

# The Internet - A Unique Medium or Simply Print, Delivered Online?



Welcome back. By now you should be raring to go. You know the potential for internet marketing and the kinds of activity you can engage in. But before you proceed, consider this oft-overlooked fact:

*While the internet looks deceptively like other media –eg, banner ads are like billboards, websites look like print media etc – **it is a unique medium.***

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## Drive by looking at the rear view mirror...

In his landmark book Understanding Media, Marshall McLuhan refers to “Drive (ing) by Looking at the Rear View Mirror”. In other words, the strong tendency for us to employ new media by looking at models adapted from more familiar territory.

Take the example of the movie industry. In its early days, the movie was employed as a filmed version of the play. Movies start off with an opening curtain, the venues were often called theatres although years later, on hindsight, the differences appear obvious and simply transforming the stage to the screen seems laughable.

However, we often repeat the same mistakes.

When a new media such as the Internet comes on the scene, we think websites = print, email = direct mail, banner advertisements = billboards, broadband + animation = movies or TV.

## How is internet marketing different?

### Mantra Numero Uno – It’s Interactive!

Marketers often fail to exploit the interactivity of the medium. We have seen and received countless print brochures scanned into an image or converted into a html webpage and sent over the email.

In so doing, we completely fail to recognize that the internet is an interactive, 2-way medium capable of doing so much more.



- **Interactivity = Trackable behaviour you can modify...**  
Think beyond measuring how well (if at all) your message is received. More powerful is the ability to tailor your campaign in real time to more actively influence your target audience’s response.
- **Interactivity = Engaging the customer...**  
Humans like interaction and like to be engaged. Hence, give them the opportunity to do so. Better still, let them interact with one another. For eg, if you are running an online poll, getting your site visitor to complete the poll is one level of interaction, showing the results of all poll takers takes it up one notch.
- **Interactivity = An easier, more customer friendly process.**  
For eg, shopping sites typically list their products and expect customers to browse through all that’s available to make purchase decisions. The interactive quality of the internet allows us find out our customers’ needs and make recommendations to meet those needs. A good example is the Purchase Assistant found on the [Garmin](#) site. It is helpful in helping customers identify the right GPS product.

### What you see may NOT be what your audience gets!

In traditional media, the technology is pretty much a given. Over the internet, what the audience sees is in part determined by their computers, as well as the sort of operating systems, browsers, email software and plug-ins they have.

While there is little you can do to control this environment, it pays to know your target audience and what they use.

- **90% of Singaporeans use IE (Internet Explorer)**

In Singapore, almost 90% use Internet Explorer (IE) whilst 10% use Firefox / Mozilla as their default browser. Netscape, which used to be a significant browser a few years' back, is now insignificant.

**Important Note:**

Make sure that your content looks correctly formatted in IE, followed by Firefox / Mozilla. If it does show up properly in Netscape, you can probably ignore it.

- **Email Design – Keep it simple!**

Emails can be an even more complicated situation.

Web-based emails such as yahoo mail, gmail and hotmail have different characteristics from POP emails (the kind most of us would have in our office / home where the email is received using software like Outlook, Outlook Express or Lotus Notes (such software is called 'Email Clients').

For POP emails, the situation can be further complicated by system settings, which often come as a default with the software purchased or are set by a system administrator within the office.

Whereas some of these settings will only display text emails (as opposed to html), others may block images or have spam filters.

Given the complexities, the motto "Keep it simple" works.

Having said that, it is not always desirable to adopt the simplest approach. Your message might require the use of more sophisticated techniques.

Over the next few issues of this newsletter, we will discuss some best practices for implementing webpage and email.

## Bandwidth

Bandwidth is a measure of the speed by which data can be delivered to the user's computer. The greater the bandwidth, the shorter the waiting time for download and the more you can deliver.

- **Rule of thumb** – Your customer should not have to wait more than 10 seconds to receive your message.
- **80% of Singapore users** have access to broadband<sup>1</sup> but if your customers are elsewhere, well, bandwidth typically ranges from 56 kbps (usually effective 33 kbps) to 512 kbps

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<sup>1</sup> Annual Survey on Infocomm Usage in Households and by Individuals for 2003

When you design your marketing material, be acutely aware of the potential bandwidth resource of your audience.

As an illustration, if you have a 50kb image file on your webpage it will take:

- 12 seconds to download using a 56kbps line (usually effective bandwidth of 33 kbps)
- 1 second to download at 512 kbps

As you can see, differences in bandwidth can result in dramatically different download speeds and consequently, online experiences.

## Your customers have shorter attention spans online...

Online users typically have much shorter attention spans.

Reasons for this range from the fact many will use the internet while at work; lower screen resolution but whatever the reason, online users prefer content that is structured and concise.

## The Internet Audience – In control and not afraid to use it...

The online world is a user-centric one. Whereas a bad TV ad can be turned off, the online audience is less forgiving. With the increasing popularity of online bulletin boards, blogs and email, it takes only days before a bad online ad or website to reach the teeming millions on the other end of the world.

Whereas most marketers will ask themselves ‘What is it that I want to tell the audience?’ You’ll have to start thinking differently.

Ask yourself ‘What is in there for the audience’. If your content does not offer the user anything they want, you can bet that they are certainly going to leave, or worse, flame, grill and double boil you with a few clicks of the mouse.

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That’s all we have time for in this issue. Look out for next month’s **Interact!** Where we will touch on:

- “Integrating Internet Marketing into your business operations”

PS: Found this newsletter informative and useful? Email us with your comments, questions or other topics you would like covered at [custservice@designdepot.com.sg](mailto:custservice@designdepot.com.sg)

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