



Kip Gregory spoke on “Untangling the Web: Making the Internet Work for You” at the ICIMC’s Wealth Management Conference on June 7 in New York City. This article, taken from that presentation, offers some ideas for using the Web to streamline your business and simultaneously strengthen relationships with your best clients.

Using the Web to Get Closer to Your Clients

Top investment consultants recognize that retaining assets long term requires more than solid portfolio management and financial advice. Offering true value-added service is critical to cementing relationships with your most important clients and differentiating yourself in the process. Here’s a way to improve your efficiency and effectiveness AND perform a value-added service for your clients at the same time.

If you spend **any** amount of time on the Web, you’ve probably saved the addresses of sites you visit regularly in your browser under “Favorites” (in Internet Explorer) or “Bookmarks” (in Netscape). Bookmarking sites is a great timesaver when you’re working at your own PC, but have you ever been frustrated because you can’t remember an address and you’re away from your computer? Setting up an **online** bookmark account can solve that problem – saving you time and eliminating needless irritation.

High Tech – High Touch

Many of your best clients have the same problem. If you’re looking for a unique way to build ties that bind with them, offer a solution: develop a library of helpful links to their favorite sites for them and post it on the Web – a great high tech way to deliver high touch service.

Here’s how.

1. ***Identify which clients routinely send you email, a good indicator of who’s regularly spending time on the Net.*** If you don’t know them off the top of your head, keep a tally for the next few weeks of who’s corresponding with you electronically, then write down the names of those you consider to be on your ‘A’ list.
2. ***Send an email (or better, call) each person to share that you’re introducing a new service enhancement to select clients.*** Keep in mind you’re looking for those who’ll react favorably not skeptically, so only contact ‘A’ clients you know are computer/Web savvy and might appreciate the extra attention. Don’t waste time with clients who are likely to question why you’re doing this instead of monitoring their money... they’ll completely miss the point.
3. ***Explain that your goal is to make their time on the Internet easier on two levels.*** First, by creating a system to advise them of new, valuable sites you find. Second, by giving them access to their favorite bookmarks from any computer, using any browser... whether at work, at home or traveling.

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4. ***Ask them what web sites they visit most often and why they find each one helpful.*** Listen closely and take good notes – what they say can give you valuable insights into their interests and how they use the Internet... useful information not only for this effort, but for strategizing where and what to focus on in managing your relationship with them.
5. ***Say you'd like to set up an online bookmark account for them that will include sites they mention, along with others you think would be of interest.*** Emphasize that their account will be private and password-protected, unless they decide to share its contents with others. Give them the option of providing you with access to the account after you create it (to keep them in the loop on useful sites you find over time) or just having you set it up for them, after which they can change their password. Most will choose to have you co-own the account.
6. ***Let them know that once the account has been established, they can easily add all the sites they've previously bookmarked in their own browser to it.*** You already know how simple this process is from setting up your own account. Why not direct clients to it so they can view what one looks like firsthand?
7. ***Finally, tell them that you'll forward an email with complete instructions on how to access and use the account after it's been set up.*** For very important clients, you might even consider scheduling an in-office appointment. Either way, be sure to check if the bookmark site already has instructions you can borrow (why reinvent the wheel if you don't have to?). If they don't, have someone on your staff prepare a write up (you can review and fine-tune their description once complete, if necessary).

Sending all your clients this information may encourage others to get online, a goal that will simplify and enhance your ability to communicate to clients. Set a date for a tutoring session on using your new service. Offer dinner and a hands-on session on each participant's laptop to get them "up and running." You get to shake hands, be seen as highly creative and to cement those relationships, by assisting clients set up this valuable service

What is a Bookmark?

Let's spell out exactly what we're talking about. Adding a web page's address (technically, a "URL" or "Uniform Resource Locator") to a list of frequently visited sites in your browser is called "bookmarking." Bookmarking a Web page allows you to go to that page quickly by clicking its title in your list of Favorites/Bookmarks, rather than having to re-type the URL.

Many web portals (Yahoo, Excite, etc.) now allow users to include a list of their favorite sites when setting up a personalized page like MyYahoo or MyExcite. In fact, entire companies have been started around on the concept of letting people create their own account of these bookmarked sites. Accounts are password-protected and can be accessed anywhere, at any time, from any computer.

How to Set Up an Online Bookmark Account

Three of the most popular bookmarking services can be found at www.blink.com, www.backflip.com, and www.clickmarks.com. All allow you to organize your sites in folders and categories with brief descriptions of each site. All permit multiple accounts under different email addresses. And all are available to you free of charge.

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We like Blink.com because it allows us to do a number of useful things that can impress clients at the same time:

- When setting up our account, we imported our existing Favorites from Internet Explorer with just a few clicks.
- We periodically browse the library of bookmarks posted by millions of other Blink users for new ideas on sites to visit.
- We selectively share favorites with others, using “co-owned” accounts (that we and our clients can both access and make changes to), enabling us to maintain a dialogue with them about what’s good on the Web.



To better organize entries, links can be color-coded and ranked (1 to 5 stars) for quick reference. And you can also install several tools Blink provides in your Internet Explorer icon toolbar that allow you to add URLs of new sites you find to your Blink web page with just one click.

Blink even sends you a free monthly email with statistics on the number of “hits” each bookmark in an account has received (how many times it’s been viewed) and when it was last used, so you can keep track of which sites you recommend are

visited most frequently.

To get started, go to www.blink.com and enter your email address in the Join Now! Section of the main page. You’ll then be walked through a series of set up screens, including (if you want) copying the list of favorite sites from your computer into your new account.

Connecting by Catering to People’s Interests

One other very useful feature Blink offers is the ability to find sites with content similar to what’s on your list, just by selecting an entry and clicking “find related sites”. So if a client tells you they travel regularly to wineries in Europe and visits www.winespectator.com, you might suggest that they also take a look at www.worldwine.com/EuropeanWines.htm for more information on wine tours in France, Spain, Germany or Italy.

If you’ve formed strategic partnerships with accountants, attorneys, association executives or others, you should consider creating bookmark accounts of sites they’d find useful. Whatever you do to make them money or save them time will be welcome and will distinguish you as someone genuinely interested in helping them be more productive and successful.

The same is true for cultivating specific marketing niches. If your business is concentrated in a certain demographic, geographic or trade area, why not consider creating an account that describes links to helpful sites for those audiences?

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How effectively you employ this technology as a client service enhancement or prospecting aid is only limited by your creativity. The more you use it, the more benefits you'll discover you can deliver to your target audience.

And while a tool like this may not excite all your clients, for the right group it *will* enhance your reputation for making their lives easier and more productive (never mind your own).

So move your bookmarks to the Web; I promise you (and your clients) will be glad you did.

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