

Internet: E-nough's E-nough!

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The Internet is, for sure, here to stay! Just wait until the "big boys" really come out to play, big time. Soon, however, we will stop discussing the Internet in the future tense as it becomes a reality. Recent projections for B2B commerce is \$1.3 trillion in 2003 or more than 9% of total U.S. business sales (Forrester Research). Fortunately for the relatively small industrial safety industry we can learn from the victories and mistakes of the large industry segments such as medical or retail (i.e. Compaq's faux pas trying to by-pass their existing retailers who got them where they were, by attempting to sell direct or we can learn from Home Depots message to their vendors - "sell direct on the Internet and you won't sell Home Depot.")

Like most selling, the Internet will settle down to its own 80/20 rule - its new and hot now and a great tool as it replaces mundane duties and allows great research functions that helps in purchasing decisions - its a data engine - it's all about facilitating communication, connections and transactions, with the outside world.

While some products lend themselves more than others to Internet sales such as so-called commodity products and/or the replenishment of those commodities - and others that could be very sophisticated and highly complex products could be included as well. It must be pointed out that all things run in cycles and the Internet is on the up cycle but it will always remain an important tool for sellers and buyers.

"Portals" have and will become more important to the Internet just as malls have been to retailing. People don't have the time to "hop" or "browse" to a lot of sites, they'll settle down to a few portals that lead them to the distributor sources that provide them the products and/or services that they require. Safety is different from selling pipe - sell the wrong pipe, you can send it back - sell the wrong respirator, someone could die or be seriously injured. This is high tech business but it also requires high "touch" relationships that can rely on proper selection of proper safety products for each specific job - not just generalities, but by qualified safety sales professionals (i.e. QSSP).

We are a gregarious society and when everything else is equal, people will still make the difference because people like to deal, trust and be with people. The key is to maintain a consistent and effective partnership with all channel partners each demonstrating economic value added.

Buying is reactive and selling is proactive and proactive selling will always exist with the Internet as a tool, so we can be better-educated buyers and proactive consultative salespersons. The Internet isn't everything, but a well-planned and fully integrated strategy including the Internet will still be the best tool for accomplishing your tasks.

E-commerce? It's here to stay - embrace it, learn how to use it to better equip yourself and your company - now. E-nough's, e-nough. "Just do it!"

Think about it.

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