The Expert's Opinion

An interview with the Funagain Games management team, who planned, designed, and implemented a commercial Website.

Interview by Kenneth E. Kendall, Rutgers University

IRMJ: You leaped into the world of e-commerce this year with a Website that demanded much attention during the holiday season. How aware were you of the rewards and pitfalls of this endeavor when you started getting involved?

FA: E-commerce is not that much different from conventional business, though things do seem to happen faster. Having had prior business experience, nothing so far has been too big a surprise.

IRMJ: What were your goals when you began to design the Website at www.funagain.com?

FA: Total world domination through games. We planned, designed, implemented and depend upon the Website. Our Website has grown in design and function as our business has grown. We draw from: Customer feedback; what we would want in the best of Web sites; what we like in other vending sites (e.g., www.amazon.com).

IRMJ: Tell us a little bit about Funagain Games. Who are the people who own Funagain? What are your customer demographics (those on the Internet versus those that place phone orders, mail orders or walk-ins)?

FA: Funagain was formed by a group of friends who met for weekly game nights. We decided a solid resource was needed for both the many great games that have gone out of print, and the European games that we had discovered to be so incredibly good, but that were widely unknown in America. The overwhelming majority of our business is done via the Web.

IRMJ: What can you tell us about the design process for the Website?

FA: German boardgames most definitely provide artistic inspiration (the little colored arrows should remind you of the route markers in the game “Abentuer Tierwelt” (“Wildlife Adventure”). Color is important - this is about fun. Ease of access is important; no waiting for heavy graphics, no tricks - we don’t want to make using our site like solving a tricky puzzle. Design is always a compromise between what we want to offer visitors and what we can offer, quickly. Combining the best of form and function is the biggest challenge.

IRMJ: Do you have your own Web server or is someone else hosting your site? How did you arrive at this decision?

FA: We work closely with an independent Web host. This allows us to scale up economically and quickly, as needed.

IRMJ: How do you handle payment processing? Do you use a service such as CyberCash or Payment Net? Do you see security as a barrier that you need to address in the future?

FA: We accept major credit cards, checks and money orders. Credit cards (or debit cards) are effectively a universal currency, allowing us to do business worldwide. Security is not an issue; we use the highest level of encryption available, and most credit cards today offer fraud protection.

IRMJ: Once you have the orders, you need to deliver the games to the customers. Are you planning to connect your system into a shipping company such as Federal Express or UPS?

FA: We’re connected. We ship almost exclusively with UPS, although we will offer other shipping options on request.

IRMJ: Some e-commerce firms keep no inventory at all. But your company depends on a complex supply chain that extends from another country (Germany). Carrying inventory might negatively impact profit margins, taking your e-commerce advantage away. Therefore what can you offer online that more conventional stores offer?

FA: We’re a discount retailer, much like Amazon or other Web stores selling published items; and just like Amazon, we have to carry some inventory. Wherever possible, we prefer “just in time” inventory, but that’s not always feasible. Our major advantage is selection; we’re offering games you simply can’t find in stores.
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