

CiscoLink™

Web Speeds Small Vehicle Accessories Maker to Lucrative New Markets Around the Globe

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For Precision Auto Designs, cost-effectively getting the word out about its innovative accessories for luxury sedans, boats, and other vehicles has always been a challenge. Historically, the 20-person, Campbell, California-based company has relied on catalog sales and other print advertising to reach potential customers, who purchased products mostly over the phone and by fax.



A ballooning line of vehicle storage products steered Precision Auto onto the Web and toward worldwide orders.

But the print medium can be expensive, quickly outdated, and space-restricted. So Precision Auto decided to tap into the vast sales opportunities of the Internet—both to promote its products and to close orders.

On the advice of Cisco reseller Thresher Communications and Productivity in San Jose, California, Precision Auto implemented the Cisco Networked Office stack of Internet products for small businesses. This suite of Internet products allows small businesses to broaden their communications reach and ultimately increase productivity and revenue. The products in the stack deliver secure Internet and WAN access,

plug-and-play Web hosting, and local-area networking to businesses with as many as 100 users.

Armed with these products and a 56-kbps dedicated link from Internet service provider @Work, Precision Auto now reaches potential customers worldwide

with information about products—such as its Vehicle Storage Capsule line of protective “bubble” wrappers for cars, boats, and motorcycles.

Web Presence Payoff

The Vehicle Storage Capsule

line was a big impetus behind the electronic marketing move. The portable products store vehicles within large inflatable vinyl “bubbles” to protect them from dirt, rain, mildew, dings, and other hazards. Bill Weiner, Precision Auto’s president, felt that if he could reach a worldwide audience about the products, he could turn the Vehicle Storage Capsule into the biggest seller in his company’s history.

After two months on line, he is well on his way. “We have had at least a half-dozen

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"The Web made us realize that our market was a lot bigger than we thought it was."

Bill Weiner, President
Precision Auto Designs

Precision Auto Designs continued from front page

international offers from resellers to market this product, from places such as Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Puerto Rico," Weiner says.

Marketing Costs Plummet

In addition, marketing on the Web costs a fraction of the direct mail and print ad alternatives, according to Weiner. Customers can also purchase products electronically while visiting the www.precisionauto.com Web site.

"With the Cisco equipment stack, a company like Precision Auto maximizes functionality for the lowest cost," comments John Nickel, Thresher's owner and Precision Auto's reseller consultant.

Nickel advises small businesses to choose their product strategies based on the number of users, the capabilities they require both now and down the road, and the resulting horsepower needed (see story, "Reseller Offers Small-Business Perspective," below, left).

Reseller Offers Small-Business Perspective



Thresher's Nickel: Web server investments are often more economical for small companies than hosting services.

When counseling small businesses on Internet connectivity, John Nickel says he first sizes up the company's user population, the likelihood that it will grow and at what pace, and what the company is trying to achieve with Internet access.

"It tends to be more cost-effective for companies to move from a modem solution to a low-end router or switch if they have more than five users and want to host a Web site or do a lot of Web browsing," says Nickel, owner of Thresher Communications and Productivity, a San Jose, California-based Cisco reseller.

For sites like Precision Auto Designs, he says, keeping Web hosting in house makes economical sense. "The minimum price of a hosting service is about US\$300 a month, while a Cisco Micro Webserver runs about US\$1000. Over a single year's time, a company would have paid more than triple the product cost in hosting fees," he notes.

When choosing a transport speed and technology, new Web site owners must strike a balance between risking slow user response time by scrimping on bandwidth and paying for higher capacity that might go partially unused.

"With the forthcoming trend for companies to run voice across the Internet, though, I usually advise clients to go for the larger access pipe," he says.

Catalog Finds Way onto Internet

To truly exploit the Internet, Weiner is posting his entire catalog. He is doing it in a phased approach throughout this year, to keep his budget intact while juggling both Web design and print costs during the transition to exclusive online marketing.

Precision Auto's site has been designed so that the company can update product and catalog information in house, without the continued support of an outside Web design firm. This capability supports Precision Auto's plan of leveraging the Internet to hold down costs while entering new markets.

Weiner notes that jumping into electronic commerce was not the daunting task he originally expected. "With the Cisco solution, we quickly saw that electronic commerce was indeed possible and would not cost much at all," he says.

"It is like putting together a TV and a VCR. Any company that already has computers isn't going to have too much out-of-pocket expense to make this work." ■