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Virtual trade show offers business opportunity in Naples market <http://naples-expo.com>

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<http://gigabo.com> a Lee County paid database engine for a similar Lee County advertising online business]

By Laura Layden

Monday, July 30, 2007

Forget the key chains, pencils and stress balls.

Businesses don't need them for a new trade show started by a Collier County couple. The virtual trade show offers local companies a way to market themselves 24/7. It's found at Naples-Expo.com.

The grand opening is Sept. 1.

It's online. You can definitely go out there and see what it is. We just don't have very many exhibitors on display yet. It's going to take awhile, said Sue Haberkorn, a co-founder of the site.

She and her husband, John Haberkorn, have big plans for their latest venture. The couple, in their 60s, have more than 25 years of experience in sales and marketing. They've been in business together for close to 40 years.

On the site there's room for 900 exhibitors. One day the Haberkorns hope to have that many.

It's all about advertising local businesses locally, Sue Haberkorn said.

On the site, you can find exhibitors by category. There are 10 primary categories including transportation, retail, finance and insurance, contractors and real estate.

It covers the whole gamut, she said.

The new site offers more than the printed page in a magazine or newspaper, she said. Companies can use audio and video clips to advertise their products and services.

They get to tell their story, Sue Haberkorn said. They can tell what their business is all about.

The Haberkorns prepare the slides and videos for exhibitors.

Business cards and directions with a map can be printed from the site. Coupons are available.

This is just something we saw the need for, Sue Haberkorn said. Naples businesses are always looking for more exposure and the Internet is the way to go. Over 60 percent of consumers look on the Internet before they buy a product or service.

The idea has been in development for several years. Marketing began about six months ago.

The site offers three booth sizes.

In a silver booth, a business gets one slide show presentation.

In a gold booth, a company gets two slide shows. Add streaming video and you get a platinum booth.

The annual cost for exhibitors ranges from less than \$500 to about \$1,300, depending on their booth size and the services they request.

State Farm Insurance, Stock Realty and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary are among the first exhibitors on the site.

One of the big hotels in town has signed up for the service, and so has the Raymond L. Lutgert Cancer Center, Haberkorn said.

Brian Glaeser, a State Farm agent and owner of Brian Glaeser Insurance Agency Inc. in East Naples, has his own Web site and advertises in newspapers and the Yellow Pages. But he_s added his name to Naples-Expo.com because he sees it as yet another way to reach out to new customers.

We did it because we felt like it was another source to get our name out, he said.

The Web can be especially effective in reaching the younger generation, Glaeser said.

This year one of our goals in our agency was to try to find ways to get out there on the Internet more in a good positive way, and I thought this was a good positive way to do it on a localized basis, he said.

He also sees the service as cost-effective.

Mary Horesco, a Realtor at Stock Realty, said she_s using the new site to give buyers a sampling of her listings and as a marketing tool to get more clients.

_I think nowadays that one has to be on top of every market tool one can if you_re in the real estate profession,_ she said.

In a down market, it_s tough to reach buyers. And with so many homes on the market, getting your listing noticed can be difficult.

Gone are the days that you can list your house and get it sold in 30 or 60 days, Horesco said. _It_s a longer, harder drive to do that. The more exposure you have the better._

The booth on the Web site is one example of how her company is trying to stay ahead of its competitors, she said.

She has given the Haberkorns her own ideas about how to make the site useful to businesses and residents.

We are all partners together in this, she said.

A marketing blitz is under way that includes radio, TV and newspaper advertising. The Haberkorns also are pitching their site at movie theaters.

The business has seven employees, including three sales associates. But there are plans for growth.

The Haberkorns, who live in eastern Collier County, have been in business in the area since 1989. Since 1995, they_ve operated IAM Unlimited LLC, a company that has created software programs for a variety of businesses.

Down the road, the couple plans to create similar Web sites for businesses in other markets, including Fort

Myers, Tampa, Fort Lauderdale and Orlando.

We may not do a major city like Miami, she said. _I_m not sure._

For now, the focus is on Naples.

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