

My family has always had a love for basketball. They love basketball at most every level, with the only exception being the NBA. March is one of our favorite times of the year because of the amount and intensity of the college games. In the past some of us have filled out brackets for fun just to see if who could predict the most wins. This year we upgraded to on-line "bracket-ology".

My oldest daughter Emily set up the just for fun pool using CBS Sports Online, and invited her immediate family and cousins to play. All in all only 8 of us entered the pool, 6 out of the 7 Friedmans, an uncle and 1 of 22 cousins on my wife's side. The cousin, a Drake graduate, picked his alma mater to go all the way. Others had more practical picks. CBS started sending us updates via e-mail once the tournament began. After the first round I was tied for 2nd place, after the 2nd round I was all alone in 1st, and very proud of it. It was fun to be able to keep track of who was winning and their potential to keep winning without doing a lot of work.

Now that we are awaiting the outcome of the final four, I am in second place. 23 year old daughter Katie has vaulted from dead last after 2 rounds to 1st place with a pretty comfortable lead. She has 3 of the final 4 teams correctly picked while I have only 2 of the 4, and my 2 play each other. To make matters worse, we both have the same team (North Carolina) picked to win the entire tournament. The odds of me winning the pool are not very good.

But that is not the point of my story. When we were in Sioux City for Easter, Emily found out that several of her basketball loving cousins had participated in their own on-line pool, forsaking ours. When Emily asked her cousins, they said it was too hard. Not hard selecting their teams, hard in the sense that they had to either give too much information or spend too much time getting through all the bureaucracy to participate. Apparently the Yahoo on-line brackets were less time consuming.

Hearing them talk about ease of use made me think of my own tendencies in using the internet. I completed the CBS Sports bracket for a couple of reasons; first it was the bracket Emily set up for the family. Second I had no idea that there was anything out there that might be easier. Then I started thinking about web sites I use and those that I used to use.

As owners and managers of small businesses, most of us don't have a choice but to make our business known via the internet. Most of us don't have a clue on how to set up a web site, or frankly how ours should look. I am willing to guess that most of us set up web sites because we thought we had to. Some have taken advantage of the internet and are selling products using this medium. Some are using the internet to enhance their level of service and convenience.

If you have a web site and are using it to sell or enhance service, congratulations! But we still need to ask the question: "how easy is your site to use?" Ask some of your

customers for their opinions. Ask people who are not in your industry and not internet savvy for their opinions. There is a fine line between bureaucracy and good on-line security, and most people understand where that line is. Do you? I suggest you also ask professionals for their help and then test for practicality.

By the time you read this, the college basketball season will be complete, and Katie most likely would have won the pool, with all the glory and honor it brings. No money. Then we will have to wait a whole year to get better at online “bracket-ology”.