

# Surviving Tough Times Online

By Jim Edwards

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With economic problems dominating the headlines, all businesses, online and off, need to make the most of every single customer contact if they hope to stay in business!

Consumers want to hang onto every dollar and only spend money for things they feel they really "must" have.

To put yourself and your business in the best position to survive and thrive in the current economy, follow these simple rules for making every website visitor count.

The first step in making every visitor count involves knowing exactly what people want from you. The vast majority of businesses never bother to ask what customers and visitors want, and therefore, they make fewer sales than they could with a little research.

Smart online business owners use surveys regularly to stay in touch with customer needs, tastes, and preferences. It costs next to nothing to ask a customer what they want and then simply give it to them. But, it may cost you everything if you don't take the time to ask first.

Next, businesses hoping to make it in these uncertain economic times must form alliances with other business owners who cater to the same audience. Other business owners have the traffic you need in order to grow your business.

For this reason, you must constantly look for creative ways to work with them. The easiest way to profit by working with other website owners involves endorsing each other's products to your own lists or, at a minimum, trading links to funnel traffic back and forth.

Creating traffic from "scratch" rates the slowest and

costliest way to bring customers to your website.  
Persuading other people to send targeted traffic your way  
puts you on the fast track to profits.

The third step for triumphing in uncertain economic times  
entails building one-on-one relationships with your  
customers and prospects, even if you have thousands of  
them. They must feel as if you are speaking only to them  
in all of your communications.

The quickest way to accomplish this involves specializing  
in one highly specific area of concern for them. In other  
words, no matter what you sell, you'll never succeed as  
"Wal-Mart." To succeed, your online business must  
completely meet the needs of your customers in one,  
specific area.

Time to face facts: the Internet won't go away! In fact,  
despite the well publicized "dot bombs" of a couple of  
years ago, the Internet forms a more integral part of our  
lives than ever.

Even if you feel like your business, your job, or some  
other important aspect of your life doesn't depend on the  
Internet today, what about tomorrow?

Finally, everyone must stay current at all times with the  
ever-changing landscape of the Internet. At some point,  
virtually every one of us will find the Internet an  
integral part of our business lives.

As effective business people, we must develop the ability  
to adapt to change and give customers what they want - not  
in months or years -but in the space of hours or days.

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Jim Edwards is a syndicated newspaper columnist and the co-  
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