

by Debra Kahn Schofield

The answer is a resounding YES. Guerrillas know that the Internet is the one place where even a small business can have a large presence. Unlike television or print advertising, a huge budget isn't necessary to make an impression and attract traffic. When advertising on the Internet, you have to ask yourself whether you can induce enough people to visit your Web site and stay long enough to do business. One of the benefits of being on the Internet is that a modest amount of business activity can justify the outlay of funds and energy.

Use your Web site to promote the service you offer your customers. Let potential customers know that when they do business with you, they can avoid the layers of bureaucracy to get assistance.

Large companies do have certain advantages. Chiefly, they have the finances to subsidize banner advertising on high traffic sites, and they can afford to refresh their content often. This enables them to attract new visitors and convert them into devotees. You can level the playing field somewhat by contacting other small- and medium-sized related sites and arranging to trade Web links.

Of course, big companies sustain major disadvantages too. Corporations have more levels of management that have to review and approve every new budgetary or marketing decision. Reaction time is delayed until input is obtained from the top brass. Often people at the top are out of touch with the technology and advances of the Web and they may put up resistance to what they perceive as untried and risky. Due to the inherent conservatism and fear of offending anyone that's endemic in many big companies, their Web sites are often bland and indistinguishable from similar sites.

When setting up your Web site, you need to follow a basic recipe. Take one part commitment; incorporate elements such as graphics, audio and video, blending properly; and then put the icing on the cake. The icing is your ability to create opportunities for interaction between your customers and your company. This can be accomplished by providing a bulletin board or establishing a discussion group.

Look before you leap and do your research. Surf the Net, visiting as many Web sites as you can to see what captivates you. Then hire a consultant who understands the technology and the associated costs and can help you realize your vision.

Here are some of the advantages and drawbacks to being a Guerrilla Marketer on the Web:

### Advantages

1. The Web gives a voice to almost everyone with a message. Every company from multi-national corporations to home-based businesses can have the same level of exposure at a

moderate cost.

2. The Web is the most efficient and financially expedient way to market your products and services on a local, national, and even global level.

3. Your size frees you to investigate numerous strategies such as storefronts, autoresponders and mailbots.

4. Unlike large companies who mindlessly pay huge sums to high-profile advertising agencies, when you approach an independent Web site designer, you can get a great deal—from one Guerrilla to another.

5. Small companies don't have the tremendous overhead that their bigger competitors have. Your profit doesn't have to be as high to succeed.

6. You will be listed alongside larger firms in the heavily-used Web search engines.

7. You may be able to get up and running on the Web before many of your larger competitors. The entry cost won't prohibit you from experimenting and learning as you go.

### Drawbacks

1. It is unrealistic to expect your new site to attract enough Web traffic to enable you to sell advertising on it.

2. If you plan to sell items directly over the Web, be prepared to pay for a convenient shopping cart buying system (unless you have just a few products).

3. You probably won't get rich, but you will probably expand your present business.

4. Even though marketing on the Web will draw from your current advertising budget, you shouldn't abandon the advertising you are doing now. Add a Web site to your existing advertising mix.

5. Many people aren't interested in Web sites offering products or services for sale. If you can offer useful information, people will be more likely to do business with your site.

6. Since the Web attracts a global market, It isn't advisable to establish a Web site to advertise a service or product to a strictly local market.

7. Your larger competitors have the funds to invest in more bells and whistles. It may be difficult to compete with sites offering games, chat rooms and MUSEs (Multi-User Simulation Environments).

The Web can't exactly narrow the margin between the financial power of corporations and small businesses, but it does provide an excellent opportunity for the intrepid entrepreneur to expand a business successfully.