Lo-cost, Hi-impact Ideas
25 ways your computer can help you build your business

by Rix Quinn

H ere's a story you can tell your friends at lunch...and it's absolutely true.

I come from a big high school. A few months ago—in a semi-annual newsletter—we asked classmates to send in their e-mail addresses. I volunteered my e-mailbox to receive the information.

Bad idea, because...

When the newsletter came out, I got FLOODED! In the few days, I got maybe 100 responses. And today - three months later - data's still trickling in.

Why do I tell you this? Because the E-Mail Revolution could mean MAJOR NEW INCOME for you and other turf professionals!

Three gigantic benefits of the Internet

Most business folks agree the Internet represents surprising opportunity. And some say its impact will rival that of the Industrial Revolution a century ago. But three factors make Internet communications a vital tool:
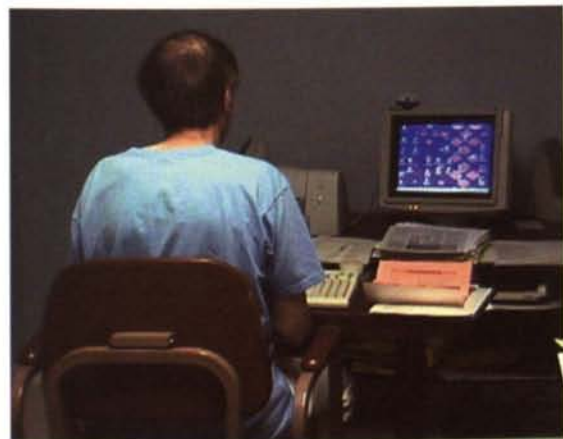
The Internet makes it possible to maintain almost instant contact with your customers, so gathering their e-mail addresses is a good idea.

1. It's **INTERACTIVE**. You can contact customers or potential clients, and they can respond to you.

2. It's **INSTANT**. You can share turf data, sales or advertising ideas, and your readers can give you feedback right away.

3. It's **QUANTIFIABLE**. You can build a database easily, track in constantly and update it momentarily.

How to share your skills with current (and future) clients

Believe me when I tell you I'm a computer amateur. As a business writer, I fought the Revolution as long as I could. But today, I can't do without it!

In the next few paragraphs, I'll offer you 25 ideas you can implement almost immediately. And the more customer data you've already captured—the more e-mail addresses you've got in your Address Book—the faster you can start.

25 keys to unlock the Internet profit door

1. Computerize your database: Beginning today, you or your employees can start gathering e-mail addresses of customers, suppliers and manufacturers. And that customer list may become the most valuable asset of your business.

2. Think like a reporter: I know there are hundreds of turf issues you must "file" in your brain. How

Pre-test your e-mail communication by sending it to only a few customers first, then calling them to get their opinions and ideas before sending to a larger audience. Photos courtesy: Rix Quinn.

many of those are "newsworthy?" How would these facts help your customers?

3. Focus on customer problems: There must be several common problems your customers share...and for which your business offers SOLUTIONS. Those problems are the key to continuous communication.

4. Consider E-MAIL over WEB SITE: Why? Recent research shows that when folks visit a Web site, only 10 percent scroll past the first page! That means they might not sign the "guest book" so you can record their e-mail addresses. Instead...think about sending e-mails to customers, and ask them to "link" back to your e-mail address.

5. Simplify! Simplify!: Oftentimes the most effective e-mail message is a brief one. Reason? Long e-mail letters look daunting...and may discourage "down-loading." If you can get your recipient to read your short message on-screen AND download it

for future reference, you've made TWO impressions!

6. Reader habits: Mouser's Retail Advertising Report says "While readers of print newspapers direct their eyes first toward art elements on a page, on-line news readers first notice HEADLINES and NEWS BRIEFS, according to early returns from joint research by Stanford University and the St. Petersburg, Fla.-based Poynter Institute."

7. More headline helpers: Says Lee Iacocca: "As the layout editor (of my college newspaper), I figured out pretty quickly that most people don't read the stories. Instead, they rely on the headlines and subheads. That means that whoever writes those has a helluva lot of influence on people's perceptions of the news."

Hint: Can you point out a customer problem—or offer a solution—in a two or three line e-mail "headline" of 10-15 words?

"What satisfied customers say about you makes a powerful statement. Can you get a client's permission to use a positive quote in your e-mail letter?"

8. Scannability: What's that? Well, if you type long lines, some computers will "line-wrap," leaving stand-alone words or phrases than hinders readership. To avoid that, make sure each text line is no more than 70 characters. (Blank spaces also count one character.).

9. The "Subject" line: Use the

Because of its "interactivity" potential, the Internet gives you a way to connect with your clients...almost as if they were sitting in the same room.

place in your e-mail where you describe your message-make it "shout," like: "Attention: Turf Professionals."

10. Consumer vs. business reading: It's said that consumers read for fun...business folks for information. Will your product make them money, save them money or time, or enhance their work environment?

11. Think "contrarian:" What sets your business apart? What differentiates you from your competition?

12. New customers or current customers? Experts tell us it's easier to sell more to a current, satisfied customer than it is to acquire a new one. That's why...

13. You must communicate REGULARLY: Frequent newsletters or personalized e-mail letters make sense.

14. Simple concepts: Many professionals want concepts presented simply. Said Woody Guthrie: "Any damn fool can make something complex. It takes a genius to make something simple."

15. Testimonials: What satisfied customers say about you makes a powerful statement. Can you get a client's permission to use a positive quote in your e-mail letter?

16. Eye-catchers: Often, direct mail folks make liberal use of keyboard signs (#,*, +, =, —, etc.), white space, or all-capital-letter headlines. These should also work well in e-mail correspondence, which brings us to...

17. Asterisks: These symbols (*) are often used to identify major points of a mailing, or identify benefits of a product.

18. Another way to make things "stand out": Number them (just like we're doing here)!

19. Gain vs. loss: Studies tell us that customers want to avoiding LOSING something more than they want to GAIN something. So...what sorts of loss can you help your customers avoid?

20. "People will do much to cure a trouble," said ad genius Claude Hopkins, "but people in general will do little to prevent it." What can you help your customer cure TODAY?

21. "Free": It's one of advertising's most powerful words. What free product, service or bonus can you offer customers to get their attention?

22. Headline "starter" ideas: You fill in the following blanks with specifics about what you do: "The secret of _____"..."Advice to _____"..."How to _____"..."17 (or 15, etc.) ways to _____"..."How to improve your _____."

23. Possible things to discuss in your e-mail letters: legislation...customer-of-the-month...predictions (usually a hot topic!)...this week (or month) in history...service schools or training.

24. Great books to inspire e-mail ideas: Ogilvy on Advertising by David Ogilvy...Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind by Al Ries and Jack Trout...101 Ways to Promote Yourself by Raleigh Pinskey.

25. Web sites to visit for more inspiration: wdfm.com and writersdigest.com.

For details on how to launch a customer newsletter, request The Rix Report—# 103. Send a check for $3—plus your e-mail address—to Rix QuinnCommunications, 4212 Inwood, Ft. Worth, TX 76109.