

Making the sale through e-commerce

BY AUDORA BURG
STURGIS JOURNAL

Local chocolate store makes international sales

Internet developers have yet to unveil the cyber equivalent of "scratch-and-sniff," but that hasn't slowed Internet sales at Great Lakes Chocolate and Coffee Company.

Great Lakes is one of a growing number of Sturgis-based businesses to have established an Internet presence.

Although their online sales are currently a small percentage of their overall business, the Internet is an important sales tool for them, said Paul Smith, co-owner with his brother, Jared Smith.

"Business begets business," Paul Smith said. "It's actually an important part of our business. We think of it as its own store," he said.

Even after he and his employees shut down the coffee makers and chocolate counter for the night, their store remains open — online.

"You can track when the sales come in," Smith said. "We get many late-night sales."

Their Web site is an important marketing tool, not only for their products, but for the business itself.

"A good Web site legitimizes a company," he said. "On another larger order this year, the customer went with us in particular because they felt comfortable with us and our products primarily from our Web site. The Web site was involved in painting a picture of our company for that customer," Smith said.

Great Lakes has shipped chocolate and coffee to all 50 states as well as internationally, including to Iraq, Scotland, Mexico, Japan, and Czechoslovakia.

A portion of their business is corporate gift-giving, especially at the holidays, which expands their marketing.

"We send a lot of gifts for corporate customers, and of course all the gifts that are sent will include our phone number and Web site. Through that we will market our Web site, and we'll see our customers' customers ordering," Smith said.

Smith highlighted a favorite example: he won a new customer when one of his long-time customers sent Great Lakes gifts.

"Then they (the recipient) — without me realizing, we pieced it together afterwards — they ordered a small gift online through our Web site. It was the same gift they had received. The following Christmas, they called us up and placed a very large order over the phone. So they received our gift, they visited the Web site, they ordered something from the Web site, were pleased with the gift and service they got. I think we did like 300 pounds of chocolate for that customer," Smith said.

"Those sales don't get recorded as Internet sales, yet without an Internet presence they never would have occurred."

When Smith reviewed statistics for the

'Information architect' puts it all together online

BY AUDORA BURG
STURGIS JOURNAL

Amy Frost says she's not a "technogeek" because she doesn't "speak binary." But not only is she technically proficient in writing "raw code," in HTML, she enjoys it.

She prefers the term "information architect" to technogeek.

Or you can call her a Web site designer.

Since starting her business, eStudio Design, in 2000, she has designed Web sites for many local entities — including city of Sturgis, Sturgis Area Chamber of Commerce, Sturgis Hospital, and Great Lakes Chocolate Company, as well as businesses all over the country.

Technical arts

Frost first got into Web design while working as technical support for an internet service provider in Massachusetts.

Although the job of "graphic/Web designer sort of fell into (her) lap," she was instantly smitten.

She'd long been interested in art but had never found a medium she really liked. Web design allowed her to draw on her talent and her passion.

"It was the perfect marriage of technical gifts with the creative need I have," she said.

Then she moved back to Sturgis, bringing her skills and creativity with her.

"I felt there was a void that I was confident I could fill, so I moved back."

She started small, and cheap.

"I started at \$20 an hour. I made no money. I was dirt poor," Frost said. "When I started doing design, I had a 13-inch monitor and 16



AUDORA BURG / JOURNAL

Amy Frost has been designing Web sites since she started her business, eStudio Design, in 2000. "There's absolutely no rule to Web site design," Frost said. "No two customers are the same, no two Web sites are the same." But there is a challenge common to all Web sites: "It's very important to be a living, breathing thing. You need to have something that pulls people in repeatedly," she said.

megabytes of RAM. I couldn't have more than one window open at a time."

She said her first customers were "people who just took pity on me in the very beginning," and credits landing the design job for the city of Sturgis as both "a total fluke" and her "big break."

"In 2000, I'd been in business for six months, and I decided to make Christmas cards on the printer to drum up business."

The cards cost her \$1 each, including postage. She mailed five, including one to the city, which ended up in the hands of Mike Hughes, then assistant city manager (now city manager).

"I'm cheap and apparently impressed him," Frost said. "The city was a definite starting point. It taught me a lot about how to work with people."

Web-building

"There's absolutely no rule to Web

See TOGETHER, 18

Web site, between May 2006 and February 2007, the lowest number of "hits" was 20,292; the highest was in December, at 89,776.

"It takes everything clicking to make it work, but this (online sales) is an area where I see the most potential for growth. It's increased every year, and we'll target it

even more aggressively," Smith said. www.greatlakeschocolate.com

Manufacturer uses Internet to get its name out there

Freeman Manufacturing Company's Web presence is partially e-commerce, like Great Lakes, but it's more about having a Web presence that potential customers may encounter.

The company's Web site has been up for about 12 years, said Freeman's webmaster Thom Drake.

Drake said they get an average of 150 unique "hits" per day, and they do get a few orders through the Web site, but most sales come in through their call center.

Because their orthopedic softgood products require specialized knowledge for distribution, Freeman sells its products through dealers rather than straight to the consumer.

"For us, it's more to get our name out to the public, and hopefully (they) ask for the products from their doctor," Drake said.

www.freemanmfg.com

Sturgis Hospital's online nursery a popular site

You can't exactly practice medicine on a Web site, so Sturgis Hospital's site doesn't involve a market basket or e-commerce.

But there is a lot of information on their 50+ page Web site, which is in the midst of an upgrade.

"We have everything on there from our lab hours — of course we're a 24/7 operation so they can call for answers — but they can check the Web for visiting hours, shop for doctors, look at the babies. We try to make it easy for them," said Phyllis Youga, marketing manager.

The approximately five-year-old "E-nursery" showing pictures of babies born at Sturgis Hospital is one of their highest-traffic features, Youga said, followed by employment pages, second, and finding a doctor, third.

A program monitors activity on the hospital's Web site, keeping track of the number of visitors to the site and how many pages they looked at.

For February 2007, there were 1,127 unique visitors 2,060 times, viewing 10,612 pages.

"On the Web, that would correlate to 115,725 hits," Youga said. "That's actually a little low. January was higher."

www.sturgishospital.com

Logged In

How do you use the Internet?

I use the Internet mainly for keeping in touch with friends and to surf for entertainment.



Theresa Briggs
Centreville

The Internet helps me to keep in touch with family in Europe. It's faster and cheaper than sending a letter.



Kees VanZelst
Sturgis

I love to play Internet Explorer games.

Ashley Algarin
Sturgis



The Internet allows me to stay better in touch with my friends and family, some of which do not live nearby.

Corinne Yockey
Sturgis



"As we go forward, I hope we're going to continue to use technology to make really big differences in how people live and work."

~ Sergey Brin - Google co-founder

ADVANTAGE
PRINTING & DESIGN

KAREN J. CARY
Sales & Marketing

269 • 651 • 5858

kcary@voyager.net
307 W. Chicago Rd. • Suite 240 • Sturgis

Uniq
Jewelry, Gems & Gifts
of Distinction



Doug Mitchell
Owner/Artist



LaLaesha Black
Head Designer

(269) 278-UNIQ (8647)

33 N. Main Street ♦ Three Rivers, MI
www.uniqjewelry.com

The Digital Goldsmith allows us to show you on screen and in scale what your custom jewelry will look like before it is actually produced.

Midwest Tool and Cutlery Company
and division: MIDWEST FORGE COMPANY



Proudly manufacturing
tradesman quality hand tools in
Sturgis since 1945.

MIDWEST
SNIPS

For further information visit our website at www.midwestsnips.com

