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Turn Benefits Into Sales with Streaming Media

By Ronni Rhodes

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TURN BENEFITS INTO SALES WITH STREAMING MEDIA

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The "Wow" factor that accompanied the introduction of streaming media on the Web has long passed, and the technology now has to prove itself to marketers. Its' acceptance by advertisers, in conjunction with other rich media technologies, is on the upswing, but it's still not widely used to enhance commercial sites.

Companies trying to do business on the Internet are bombarded with marketing advice. Go to your target market. Promote your brand. Develop a web "community." Publish a Zine. All of it, good advice. But shopping carts are still being abandoned at an alarming rate, and conversion has become the most important web statistic.

In the absence of live salespeople, who know how to listen and focus in on the customers' desires, businesses on the Web must use the technological tools available to replicate that human experience. Streaming is one of those tools.*

Streaming Media is a natural way to motivate purchasing. It can be integrated into your website as a means to help people get over that "hump" when they haven't been able to see or touch a product. Use it to calm customers' nerves, build their trust in your company, and to keep their excitement about your service alive.

When would streaming media serve visitors' needs on a commercial or business site? Use it for:

*Product Demonstrations – Visuals are powerful and convey product features difficult to explain only in text. Medical devices are great candidates.

*Installation issues – especially for products geared to personal safety such as child car seats – are expertly handled with video.

Turn Benefits Into Sales with Streaming Media

* Human Resource professionals can use it to enhance corporate Intranets for remote sales forces and clients. Training programs can be stored and viewed by personnel at their convenience. Both audio and video can be used in conjunction with written materials to explain company policies and procedures.

*Streaming slideshows are an economical method of showcasing vacation facilities, business plants, and real estate properties.

*Demystify the shopping experience – use it to navigate the selling process.

*Teachers and coaches of dance, sports and gym activities can highlight their training methods with short demonstration clips.

Many businesses would like to use streaming media but are put off by high production costs. Keep in mind that existing materials might be perfectly suited for current needs. Your streaming provider should be able to assist you with preparing and, if needed, modifying your material.

Streaming media is a very effective and affordable marketing tool. In today's world, where consumers have more purchasing power and choices than ever before, it can be used to make your customers aware of benefits that can't be found elsewhere. And, benefits often turn into sales.

Streaming media should not be used arbitrarily, however. Unless your material is relevant to your visitors and adds perceived value to their purchase, don't waste your time or theirs. When designing your streaming media presentation, ask yourself what it will accomplish that your current content doesn't. Will it complement your existing material? Will it be utilized to enhance your offering? Will it provide additional incentive to make your visitor buy?

If you can answer yes to those questions, streaming media should be a strong candidate for your marketing dollars. Use streaming media technology wisely, and it will go a long way to making your business site stand out in a very crowded field.

*What IS streaming? Streaming promises quick access to crucial audio and video content without the aggravating wait for files to download. Downloading requires that files be sent to the user's PC in their entirety before they can be played; MP3 audio is a perfect example of this. The files then remain on the user's machine until they are deleted. Streaming continuously sends these same files, which have already been digitized, to the user's PC while the user is listening or watching. When the stream is ended, no data is left behind on the user's machine.

Ronni Rhodes is the owner of WBC Imaging, a company that specializes in web site enhancement utilizing streaming media technology. With her husband, Don, a digital media engineer, they work with companies to incorporate streaming as part of successful and meaningful training and marketing programs. Please direct all questions and comments

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Integrating Streaming Media into Marketing Programs. An Interview with Ronni Rhodes.

By Bobette Kyle

Streaming Media – audio, video, and multimedia clips played over the Internet – seems to be everywhere lately. Few of us, however, know how to effectively use it on our small business sites.

I recently spoke with Ronni Rhodes of WBC Imaging, <http://WBCImaging.com>, who specializes in Streaming Media services. She is here to help us understand how and when to use Streaming Media in our marketing activities.

Bobette: Hello Ronni. Thanks so much for taking time to share your knowledge of Streaming Media. I understand you have a good deal of experience working with digital media.

Ronni: Yes. My husband Don Rhodes is Chief Engineer here at WBC Imaging. He has been working with digital media since the early 90's. We understand how to produce and handle digital media so that visitors to your site have an optimum streaming experience.

Bobette: What are some of the advantages of delivering information via Streaming Media rather than with file downloads?

Ronni: A streaming file starts within seconds. Downloads often take several minutes before the user can see/hear the file. Downloaded material also remains on the visitor's computer.

Bobette: Some folks see Streaming Media in a bad light. They think of tedious flash pages and music or audio clips forced upon them.

Ronni: I feel strongly that Streaming Media should not be forced upon the user. There are ways to add Streaming Media to a site so it enhances the user's experience. I encourage site owners to regard a Streaming Media message as part of the site content by letting users choose to listen to or watch a clip.

Bobette: Can you give some examples?

Ronni: The potential applications are endless.

Retailers can enhance product descriptions and deliver product information in ways far more persuasive than plain text.

Booksellers can have "special events" that offer excerpts from selected titles.

Art dealers can use voice to give value added information on an artist or a period of history depicted by an artist's work. (Think of those audio tours that museums offer.)

Gift sites could give the visitor facts about certain holidays and how they came into being.

Turn Benefits Into Sales with Streaming Media

A candy maker can provide the story of how chocolate came to be so popular.

The florist could tell his visitors how and why a particular flower represents a special occasion.

Organizations that specialize in selling educational tools can use clips for potential clients to preview and evaluate the material being offered.

Bobette: I have also seen Streaming Media used to deliver Internet radio programs, pre-recorded tele-seminars, and information products.

I understand business can enhancing customer relationships with Streaming Media as well?

Ronni: Absolutely. Streaming Media is invaluable as a customer service tool. Voice and image messages add a personal touch that intrigues the listener and encourages them to remain on the site.

Use it to guide visitors through a sample order form.

Explain when shipping charges will be calculated and added to their order.

Perhaps your numbering system has caused confusion in the past; a brief audio message can unravel the mystery.

You can add an audio-based FAQ page to your site or integrate voice instructions at crucial points in the ordering process.

Bobette: How about in employee interactions?

Ronni: Employee training is greatly enhanced with audio or video. Use it to orient new employees and keep the information archived on the site for easy reference.

Sales training can also be archived and quickly retrieved when needed. The ability to offer customized training materials on a 24/7 basis makes streaming audio a very versatile and efficient learning tool.

Bobette: Wow. You have me convinced. How would I go about adding, say, and audio clip to my site?

Ronni: That's a good example because audio is the most mature and economical of the streaming technologies. Also, it doesn't have the bandwidth requirements associated with video. Any Internet user connected at 28.8k or better can enjoy quality sound.

You should start with a good quality tape recorder and an external microphone to record the message. After the message is recorded and edited, a streaming vendor can encode it into one of several formats. We recommend Windows Media or RealMedia for audio.

You then store the finished clip on your site host's or encoder's server and link directly to the file from your Web site.

Turn Benefits Into Sales with Streaming Media

Bobette: Is Streaming Media affordable for small businesses?

Ronni: Absolutely. We'll convert an audio clip to Streaming Media for less than \$75. The fee includes setup and up to five minutes of audio. There is a small per minute charge for time over five minutes.

Bobette: Great! Thank you, Ronni, for your time.

Visit WBC Imaging to learn more about Streaming Media:

<http://www.wbcimaging.com/articlesbyexperts.htm>

Bobette Kyle draws upon 10+ years of Marketing/Executive experience, Marketing MBA, and online marketing research in her writing. Her book shows how to better find, target, and attract Web customers. Read about it here: <http://WebSiteMarketingPlan.com/bookinfo.htm>

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