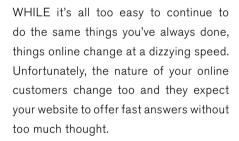# NEW WEB TECHNOLOGY SAVES TIME AND MONEY

What's new on the World Wide Web? This month we take a look at some hot trends customers love, to help market your business and build its profile without spending a lot of money or time.

WHILE it's all too easy to continue to do the same things you've always done, things online change at a dizzying speed. Unfortunately, the nature of your online customers change too and they expect your website to offer fast answers without too much thought.

Consider some of the following trends we're now seeing online.

Saving admin time

Automated systems continue to make a big splash on websites with more companies investing in website applications to replace repetitive administration tasks.

An example of this includes the large number of accommodation properties able to display availability. Customers can quickly check and book travel dates saving the client time and the property from responding to email inquiries.

Similar systems are being applied to the medical industry to book appointments and to restaurants to reserve a table.

Even automatic billing systems are common online to save invoicing.

Customers love the control and interactivity these systems bring and businesses love the time it saves them in answering repetitive questions or doing repetitive tasks.

Functionality over form

Websites have grown from being a 'knock your socks off' multimedia show. Most companies now understand their website is about attracting new business, making sales or establishing credibility.

Trends lean toward clear navigation, strong calls to action, demographically-targeted copy and intuitive usability. Flash introductions are a thing of the past having proved very frustrating. Animated graphics are used sparingly to draw attention to something that will make the business money while music and sound has calmed down with webmasters wisely opting to allow website visitors

to choose whether or not to play embedded sound.

Trackable advertising

The envy of traditional media, online advertising boasts 100 per cent trackablity. This translates to precise ROI figures - the dream of any marketer.

Gaining the most momentum continues to be pay-per-click advertising, particularly Google's AdWords program. The drawback is the new breed of moving popup ads that invade our screens while traversing some of Australia's biggest media websites. We will continue to see these throughout 2008.

Pay-per-click is incredibly popular with e-commerce and tourism websites due to its scalable nature and suitability to both small and large budgets. Can you imagine a radio station giving you free airtime and only charging for the number of people who respond to the ad? That's how pay-per-click works - you pay for a soft but highly targeted inquiry.

Mapping your location

Gone are the days of scribbly mud-maps or incoherent driving directions. Online mapping is all grown up with sensational free map plug-ins available from Google Maps. Not only can you mark on your location and embed the maps in your site, they come with a whole host of optional tools to make them a truly useful feature.

The maps zoom down to street level and can switch between a high resolution satellite view and street name overlay. Give it a test run at maps.google.com. Put in your street address and suburb and see if Google can find it.

Mobile and print versions

It's now very easy and inexpensive to create an alternate version of any website to be viewed on a mobile phone. This is a strong selling point if you're targeting the corporate market that uses public transport in the capital cities.

Print versions are similarly inexpensive and there's no excuse for having the right-hand side of your website cut off by the printer. If you don't already have both of these, ask your web developer to implement them for you.

Impact through video

Online video is hot property and evident in the billions of dollars being thrown in the video end of town on acquisitions such as YouTube.

Small businesses can use videos to their advantage by showing the action and adventure elements of their services. Tour companies have been particularly successful in implementing this technology to give customers incredible insight into their product.

We're networking, not socialising

Lots of business owners have discovered social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn. If you haven't, I suggest you open an account and have a look at what goes on inside.

While many of us will not necessarily do business through these mediums, they're proving to be a strong tool for social interaction with many businesses taking advantage of the plague-like nature of how 20-somethings share knowledge.

Ultimately, adding new technology should be about saving time or making money - preferably both. Consider adding some of the trendier applications for these reasons.

Nicky Jurd

Director – cityofcairns.com

nicky@cityofcairns.com