For many internet businesses the differentiating factor will be the ability to attract and retain customers. This chapter will help you do this. It is equally valid for Internet start-ups, and for established brands that are seeking to add an Internet strand to their existing business offering. It assumes an audience which is not necessarily expert in marketing and communications. If you are already an old hand at these, you might find some useful reminders, but the chances are that much will already be familiar to you.

**Introduction: the Internet brand landscape**

**Developing a communications strategy and plan**

So you’ve got your business idea, the technology is being tested, the funding is on the way, but you still need a marketing and communications strategy to complete your business plan and move into action. Where do you start? What do you need to do?

**Co-creating**

Is marketing an Internet brand the same as a brand from the offline world?

Yes and no. Many of the questions and disciplines remain the same, but the priorities are slightly different.

‘Strategy needs to be created from the future backward, not the present forwards’ (Gary Hamel, business guru and co-author of *Competing for the Future*, 1994). Because many of the Internet companies are start-ups, they
are less weighted by the past and can therefore avoid the old structures and invent a better solution. Although the dot.com brands have a greater freedom to re-invent the established rules, the rush of new companies means that those looking for long term business success may find they need an even deeper understanding of their potential customers, their needs and motivations, than was the case for traditional brands.

Probably the greatest difference introduced by online businesses is the amount of time taken to move from brief to finished ad. Conventionally, the process might take months of research, analysis, honing, refinement and deep thinking. With the dot.coms, the timing is more likely to be in days, rather than weeks or months. In itself this is transforming the traditional communications companies, who are having to re-think how they do business.

These time pressures demand a new way of working. No longer the old fashioned silos of responsibility. Such a compression of usual timetables requires a more co-operative approach; clients and their agency/business partners need to work together to ‘co-create’. More fun for everyone, but it also requires a high degree of discipline in terms of who can approve ideas. (The outside architecture of the Millennium Dome was signed-off by one person; its interior was decided by a committee of public servants and politicians – decide for yourself.)

There may not be enough time to implement all of the different elements of the process in depth, but the questions and issues remain the same. This chapter seeks to provide straightforward help and support as to how to develop a powerful and effective communications plan and execution. For those who do not have time to get any further than this page, go straight to the end of the chapter, where you will find a 10-minute strategy plan.

**Dare to dream**

Companies operating on the Internet are driven by energy and a ‘can do’ mentality. They are reintroducing the entrepreneurial spirit of small business into many larger corporations which, until recently, had managed to insulate themselves from this momentum. So dare to dream, and dream big. One of the most exciting aspects of the Internet is that all sorts of opportunities are now possible. In the past, they would have been unimaginable. The technology is creating new possibilities to connect with other people.

There is, however, a balance of the dream: dream your dream to the limits; and at the same time be very down-to-earth when it comes to