firms, whose needs are complex and more sophisticated, you're not going to get by for long with three or four Web pages that basically replicate your marketing brochures. Check out www.aiminvestments.com and www.vanguard.com, and you'll see what I mean. They're live—and lively. They're performance-related, client-friendly and news-driven. They're also industry models.

As an emerging manager, though, you may not need anything as sophisticated as something that the biggest investment firms are likely to have. What you need is something that works – not just for you, but for your clients and prospects.

A good Web site designer will sit down with you, listen to what your needs are and put together a plan, sketching out each and every page. Of course, there are decisions you'll have to make. Do you want to have separate links for individual and institutional investors? Do you want a link for financial advisors with more detailed and, sometimes, proprietary information? And, needless to say, everything you post will need to conform to any legal and compliance requirements. And don't forget the small stuff like accurate contact information. We've all encountered Web sites where a phone number is wrong or a link doesn't work. It can compromise your entire marketing effort.

Once it's up, you'll also need to keep an eye on it. Internet technology is not infallible. Every once in awhile, I'll hear from someone that our site was taking a long time to load. The message here? You have to stay on

top of your Web hosting company. You also need to keep the site fresh. What good are four-year-old press releases or bios of executives who no longer work with you? They won't exactly add to your 'crisp' factor.

I'm not a big fan of committees, but depending on how large your organization is, it can be very productive assigning a small number of people – maybe someone from HR, sales, marketing, and product development – to review your Web site's look and content regularly. This will help ensure your site not only remains fresh and relevant, but gives the people who are most crucial to your continued success – client and prospects – reasons to come back. It can be an exciting, dynamic process. What you don't want is corporate speak.

The bottom line? Think strategically and comprehensively. What is the value of the information you are communicating and how does it speak to your brand? This is how people will remember you. This isn't just a storefront. It's a business tool.

Bill Blase is the president of New York City-based WT Blase & Associates, Inc., one of the nation's leading corporate and market positioning firms, and StreetSpeak[®], Inc., an executive presentation and media training firm for financial executives. Bill can be reached at billblase@wtblase.com.