



Australian Tourist Attraction Online

Submitted by our Contributing Jo-anne Fisher. Note that the JIBC Editorial Board reserves an unrestricted right to shorten any original document submitted for publication.

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Centrepoint is a familiar site on Sydney's skyline, and this major shopping centre and tourist attraction is aiming to stand out as prominently on the World Wide Web as Sydney Tower does on the horizon. It's common for any major company or group to place itself on the Web, often as a little more than a token acknowledgment that the system exists, yet Centrepoint marketing Manager Mark Fowler explained that Centrepoint's Web site at <http://www.centrepoint.com.au> is an integral part of an overall marketing philosophy. 'I guess that one of our strongest philosophies is 24-hour marketing', he explained. 'A lot of institutions work on a yearly, monthly or quarterly promotional calendar. In order to keep ahead of our competition, we need to review our performance every day.'

Fowler conducts a daily meeting for approximately 20 minutes with his marketing team to study trends in tourism entertainment and demographics that ultimately influence the way the Internet is used.

Centrepoint's move to the Internet has an intermediate electronic phase. About eight months ago, Fowler spoke with Adesh Goel from Integrated Media, who had introduced the idea of touch screen information kiosks for the centre. The screens have been active for about a year and a half. 'There are a lot more add-ons than the usual touch screens in other shops, so it's more personal.' The kiosks provide information about the centre to shoppers, but Fowler thinks that the information that has flowed in the other direction is just as significant. 'It collects data for us. We know how many people are using it each week and what sort of questions they are asking. We can tailor our response on a weekly basis. In the future, we hope to have five or six different languages so we can, for example, tell how many Japanese visitors we are receiving. We can find out how many people are looking for fashion, and possibly change the store layout. If people are trying to find certain facilities, then perhaps our signs aren't big enough. We will probably be installing more of them, but our newest option is to use the Internet.'

Fowler had not considered using the Net when the kiosks were considered, but much of the information that now appears on the Centrepoint Web site is identical to the kiosk screens. 'It was just something that followed on, especially with our 24 hours marketing strategy.'

The Web site is the first stage of an online services process that will reach its second level in January 1996, when the first experiments with actually selling products across the Internet will begin. 'We'll only sell three or four products per month at the start,' Stage three of the process is scheduled to be towards the end of 1996, when actual renditions of Centrepoint's retail stores will be placed on the site. 'You'll be able to march into the store with your mouse, and click on products and shelves to take a closer look.' After inspecting details of the product, a customer would then be able to purchase it online. Fowler's Web developers are monitoring the growth of secure online transaction systems and more advanced presentation formats such as VRML (Virtual Reality Markup Language). 'We believe the technology should

be available for this final stage when we are ready to introduce it.'

Fowler has watched the development of home shopping through cable TV and online services in the USA, where total sales across the wires account for as much as 5% of all goods sold to consumers. 'We're not scared by this trend, we want to run it instead', he boasts.

Nevertheless, Fowler does not believe that home shopping will make any significant impact on the Australian retail industry until 1999. 'I just don't believe there will be enough Australians with Pay TV in the next year or two to affect us.'

Fowler claimed that it is too early to consider the exact differences between products that are suited to an online environment and those that people will still need to visit a shop to buy. 'Retail goods are only one of the product lines we intend to sell at the site: we are also a conference venue, for example. But products you can visually inspect across the Net, like watches and sunglasses would be obvious choices for consumer goods. You don't need to try them on like clothes.' Souvenirs are expected to be another popular item. 'If you were coming to Australia from overseas, you can buy local products before you even get here, and have them sent directly back to your home country.'

The design of the Web site was supervised by Centrepont, who formulated a brief on exactly how they wanted to market their services. 'We wanted to sell the tower more than the retail side of things at the current site', adds Fowler. 'It's well-known, so we had an easy product to market. My brief to Merlin, our designers, was to cover all our services. We have the tower, the convention centre, the revolving restaurant and an education package. So we had about four strong products that we could sell to different markets. We also had about the same number of separate markets to appeal to, all of whom had access.'

Many retailers are keen to match the Internet's demographics to their own market profile, but one aspect of the site isn't even commercial. 'I believe the strength of this site is our education programme. For example, our television commercial is targeted to people of any age: other campaigns aim at specific demographics. We think there are qualities at Centrepont that would appeal to anyone. But the education package is also versatile; it goes from kindergarten level to University courses in engineering. It's a free service to all schools, and we shall be improving the content over the next few months.'

Promoting the conference centre will probably be the next step in developing the site. Centrepont is already receiving more foreign inquiries due to the Sydney Olympics, and the market is expanding. Fowler claims that 60% of the clientele for the revolving restaurant at Sydney Tower are overseas visitors, and expanding its online content is also important. Individual retailers presently have little more than a name and contact details at the site. The trickle through to them has been small so far, but noticeable for at least one shop: a suit retailer.

'We have a marketing advisory committee with our retailers that meets monthly. A few of them are willing to put up their own money to get their own individual sites online.'

'We're also going through the very expensive exercise of putting our URL (Web address) on our stationery. It's going on our letterheads, business cards, our TV commercial, and on the information kiosk. The address will be on everything we send out.'

'One future option for the site will be a link to a video camera on top of the tower. The camera could move, but we don't want to supply great detail. We are also looking at options for putting cameras in the shopping centre. But we don't want to show too much. We want to make sure people come in to see the rest.'

When asked about the lessons that Centrepont's brief foray into online marketing has delivered, Fowler replied that 'if there's a moral in our experiences, it's that our 24 hour, global marketing model is effective. Having the resources to monitor your marketing activities every day is important. The publicity we have received has proven to us that going on the Web was a right decision to make.'

Centrepont presently spends large amounts on printing flyers and publications for their various services, but Fowler expects to cut his printing costs by 50% through the use of online services.

