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MICROSOFT LINKS TO COMPANION WEB SITE DEVELOPED AND OPERATED BY A COLLEGE JUNIOR

DAYTON, Ohio — American consumers are expected to spend nearly \$5 billion this year buying from online retailers, and sales may grow to as much as \$17 billion by 2001.

It's a lucrative market, but one rife with technical challenges. E-commerce requires sophisticated Web sites and secure credit-card transactions, and companies such as Barnes and Noble, Eddie Bauer, Dell Computer Corp. and 1-800-Flowers have turned to Microsoft's Site Server software to manage their online sales.

Retailers who hit snags or want to find out more about how the software operates can depend on a 20-year-old University of Dayton junior from Detroit who anticipated the popularity of Site Server. As a personal project over the summer, Brian Fino developed SiteServer.com (www.siteserver.com), a Web site that offers free support and information about the Microsoft software. Columnists regularly contribute to the site, sharing their experiences as they explore the capabilities of the commerce edition of Site Server 3.0, released in July.

Fino, a full-time computer engineering major at UD, received the ultimate compliment when Microsoft recently included a link to his site from its Site Builder Network Workshop Web site (<http://www.Microsoft.com/workshop/default.asp>) designed to provide help for users. Of the 144 helpful links on the server technologies page ([wysiwyg://99/http://www.Microsoft.com/workshop/server/contents.htm](http://www.Microsoft.com/workshop/server/contents.htm)), only 11 are hosted by non-Microsoft providers. The rest are links to other pages on the Microsoft site.

"I put off the rest of my personal projects for the summer," Fino explains. "It was important to get this right." He contacted software developers and programmers to get suggestions for topics that should be covered, developed a glossary of terms, found the answers to frequently asked questions, recruited columnists and set up the Web site — using Site Server.

One of the regular contributors is Clancy Cross, executive editor of SiteServer.com and director of the University of Dayton Research Institute's Web Development Center, which hosts the site and where Fino is a student employee. Cross, a programmer who for several years has turned his attentions more to management than programming, is exploring the various features of Site Server from a manager's point of view in his biweekly column, "Back to the Trenches."

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"You will have the opportunity (this word I use gratuitously) to see my development foibles, every grunt and groan, as I stumble along in full view of the world," he wrote in his first column.

"We are unapologetic in our excitement about Site Server, but are not shills for it or for Microsoft," Cross also wrote. "The best service SiteServer.com can offer to our visitors is to call it as we see it. Therefore, you can expect the straight scoop, plus a little fun along the way."

The Microsoft software has attracted successful Web clients for a reason, Fino says. "It does everything you need to create an online business, and it lets you expand infinitely," Fino says. The software provides retailers with the ability to accept advertising, personalize sites for users, track membership and analyze site traffic. It can also provide mass distribution of e-mail messages, search capabilities and one-click processing for purchasing products.

Fino stumbled across the Site Server opportunity in June when he learned that Wayne Berry had registered the siteserver.com domain name. Berry, system administrator and technical adviser for 15seconds.com and Sign Me Up Marketing, who occasionally corresponded with Fino, couldn't fit a new project into his schedule but was eager for someone to develop the new site.

"He basically said, 'Take it and have fun with it,'" Fino says, "although we've since made a contractual agreement." The University of Dayton Research Institute extended financial backing, hardware, labor and other resources for the site through the Web Development Center.

Fino is a veteran of online commerce, albeit on the consumer side of the action. "I routinely buy CDs on the Web and get books from amazon.com," Fino says. "And every computer I've ever owned I've bought through Dell online."

Fino is confident of the security of credit-card purchases online. "I don't worry about it. If someone wants my credit card number that desperately, they can raid the floor of my car for credit-card receipts."

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