

“Death of a Webmaster”



Hiring a Webmaster solely for the purpose of Web site maintenance and upgrades may quickly become just a footnote in the annals of cyberspace history.

Jozef Hubburmin, president of **HI-PERformance Enterprise Inc.**, has a theory he calls "Death of a Webmaster." Hubburmin's company develops "self-serve" Web sites that allow clients to update content without knowledge of computer codes, the widely used Internet programming language HTML or file directories.

As a result of this new development, an authorized employee with a recognized ID and password can access the site to modify, delete or add text and graphics without the help of a technician.

"The originator of the content updates the Web site and it is kept fresh," said Hubburmin, who believes Webmasters will evolve into graphic designers, Web-based software developers and Internet marketers.

Hank Poelvoorde, vice-president of technology and information systems for the **Delta Credit Union** (www.deltacu.com) uses a Web-based software application made by Surrey-based HI-PERformance to allow for site updates without having to go to a Web specialist. Poelvoorde said the credit union regularly changes information on its site, such as daily interest rates.

"We wanted to have more control and management of the site," he explained. "We didn't want to be on someone else's time schedule."

The Delta Credit Union has designated two staff members, one from the marketing department and the other from the company's technology group, to manage its Web site. Poelvoorde estimates the credit union is saving about \$50,000 a year by not hiring a full-time Webmaster and avoids paying about \$100 an hour to hire an outside company to update its site. The credit union paid about \$45,000 for its new 65-page Web site, launched in May, and the software application.

"We can make changes on a moment's notice," said Poelvoorde.

HI-PERformance (www.hpmarketing.com) also develops Web-based business software applications that can be used on any computer with an Internet connection and a Web browser. With applications running on HI-PERformance's server, companies can access their Web site's backend and change content through their browser without installing Web development applications. HI-PERformance, launched in 1997, charges a fee for the use of applications which ranges in price from \$5,000 to \$90,000, depending on the application and a company's needs.

According to Hubburmin, a company can save money by using these applications instead of hiring a Webmaster or outsourcing Web site maintenance and updates to a Web design company. Security issues are addressed by giving passwords to staff members and HI-PERformance tracks who is logging onto the system.

"We suggest they change the passwords on a regular basis," said Hubburmin.

For added protection, companies can program "point-to-point" security into the software application to specify geographical locations from which the Web site can be

accessed.

Web sites can also include a content migration feature to allow online event calendars, sales promotions and other time-sensitive items to be automatically updated.

Brad Dolman, western regional manager of e-commerce consultants **Inglenet Business Solutions** (www.inglenet.com), agreed Webmasters are at risk of being replaced by software applications. Maintaining a corporate Web site is being handled more and more by internal marketing department staff members who may have little knowledge of HTML.

"The Webmaster's role is more marketing and communications as well as maintaining the appearance of the Web site," said Dolman. "I do believe they are going to be phased out over time."

Discover Vancouver's Webmaster Chris Breikss said he is a prime example of how people in his position are transforming.

"The Webmaster is not dead, but is evolving at the same speed as the Internet is evolving," he said.

Breikss, who started his job in June 1999, said he originally spent about 75 per cent of his time updating content and making manual revisions to the Web site (www.discovervancouver.com). In the past year, traffic to the profitable site, which lists local attraction and event information, has increased by about 300 per cent and today gets about 4,000 visitors daily. Outside content providers now post information and graphics on the site on a weekly basis.

"My position has moved more towards generating money for the site through advertising and Internet marketing efforts," said Breikss.