

## LIVE WEB INTERACTION FOR TOTAL CUSTOMER VALUE

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**Electronic commerce has swept over many of the conventional barriers to competition. To attract and hold customers today, marketers must offer more than traditional price and product; now, the winning advantage is in delivering superior service levels. Live Web interaction promises a breakthrough in customer service, but it is a new medium that is often imperfectly understood. The leaders in the emerging live Web channel will be those who design for the way humans communicate and behave in the real world. HelpCaster offers some observations, based on practical experience in the live Internet environment.**

### THE CONCEPT OF TOTAL CUSTOMER VALUE

The emergence of the Internet market has fundamentally challenged the conventional foundations of strategic advantage: barriers to entry, degree of competition and the relative power of consumers. As the Internet broke the entry barriers (eg costs of distribution or extending market reach,) competition proliferated. Armed with choice and ease of switching—the competition being only a mouse click away—the power of the consumer escalated dramatically.

This shift has driven eCommerce marketers to search for ways to entice and retain consumers with value premiums in addition to conventional selling points of price and product. As the practical limits to discounting, bundling and incentive offers are soon reached, the only real area of value expansion remaining is not in *what* is offered, but in *how* it is offered.

The underlying market evolution that has been advancing in eCommerce is the development of *context* value, in addition to *content* value. A product is content. But now, eCommerce, armed with rich media and immediate access to processing capabilities, has been able to personalize assessment of customer needs and respond with individually tailored offerings—this is persuasive *context*. The object of this game is to win the consumer's heart and mind with total customer satisfaction. The old retail inducements—price, choice, convenience—are now only the starting point; the winning advantage is now conferred by emotional values—empathy, responsiveness, trust, identification.

This holistic view of customer benefit is driving the emerging concept of Total Customer Value. The practical question is how to deliver and sustain it in the Web environment. As the Web has been embraced as a means to reduce service costs, the issue is not without challenges.

**Key points:** satisfaction through Total Customer Value in the Web channel is a strategic foundation for market viability.

**Key points:** processing capacity and rich media enable the Web channel to extend value through context (“how”) in addition to content (“what.”)

**Key points:** keeping the user engaged in the Web process will require satisfaction of broad emotional needs in addition to the search for product and price.

## THE SELF-SERVE UNIVERSE

Initial commercial interest in the Web focused on the economic value of *reduced transaction costs*. In this context, transaction costs mean any operational exchange within an organization, with suppliers or with customers. The immediacy of processing power in the Web environment and the replacement of physical constraints with virtual ones, meant that fundamental cost benefits could be realized. Manual processes could be automated, material costs eliminated, and information—essential for consumer awareness and choice—could be distributed directly to the customer without human intermediation. The result: the self-serve Web environment.

The self-serve Web delivers sufficient value to both commercial provider and customer to sustain massive growth in a marketing channel barely a decade old. As it enters a more mature stage of growth, we are accumulating practical understanding of the Web's limitations and failure points, but its historical growth is founded on automated process and "virtuality," i.e. the replacement of physical environments and people with digital facsimiles.

**Key points:** the Web has introduced fundamental transformations in costs to reach markets—virtuality and process automation have driven the growth of eCommerce with the promise of new levels of efficiency.

**Key points:** the need to overcome the clear limitations of automated process—rigid prescribed routines, lack of empathy, inability to "invent" new or personalised solutions—in the eCommerce value chain will push development of supplementary or alternative methods.

**Key points:** the winners in the continuing evolution of IP-carried commerce will be those who build on the foundation of the self-serve Web, exploit its new standard of economies and correct its deficiencies with precision.

## INTERACTIVITY—THE PARALLEL UNIVERSE

A parallel development has been the rise of live digital interaction—synchronous, or real-time dialogue, as opposed to email or bulletin boards. Conferencing, Internet Messenger and SMS messaging (particularly in Europe and Asia) have been the leading examples. The wide adoption of broadband has now introduced voice and video to the mix.

These media have created a broad acceptance of the use of live interaction. Although the phenomenon has not spread widely to the eCommerce Web environment, familiarity and the ample bandwidth now available can be expected to create increasing demand.

While the technology is ready, human behaviour may be another matter. There appears to be a wide spectrum between the extremes of enthusiastic early adopter and technologically inhibited slow adopter. Personal preferences for interactive media similarly appear to vary widely. While online voice dialogue is much easier, many users will cling to text chat. Others will forego the ease and richness of online media in preference to the familiarity of a callback on the conventional telephone.

When working with online media at the present stage of its development, it must be acknowledged that IP communications have not yet coalesced into a clear and unified perceptual entity like the conventional telephone. Online interactivity is, for most potential users, a cluster of possibilities or unknowns. There is a clear conclusion that arises from this fact, when we direct users to access points for online media, *we must force clarity where there is none*.

When applied commercially, live interaction appears to undermine one of the achievements of the Web—the replacement of manual processes with automated ones. The interactive world re-introduces the direct cost of live agents, plus associated costs of training, facilities, workplace management and human error.

In a business context, a resource is not applied unless its cost is justified. The principle holds with particular force in the Web environment. Access to live interaction should only be offered in those

instances where the cost is defensible, eg resolution of a service issue or to complete a sale. Where, when and how access is provided should be clearly formulated as part of the business rules of the Web process.

There are abundant examples in commercial Web sites of inefficient offering of live interactive services. On a routine Web page, the placement of an imprecise message such as “to chat with a live agent, click here,” is likely to build inefficiency into the process on two counts:

- It will exclude many legitimate users by not clarifying their expectations regarding what the live application is, how it works and especially, what it will do for them.
- It will attract many users without a clear sense of need or purpose. The agent will have to ascertain the nature and importance of the call and route it to the most appropriate point of resolution. The service cost will be high; most of this process should have been automated or filtered through proper navigation at a cost a fraction of that of the live agent.

**Key points:** acceptance of live interactivity is advancing rapidly, driven by such applications as IM and SMS.

**Key points:** there is little clear recognition of what live interactivity on the Web is. To attract the right amount and kind of usage, live access must be presented with messaging of the highest degree of clarity.

**Key points:** live interaction involves human labour and facilities costs. To sustain an efficient business model, live interactivity should be invoked only when the costs are justified. Imposition of business rules should control usage.

## **CONTEXT—NOT WHAT YOU SAY, BUT HOW YOU SAY IT**

The self-serve and the live interactive Webs have fundamentally differing economic drivers, yet in the greater whole of eCommerce they are both necessary parts. Successful performance of the channel depends on designing for complementary synergy.

We can start with an analysis of where and why the existing self-serve fails, and apply remedial applications of interactive devices at those precise points. These interventions become *defined by context*.

The strength of the self-serve Web has been its capacity to deliver *content*: product information, such quantitative data as pricing and availability, or such data processing as order taking. These have provided new levels of customer value as market acceptance of the channel attests.

Content delivery, however, does not fully address fundamental components of Total Customer Value—notably motivational and behavioural differences.

A useful set of criteria for customer value was developed by Parasuraman et al. in their SERVQUAL framework (*Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64 spring, 1988.) They conceived five measures that confer customer satisfaction:

1. Reliability: dependable and accurate service delivery
2. Assurance: ability to convey trust and confidence
3. Tangible: richness and appearance of the service environment
4. Responsiveness
5. Empathy

Of these criteria, reliability and tangible depend largely on the design and business processes (fulfillment, etc) that contribute to the self-serve Web channel. The remaining, assurance, responsiveness and empathy, are poorly served by content delivery, and fall primarily in the precinct of live human interaction.

Empathy and responsiveness are the decisive operators for the underlying mechanism of Total Customer Satisfaction—the ability to personalize service delivery to customer needs and differences, rather than the conventional compliance of behaviour to service process.

**Key points:** the self-serve Web is well adapted to delivering content, the “what” of eCommerce; the emotional context, or the “how” of eCommerce is the proper province of live interactive Web.

**Key points:** assurance, empathy and responsiveness are key components of successful service delivery, but these are not, by the nature of the medium, well handled by the self-serve Web.

## **THE COST OF NOT DELIVERING TOTAL CUSTOMER VALUE**

There will be a hard-nosed view that balks at these “softer” service deliverables, holding onto the conventional merchandising wisdom of product and price. These will remain primary drivers in the lower end of the scale in average ticket value. Here, the relative cost of service premiums in relation to product price rule out value-added niceties, and customers do not expect them.

In highly competitive eCommerce markets, old territorial advantages are eliminated and price discounting quickly reaches practical limits. Customer service becomes the prime differentiator and competitive advantage. In fact, service can command a premium even on a free product as the large service companies have discovered with Linux!

Further up the scale, the picture becomes more complex. Low barriers to entry on the Web admit high numbers of competitors. With the power of the mouse in hand, customers can switch merchants with a click. At the same time, customers are showing themselves more critical and demanding.

A common statistic to estimate the cost of lost sales is abandonment rate. It is not uncommon for abandonment rate at the point of sale on the Web to run around 70%. A portion of these can be attributed to defective service. But the real cost is not the loss of a sale, but the loss of a customer; the lifetime value of one customer will be many times the value of a single transaction. And research indicates that a sizeable percentage of customers who abandon a sale go to the competition.

An eCommerce marketer can expect not only more competition but greater sophistication in among competitors. Marketing and branding strategies now have customer retention as prime objectives. Marketers who lose customers, due to insufficient service delivery, will face an expensive proposition to win them back.

**Key points:** high competition, high demands from customers and low switching costs mean that service delivery is more than just a value-added premium; it is a strategic imperative.

**Key points:** the real cost of service delivery failure is not fairly measured in lost transactions but in lost customers, whose lifetime value will be multiples of a single sale.

**Key points:** competitors are trying to win your customers for life with enhanced service offerings.

## **USER AUTONOMY—THE SELF-DIRECTED PROCESS**

Research indicates that users place high value on making their own choices in Web navigation. At the same time, Web visitors show low tolerance for frustration in getting what they want from a Web site quickly and easily.

The implications have deeper significance than is at first apparent. It is a fundamental error to assume that Web visitors will choose the optimal, most logical way to do things. Web developers tend to design process for optimal efficiency based on algorithmic logic, i.e. a procedure of strict instructions to reach a desired output. Humans tend to operate in the Web environment with heuristic logic, i.e. a loosely organized set of rules-of-thumb, trial and error experience, and personal preferences.

These two realms loosely correspond to the self-serve and the live interactive Webs. Viewed in this context, it becomes apparent that both are necessary and complementary sides of human behaviour in the new environment of the Web—logical vs. intuitive, intellectual vs. emotional, outer-directed vs. inner-directed, and so forth.

Interesting conclusions emerge from this holistic view of the Web environment:

**Key points:** pop-up “proactive” devices may be counter-productive, as they can be interpreted by the user as intrusive in the flow of self-directed actions.

**Key points:** sound navigational architecture is necessary to prevent frustration, but it must never be viewed as coercive.

**Key points:** human behaviour on the Web may be sub-optimal (in process efficiency terms) by choice. Failure to accommodate this will violate the principle of self-directed user autonomy and will undermine the customer-oriented focus of Total Customer Value.

**Key points:** to motivate a customer to take an action in the Web environment, purely logical appeal is insufficient; emotional cues will also be required (eg trust-building, empathy, responsiveness.)

## **LEAVING THE QUIET SPACE**

It has been pointed out that, in the self-serve Web environment, human behaviour tends to be introverted. While the extrovert prefers to talk through an issue, the introvert likes to think it through. And to think it through, the Web introvert demands plentiful information. Solitary problem-solving reinforces the preference for self-directed procedures. Privacy, furthermore, has become a condition of the Web environment, generally viewed as a benefit. Intrusion in the private space, as in the case of “proactive” devices, can stimulate resistance, even hostility.

The live interactive world is very different in nature. It is social rather than solitary. Privacy is surrendered. Autonomy gives way to shared procedures or following instructions. *To properly understand the management of traffic between the self-serve and interactive Webs, their differences in mood, motivation and behaviour must be recognized and understood.*

At the launch point, where a user jumps between the self-serve universe and the live interactive one, we can expect various barriers of inhibition—surrender of privacy, fear of the new and unknown, abrupt shift from cool introversion to hot social engagement, fear of being judged (a natural accompaniment to seeking help,) technophobia (“I don’t know how to use this thing,”) and so forth.

If we simply offer access to live dialogue, without addressing these concerns, our take-up could be disappointingly low. Successful use of live links will require precision in the promise of functional and psychological benefits. Among the component values that can be used to tip user inhibition to user acceptance might be:

**Define the specific service by the context of need:** “Do you have questions about shipping? Click here for live help.” on the Internet configuration Web page will generate more and better results than “click here for live help.”

**Promise reliability and efficacy:** a generic message of the sort “click here for live help” does not suggest any real distinction between a live agent and any other form of interactive help (knowledge base, callback, etc.) “Talk to a live agent who can answer your email configuration questions now,” promises definitive resolution to the problem and a clear motive to click through.

**Promise assurances of courtesy and professional diligence:** to counterbalance fears of exposure to criticism or ridicule, messaging should give comfort that the agent is friendly, non-judgemental and courteous. “Click to speak live with a friendly Internet specialist who can answer your email configuration questions now” will comfort uneasy users.

**Create a tangible, recognizable interactive space:** as the qualities of the self-serve and the interactive Webs are so fundamentally different from each other, it may be advisable to create a look and feel for the interactive access points that is distinct from the overall design theme of the Web site. A good analogy would be the phone booth—its appearance announces its function and it offers a temporary space in which to conduct a private interaction. Attractiveness and visibility are important factors in attracting use.

## BUILDING AWARENESS

With a physical tool, function is usually expressed in form. Humans have an intuitive skill for deducing what a hammer, for example, is for from the qualities of its shape. Software design poses particular challenges as its functions often have no visible surfaces. We have to invent interfaces that indicate function and utility.

We have to create a shape for IP interactivity. It has no counterpart to the telephone in the language of symbols.

We have seen that sufficient motivation to overcome inhibitions and take the leap into interactivity will not be solely based on intellectual appreciation of functional benefits. Also coming into play are familiarity, comfort, aesthetic appeal and design friendliness. All of these associations cluster in the visible shape of our interactive applications.

In order to promote good and proper use of online live interactivity, therefore, we must create awareness by giving it coherent shape where there was none before. We must further embed the values in the shape that we expect will motivate the user.

**Key points:** before Web visitors can use the interactive application, they must be able to see it. The first step to awareness is to create shape.

**Key points:** the visual cues or symbols that give our application shape should contain the various values that will motivate proper use—not only functional efficacy but also reliability, friendliness, desirability (cool factor.)

## UNIVERSALITY

The new medium of IP communications and live online help lacks a clear symbol analogous to the telephone. At one level, we want to communicate to users that the medium is available. The associations at this level should be detached from the objectives of the Web or corporate interests. One of the key messages for building trust is that the use of this medium is free of manipulation or abuse. This assurance is one of the primary motivators with this new medium.

In addition, the more universal the symbol for online interaction becomes, the more it will be used in all Web channels. This is a specialized example of network effect in which value increases exponentially with the number of users.

HelpCaster has adapted a universal symbol for help specifically for the online environment, and legally protected it solely for that use. It is free of proprietary associations and its Code of Acceptable Use maintains consistency across all users.

The universality of the symbol and its impartiality convey an important message: the user can safely and reliably step out of any Web process, which may be giving difficulty, for good advice and return to the process with ease. This presents an easy launch point from the self-serve universe to the interactive one and back again.

**Key points:** universal symbols for online help give necessary assurances that use of the medium is free of manipulation, abuse or obligation.



*The universal help symbol—adapted to designate live online dialogue. The design has been protected against abuse and co-option by proprietary interests.*

**Key points:** there is a compounding value to the medium when multiple interactive hosts use universally recognized symbols.

## **THE WEB AWARENESS PROGRAM**

A graphic unit is prepared for a single objective: to create informed awareness of the availability of live interaction on the Web site. The unit comprises a number of graphic and verbal components, each performing a role in encouraging visitors to take proper advantage of the medium.

It is imperative to be precise in defining the communications objective of the unit's message. It is *not* simply to promote use of the interactive facility; this would generate a volume of calls with no clear intent which would waste agent resources. The objective is to encourage users to seek live assistance at a point of definable need.

The communications elements that comprise the awareness unit should include at least a number of the following:

- **Universal help symbol:** for instant recognition and to assure integrity
- **Human face:** to denote "live human interaction," to express friendliness and empathy
- **Description of the application:** to clarify expectations and eliminate fear of the unknown.
- **Statement of benefit:** state how the application will help the user. Generically, the promise, stated or implied, will be that a live agent is available to offer definitive solutions when the self-serve process has reached its service limits.
- **Emotional motivators:** reliability, assurance, empathy and responsiveness.
- **Procedure:** step-by-step actions. Advanced users will shortcut these, but it is necessary to accommodate the uncertainty of the technologically naïve or phobic.
- **Continuity elements:** explain signposting that will point to recurring instances throughout the Web site. Some elements must be used consistently in order to maintain easy recognition.

## WEB AWARENESS SAMPLE UNIT

Awareness is promoted through a Web graphic module, situated in one of the side columns. It is essential that the unit recur with sufficient frequency to reinforce the Web visitor's recognition of the message.

Components of the sample unit include:

**Incorporation of look and feel elements:** a format has already been devised to segregate margin units from the body content of the page. The unit borrows these elements.

**Feature name:** the interactive feature has been given the nickname "live line" to create a distinctive identity—creating clear and memorable focus in the visitor's mind.

**Functional description:** the initial section of copy describes the application in a simple question-solution premise, i.e. your question will be answered by a live specialist.

**Agent photo:** the model photo creates a point of human identification, expresses empathy and friendliness and establishes visibility on the page.

**Agent quote:** the agent's words offer a friendly invitation and express responsiveness, reliability, and ease of use.

**Procedural description:** a few words make explicit the steps required and what to expect ("click for live text chat.")

**Assurance and reliability:** reinforce empathy, efficacy and personalized attention. ("Friendly," "specialist," "work for you.")

**Icon recognition:** reinforce association of help application with the universal help symbol.



## ACCESS TO LIVE INTERACTION AT POINTS OF NEED

Some principles should be observed to successfully attract traffic to live applications:

1. *Proximity* is an important principle in traffic management. Placement of live access points near points of need tends to filter out curious browsers and attract users with specific service issues. The closer the access to live interaction to self-serve failure points, the greater the likelihood that appropriate help will be sought.
2. *Visibility* ensures that the user can recognize the meaning of the live access point instantly when it is needed.
3. *Activation* tells the user that the live application is enabled and will deliver service. The desired psychological state is decisive action rather than tentative, trial-and-error action. Presence detection can be used to enhance the perception of activation. In addition, presence detection of service availability can be used for dynamic enhancement of messaging and management of expectations. For example, when no agents are available, text and graphics can change to offer alternatives.
4. *Contextual messaging* narrows the general help function to the specific problem-solving task at the point of need (eg "click here for live help configuring your email account..."). This specific signposting not only helps the user find what they need, it filters extraneous calls from the agents.

The more successfully continuity elements maintain the thread of awareness and recognition between the awareness-building units and the individual access points, the more the local access points can be relieved of the weight of messaging. Special attention, therefore, should be paid to components that can create consistent and distinctive appearance across the Web site—universal symbol, colour, typeface and imagery.

This consistency becomes all the more important if multiple interactive devices are offered at various points of the Web site. The positive associations (trust, loyalty, reliance, etc) developed for one application then spread to all.

*Sample access point (online state)*



This unit is designed to accompany text in the central content area of the Web layout. It incorporates the following components:

1. **Visual consistency with program:** graphic elements relate directly to the awareness-building unit, reinforcing the instant recognition of the live help function.
2. **The universal help symbol:** in this case, the “question mark” icon unobtrusively flashes to indicate *activation*, i.e. the application is live. The animation provides *visibility*.
3. **Proximity:** the unit is designed for insertion with the specific content that has created the customer issue. This proximity attracts more and better usage than a live link situated on the peripheries of the page—side margins, top or bottom.
4. **Contextual message:** the primary copy refers directly and specifically to the issue at hand—in this example, help with email configuration.
5. **Assurance:** the sub-head reinforces the critical messages of *reliability, responsiveness* and *user friendliness*.

*Sample access point (offline state)*



It is important to plan carefully the help offering when agents are not available. To withdraw help altogether risks creating negative associations with the application.

Presence detection lets us change the graphics when no agents are online to take calls. In the example, the unit changes to offer a call back. Call back is an ideal medium, as it still offers live help though deferred. The link could point to email, an online knowledge base, a forms-based Web page or other alternative help devices.

In the example, the “question mark” help icon has been replaced by a symbol for call back. To preserve the association with live interactive help, we reserve the help icon exclusively for use with real-time applications.

## INITIATING THE DIALOGUE—USE OF THE POP-UP

The offer of live help via pop-up window has been promoted by some providers as a means of “proactive” marketing on the Web page. Examination of user behaviour cautions against careless use of this technique.

As we have remarked, users are extremely protective of both their privacy and their autonomy online. The pop-up window can be viewed as aggressive or intrusive. A documented but often overlooked

factor is the difference in sophistication among users. Experienced users will tend to know how to find help on a site, if it is available, and are used to navigational shortcuts. They are liable to find pop-ups both demeaning and necessitating additional steps in their streamlined site navigation—even if that means the time required to close the pop-up window.

Unsophisticated users are more likely to find the pop-up threatening. An event *beyond their control* and which they poorly understand can elicit negative associations in these users.

More fundamentally, the self-serve and interactive modes are very different psychological environments. The transition between the two should take place where there is sufficient rationale in the mind of the user. If this transition is forced, the result can be psychological discordance.

Before relying on pop-ups as a measure of program success, the percentage of blocked instances should be well considered. Firewalls, new browser versions, popular toolbars (Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc) all provide pop-up prevention.

As in all media that can be perceived as intrusive, eg email or telemarketing, *permission from the user* is a critical factor for effectiveness. Permission is, in the case of the pop-up, conferred through tone of address. Courtesy in the pop-up message is imperative. We also offer the user the ability to *opt out* of further solicitations.

*Example pop-up window:*

The sample pop-up has a number of elements designed to mitigate resistance and highlight usefulness:

**Visual consistency:** graphic elements relate both to organizational look and feel and to the awareness-building unit. When the window pops up, users will confer the same trust on this unit as they hold for the organization.

**Program identity:** the “myco live line” name (using a hypothetical organization) makes association of the pop-up with the interactive help program explicit.

**Clear premise:** The “need help?” text makes instantly clear the purpose of the unit.

**Human identification:** the agent photo and quote give the pop-up unit a friendly, empathetic face that defuses threatening associations and creates a bond of identification with the user.

**Action path:** “Click here to . . .” instructions clarify both expectations and required actions to satisfy the user’s interest.

**Universal help identification:** the “question mark” clearly denotes the function of the pop-up window. The user’s recognition should have been “primed” by the awareness units; the pop-up should bear some familiarity and not threaten with fear of the unknown.

**Animation:** the help symbol is subtly animated to designate “activation,” i.e. the application is live.

**Opt-out choice:** a tick box allows the user to deny permission for further interventions. This respects the user’s autonomy, and mitigates any negative perception that the pop-up is an intervention beyond the user’s control.

**Stop option:** the “Close window” box further enhances the perception that the agent-initiated process is within the user’s control. The window could be closed by the Windows control button but the perception is different; this is associated with a deeper level of operating system intervention.



## **STIMULATING TRAFFIC**

While we expect that within the next few months, Web communications in various forms will enter the mainstream, it remains a new and unfamiliar medium for most users. The reward for your organization as an early adopter of Web interactivity will be a leadership position within your industry; the risk is initial under-usage of the medium. This risk should be acknowledged and understood, with mitigating measures prepared.

Among the total your Web user population, we can expect the usual bell curve of adoption rates for the interactive applications. A small percentage of early adopters will embrace the live media. Another small percentage will be entrenched in resistance or inhibition. The greatest number will have mixed motives—urge for optimized help, attraction to novelty, inhibition about leaving the private space of the self-serve Web, technophobia or even inertial reluctance to try new Web routines. Simply stated, ambivalence will restrain initial adoption.

We cannot hope that everyone will use the new technology because it is good for them, but we can skew the adoption curve in our favour. And we can achieve this with time-honoured techniques— incentives, promotion, special offers and other excitement-building measures. Here are some recommendations:

**Create instant recognition through iteration:** reinforcement is the most effective means to overcome resistance due to unfamiliarity. Presence of the interactive applications should be visible throughout the site. The awareness unit, which does not offer access, should be a prominent feature throughout site architecture.

**Promote the interactive program as a value-added site feature:** for illustrative purposes, the interactive program has been designated the “myco live line” to create a memorable identity in the mind of the user. In this way, we build perception that your visitors are receiving a special feature that delivers added value. In addition, this special site feature becomes a point of interest for corporate communications to the media, etc.

**Offer premiums:** when the program is introduced, offer premiums to Web callers. Even standard promotional items can be effective in attracting users—T shirts, mousepads, mugs, etc. These will be particularly effective when used with live online sales. The cost of this activity is easily justified as a marketing project creating high-touch involvement with the organization and its Web channel. Such activity not only attracts users but creates excitement around the interactive program.

**Offer true price incentives:** there are offers that are most efficiently sold through the Web channel— items with dynamic pricing, items that can use the Web’s data processing to bypass physical branches and manual forms, or items that can be fulfilled online. Cost savings from online distribution can be passed on to users of the live communications channels without disruption to margin integrity. If discount offers to live Web callers are positioned as limited promotions, resistance to differential pricing from other channel managers can be avoided.

**Do not rely on agent-initiated techniques to build traffic:** general user aversion to pop-ups and increasing security safeguards to block them make these agent-initiated measures increasingly unviable. New methods of using these techniques within a permission-based context may yet develop, but current practice does not provide a reliable platform for building stable traffic growth and may, in fact, alienate many users.

**Promote outside the channel:** understand the true benefit of the live channel within the Web environment. Live help with rich information and rich media support and online forms processing creates, in fact, the most convenient and most abundantly featured business environment available. Promote live interactivity through other channels—direct mail, billing inserts, print, etc—to not only attract users to live interaction but also to bring new users into the Web channel itself.