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Webs That We Weave

"Where is it," mumbled the corporate marketing director as he frantically peered into his computer screen. Actually, that's really a mild (very mild) form of the language that was used; some of which I deem to have been in a far-away language.

The number of times I've gone to a corporate website seeking information, guidance, products, contacts, services or to simply browse and have been met by the virtual gatekeeper at every click of the mouse is astonishing. Having said that, my estimate is that approximately 65% of all corporate websites are easy to browse and the information is very clear.

My friend, the marketing director, was searching a particular website for information relating to U.S. federal government export controls regulations and possible legal information. The website he was searching was not a government website. When he came to a particular link it was a 'Eureka' moment. 'Click' and it begins downloading. That's the first indication that the page would be difficult; particularly with the new rapid web browser mechanisms now available. The moments of waiting were agony. Given that in the year 2007 AD we are all accustomed to the expectation that our computers will download information in the blinking of an eye; we are exasperated when this does not happen.

The page eventually downloaded and more exasperation. The page was inundated with the most lovely calligraphy and colors in the background. The actual content of the page was, for all practical intents and purposes, utterly illegible without freezing out the busy (however lovely) background and then focusing like mad on the content. The poor man's head was spinning, splitting and in a mess of sponge. We had to cut and paste the details onto a Word document. Then we had to change the color from white to black to read the text and to focus on the information. Success. The information was embedded in the entrails of the words and we then knew where to go with our project.

The number of corporate websites that do not have contact details; even the corporate headquarters address or other contact information is staggering .

The other week I needed to contact a major corporate headquarters to confirm a purchase. I typed in the website address and clicked. There was the sophisticated and informative homepage. "Dig a little further" I thought and the contact details should be there. A full twenty minutes of digging proved fruitless, futile and infuriating. Each page contained all sorts of valuable information. The website was not-too-filled with graphics, but enough to make one 'cheesed off' when the information sought was not forthcoming.

I resorted to Google.com and after various keywords were searched I found the name and contact information for the Vice President of Corporate Marketing and Sales. That was

another twenty minutes of my day gone. Before I telephoned this gentleman I made a cup of strong tea, sat outside for a while and calmed down. Then I telephoned.

"How did you get my name" the astonished Vice President asked who answered the telephone himself as it was by then after office hours and obviously his gatekeeper had gone home. "On the web" I said, hedging my bets, my information and my searching abilities. "But it's not on the web" he said with even more astonishment. "Yes it is" I said. "Hold on" he said. I heard the furious hammering on a keyboard and clicking. "My name's not on our website" says he, with a scarcely hidden sense of complete exasperation. "I didn't say I got it on your website" I said.

There's little in our life that is secret or sacred anymore. Nuff said. I got the information I sought and was off to the next project.

Life is difficult and time is in even shorter supply than yesterday. Websites, whilst generally speaking, are becoming more and more simple and easier to browse. There is, however, still a residual of companies and organizations that cling to the graphics, the difficulty in browsing for clients, prospective clients and general users.

Most people seek websites for information and they read newspapers and magazines for the headlines and the first paragraph. Blogs are usually to extract 'untold' information and television is more and more becoming a state of vegetable gathering.

My advice to corporations; even major global corporations, is to have some simple method whereby your public can communication with you on or through your website. Why it's not there is still a mystery. And, have you ever sent an email to a company through their web email page? Have you gotten a reply? Probably not.

The age of instant communications is rapidly becoming the age of stonewalling, sound bites and senseless and very frustrating forays into the mysteries of the unspoken word.