

## **Workshop for Small to Medium Size ISPs Entering the Web Hosting Industry.**

Location: Apachecon 2000, Orlando, Florida

Date: Friday March 10, 2000, 3:45pm

Facilitator: Frank DeChellis

### **In Attendance:**

Tony DeCicco, John Congdon, John Schabe, Amiel Lee Yee, Simon Cheng, Troy Dere, Bob Day, Peter Haggerty, Scott Pichelman, Charles Paul, Chen Meng Kuan, Anders Berg, Chuan Wee, Paul Herman

The purpose of this workshop was for Small to Medium size business to take an extended look at their intention of starting a web hosting service. Through a SWOT format, we examined what our strengths and weaknesses are and what opportunities and threats await us.

First, we all agreed as to what web hosting was....a service where we host web sites without necessarily providing dialup services.

The SWOT sessions provided us with lists to work with. If we were all part of the same organization, we would have followed the SWOT analysis with a task and priorities list to act on. Since we are separate entities, we need to examine the list separately and create our own task lists.

### **Strengths**

- Personal Service
- Intimate with market
- Make decisions and act quickly
- Adaptability
- Accessibility to high level support (for customers)
- Proximity to Customers
- Customized service levels
- Personal stake in company (gives customers confidence)
- Can make use of larger companies
- Can establish a niche
- Low overhead
- Can add value (VAR)

## **Weaknesses**

- Shallow pockets
- Lack of 24x7x365 support
- Think "Small"
- Fault Tolerance (or lack of)
- Lack of specific staff roles
- Inability to meet sudden demand
- Lack of access to funding
- Lack of time to stay up to date
- Hard to develop brand name
- Lack of volume
- Lack of focused marketing
- Lack of business plan to follow
- Overshadowed by customer doubt
- Lack of multiple environments
- Lack of expertise
- Lack of influence on upstream providers

## **Opportunities**

- Small to Medium Size Clients
- For ISPs - Sell to existing client base who are usually a captive audience
- Reseller relationships with Web Developers
- Personally upsell clients
- Domain Hosting
- Email services
- Access Logs
- Web Development
- Built in link checking
- Co-location
- Maintenance
- Sell hardware
- Setup fees for Unix, Apache, Hardware, whatever!
- Comprehensive marketing services
- Educate market through seminars and 1-1 meetings
- Become an ASP
- databasing

## **Threats**

- Free hosting
- Hackers
- Departing access clients who takes all services with them
- Broadband access to client's site
- Inability to expand properly
- External forces shutting us down (with no fault tolerance)
- Government Regulation (privacy issues, content, taxes, whatever)
- Clients requiring Service Level Agreements

## **Summary of Lists Compiled**

The group was slow to list our strengths but quick to list our weaknesses. At first glance, most of our weaknesses are a direct result of not having "deep pockets". Some of the other weaknesses can be overcome by rolling up our sleeves and putting in extra hours for duties such as marketing, results analysis and administration.

What we listed as strengths we very important and are necessary to capitalize on opportunities that are available. When you starting laying out your tasks you will find yourself wrestling with whether to work on tasks to overcome your weaknesses or capitalize on your strengths. That is for you and your group to determine.

As a small to medium size business, you are already overwhelmed with the daily tasks of keeping the ship on course. Don't make matters worse by creating a list of 20 tasks or projects from this SWOT summary. This will make you even less focused than you may already be. The number of staff members you have and daily requirements of your time will determine how extensive your task list will be. It is important to assign a person and deadline to each task and FOLLOW THROUGH with completion!

One encouraging aspect of the workshop was how easy it was to identify opportunities available to us. It would have been a sad session to have 2 pages of weaknesses and 1/2 page of opportunities.

The SWOT Analysis has 2 different and equally important parts...the compilation of lists and identification of tasks afterwards.

My company, Internet Access Worldwide, has brought in a SWOT facilitator every 6-8 months for the past 3 years and we have found that this has helped the company tremendously. The sessions are usually performed away from the office without interruption. The list compilation and task recognition usually takes about 5 hours. It is not a good idea to have somebody involved in the company facilitate it. In fact, it's a horrible idea. Your staff may not express themselves because their supervisor is the person standing in front of them. It's like trying to fix your own golf swing.

Our company's SWOTs are done by a gentleman named Larry Cote ([larryc@jaw.com](mailto:larryc@jaw.com)). He is a retired business professor at the local College and a respected man in the community. He does a good job of making my staff feel comfortable enough to say what's on their minds, for the good of the company.

Occasionally, somebody will say "We could have done that ourselves" but the question I always put back to them is "Would you have been able to get those people together for that long without interruption to sit down and think about the business?" In today's gotta-have-it-yesterday world, the answer is NO.

I have created an email address on our system called [apache-swot@iaw.com](mailto:apache-swot@iaw.com) if you want to email anybody in the group. If you don't want to be on the email list, let me know at [frankd@iaw.com](mailto:frankd@iaw.com) I will be sitting down with my staff in 2 weeks to create a task list and I will share that with you.

Good luck with whatever actions you take from here. It was (is) a pleasure working with you.

Sincerely,

Frank DeChellis

Internet Access Worldwide

[frankd@iaw.com](mailto:frankd@iaw.com)