

Integrating Streaming Media into Marketing Programs. An Interview

with Ronni Rhodes.

By Bobette Kyle

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Streaming Media - audio, video, and multimedia clips played over the Internet - seems to be everywhere lately. Few of us, however, know how to effectively use it on our small business sites.

I recently spoke with Ronni Rhodes of WBC Imaging, <http://WBCImaging.com>, who specializes in Streaming Media services. She is here to help us understand how and when to use Streaming Media in our marketing activities.

Bobette: Hello Ronni. Thanks so much for taking time to share your knowledge of Streaming Media. I understand you have a good deal of experience working with digital media.

Ronni: Yes. My husband Don Rhodes is Chief Engineer here at WBC Imaging. He has been working with digital media since the early 90's. We understand how to produce and handle digital media so that visitors to your site have an optimum streaming experience.

Bobette: What are some of the advantages of delivering information via Streaming Media rather than with file downloads?

Ronni: A streaming file starts within seconds. Downloads often take several minutes before the user can see/hear the file. Downloaded material also remains on the visitor's computer.

Bobette: Some folks see Streaming Media in a bad light. They think of tedious flash pages and music or audio clips forced upon them.

Ronni: I feel strongly that Streaming Media should not be forced upon the user. There are ways to add Streaming Media to a site so it enhances the user's experience. I encourage site owners to regard a Streaming Media message as part of the site content by letting users choose to listen to or watch a clip.

Bobette: Can you give some examples?

Ronni: The potential applications are endless. Retailers can enhance product descriptions and deliver product information in ways far more persuasive than plain text.

Booksellers can have "special events" that offer excerpts from selected titles.

Art dealers can use voice to give value added information on an artist or a period of history depicted by an artist's work. (Think of those audio tours that museums offer.)

Gift sites could give the visitor facts about certain holidays and how they came into being.

A candy maker can provide the story of how chocolate came to be so popular.

The florist could tell his visitors how and why a particular flower represents a special occasion.

Organizations that specialize in selling educational tools can use clips for potential clients to preview and evaluate the material being offered.

Bobette: I have also seen Streaming Media used to deliver Internet radio programs, pre-recorded tele-seminars, and information products.

I understand business can enhancing customer relationships with Streaming Media as well?

Ronni: Absolutely. Streaming Media is invaluable as a customer service tool. Voice and image messages add a personal touch that intrigues the listener and encourages them to remain on the site.

Use it to guide visitors through a sample order form.

Explain when shipping charges will be calculated and added to their order.

Perhaps your numbering system has caused confusion in the past; a brief audio message can unravel the mystery.

You can add an audio-based FAQ page to your site or integrate voice instructions at crucial points in the ordering process.

Bobette: How about in employee interactions?

Ronni: Employee training is greatly enhanced with audio or video. Use it to orient new employees and keep the information archived on the site for easy reference.

Sales training can also be archived and quickly retrieved when needed. The ability to offer customized training materials on a 24/7 basis makes streaming audio a very versatile and efficient learning tool.

Bobette: Wow. You have me convinced. How would I go about adding, say, an audio clip to my site?

Ronni: That's a good example because audio is the most mature and economical of the streaming technologies. Also, it doesn't have the bandwidth requirements associated with video. Any Internet user connected at 28.8k or better can enjoy quality sound.

You should start with a good quality tape recorder and an external microphone to record the message. After the message is recorded and edited, a streaming vendor can encode it into one of several formats. We recommend Windows Media or RealMedia for audio.

You then store the finished clip on your site host's or encoder's server and link directly to the file

from your Web site.

Bobette: Is Streaming Media affordable for small businesses?

Ronni: Absolutely. We'll convert an audio clip to Streaming Media for less than \$75. The fee includes setup and up to five minutes of audio. There is a small per minute charge for time over five minutes.

Bobette: Great! Thank you, Ronni, for your time.

Visit WBC Imaging to learn more about Streaming Media:

<http://www.wbcimaging.com/articlesbyexperts.htm>

About the Author

Bobette Kyle draws upon 10+ years of Marketing/Executive experience, Marketing MBA, and online marketing research in her writing.

Her book shows how to better find, target, and attract Web customers. Read about it here:

<http://WebSiteMarketingPlan.com/bookinfo.htm>

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