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Creating a buzz

Wasp Barcode Technologies went in-house to optimize its Web site, luring online visitors and quadrupling sales

By [Karen Nielsen](#) Correspondent

As president of [Wasp Barcode Technologies](#), Steve Coffman knows plenty about helping small businesses improve productivity. But even the best product falls on deaf ears if nobody is listening.

So last year, the Plano company -- which uses bar-coding as the backbone for managing inventory, assets, point-of-sale and other functions -- took a unique approach in reaching its potential market of more than 2 million small businesses. Instead of throwing money at Web marketing strategies, Wasp spent less -- and got better results.



JAKE DEAN

MIGHTY STING: Wasp Barcode Technologies, led by Steve Coffman, uses bar-coding techniques to help small businesses automate inventory and asset management, point-of-sale and other functions.

and YouTube demos.

"It's an area that needs to be in-house," Coffman said. "If you're not on top of it, day to day, it can move quickly, and you're behind the curve and you don't even realize it."

The company focused on improving search-engine optimization rankings in-house, versus paying a service to buy placement on search-engine results pages.

"It's not the optimum way to do business," Coffman said of paying for placement. "We did a lot of that in 2004 and 2005, and we got a lot of Web traffic, but the goal is to be ranked organically. In late 2006 and 2007, we launched into this concerted effort to make sure we were relevant, which would lead to organic rankings."

Wasp cut its external spending by 13% and reinvested the funds into in-house personnel, who "re-architected" the site so searchers would find it easier to use and more relevant. Those steps meant optimizing the site for specific key words such as "asset tracking" and "inventory control" and continuing to add richer online content, including slide show presentations, Webinars

The efforts are paying off in a multitude of ways. In 2007, the company's Web hits grew by 60%, topping 600,000 visits.

The added visibility makes the company appear large and established, and bodes well with resellers such as Fry's and [Staples](#) who rely on brand awareness to sell Wasp's products, Coffman said.

It also helps Wasp reach small businesses, which often turn to the Web for technology guidance.

Wasp is unique in that its products are geared toward small businesses in virtually every industry. At the top of the list are light manufacturing, warehouse and distribution companies and small retailers. Its asset products are increasingly popular with governmental agencies.

"Our core value proposition of the company is that we can take a process such as POS (point of sales) or inventory control, and we can make it easy to use for the end user -- easy to install and easy to maintain," Coffman said.

[Seals & Packing](#), based in Richardson, uses Wasp's biometric time clock to improve the efficiency of its clocking in and payroll functions.

Holly Keller, human resource manager at Seals & Packing, said Wasp has helped bring her company into the 21st century with fingerprint scanning. It also reduced the time spent on payroll from one day to less than two hours, and provided visual training for Seals & Packing employees, many of whom are Hispanic and have limited English-speaking skills.

Right direction

Reaching the small business "market" is no small feat, but Coffman -- whose previous experience includes stints as president of [Bibbentuckers](#) dry cleaners, a small business consultant at [Deloitte & Touche](#) and former mayor of the city of Prosper -- appears to be steering the company in the right direction.

Since he joined Wasp in 2001, the company has quadrupled its sales to \$20 million. It recently inked a deal to place several of the company's productivity solutions on the shelves of 1,400 Staples stores. Wasp also continues to expand its presence in Australia and Canada.

"At the end of the day, all of the products we sell are geared to give the small business an edge in efficiency or productivity," Coffman said. "The same things that we are selling and preaching to our customers are allowing us to add more efficiency, productivity and more controls in our organization."

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