

CHAPTER II: PUBLIC EDUCATION ABOUT BROADBAND

Helping people learn how to use computers and the Internet and helping business people take advantage of E-Commerce is probably the most important part of the Oregon Coast Telecommunications Economic Development Strategy.

There is a digital divide in America. The digital divide cuts sharply across income, education, and geographic lines (urban vs. rural areas). Local telecommunication committees can spearhead local “tele-literacy” programs in partnerships with others.

Having cutting-edge telecommunications infrastructure in your community is important. But, unless institutions exist at the local level that can provide effective training programs, many people will not be in a position to take advantage of these opportunities. The digital divide will persist.

Through a general telecommunications education effort, we can let people know about the good jobs that await individuals who acquire skills to work for knowledge-based businesses.

And, to make a dent on poverty, coastal communities must have places where people of limited means can access the Internet and search for jobs. Training programs must be accessible and affordable. And, people do not need a college degree to participate in the New Economy. Getting basic office-skill training will boost a person’s employment chances substantially. Entry-level competency can sometimes be accomplished with just a few classes. And, once people are hired by knowledge-based businesses, many firms will invest in the training of their employees. These firms accomplish this through on-the-job training and/or by supporting their employees to attend community college or other technical training programs.

Why would employers pay for their employees to get IT training? In the New Economy, a skilled and reliable workforce is essential. Knowledge-based companies compete for people with skills. The job market will reward people who acquire basic IT skills and are willing to frequently upgrade those skills. Locally-based outreach programs are the most effective ways to get the word out to people that these opportunities exist.

Helping People Go On-line

The Logical Places to Access the Internet

There are a number of good ways to get people the rudimentary information they need to access the Internet.

- The local public library
- Senior centers
- Local ISPs, computer consultants
- Community colleges, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs)
- Children can be introduced to computers and the Internet through school
- Local technology/computer clubs



People who were interviewed for this study agreed the most effective way to introduce people to computers and the Internet is through one-on-one instruction. This way, people can be walked through the process. After they repeat the steps a few times they begin to feel comfortable with the technology. Experience shows people will then expand their computer and Internet skills on their own after they receive basic instruction.

Small classes also seem to work well. However, because introductory training is so time and personnel intensive, it is difficult for private-sector computer consultants to earn enough money to provide hands-on instruction. Other local knowledge institutions have a major role to play. Many people today are purchasing portable laptop computers; therefore it may be easier to have people receive training because it is much simpler to bring the laptop computer to the instructor.

An interview with Linda Weight from the Siuslaw Public Library is included in the Appendices (*see Appendix G*). The Siuslaw Public Library in Florence serves as an important local gateway institution for people seeking access to the Internet. The library has a bank of computer stations and “Internet guides” or volunteers who, at no cost, introduce people to the Internet. In addition, the library in Florence has dedicated computer terminals so people can gain access to the Oregon Employment Department’s database. People in Florence can also get help from library staff with writing their resumes. In the small communities on the Oregon coast, word of mouth is the primary means people use in taking these first steps.



The introductory computer and Internet training taking place at the Siuslaw Public Library is happening at many public libraries across Oregon and the nation. Linda Weight was questioned about what she thought was the best way to introduce people to the Internet. She said, “People learn in so many different ways. There is no one best way to learn about computers and the Internet. We need for there to be a number of different places—the libraries, the community colleges, the ISPs. All these places have a role to play.”

Key Questions Relating to Public Education

- Does your community have places or local knowledge institutions like the Siuslaw Public Library that can introduce people to computers and get them on-line?
- If local educational institutions or clubs exist in your community that can introduce people to computers and the Internet and give them regular access to the Internet, can

your community help them perform this role more effectively? Do these groups or clubs need more space, more computers, additional volunteers?

- Does the Oregon coast's workforce have the skills and abilities to work in knowledge-based businesses?
- Are adequate training programs on the Oregon coast in place to get people the skills they need to work for knowledge-based businesses?
- If there is a sudden increase in the number of people seeking office skills and IT training, can our community colleges meet that need? Are there other local knowledge-institutions like the local libraries that can help fill the gap?

E-Commerce Opportunities

What Is E-Commerce?

E-Commerce is the sale of goods and services over the Internet. E-Commerce growth rates are exploding! Check out these statistics.



- By 2008, 10% of all retail purchases will take place on-line (\$2.38 billion a year). More and more people are shopping on-line.
- By 2007, two-thirds of all households will be on-line. And the average income of these households is \$59,000!
- By 2004, each month, there were four billion searches on-line. Today, it is probably a much higher number.
- E-commerce is the fastest growing activity on-line. E-commerce is presently experiencing a 25% annual compound growth!
- An estimated 300 million people are on-line.

(Source: Forrester Research)

A number of profiles of coastal business people who use the Internet to improve their businesses are featured in the Appendices of this report.

These profiles show how varied these businesses are. The profiles offer important tips about how to use the Internet. Profile entrepreneurs include Joshua Greene (*see Appendix H*) who markets his father's priceless photography collection to sophisticated patrons around the nation and the world and Jim Iverson (*see Appendix I*), the owner-operator of Lighthouse Deli in Newport, Oregon who, through experimentation with the Internet, taught himself how to expand his retail seafood business to include a thriving seafood Internet sales operation.

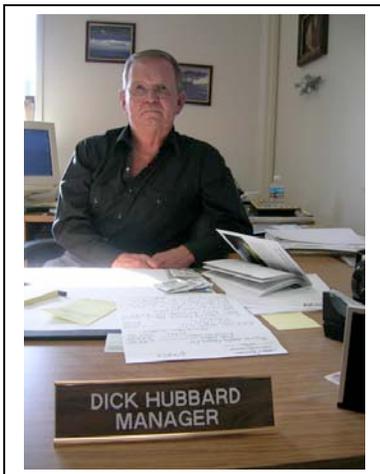
The profile of Steve Simpkins, Yesterday's Books demonstrates how some businesses, like book sales, face strenuous competition. A profile of Steve Simpkins is included in the Appendices (*see Appendix J*).

Also, up and down the Oregon coast there are a growing number of "lone eagles" or consultants who work out of their homes but interact with customers throughout the country using broadband communications. The profile of Dan Dawson in the Appendices (*Appendix K*) describes this important phenomenon.

And, there are a growing number of people using e-Bay to buy and sell goods. For instance, there are self-described "e-Bay moms" who market merchandise on the web in the evenings after their kids go to bed. These people go to garage or estate sales, or, even purchase goods on sale at conventional retail stores and then place that merchandise on e-Bay at a substantial mark-up. One self-described e-Bay mom was asked, "How did you learn to market on e-Bay? Did you buy a book or take a class?" She replied, "No, I just examined what other people were doing on e-Bay. You can tell which people are doing it right because they attract lots of bids. I got a digital camera to take photos of the merchandise. Then, I copied what the successful people were doing. I am making a really good supplemental income doing this. And, I really enjoy it!"

Changing the Mindset in Coastal Communities

The examples cited above may just be the tip of the iceberg. For instance, after an article about the Oregon Coast Telecommunications Economic Development Strategy was published in the *Newport News Times* on September 7, 2005, Dick Hubbard of Pioneer Telephone Cooperative contacted OCZMA. Dick shared that Pioneer Telephone Cooperative was experiencing a big spike in demand for their DSL services, well beyond their market projections. Dick said, "I started calling these people to see what was going on. Many of the new DSL subscribers are



telecommuters moving to the Oregon coast. These people researched the local telecommunication offerings. They found out that Pioneer offers business class DSL on a route-redundant fiber system. That is why they came here to live and work. These people work here and their customers and company headquarters are located somewhere else."

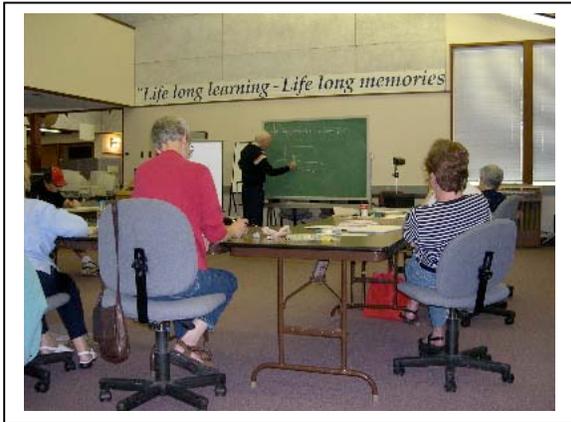
All these people—the people moving in and local people taking advantage of broadband technology—are quietly changing the face of coastal communities and bringing new prosperity to our region. Unless you encountered them at a Rotary Club meeting or another social event, or, unless they move next door to you, you would not even know they are there. And, the great thing is these people are creating a diverse economy. As this trend continues, your community won't have to worry as much about a mill closing, or, a major employer taking jobs overseas. And, the economy of your community will not be as vulnerable to events beyond its control such as evolving federal public lands policies.

So, how do we accelerate this trend? How do we let people on the coast who are not aware of these opportunities know about what is happening around them and how they can participate? How can we use the New Economy and the trends in global E-Commerce to work for us?

That can be accomplished through public education. Share this report with others and stimulate a dialogue in your community about how you can help people comprehend these opportunities.

Getting Your Business On-line: Some Primary Considerations

- A good web site caters to your customer's needs.
- A web site gives your business a presence 24 hours a day, 7 days a week—a place customers can find you and quickly get information they need and potentially order from you.



- A web site must be attractive and easy to use.
- Any business can benefit from being on the Internet.

◦ For small businesses competing from rural areas, try selling goods and services not readily available elsewhere.

◦ E-Commerce is especially suited for specialized food, art or other kinds of products

and services. If properly marketed, specialty goods and services can attract the patronage of specialized consumers, locally and globally.

◦ Consider establishing a presence on e-Bay, Yahoo and other prominent E-Commerce vehicles. Do not reinvent the wheel!

Be Ready!

Like all businesses, the primary focus should be on the customer experience. Make it convenient for them.

When customers place orders, be prepared to fill their orders as soon as possible—no excuses, no exceptions.

In today's market—especially on the Internet—people demand instant response and a rapid delivery. Overnight air service companies make it possible to fill orders around the nation and world. Many Internet orders are, by their nature, time-sensitive. Anniversaries, birthdays and holiday gift shopping stimulate Internet purchases.

At Least Establish a “Relatively Static Web Site”

To start, you do not need a cutting-edge web site that takes credit cards and interacts with customers. You can take it slowly.

Establish a home page for your business that provides basic information about you and your business. Think of your web site as a large listing in your local *Yellow Pages*, like a brochure or catalogue. Your web page tells people who you are, what you sell, your prices, your location, your office hours and other key information.

Important Note: It does not take a lot of time or money to establish a relatively static web site. And, because relatively static web pages often serve as local advertisements (for local people and visitors to the region), you do not need to invest a lot of time updating your web page's content. Having said that, ask your web designer to prepare a web site that you can update from time-to-time. You want to keep your web site current without paying a programmer each time you want to make changes. Do not look at your web site as a one-time effort.

Here is the good news. For even a modest investment of time and money, a relatively static web site can stimulate a significant increase in your business.

Full-Blown Web Sites—Interactive, Updated, E-Commerce Ready

To maximize the value of your web site to your business, in most cases you need to be prepared to carry out financial transactions on-line over your web site using credit cards.

That is not surprising. Think about it. Do you take credit cards at your business? Can you imagine not taking credit cards and only accepting cash or checks? Why should your web site be any different?

It is all about customer convenience. Surveys show once customers learn a web site does not take credit cards—they will probably exit that web site and find a web site that does take credit cards.

To reach its full potential, your web site should be interactive and regularly updated. Keep it fresh. On a regular basis provide new offers, special prices, new information, contests, carry out auctions, do things that can attract customers back to your web site.

Getting Started

Of course, you must come up with a “domain name” for your web site. Make sure the name you choose is not already taken. You will learn that when you register your domain name.

And, then you probably need to hire a web designer. **But first**, learn a few things about E-Commerce. This way, you can help your web designer craft a web page that will meet your needs and your customer's needs. After all, you are the one who knows your business best.

A Crash Course in E-Commerce

We reviewed hundreds of E-Commerce education web pages and selected what we think are the best. Below, we have links to these great web sites to provide you access to free, easy-to-read orientation material.

Why do these firms give away this valuable information? They hope you will read their material, get excited, and purchase their E-Commerce courses. You may want to take these courses. And, note there are many popular and relatively inexpensive “how-to” guidebooks on E-Commerce worth buying and reading. Many of these books are listed on these E-Commerce web sites.

But, before you dive too deeply into the subject, remember, a good web designer (someone who understands marketing) will prepare a web site that gives you the opportunity to be successful on-line.

Two Highly Recommended E-Commerce Sites

So, again, start by reviewing this free information. Check out these two outstanding web site resources: 1) **myownbusiness.com**, and 2) **workz.com**. We could never improve on the educational materials they provide directed to people wanting to get their business on-line.

Ten Top Do's

1. Create a web site to complement your business.
2. Hire a professional to create your web site.
3. Use a .com web site domain name that is descriptive of your business and easy to remember.
4. Register your domain name. Keep your account information in a safe place.
5. Develop a mailing list to better connect with your visitors.
6. Provide updated useful content on your web site in order to encourage visitors to return.
7. Encourage customer feedback via on-line forms and e-mail.
8. Learn how to, and continually implement, ways to improve your placements on top search engines.
9. Keep your eye on your competition's rankings and get pointers from their sites.
10. Consider e-Bay as a means of selling your product and gaining traffic to your on-line store.

Here is an example of orientation material from myownbusiness.com about web site development.

Ten Top Don'ts

1. Do not assume a web site will assure you of competing favorably with large established competitors.
2. Do not turn your customers off with an unprofessional web site.
3. Do not incorporate unusual or unique web design styles that are difficult to print and save.
4. Do not make it difficult to navigate your site.
5. Do not permit out-of-date content to remain on your site.
6. Do not rely on graphical buttons.
7. Do not try to create a web site on your own unless you are a web designer.
8. Do not make it difficult for people to find your contact information.
9. Do not turn off your customers with unsolicited e-mail advertising.
10. Do not weigh your pages down with too much graphics and media.

You Can Do This!

Do not be intimidated. Remember, it is your web designer's job to build you an attractive and easy-to-use web site. And, there are secure commercial services (like "Pay Pal") that will, for a reasonable fee, broker your E-Commerce transactions. That will insulate you and your customer from liability. And, your customers will feel secure when you use these payment services.

Market. Market. Market. To be successful, you must market your web site. Use a multi-media approach. Start by listing your business and web site in your local *Yellow Pages*. Purchase ad space in the local newspaper and magazines to draw people to your web site. Where appropriate, purchase radio and television time. Put your web site address on business cards, stationery, and other company literature. Scale your advertising to fit your budget.

Yes, search engines are important. A talented web designer can set up your web site to draw people who are using search engines. But, your web designer needs to know how search engines work to get your web site noticed. Today, there are thousands of new web sites being posted on the Internet so it takes knowledge and skill to have your web site listed when people do web searches.

"Search engine management," as it is called, is important. But, it is not the whole story. Distinguish your web site from the others. See the interview with Jim Iverson, Lighthouse Deli to learn a few important Internet marketing tips.

Is the Internet Really Secure?

Yes. Secure payment methods have been established that will limit your exposure and your customer's exposure to fraud.

Consider this. If people were getting ripped off on the Internet (at rates beyond conventional commerce), E-Commerce would quickly grind to a halt. The opposite is occurring. Every day, more people shop on-line. E-Commerce rates are exploding.

If you use credit cards in your business or in your personal life, or, if you use an ATM machine, you already move money and financial information over the Internet. All modern banking systems use the Internet. The potential for fraud exists in all business transactions.

Today, it is relatively easy to set up a safe and secure E-Commerce business as a part of your overall business. Again, read the free introductory materials on the web sites listed in this report to learn more. Ask professional E-Commerce service firms to explain how they can meet your E-Commerce needs. Talk to your friends in the local business community to find out which services they use. Learn from the experiences of people you know and trust.

Finding a Good Web Designer

Today, many people and companies offer fee-based web design services. Get several bids. Ask web designers to provide examples of web sites they have built and ask them for references.

Ask around in your community about good local web designers. Check the local commercial listings. Do a web search. Ask your local ISPs (Internet Service Providers) who do web sites? ISPs may offer web design services or work with firms that design web sites. Your local ISPs could serve as the “host” for your web site. Your web site needs to be hosted on a “server” somewhere (it can be located anywhere in the world). Many ISPs offer web-hosting services and bundle this service with standard Internet access fees.

It will not be hard to find a good web designer. Your web designer does not have to be local. Be selective. Remember, to bring customers to your business, your web site must look professional.

Included in the Appendices (*Appendix N*) is a list of companies on the Oregon coast advertising telecommunication services. **(Disclaimer: OCZMA does not recommend or warrant services advertised by these entities. In addition, this compendium of telecommunications service providers, by its very nature, is subject to change.)**

Important Note: Putting up a web site does not have to cost a lot of money, especially if you are only putting up a static web site. And, the “hosting fees” for your web site are usually quite modest (\$100 a year or so).