

Topic: E-commerce Business Plan Pilot Event for 2002

Advisors: Anne Westrich (Wisconsin State Advisor), Dennis Sweetapple (Spanish River, Florida), Kristin Crowe (Washington State Advisor)

In this column, we address the opportunities presented in the new E-commerce Business Plan Pilot Event. Those who delved into the area of e-commerce with last year's E-commerce Management Team Decision Making event found the area to be much less daunting than they might have thought originally. Now it's time for others to join them and encourage your members to approach this area—they're interested in it and they know quite a lot about it. Remember to use their expertise.

The task before participants is to "research and design a plan to start an e-commerce business or component of an existing e-commerce business."

Before you begin to plan an approach to the event, look at the written entry evaluation form. For this initial year, the form closely resembles the form of a marketing research event. Since the event is a pilot, the format is still in development. The Competitive Event Task Force says you can expect to see the form move more toward an entrepreneurship event next year.

But for this year, note how many points on the sheet are devoted to research for the site. Items III and IV deal with the research and the findings of the research. The total number of points available in these categories is 28.

So the question arises how to do the research. There are multiple avenues of research for determining the desirability of the site. Students can find out the demographic of most e-commerce shoppers and

go to places where those people can be found. They can determine what demographic would be interested in their product or service and do research among that group. Last year one DECA e-commerce researcher did the survey from his own Web site; he received thousands of replies. Students can also go to a bricks and mortar business that deals in the products of interest and do the research there.

As students are getting started, they will want to go to the Web to look for an existing business like theirs. Not only can they get ideas from that site, but they might decide to focus on a missing component of an established site and then approach a bricks and mortar unit of that business for permission to do a survey on the appeal of that missing element.

Still having trouble getting used to this leading-edge topic? You can always look at the E-commerce MDM winners from last year (available through DECA IMAGES) and see how they handled the topic.

Here are a few frequently asked questions about the e-commerce area.

FAQ 1

The description of the event in the official guidelines does not mention whether I can establish an e-commerce site for an existing bricks and mortar store. Can I?

Yes, you may. Several members of the Competitive Events Task Force were polled on this issue and replied in the affirmative.

FAQ 2

Do I have to be technically adept at actually constructing a Web site in order to do this

event?

First of all, look again at the evaluation form. The Web site itself will only be dealt with as a proposed activity under section V.B. It is important to know what features a Web site might have, but not crucial to know how to actually construct a site. You will have to budget for technical services if you won't be doing it yourself.

This column was written with the advice of Ann Westrich, Wisconsin state advisor, and Kristin Crowe, Washington state advisor, (both members of the Competitive Events Task Force), and Dennis Sweetapple, advisor at Spanish River High School