

SEIZE THE POWER OF THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Adrián Intrieri has worked in youth leadership for over 15 years and is finishing his first book for teenagers on self-esteem. He currently directs Certezajoven.com.ar., a site dedicated to teenagers and youth. He is also the marketing manager for Editorial Certeza Argentina and travels the continent teaching marketing and sales.

Many childhood experiences remain etched in our memories for a lifetime. Here's one I recall vividly: My father and I are seated at our dining room table. I'm almost finished with an important school presentation—and I've asked my dad to proofread my written report. He agrees—and is even making the necessary corrections on the typewritten version.

But this is a painstaking process, since every time my father discovers a spelling mistake, he has to cover the error with correction fluid, insert the page in the typewriter, align it perfectly, then type the correction. Of course, I cringe whenever he finds a mistake—for I know the complicated procedure to follow!

Today, making corrections is a much simpler task. Modern technology—in the form of computers and word processing software—makes editing a snap.

And this is only the tip of the iceberg. Advances in technology have also revolutionized the ways we access information, conduct research, check facts, and even market our materials. In short, modern technology has opened up the on-ramp to a vast information super-highway...the Internet. If we want to be effective and efficient, we must learn how to navigate wisely and safely on this highway!

Why the Internet?

There are two key reasons why Christian publishing houses need to harness the power of the Internet—and establish a Web site presence there.

1. *The costs are low.* For just the cost of one computer and some simple software, a publisher can create and manage an entire Web site—updating content regularly and generating publicity.

2. *The potential reach is significant.* The Internet can communicate with all kinds of audiences in ways no other tool can match. It can cross all barriers, has a presence in all countries, and penetrates into all markets.

Problems of the Internet

Because Internet connections available in each country or region vary so significantly, it is often unwise to design a “one-size-fits-all” Web site, complete with high-quality images and other attractive features. In places where high-speed connections are unavailable, the time required to download large files can be prohibitive. So, those who design Web sites must keep these limitations in mind.

Another challenge facing publishers is the never-ending task of keeping computer hardware and software up-to-date. In many countries, this technology is all but inaccessible. When it is available, delivery is often slow and prices are high quite high. And, it can be difficult to

find personnel qualified to design and troubleshoot Web sites.

Despite these obstacles, publishers must recognize the incredible power of the Internet—and work diligently to take advantage of it. If you do not have a Web site, chances are good that countless people have already searched for your publishing house on the Web—without success!

Web site design

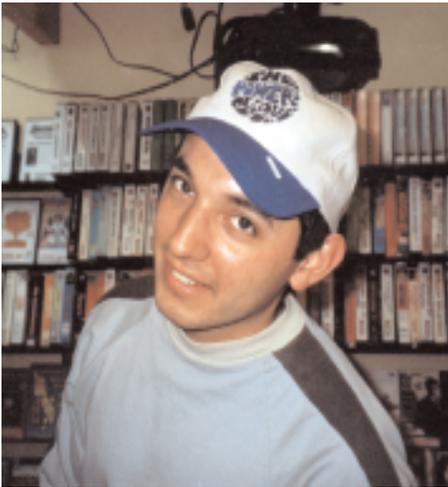
Perhaps the most important issue regarding a Web site's content is its alignment with the publishing house's mission and vision. This link must be strong and well-established.

The name of the site need not be the same of that of the publishing house, but should be closely related with it.

The design, use of colors, and typography should reflect the image that the publishing house wishes to project—and should echo the images used in letterhead, signage, and print materials.

The Web site should not simply offer a graphic presentation of the print catalog where visitors only see book covers, brief descriptions, and contact information. None of this has great benefit on the Internet and will only yield a handful of visitors each year.

When planning an effective Web site, investigate how to achieve market positioning in a medium that has its own rules:



1. *It must be dynamic, agile, and fast.* Though visitors might have problems due to the speed of their connections, publishing houses must remember that static sites do not tend to last. Movement is an important component of Web design. Yet too much movement can be annoying and even harmful. Adults, teenagers, and children all have different tastes and it is important to find the correct balance of movement for the audience your ministry's site aims to reach.

2. *It must be interactive.* The simple fact is the public likes to participate. Your visitors do not want to review page after page of images and text without expressing an opinion, being heard, or becoming known. Those who access your Web site want to find a place to participate, perhaps a forum related to topics discussed in your books, a calendar with activities for the community in

the country, a place to exchange views, or surveys on pertinent topics.

3. *It must offer service.* The site must offer something of value to its visitors—in the form of information, ministry, or even counseling. It must offer free content—free chapters, articles, surveys, and perhaps calendars highlighting upcoming events. Ask yourself the basic question: Why should someone visit my site? Visitors will want to know much more than what your books' covers look like. The service you offer must be real and concrete. If you want them to return to your site—and you do—they must leave their visit with a whole knapsack of materials offered by your site.

According to Australian missionary Michael Collie, "Publishing houses that have a good profile on the Internet are good hosts. A publishing house that is a good host makes sure you are comfortable. A good host fills you with rich food but leaves you with the desire for more; entertains you; is concerned that you are seated next to someone interesting and that you get to know them. When you return, you feel at home but there is always something new. I come back again to enjoy their table. They know me and understand me. They seek my opinion. They let me peruse their library. They let me open and look through their books without insisting I wash my hands first."

4. *It must be up-to-date.* A stale Web site, one that is not updated at least

monthly, is a dead site. People will notice—and bad publicity makes its way around quickly! If you want to capture visitors—and keep them coming back for more—keep the content fresh and appealing.

Benefits of a good Web site

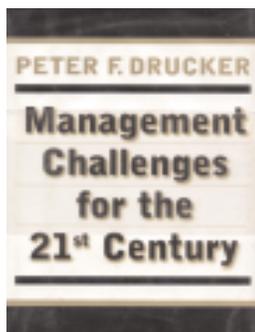
When developing a Web site, a publishing house must also consider the many ways a site can support its mission and purpose—then structure the site in ways that will maximize its impact.

1. *Your Web site can position your name and your image in attractive and dynamic ways.* Perhaps most importantly, a good Web site can position our publishing house well in the minds of those we wish to reach with our Christian materials.

2. *Your Web site can promote your authors.* A Web site can launch new or developing authors in strategic ways, including interviews with them, articles on pertinent topics and excerpts from their writings, or a list of their speaking engagements. The sky is the limit.

3. *Your Web site can highlight and establish a specific brand.* You can harness the power of the Internet by promoting your strong product line. For example, Certezajoven.com.ar maintains a tight relationship with the name of our publishing house—and strongly promotes our line of youth products.

4. *Your Web site can foster two-way communication with your audience.* An



Everybody knows that what we call "information"—and what might be aptly called "Access to the world"—has been a major growth industry, growing much faster in every developed and developing country—and even in totally under developed Third World Countries—than either national income or population. All of us hear "Electronics" or "Computers" when we hear "information". But the number of printed books published and sold in every developed country has gone up in the last thirty or forty years as fast as the sales of the new electronics. The world's leading book publishing companies may not have grown as fast as some of the top electronic companies, such as Intel and Microsoft in the United States or SAP in Germany, but they have grown faster than the electronic information industry in its totality—and are arguably more profitable.

—Peter Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* (HarperBusiness, 2001)

interactive Web site can place us closer to the very people we want to reach so we can better understand their needs and preferences. In order to be relevant, timely, and responsive to our audience, we must pay attention to what people are saying and what is happening in the church. A good Web site is an excellent tool for information flow—in both directions. We can make better decisions on the basis of information we gather through forums, chat rooms, and on-line surveys.

5. *Your Web site can help pastors and leaders.* The Internet is a library within reach for many preachers who are eager to find ways to enrich their sermons. Our sites can offer services to these leaders, inviting them to participate with articles or open comments about topics related to our titles. And we can support

them by helping them publicize the events and activities of their ministries. In addition, a Web site can help identify leaders with potential to become authors.

6. *Your Web site can link your publishing house with other organizations.* A Web site can be a place where Christians can find common ground and help meet needs within the Body of Christ. Ministries and events can use our site to reach the Christian community with important news regarding upcoming events, prayer needs, and other information of interest.

7. *Your Web site can promote your publishing house.* With a minimal financial investment, a Web site can publicize the name, image, new releases, and catalog of a publishing house. It can also offer the opportunity to offer free chapters to

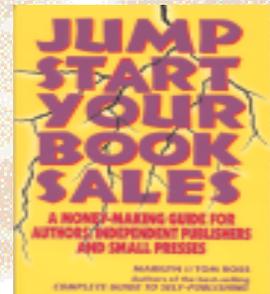
whet the appetite of prospective consumers. Another possibility is to offer books not offered in the current catalog.

There is a great deal to be done in this critical area. To ignore this opportunity is to be irresponsible and foolhardy.

Many think that the Internet is a giant that mocks us. But, with the Lord's power, we will make of this mass media a place where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed with excellence. I challenge you to conquer it!❖

Consider the Internet when designing book covers. Assess if the title will be readable when the book is reduced to the tiny size presented on most Web sites. Make sure the titles are big, bold, colorful, easy-to-read, and that the covers work well as small Web graphics.

—Marilyn Ross, SPAN Connection, www.spanet.org



Know what your Web site is supposed to accomplish. It should allow information to flow freely between the publishing house and its customers. The more products and features offered, the more customers want guidance. Position yourself to guide and act as an agent for your customers. And remember, information about the Web site—such as the number of pages, hits, time spent by visitors at the site—is not knowledge about your business. Measure the valuable behaviors of the users within the context of business objectives.

—Sonia Yuen Weston, Director of Marketing and E-Commerce, Cook Communications Ministries