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ABOUT FREE PINT

Free Pint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter every two weeks packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <http://www.freepint.com/> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, answers to research questions and networking at the Free Pint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive the Adobe Acrobat version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

EDITORIAL

I've worked in customer service for a number of information vendors, and I'm absolutely convinced it's crucial for keeping customers on your side. You can't put a price on the value of good customer support.

That's why we're announcing the 'Online Information / Free Pint Vendor Customer Service Award'. This is your chance to reward an organisation who has provided you with excellent customer service. Cast your vote today at <http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2002/>.

The Award is being run in conjunction with Online Information 2002 in London in December <http://www.online-information.co.uk>. We'll be exhibiting at the show, and organising workshops as usual. I hope you will come along to this major event in the information calendar.

We will be presenting the Customer Service Award at the Gala Awards Dinner. So come on Free Pinters, make your choice from the list of exhibitors and cast your vote for the one who has provided the best customer service: <http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2002/>.

On the topic of awards, we've just heard that the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has awarded Free Pint the Jason Farradane Award 2002. We're delighted about this and think it's a fitting thank you to the hundreds of people who have contributed to Free Pint over the last five years (yes, it's nearly our fifth birthday!).

We've just added further dates for our oversubscribed Exchanges, including today's on Electronic Copyright. We're also re-running the popular topics of managing intranets, communities of practice, telecoms information, and effective writing. So, book early as they'll all fill quickly <http://www.freepint.com/exchange/>.

Back to today's newsletter where you can read all about improving your Web site's speed, and get the inside story on what it takes to be a successful independent information professional.

Don't forget to check out the fully formatted version of this newsletter which is much easier to read and takes less pages to print. It's available free online at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/> and you can even have it sent to you automatically by modifying your subscription at <http://www.freepint.com/member/>.

Cheers
William

William Hann
Founder and Managing Editor

Email: <william@freepint.com>
Tel: +44 (0)1784 420044

Free Pint is a Registered Trademark of

FREE PINT JOBS
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

Free Pint Jobs is THE place to find and advertise information-related vacancies.

Job seekers can search the database for free, and set up a profile to be notified weekly of relevant new vacancies.

Recruiters will receive significant publicity for listed vacancies, and jobs will be matched against the 700+ stored job seeker profiles.

Find out more today at <http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

As well as the selected listings below, check out the weekly Bar postings which list the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's can be found at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b20382>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Senior Researcher (Corporate Finance)
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2065>
Excellent opportunity for proactive researcher with report-writing skills in entrepreneurial environment. To 30,000 pounds plus bonus
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Information Assistant
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2069>
Have car (and chemistry degree) will travel! Good junior role for information professional at leading consumer goods firm
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Information Officer - Legal
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2079>
City law firm requires experienced information officer to revamp information services within a busy, pressured environment
Recruiter: Recruit Media

[The above jobs are paid listings]

New Directory Of International Research Reports
FINDEX 2002, the industry's most popular directory of research reports, studies, and surveys, contains details about thousands of off-the-shelf market research reports published by over 350 global research publishers. Organized by category, publisher, and subject,

FINDEX allows you to locate research quickly and easily, precisely when you need it. To order your copy today, call 212.807.2629 or visit <http://www.marketresearch.com/redirect.asp?progid=1711&productid=528786>

Free Pint Telecommunications Exchange
Thursday 24th October 2002, West London, UK

"This Exchange is intended to give participants an awareness of the key sources of information on telecommunications, an ability to research the sector efficiently, and a basic understanding of telecommunications networks and services."
<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>

Online Information 2002: the world's no. 1 event for information professionals, librarians, knowledge managers, researchers and publishers

3-5 December 2002, Olympia, London UK
Full conference programme at
<http://www.online-information.co.uk/online/conference.asp> >> Book now for early bird discount - offer ends 4 November <<

Free Pint Effective Writing Exchange
Thursday 7th November 2002, West London, UK
<http://www.freepint.com/exchange>

"This session will equip delegates with practical principles and guidelines for making online publications more effective through good writing"

A Willco First – Email Distribution Certification

Customers of Willco's List Hosting Service now have access to low-cost certification to reassure advertisers of their circulation figures.

Just one more reason to host your email newsletter with Willco, the people behind Free Pint's technology <http://www.willco.com>

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES
from Helen Clegg

Helen Clegg is Market Analyst with RR Donnelley Europe, in Amsterdam. She holds a B.A Hons in French and German and M.Sc in Library and Information Studies from Loughborough University. She can be contacted at <Helen.Clegg@rrd.com>.

Email your top five favourite Web sites to <penny@freepint.com> or see the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

- I use the Merriam Webster dictionary at <http://www.m-w.com> to check spellings quickly. This site also has a thesaurus.

- As one of my working languages is German, I find the LEO online dictionary at <http://dict.leo.org> - really useful. It's compiled by the Informatics Department of the Technische Universitat in Munich.

- <http://www.bisnis.doc.gov> - This is a great site for information on Russia and other newly independent states. I discovered it the other day and immediately bookmarked it. It's run by the US Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration.

- When I'm searching for a reputable market research company, I use the ESOMAR directory at <http://www.esomar.nl>. It's regularly updated and covers most countries of the world.

- If there's no financial information on a publicly traded German company on the company's own web site, I surf to <http://www.marketone.de> - which has profit/loss and balance sheet data for many publicly traded German companies. This site is all in German though!

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Free Pinters can now claim a 10% discount when purchasing featured Euromonitor business reference titles via Free Pint.

This month's discount is on the 'World Consumer Lifestyles Databook', billed as ".. the ideal source to consult if you need to understand who consumers are, and the major characteristics of their lifestyles". Find out more at http://www.freepint.com/shop/euromonitor/

Free Pint Advertising Ratecard – Book Early

Our ratecard has been updated with prices and offers for advertising with Free Pint in 2003, including fixed price annual accounts giving one million exposures.

However, much space has already been booked and so don't delay if you want to advertise with us in 2003 <http://www.freepint.com/advert.htm>

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EVENTS
<http://www.freepint.com/events>

The 'International Chemical Information Conference & Exhibition' is for all you chemical, patent, and sci-tech information professionals <http://www.freepint.com/go/e108>.

The 'Competia European Symposium 2002' will be 'sharing best practices from world-class organizations, exchanging ideas, and learning from case studies in the field of competitive intelligence' <http://www.freepint.com/go/e97>.

'Internet Librarian 2002' in November is for librarians, researchers and information managers. It will be focusing on the Internet, the World Wide Web and other technology that has transformed the roles within these professions <http://www.freepint.com/go/e156>.

Submit details of your event today for free promotion. Simply complete the form at <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

FREE PINT BAR
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

If you have a tricky research question or can help other Free Pinters then do post a message at the Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar> or the Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student>.

To have the latest Bar postings sent to you every other day, log in to your account online at <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

Author Update Available

This quarter's Free Pint Author Update has been published, and is available online at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>. It has suggestions of ways you might like to contribute to Free Pint, with articles, tipples and possibly running Exchanges.

[Please note, however, that within hours of publication, all the books have already been reserved by reviewers]

TIPS ARTICLE
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/171002.htm#tips>

"Is your site slow, medium or fast, and does it really matter?
Essential Sources for Web Performance Analysis and Improvement"
By John Lewell

John Lewell is Director of Technology Relations Ltd., the London-based PR and sales consultancy that created Internet ProductWatch and, more recently, futureproven.com.

Related Free Pint links:

- "Internet Webmaster" resources in the Free Pint Portal <http://www.freepint.com/go/p183>

- Post a message to the author, John Lewell, or suggest further resources at the Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <http://www.freepint.com/issues/171002.htm#feature>

- Access the entire archive of Free Pint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

The majority of Internet managers, web developers and hosting providers in the UK are poorly informed about issues relating to web performance.

"We have no performance problem," one e-commerce manager told me last week. I checked the speed of an average page on his site using the speed checker at <http://www.siteconfidence.co.uk/>.

It said: "The total download time of the page with all its elements was 47.422 seconds".

Personally, if I have to wait 47 seconds to get served in John Lewis I leave the goods on the counter and walk to Debenhams. Many people do much the same on the Internet.

Here are some facts: only 11 percent of households currently have broadband (9 percent in one estimate); a 56Kbps modem takes 5 seconds to download a 35 kilobyte image.

Less factual is the estimate that the average Internet user clicks away from a page after 8 seconds unless there is a compelling reason to wait longer. Researchers believe the clickaway time has shortened in the past year to around 5 seconds.

The above figures just don't add up. Web sites are overburdened with rich content. And it's not sufficient merely to monitor response times, using <http://www.alertmefirst.com/>, helpful though it is. You have to consider what happens when you squeeze the entire page over that last mile of thin copper wire.

There are at least 20 ways of improving web performance and I've explained all of them at <http://www.futureproven.com/>.

The best and most obvious way to solve the last mile problem (apart from getting everyone to upgrade their connection) is to shrink the data. This can be done with compression at the server. Products range in price from a few hundred to many thousands of dollars. Some even compress dynamic pages "on-the-fly" before the data gets encrypted for security purposes. Decompression takes place at the user's computer, where nearly every browser since Netscape 1.0 has had decompression capabilities.

A more costly and elaborate performance solution is to store some of the content at the edge of the Internet, closer to the user, using Edge Side Includes (ESI). These are additions to the page code that give instructions to search nearby servers for missing elements.

Most prominent among the pioneers of ESI is Akamai <http://www.akamai.com/>, a company that has grown exponentially by establishing a worldwide caching network for frequently accessed page elements.

Content Delivery Networks, such as Akamai and Speedera <http://www.speedera.com>, help to overcome the inherent latency of the Internet -- all those cumulative delays between the originating server and the last mile.

Yet it is back at the originating server where most performance enhancement usually takes place. You can add caching, increasingly part of an integrated performance/security installation. For the latest news on this topic, check: <http://www.web-caching.com/news.html> or the extensive resources at <http://www.caching.com/>.

Other ways of improving your web performance include the essential steps of optimising your graphics and your HTML, offloading TCP processing to specialised hardware, outsourcing DNS, and the more adventurous techniques of route control and sequence reduction, too complex to explain here.

If you are unhappy with your shared hosting service, maybe it's time to move to a dedicated server with a hosting company that has a reputation for speed. Once you have your own server you can add compression to make absolutely sure that your users are getting their pages as fast as possible.

Finally, keep an eye on your site's performance with one of the standard measuring systems such as <http://www.keynote.com/>, <http://www.empirix.com/>, or <http://www.mercuryinteractive.com/>.

Analysing site performance and taking steps to improve it can ensure 100 percent availability. As Jupitermedia <http://www.jupitermedia.com/> has pointed out: "When a site experiences a service outage, 9 percent of customers permanently abandon the site, and 48 percent establish a relationship with a competitor".

With all the remedies that now exist, there's no excuse for poor web performance. So keep up-to-date on the latest techniques by reading <http://www.nwfusion.com/> or some of the other sources mentioned. Your users will thank you for it.

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles
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* Working From Home * Job Hunting * Interview with Jakob Nielsen * Internet Resources on IT * Cataloguing the Web * Health Informatics * Digital Libraries * Venezuela * Vendors * Legal Sources * Competitive Intelligence * Teaching in China * Alternative Search Strategies * Prospect Research * Archive Television * Patents *

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF
<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

"Marketing Concepts for Libraries and Information Services"
Reviewed by Alison Ross-Dow

Alison Ross-Dow is the Information Resource Centre Manager at Aslib- IMI and also works closely with her company's special interest groups and regional branches. She has been in the profession since 1998 and has a keen interest in web design and usability issues. This is her first written piece for Free Pint.

This second, paperback edition of Eileen's book has increased in size from 145 pages to 224, with the addition of two new chapters. These are: chapter five, covering promotion and public relations, and chapter seven, focusing on the new issue of marketing in the digital age. The remaining eight chapters have been reworked and updated presenting the original points from the first edition in a clearer format.

The chapters each cover a different aspect of the marketing process and are clearly laid out with the areas to be covered and a list of useful references for further reading at the end. Until volunteering to review this book, I had not taken the time to read Eileen's earlier edition. These two constituted only the second and third marketing books which I had read, the other being the much shorter "Know How Guide on Marketing" published by Aslib.

I found Eileen's book to be a wealth of knowledge on marketing techniques and practices, but I did feel that if, as an information professional, I was suddenly told to start marketing my service, I would not turn to this book as a quick read. For the information professional or librarian (who Eileen targets as her main audience) with time to indulge in the book, it contains useful examples taken from the public and private sectors. It is good that there is a balance between the two, making the book appeal to a wider audience. However if I was short of time I might find the book somewhat academic, though this only serves to emphasise the worthy background of the author.

Points to take away are the potential new roles for librarians and information professionals. Anyone involved in marketing activity should consider a mix of traditional methods, e.g. press releases or telephone marketing and the 'e' opportunities presented by email and web sites. Eileen suggested that one of the most important aspects of the marketing process is customer relationship management - not wasting time delivering services that customers do not want and would not use. Finally, Eileen said that librarians and information professionals should do what they do best - market research - and apply this together with traditional marketing concepts to old and new environments, always remembering that they are part of the greater corporate identity.

I would say that this is a good, well-researched book, presented suitably to the chosen audience, if they have time to read it. A marketing person by trade may think that the book lacks sophistication, but I feel that Eileen has presented the issues well for a non-marketing audience.

Related Free Pint links:

- Find out more about this book online at the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/market-lib.htm>

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1856044262/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1856044262/freepint00>

- "Marketing Concepts for Libraries and Information Services" ISBN 1856044262, published by Facet Publishing, written by Eileen Elliott de Saez

- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the Free Pint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

- Read about other Internet Marketing books on the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/marketing.htm>

FREE PINT GOLD

This time last year, in our tips article, Duncan Parry provided guidance on useful WAP sites and services available, and Helen Bilton looked at vacancies within the voluntary sector.

- Free Pint No.98 18th October 2001. "WAP Sites and the Mobile Internet" and "Working in Information in the UK Voluntary Sector" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/181001.htm>

Two years ago we took a look at geology web sites and document delivery suppliers.

- Free Pint No.73, 19th October 2000. "Geology On The Web" and "European Document Delivery Suppliers and Resources On The World Wide Web" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/191000.htm>

If you're interested in music then take a look at Carey McIlvenny's article. It will help you get the most out of your searches, and suggest some websites you might want to take a look at. Also in 1999 Richard Wilson dissected ADSL for us.

- Free Pint No.49, 21st October 1999. "Notes on the Net: A trawl around the Music Sites" and "Unblocking the Web: digital technology and the telephone line" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/211099.htm>

Four years ago John Garside talked about modems and Sue Welsh looked at health web sites for consumers.

- Free Pint No.25, 15th October 1998. "How to select and optimise your PC Internet modem" and "A guide to Consumer Health Information on the 'Net" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/151098.htm>

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

FEATURE ARTICLE
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/171002.htm#feature>

**"Taking the Plunge into the Entrepreneurial World
of the Independent Information Professional"
By Penny Leidtke Sienkiewicz**

Penny Leidtke Sienkiewicz, principal of the information research and retrieval firm of On-Target Information Services, has over 18 years experience analyzing, researching, and reporting on companies, industries, economic conditions, and financing strategies. On-Target helps the corporate, financial, and legal communities meet their information needs in connection with valuations, product development, competitive analysis, mergers and acquisitions, securities analysis, strategic planning, and market, industry or economic trend analysis. Penny, whose breaks include attending networking events, seminars, and assisting at a therapeutic riding facility, has given recent presentations on starting an information services business and market research methods. Penny can be reached at <on-targetinfo @erols.com>.

It's 8 p.m. Tuesday evening. The project that came in that morning is due 8 a.m. Wednesday morning. The last person to be interviewed is, so far, unreachable. The DSL line just went down, the keyboard is frozen, the fax machine is jammed, no one has eaten yet, and it sounds like trouble is brewing in the next room. It's a scenario to which many independent information professionals can relate.

A few years ago, I started to question whether I wanted to continue working as Vice President and Director of Research for a small investment bank or to move on and start my own company, providing information research and retrieval services. I enjoyed doing research and running the department, but the firm was going through structural and cultural changes. The future was questionable and it was as good a time as any to look into venturing out on my own. What follows is a broad overview of some of the factors considered, steps taken, and resources used to setup and run On-Target Information Services.

I've included links to selected sources of information useful to entrepreneurs in general and information professionals in particular. Several links to UK and/or European sites are also included, even though On-Target is a US-based firm. There is, however, one caveat: These sites are not the only sources of information available. They are merely a starting point since it would be impossible to list all of them here.

How's the Water?

Among the first questions any entrepreneur needs to answer are what do they have to start with and what do they need to turn their idea into a going concern. Based on my own self-inventory, I believed I was starting with a good foundation: an MBA in International Business combined with years of business writing, analysis, and research experience. I also had an initial group of prospective clients, including my then current employer and some other firms they had referred to me. Finally, I had the interest and drive to set off on my own.

The list of what I needed, however, was much longer. I needed (listed here in no particular order) an office, equipment, supplies, furniture, stationery, business cards, subscriptions to various services, a business plan, a marketing plan and any related materials or supplies, a larger pool of prospective clients, an accountant and a lawyer to help me figure out how to make the business legitimate in the eyes of the federal, state, and city governments. They say the devil is in the detail and they're not kidding. Each item listed above required significant time, money, and effort, not to mention sometimes agonizing decisions. Nevertheless, I decided it was worth the effort, gathered my courage, and dove into the world of the entrepreneur.

Learning to Swim

I started by developing a business plan, albeit an informal one.

First, I needed to find out about the industry and its prospects, how business was conducted, and how clients were located. This is where industry trade associations are useful. I was already a member of the Special Libraries Association <http://www.sla.org> but I found the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP), at <http://www.aiip.org> was even a closer fit and immediately joined. Not only does AIIP provide information on the industry via conferences, white papers, and other materials, but it also offers ongoing guidance through the community of members that participate in its listserv.

In addition to SLA and AIIP, there are numerous other organizations that may be useful to you depending on your area of interest, including (but not limited to):

- Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) <http://www.scip.org>

- The European Information Researchers Network (EIRENE) <http://www.eirene.com>

- American Society for Information Science & Technology <http://www.asis.org>

- American Libraries Association <http://www.ala.org>

Active memberships in these and other similar associations, and participation in any related electronic forums, can help keep you informed of industry developments, new search strategies, options related to business operations, equipment and service selections, and possibly provide access to vendor discount programs. Many -- AIIP and SLA included -- welcome international members.

While these associations are an invaluable source of information, other sources such as newspapers, periodicals, monographs, presentations, and books are also helpful. A few (among the many) that I found useful are: Information Today; Searcher; Online; 'The Information Brokers Handbook' by Sue Rugge and Alfred Glossbrener; the Super Searchers series including the recent 'Super Searchers Make it on Their Own' which was reviewed for Free Pint by Marylaine Block in issue #118 ; and "How to Avoid Liability: The Information Professional's Guide to Negligence and Warranty Risks" by T.R. Halvorson.

But while there is no substitute for knowing about the industry in which you are operating, you (or a partner or associate if you have one) must understand the nitty-gritty aspects of actually setting up and running a business in general. There are countless sites dedicated to

the entrepreneur, including various federal, state, and local government sites, to help you set-up and run your new business. A few good general ones are:

- U.S. Small Business Administration <http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov>

- U.S. Business Advisor - <http://www.business.gov/> - a site created with the assistance of the Small Business Association and maintained by them to be a one-stop link to federal information and services for the business community. The "Info Desk" section also provides links to state business programs.

- Startup Journal from The Wall Street Journal Center for Entrepreneurs <http://www.startup.wsj.com>

- CCH Business Owner's Toolkit <http://www.toolkit.cch.com>

There are similar sites in other countries as well. For instance, in the U.K. check out the Department of Trade & Industry <http://www.dti.gov.uk/for_business.html>, the related Small Business Service <http://www.sbs.gov.uk>, and their online advice site at <http://www.businesslink.org>.

The British Libraries Business Information Services <http://www.bl.uk/services/information/busin ess.html> site includes fact sheets and links to business sources on the Internet and is worth visiting if you are thinking of starting a business. Crimson Publishing's site <http://www.startups.co.uk> is also worth a visit.

Diving In

Once the research, the plan, and all the government forms were completed, the office was set up and the equipment and subscriptions were in place (all of which took almost a year), I was ready to announce to the world that On-Target Information Services was open for business. Okay. Now the real work began.

I had to find and hopefully retain clients, keep up to date with developments in my field and the fields of my target market(s), and do all of the administrative work associated with running a business. You know, all that work that other people do for you when you work for someone else.

Parkinson's Law states that 'Work expands to fill the time available for its completion'. If you doubt it's true, start your own business. For added 'fun', run it out of your home. With the office in your home, it is very easy to roll out of bed and into the office. Before you know it, you're exhausted, your family life is a mess, and your work suffers eventually as well. What to do? Basically, you have to find a balance and take a break. Go for a walk or jog, do yoga, water the garden, or talk to a friend about anything but business.

One way to take a small break, but still be doing something constructive and necessary for the business, is to dedicate some time to networking activities. Networking is exceptionally important

in the information research and retrieval industry. A majority of our business comes from someone we know, or someone that was referred to us by someone we know or by someone we've met at some time or other, or by someone who knows someone who knows someone ... get the picture?

First, you need to connect with your colleagues. In addition to joining the different associations and attending conferences, one way to do this is to participate in various electronic discussion groups such as Free Pint, AIIP-L, BUSLIB-L, MEDLIB-L, or any of the various groups connected with SLA or other organizations, including those mentioned earlier. Not only do these groups help you connect with your colleagues, but they also help you learn about new sites, strategies, and issues facing your industry and business. Keep in mind, though, that some of these groups require membership before you can participate in their electronic forums. They may also serve as an electronic 'water cooler'. Working at home can be very isolating and they provide an opportunity to 'speak' with other people about work and possibly other unrelated topics if permitted as spelled out in the group's guidelines.

But, your colleagues are not the only people you need to be in touch with. You have to get out and meet the members of your target market. It is vital to the success of your business to stay apprised of developments and issues of importance to both active and prospective clients. It is equally important to expand your pool of contacts and widen your market. And, networking is the way to go.

Check into which organizations or associations are relevant to your business and join those that you feel will be most beneficial. Attend meetings, volunteer at events if you have the time, write articles or columns, and stay in front of your market as much as possible. But don't spread yourself too thin. You can always drop one group and join another if the first one doesn't turn out to be worthwhile.

Two important things to remember about networking are that you rarely see results immediately and it is never a one-shot deal. It is ongoing. I've heard one theory that says that there has to be at least 12 separate interactions before the contact becomes a client. True or not, the moral is to never pass up the opportunity to meet someone new or to get reacquainted with someone you've met before without a compelling reason to the contrary.

After looking around, I joined the local chamber of commerce, a consultant's network, and an entrepreneurs group that includes various service providers as part of its membership. These three provide wide coverage of my target market and they each have regular meetings or networking events. They are local organizations but many of the members have contacts with prospective clients in other cities or states. That's how I wound up with a client several states away.

How do you find the associations relevant to you and your market? Word-of-mouth and research are the standard methods. There are several directories, online and in print, that are very useful. The Encyclopedia of Associations: National Organizations of the U.S. from Gale and

the Gateway to Associations Online from the American Society of Association Executives <http://info.asaenet.org/gateway/OnlineAssocSlist.html> are good directories of U.S.-based associations, many of which are open to international members. Gale also publishes an international version of its directory titled The Encyclopedia of Associations: International Organizations.

Another source of business associations from around the world is The Directory of Associations from Concept Marketing Group <http://www.marketingsource.com/associations/>, which is available on a subscription basis. Other sources of U.K. associations include the Trade Association Network Challenge's Directory of Trade Associations <http://www.brainstorm.co.uk/TANC/Directory/Welcome.html> and the online directory from the Trade Association Forum at <http://www.taforum.org/searchgroup.pl?N=500>. If you are looking for Chambers of Commerce, visit <http://www.worldchambers.com> which provides summary information and links to chambers around the world.

Meeting prospective clients is half the battle, turning them into clients and keeping them is the other half. For that reason, never forget networking activities apply to existing clients as well. Follow-up with each new prospect and keep following up over the course of your relationship. Look for reasons to make contact with both prospective and active clients. Send an e-mail, call, or write about a recent development, an invitation, a copy of your newsletter, or anything else that will be of value to them and will keep your name in front of them as someone willing and able to help them with their business. But, do not bombard them with junk. We all have enough of that and it will likely work against you.

Rough Waters?

If you are at all shy, networking can prove to be quite a challenge. However, it's amazing how outgoing you can become if your livelihood is on the line. Start small and set reasonable goals. Select a few gatherings that are, for you, low stress. This can mean that you already know one or more people attending the event, you are familiar with the facilities, or you are exceptionally interested in the topic.

For some, it may be enough to walk away from the event with just one or two new contacts initially. You can't network effectively if you're so tense you can't speak and a bad networking experience can send you running for the hills. As you become more comfortable, the number of people you meet will increase and networking may actually turn out to be more than just a necessary evil. You may learn to like it. After all, it gets you out of the office (or your house if the office is located there), you may learn something new, and you just might meet new clients.

Running a business on a day-to-day basis is a never ending series of challenges punctuated by a few disappointments but many more rewards. I plunged into the entrepreneurial world of the independent information professional a few years ago and did not drown. I have treaded water from time to time, like most business owners. The important thing is to lay a good foundation, take advantage of and contribute to your industry associations, and network and follow-up with members of your target market. Finally, keep your eye on your goal at all times but re-evaluate it and the methods you are using to reach it from time to time. Nothing is constant in life or business.

GOODBYE

Many thanks for reading today's Free Pint. We really hope you enjoyed it. Don't forget to make your nomination for the Customer Service Award at <http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2002/>.

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Managing Editor <william@freepint.com>

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Contributors to this issue:
William Hann (Managing Editor), Penny (Administrator), Helen Clegg, John Lewell, Alison Ross-Dow, Penny Leidtke Sienkiewicz, Plain Text <http://www.plain-text.co.uk/> (proof reading)

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FREE PINT

Managing Editor William Hann BSc(Hons) MCLIP
william@freepint.com

Free Pint Limited
4-6 Station Approach
Ashford, Middlesex
TW15 2QN, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1784 420044
Fax: +44 (0)1784 420033

Technology by Willco
<http://www.willco.com/>

WEB: www.freepint.com

EMAIL: info@freepint.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS: subs@freepint.com

AUTHORS: www.freepint.com/author.htm

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