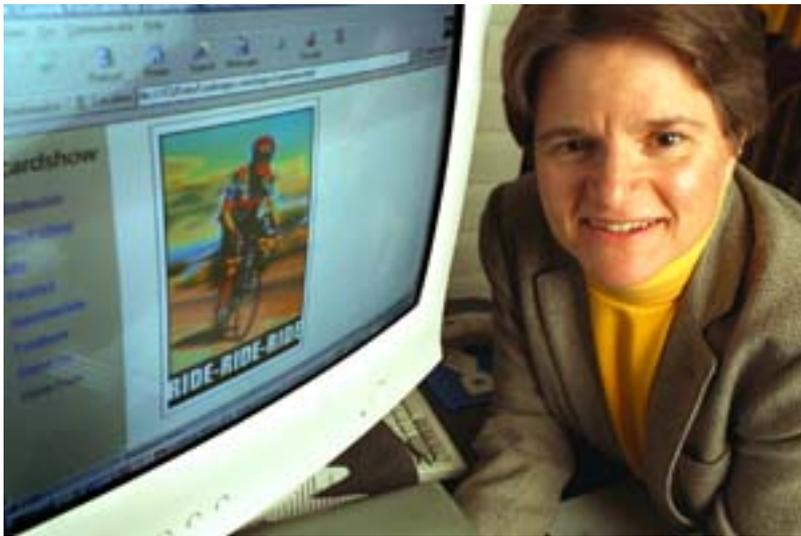


Bank on Past Successes to Ensure Future Profits

Written by Charlie Rochman
Friday, 31 January 2003 17:00

Martha Retallick grew up in Pennsylvania. She attended college at the University of Michigan, earning a bachelor's degree in economics in 1979. After college, she started an editorial job with a nonprofit organization but was laid off within a year.



The story

"It was five-and-a-half years before I found anything that could be called a professional job," she says. Instead, Retallick bicycled through 38 of the 50 states and a bit of Canada. When she wasn't riding, she held jobs as a cashier, courier, dishwasher, ditch digger and layout and paste up specialist, and in telephone sales.

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In 1987, she moved to Tucson, believing the job market was robust. She was employed within three months by the UA Foundation, working on its publications and publicity efforts. Retallick wrote a book about her bicycling adventures and, in 1994, left her position at the UA Foundation to secure a publisher.

That effort failed, she says. Fortunately, a relative unexpectedly sent her money. Retallick bought a computer and started to use the Internet. A former classmate suggested she convert her skills into a business. In late 1995, she built a business Web site for her first customer - her father. The next site was for a limousine and transportation company.

The year 2000 was Retallick's best, with sales of \$30,000, she says. Year 2001 started out slowly, so she wrote a manual titled "Your Online Success Guide: A People-Friendly Manual." The manual is for sale on her Web site, available for download at \$29.95. A printed version will soon be ready and sell for \$39.95.

The book answers questions asked over the years by those interested in Web sites, Retallick says. It is directed at small- business owners interested in building or improving their Web sites. She plans to advertise the manual via online newsletters and e-mail discussion groups.

She counts 53 listings under "Internet Web Site Developers" in Qwest's 2001/2002 Tucson area business directory, down from 62 in last year's edition, and counts just nine companies who were also listed as far back as 1998.

"I feel like a survivor," Retallick says.

The advice

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"The goal is not to sell books but increase total revenue for Lrpdesigns," says Steve Marr. The book can establish credibility for Retallick and be used to capture new Web design and consulting work.

The planned price for the book may be too high, says Marr. As part of a strategy to grow total revenue, a price like \$9.95 would be competitive and make the book more likely to end up in the hands of potential customers. An expanded free version might serve as a marketing hook to obtain other business.

Retallick's target market should be small to mid-size businesses desiring to establish a Web site or improve an ineffective or outdated site.

Since most new business will come from relationship building, past customers are an immediate source of revenue. The decline in redesign work was a key factor in reducing 2001 revenue. Past clients should be contacted and offered a free review of their Web sites every six to 12 months, Marr says. When a customer's business or marketing focus changes, there are opportunities to update information and graphics.

Past customers are also a source of new business referrals. Incentives, like a year of free hosting, should be offered for any referral generating a new Web site design or significant redesign work, Marr says.

Retallick has years of experience talking about Web site design for small businesses and wants to do more. Many organizations look for speakers. She should offer presentations to business groups throughout the Tucson area. These engagements should generate contacts for new business development, and Retallick should look for ways to get her book into the hands of promising prospects.

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Retallick should focus on clients in Arizona, capitalizing on the home-field advantage. The best long-term prospects are companies desiring to sell products and services on the Internet. They are most likely to need constant site updates and maintenance.

"She should join local business organizations to develop relationships and build trust that will generate future business," Marr says.

Whenever Retallick talks to potential customers and business groups, she should articulate her strengths.

"Many Web site designers focus on creating an artistic picture but fail to meet the customer's functional requirements," says Marr. Retallick should emphasize her diagnostic system for determining customer needs and transferring them into cost-effective Web sites with the right design, content and tools.

Steve Marr, Your Christian Business Coach

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