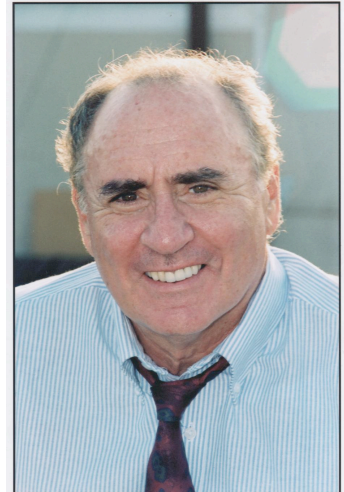


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### **Internet makes for level field to play on**

Over the past ten to fifteen years the technology revolution, particularly the Internet, has changed the consumer behavior landscape dramatically for both small and large companies.

The Internet provides smaller companies an entrance into the global marketplace. It's inexpensive for a start-up company to set up a website. A virtual store doesn't have the overhead expense of a traditional store. Moreover, customers can come from all over, not just locally.

As a playwright, I market plays by emailing flyers to past, current, and prospective theatergoers from lists I maintain or lists kept by the theater company to which I belong, The Lonny Chapman Group Repertory Theatre. I also prepare individualized flyers highlighting each actor, which they can send to their personal contact list. It costs nothing to send these emails.

On the other hand, firms with larger budgets can advertise online. Online advertising budgets have increased substantially over recent years. Often, money allocated to online advertising is taken from funds formerly allocated to traditional media.

Before the Internet, if consumers wanted product information, they visited an actual store or obtained literature from a catalog or magazine. Of course, they also contacted friends, family, and associates, which they still do. But nowadays they also scour for information from websites, chat rooms, and online reviews.

There has been a huge growth of online purchasing of all sorts of items ranging from tickets to clothing to hard to find items like My-T-Fine, a chocolate pudding I had as a kid that I cannot find at any stores nearby. In many cases, products can be customized over the Internet with customers easily ordering what features they want.

When customers buy over the Internet, companies keep records of the purchases and maintain a database to be used in future marketing. For example, companies email customers about sales, new products, and coupons.

Companies may also use these databases to conduct market research surveys to improve or grow their business. Surveys are conducted easily and relatively inexpensively online. More surveys are conducted online now than any other method, including by telephone, by mail, or in person. While online research has limitations (such as being ineffective for open-end questions), many companies feel they can live with these limitations, given the cost and speed of online surveys.