



Location:



What's New!

What's Cool

Handbook

Net Search

The Internet Invades Home Improvement

It's coming at you from every corner these days. The Internet is subject matter for television, magazines, newspapers, seminars, education, personal conversations...and now Home Improvement Retailing. The Internet has invaded every walk of life, including our industry, so even if you haven't yet 'logged on', this article will show a little of what awaits you.

It is difficult to see the picture when you are inside the frame, so we've pictured some web sites for you to see on the following pages. But, be warned, the excitement, or fear, surrounding the Internet can become a dangerous time consuming distraction.

Estimates of 30 million plus internet users, worldwide, make an attractive incentive for companies wishing to promote their global images. Companies are investing countless hours, and huge funds, creating (and updating) their commercial web sites and pages - so much so the Internet is in danger of becoming thought of as too 'commercial', losing much of its entertainment/educational value. But no one really knows where the Internet will lead us in the future.

▶ BE AN AGGRESSIVE FOLLOWER. ◀

If you're thinking about being the first on your block to have your very own web site, you may want to think twice...unless you're computer technically inclined. Besides the fact someone else has probably beaten you to the web, at what expense of their time and money? For most of us, it's smarter to be an 'aggressive follower' than to waste resources in an on-line research and development foray to the World Wide Web. A web site in the future that offers valuable content, but employs innovative methods pioneered by others, will probably save you money and make you happier in the long run.

On the other hand, if you can spare a clever, HTML-proficient staffer for 20 hours a week, go ahead and jump into the

Internet. Nothing is impossible to the man who doesn't have to do it himself. Be warned, however, that maintaining and improving your web site is no easy matter for those of us whose staffers are fully employed. Whatever you give up to get something else is what it costs...and that includes time.

But there may be a market there for you. According to a survey by Nordicity Group Ltd. and A.C. Nielsen Canada, about 55 per cent of Canadian Internet users are male, and a majority of users (54%) are between 25 and 44 years old, not just the high school kids you've always thought.

▶ A \$500 TOASTER? ◀

The home Internet market could explode even faster in the near future, if the Web "toaster" becomes a reality (\$500 devices under development by competitors to Microsoft and Intel that might let you 'surf the net' by hooking up with your TV). So, if you don't know much about the World Wide Web, you owe it to yourself to at least take a look. The person who is too old to learn was probably always too old to learn. You'll find it interesting, informative, innovative, bewildering, and entertaining. Maybe even profitable.

Perhaps you know someone who is already on the Internet. That person would probably be more than willing to give you a crash introduction. If you're already a member of CompuServe, Prodigy, or America On Line, this route may be the most inexpensive way for you to initially 'explore' the net. Then, as your needs expand, you may find it less expensive to sign up with a local 'server' who can provide you with a direct Internet link for a monthly and/or hourly fee.

You'll probably use "search engines" provided by your server, like "Yahoo", "Web Crawler", etc., to search for sites in the field of home improvement. Searching for words like "renovation", "building",

"woodworking", "decorating", etc., will amaze you with the number of the sites already on the web! Then you simply double click on any listing and away you go to the site. Easy.

If you already know the site address (such as the ones we've provided in this article), using "browsers" like "Netscape" and "Mosaic" you simply type in the "http" addresses you're interested in and press "Enter. Seconds later, you are there. Some sites are pure commercial, others very useful.

▶ ONE WEB SITE WILL EVEN FIGURE OUT HOW MUCH PAINT YOU'LL NEED. ◀

Into an easy-to-use form, right on the computer at this web site, you enter the height and width of your walls in any room, the number of windows and doors, and the area of the ceiling. Then you enter how many coats of paint you plan to brush on, and it calculates the number of gallons you'll need for the job. Pretty slick. (http://www.btw.com/applets/paint_calc.html).

Building a deck? A span calculator will figure out the maximum allowable joist span spacing for the floor. (http://www.btw.com/applets/span_calc.html). Other pages at the same site have other useful tips on selecting quality paint brushes (<http://www.btw.com/tips/home/9506/brush.htm>), or on replacing an asphalt shingle (<http://www.btw.com/tips/home/9508/shingle.htm>); maintaining your furnace (<http://www.btw.com/tips/home/9509/furnace.htm>) and more.

So jump in now. Explore the world without leaving your home. Learn a few things. And decide if the Internet provides your operation with an opportunity to build your business. It's a tangled web for many of us in cyberspace, so approach the Internet cautiously and use it for what it's worth at present... because the future is bound to change. By the way... you can eMail *Home Improvement Retailing* at pwrshift@idirect.com. See you on the web.