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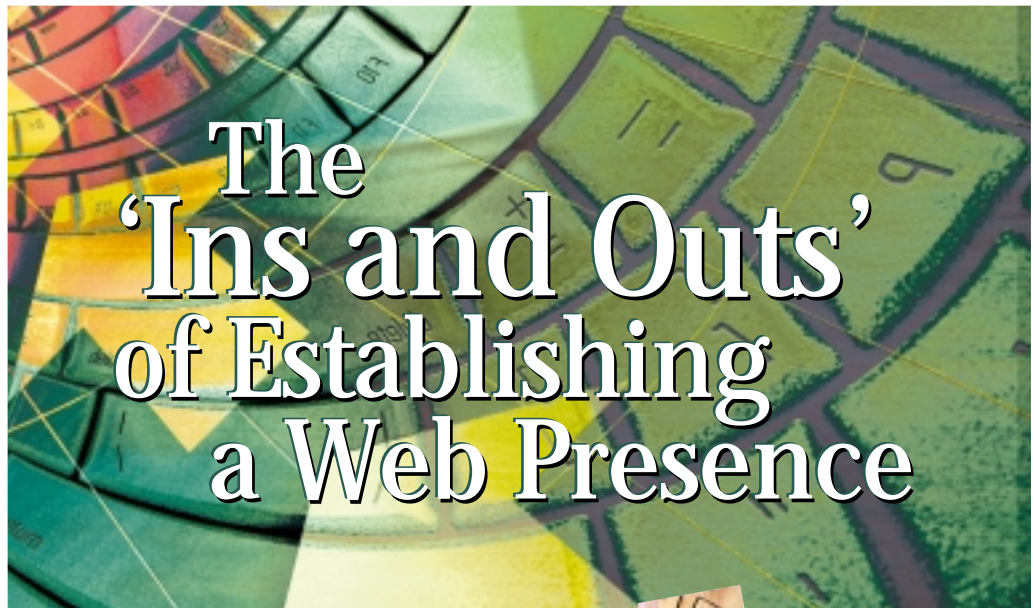
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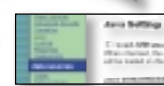
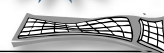
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SELECT * FROM Registration
ORDER BY ID ASC</CFQUERY>
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BY MARK ALEXANDER

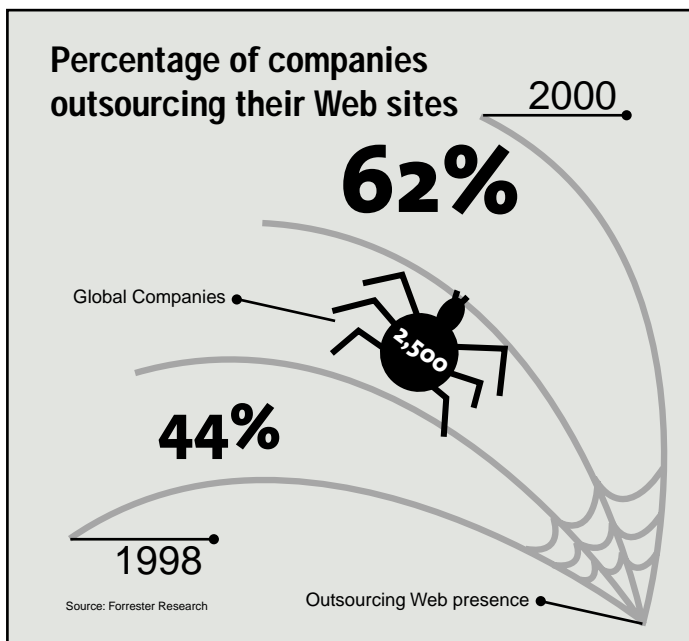
With the Internet and e-commerce becoming ever more important to business success, the connection a company makes to the Web and the way it's maintained and managed can become a major success factor – or a major liability.

Making the decision to establish a Web presence isn't even an issue for most businesses these days. Companies are expected to be accessible via the Web. In fact, for many companies a Web presence isn't just nice, it's mission-critical. And the decision is more likely to be whether to implement a Web site in-house or outsource it to a total Web solutions provider.

Success in the Web arena – whether for information, marketing, or more complicated e-commerce applications – requires an implementation strategy that does more than just ensure a Web presence. It also has to ensure that the site will be up to date, open for business, and responsive to customers and business partners 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

An unreliable Internet connection or a limited network can be a disaster when mission-critical business is directed to the Web. If your Web site isn't available when your customers or your business partners need it to be, or if it can't handle increases in demand effectively, your company can lose both time and money, and possibly damage your reputation.

Determining how to approach development and ongoing operation of a business Web site presents challenges – and the choices you make can directly impact your bottom line. The more you know about the issues involved in in-house implementations and outsourced approaches, the better prepared you'll be to make the right decision for your business.



In or Out?

If yours is a simple site that doesn't need to support a great deal of interactive or transaction activity, and doesn't require frequent updates or day-to-day management, an initial in-house implementation may make sense. With such an implementation, you'll have total control, but even with the simplest of Web sites you'll have to deal with issues such as capital equipment planning, acquisition, and costs; security; speed to market; staffing; management; ongoing site maintenance; adding capabilities and capacity; reliability; and hosting alternatives. And simple sites have a way of becoming more complex very quickly. These are the sorts of issues that are leading more and more companies of all sizes to outsource their Web presence.

Outsourcing was the route of choice for 44% of 2,500 companies worldwide that were interviewed in 1998, according to a recently published Forrester Research report. Today, 62% of those companies are in favor of outsourcing their Web presence, top reasons being cost savings and lack of internal expertise.

Clearly, choosing to outsource your Web solution can eliminate many of the expenses and issues you'll encounter with an in-house approach. For the majority of businesses of all sizes, outsourcing is the most cost-effective, most efficient way – and in many cases the most secure way – to implement and manage a Web-based capability.

Still, a number of issues should be considered as you select your outsourcing partner. What portion of the development, management, and maintenance of your Web-based solution should you outsource? Will your information be secure? Does your outsourcing partner offer you a choice of plans and hosting options? What kinds of resources will your solution provider make available to you for creating, developing, and supporting your Web business? What happens when you need more bandwidth or want to add capabilities? How quickly can your solution provider act and react?

What the Right Partner Can Do

For starters, a good outsourcing partner can save your company time and money. With the right partner, your time-to-market will probably be significantly faster than with an in-house solution. Why? Because your outsourcing partner does this day after day – it's the company's core business. The infrastructure is in place, the network is secure, and skilled professionals are available to manage the implementation and deployment from start to finish, as well as perform system administration, monitoring, and testing procedures.

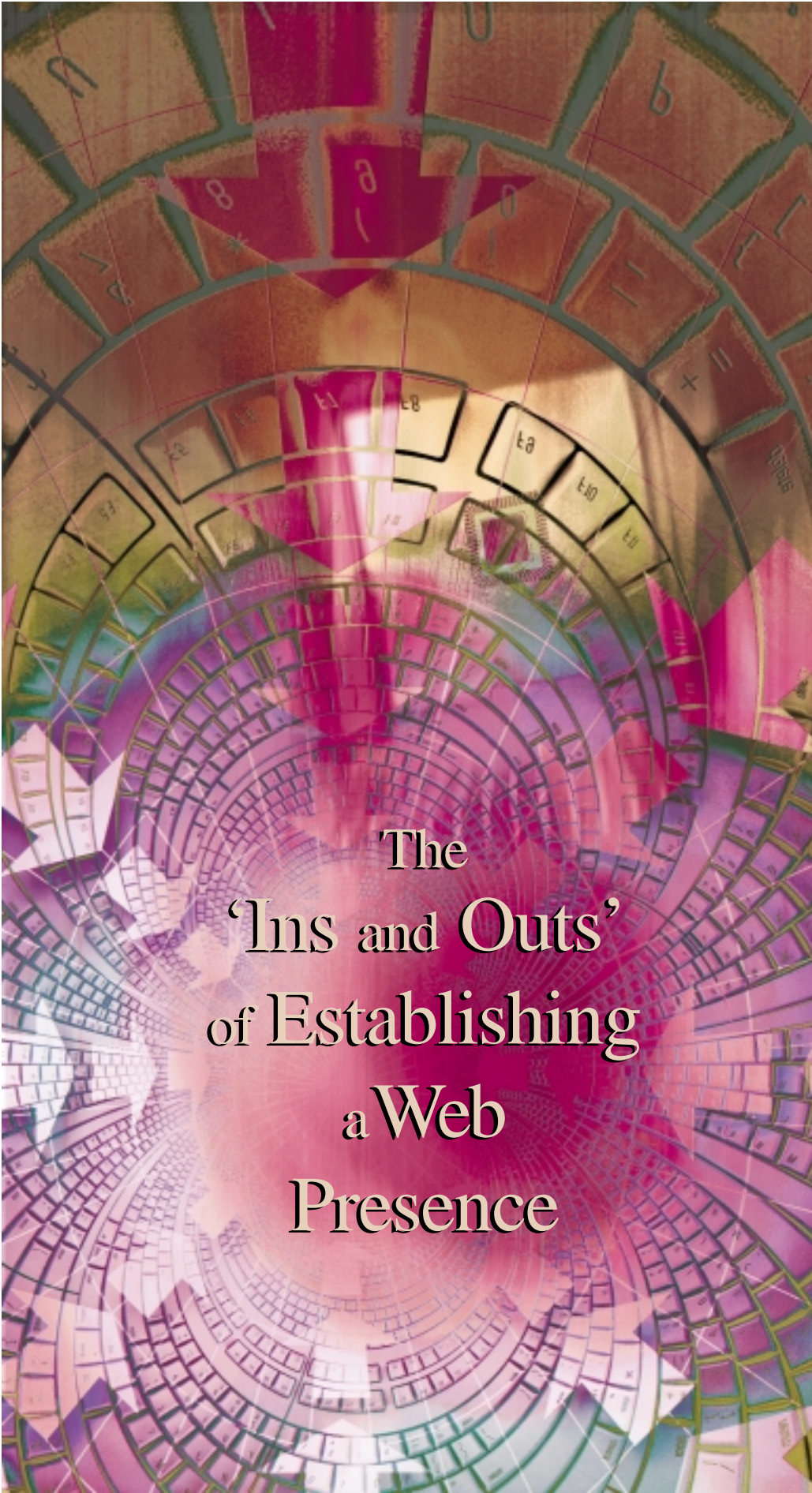
Another benefit of working with an outsourcing partner, and a real time-and-money saver, is their knowledge of the Web and the important considerations involved, from provisioning your business on the appropriate system architecture to database integration and support, and access to reliable customer service and technical support when you need it. With an outsourcing company handling your implementation, you don't have to spend time locating, hiring, and training Web-savvy professionals. The right partner will already have a staff of experienced Web experts who deal daily with the issues encountered in Web site implementation and can recommend the most appropriate solution for your needs. Web outsourcing companies are constantly tracking technological advances and evaluating new offerings. They have ready-made solutions for most requirements and the expertise to address others efficiently and accurately.

Should it be implemented in-house or outsourced?

An outsourcing partner can also save you significant time and money in equipment, software, and network access expenses. If you implement in-house, you must purchase servers, set up the network or integrate the Web applications into your existing network, implement security measures, and contract for hosting, among other things. When you outsource, you can leave all that to your partner, saving the capital outlay and getting your site up and running much more quickly. What's more, you'll save additional time, money, and aggravation down the road as your requirements change. Because your outsourcing partner provides this kind of service on an ongoing basis, you can expect that the company will be ready and able to scale your site to handle new requirements, higher traffic volumes, and new applications.

What to Look for in an Outsourcing Partner

One of the first issues that companies considering outsourcing must address is the level or degree to which they want or need the outsourcing company to manage their Web site. Outsourcing companies are able to provide everything from managed hosting services, e-commerce, and Web site design and development to business applications hosting. Even if your business Web requirements are minimal initially, it's probably a good idea to look for an outsourcing partner that offers a broad range of services you can take advantage of as your needs change and grow. The more capabilities your outsourcing partner brings to the relationship, the fewer



The 'Ins and Outs' of Establishing a Web Presence

resources you'll have to divert from your core business to work on Web-related tasks.

Most outsourcing companies offer several hosting levels, giving you the opportunity to select the one that best meets your current needs. In many cases upgrading to a higher level is a relatively simple process; however, sometimes an upgrade will require retooling your site. Check with potential outsourcing partners to learn how they plan to address needs for added capacity and additional solutions that you may require down the road. Scalability is important, and the more scalable your outsourcing partner's infrastructure, the less likely it is you'll need to start over to handle increased traffic, transactions, and user functionalities on your site.

Hosting options offered by outsourcing companies include:

- **Shared hosting:** An economical, flexible Web solution that small- and medium-sized businesses can use to establish an online presence. *Shared* hosting, as the name implies, means that your site is allocated a portion of a Web server that's also used by other companies. (Your databases, information, and user access to your site remain singularly yours). It's important to find out critical information such as the sizes and types of servers your potential outsourcing partner uses, security methods employed, whether there's sufficient system redundancy to ensure virtually uninterrupted availability of your site, and back-up schedules and procedures.
- **Dedicated hosting:** Provides a full-time link to your Web site that's yours alone. Dedicated hosting is a good choice for businesses that want to take advantage of the power of a high-speed network without having to make a large capital investment. If dedicated hosting is what your business needs, be sure to look for an outsourcing partner that goes the extra mile, offering high-speed continuous monitoring by trained Web experts.
- **Managed hosting services:** Typically added to dedicated hosting plans and available for businesses with complex Web site needs to ensure maximum site performance and scalability. These services address foundational Web hosting and server operations, allowing customers to focus on their core business. Powerful features can include added security, virtual private network services (VPNs), system backup and recovery, and system administration to handle upgrades and software installations, as well as system monitoring and real-time reporting services.
- **High-availability hosting:** Available from some Web outsourcing companies for mission-critical data and applications that absolutely must be available without interruption. Usually a multiserver configuration, high-availability hosting solutions offer availability guarantees through service level agreements (SLAs). With these hosting plans it's important that features capable of delivering this kind of reliability and availability back the guarantees. Load balancing, security, fault-tolerant backup, reliable high-speed availability, and scalable architecture are some examples of features that can help protect your mission-critical data and applications from performance-related problems.

Services Beyond Hosting

While many Web outsourcing providers limit their services to hosting, others go further, providing a broad range of services that can add value to the relationship and deliver significant savings. Being able to turn to a single outsourcing partner for such things as software applications, Web site design, Web marketing, and e-commerce solutions in addition to your Web hosting needs provides your company with proven added value, and can help businesses significantly increase the utility of their Web presence.

Among the value-added services you may want to investigate as you look for a Web outsourcing partner are:

- **Software application hosting:** If your outsourcing partner has the ability to deploy, host, and manage Web applications for you, you can take advantage of this capability to expedite implementations and save in-house costs. "Renting" access to hosted business applications, such as Microsoft Exchange 2000, lets you leverage the connectivity, storage, hardware, and network administrators already in place in your outsourcing partner's organization – at a cost that's only a fraction of what it would be if you managed them in-house.
- **Web site design:** Creating a Web site that's both attractive and functional requires a combination of technical and creative talent seldom present inside companies. If your company doesn't have resources to do this job well, it makes sense to find an outsourcing partner that offers this service. Your site is the public face and reputation of your company on the Web. It's important that the organization you choose to plan, build, and launch your Web site understands the mission of your company, the role the Web site plays in that mission, and your audience, and will create a site with a look and feel consistent with your image and goals.
- **E-commerce solutions:** A profitable Web site depends on e-commerce. When outsourcing your e-commerce application is part of your Web site plan, it's critical that your outsourcing partner have the facilities, knowledge, and commitment to provide you with secure, reliable solutions to ensure that your e-store is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This kind of performance depends on advanced technologies that many outsourcing companies may not have. For an alternative to expensive in-house development, look for an outsourcing partner with industry-leading platform and the server technology and know-how to implement and maintain an effective, productive e-commerce solution for you. The right choice can add directly to your top and bottom lines.
- **Web marketing:** Promotion is an integral component of successful Web sites. The right outsourcing partner can deliver big returns. If the company that does your Web hosting can also help you market effectively by providing the necessary resources to gain high visibility on major search engines, you'll benefit through increased traffic to your site.

The Bottom Line

While outsourcing may not be for everyone, it offers big advantages in terms of time and cost savings. With the variety of capabilities and options available, and the advances in security measures that protect your online assets, many organizations will find that relying on a full-solution Web hosting/outsourcing provider for managed Web hosting services, business application development, launch, and maintenance tasks can deliver:

- Faster time-to-market for that all-important competitive edge
- Hosting choices and the ability to expand your site rapidly to accommodate growing needs and increased traffic
- Secure networks and servers to ensure that your private information is protected
- Professional site maintenance and management that free internal resources to focus on core business objectives
- Value-added capabilities and services conveniently delivered by a single provider
- An ongoing relationship that saves you time and money without forcing you to compromise on quality

About the Author

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