



Are We Caught In a Tangled Web?

Editorial by Deitz Kracker

I find it interesting that the word “website” is not found in the vocabulary of my word processor’s spell check. It should really not be surprising since it has only been 9 years since the first computer appeared in our office and only two years since we first went “on-line”. The predicted explosive impact of the Internet has become a reality, leaving Baby Boomers scrambling to keep a staff of Generation Xers involved to hold on to the tentacles of progress as it quickly evolves before us.

The speed and complexity of this evolutionary process has left us all somewhat stunned, fearful, and poised to react, unsure whether our reaction is positive or negative. Not surprisingly, this has left us all in a “tangled web”, dangling, vulnerable, and uncertain what to grab on to next.

At this point, trying to untangle the web would be a futile waste of time and energy, and trying to escape would mean certain company demise, so all we can do is ask ourselves, “what are we doing here?”. It seems that everyone is trying to secure their share of Cyberspace, much as staking a claim in the Gold Rush days, whether what they are securing is of any value to them or not. As a small manufacturing company, I am “here” (tangled in the net) because it is an excellent source of communication. But as with all good things, too much can result in less. Too much communication from too many sources becomes overwhelming, confusing, and too “tangled” to be used effectively. Am I communicating the same thing everyone else is? Has my communication grown so detailed that it is providing too much information? In order to be bigger, better, and first in the search engines have we lost our attempt for simplicity?

We need to define our relationship as vendors and distributors and our expectations for working together in the presence of the Internet. As a manufacturer in Michigan do I really want to sell one HSE element to a woman in Massachusetts who’s credit card was not accepted twice? The answer is no. Why is a woman in Massachusetts contacting the factory direct? Because I have a web-site and e-commerce and evidently no Infrared distributor in Massachusetts does, or, if they do, it is not informative or accessible enough. Should I refer the woman to the distributor in Massachusetts even though she wants the simplicity of e-commerce? Possibly. Should I refer the woman to the distributor in Massachusetts who would get the sale though he has invested no time, effort, or money in marketing on the Internet? Possibly.

The questions posed in this scenario bring up some of the answers to the question of manufacturer/distributor Internet relationships that affect all of us today:

1. Though it is beneficial to advertise all products on web-site, it is sensible to offer only commodity items through e-commerce. This places the niche of engineered, high profit, personal contact products in the hands of the local distributor.

2. A minimum billing should be set for e-commerce purchase of these commodity products, forcing the sale of small dollar amounts back to the local distributor and protecting the manufacturer from tying up their shipping department by shipping too much for too little.

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3. Just as literature, trade shows, and publication advertising, have always been the manufacturer's responsibility, so is an adequate web-site that links contacts to authorized local distributors. Manufacturers should encourage distributors to have their own web-sites designed in a complimentary rather than competitive manner.

4. Definition of an Authorized Distributor should be more clearly established to protect the manufacturer from losing sales to other lines.

5. A method of lead referral accountability should be mandatory.

Writing this has helped me to understand Infrared Internationale's own entanglement in the web and the resulting cause-and-effect it has on our relationship with our distributors. I will begin immediately to develop the above points further and put them into action. The Internet is a wonderful resource, but it still does not allow us to be "all things to all people" or eliminate the need for our own network of "human" resources.

Comments regarding this editorial may
be e-mailed to Deitz Kracker at:
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Future Newsletters Mail or e-mail?

Following the survey done in our December '99 issue, 11% of our Jan. *Salamander* News mailing list was sent via e-mail addresses. We received two responses, one that it worked well, and two, that it took too long to download. We would like to eventually send all newsletters over the Internet, especially those going overseas. They will arrive sooner and be less expensive to send.

This issue will be both electronically sent and mailed. In April, those readers with e-mail addresses will not receive a mailed copy unless it is requested. Please complete and fax the simple form below as to your preference of receiving future issues.

Name	<input type="checkbox"/> Please add the following name
Company Name	<input type="checkbox"/> No longer wish to receive the newsletter
Address	<input type="checkbox"/> e-mail yes no
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