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ERA UNVEILS NEW SEMINAR PLANS FOR 2001

By Edward Easton

The Electronic Retailing Association, comprised of a select group of industry movers and shakers that market products via electronic broadcast or on the internet, is in the beginning stages of setting its 2001 agenda, which will focus on helping entrepreneurs, small manufacturers and inventors get innovative products to market

Every September The ERA holds a monster bash and trade show in Las Vegas. To make next year's even more memorable, special blue ribbon panels will fan out across the country to hold educative workshops and seminars for neophytes wishing to bring new products to market.

Garage tinkerers and inventors who come up with these often carry their ideas to prototype stage, but have no clue about where to go from there. The ERA feels that many of these efforts founder simply from lack of exposure or ignorance of marketing strategies. To this end the workshops will address these and other issues plaguing the little guy with a terrific idea.

Ron Perlstein of Concept Media has been chosen by the ERA leadership to sit on a blue ribbon panel that will set rules and criteria for identifying ideas and products that will actually take off and fly. Perlstein will also sit on advisory panels that will guide newly fledged entrepreneurs through the maze of the broadcast and electronic marketing world. The effort will concentrate on large cities across the country, beginning with Miami in late February.

"The idea is to wind up with a 'trade show within a trade show' that will give product innovators a shot at the big guns of marketing and manufacturing at the main event in September," says Perlstein.

Normally at a big trade show, an exhibition booth costs thousands of dollars. At the ERA conference and Trade Show in Las Vegas, there will be a Product Pavilion where almost anyone can have a booth costing as little as a few hundred dollars. Here they will have a chance to network with other members of the industry and get feedback on their wares.

The ERA leadership will move among them and select those with the most promise for the *Product Showcase*. These will be products and services that best lend themselves to electronic marketing as well as being truly innovative.

The big event will include an awards dinner where the "best in show" candidates will be chosen, garnering further attention and publicity. The winners participating in the Product Showcase will benefit from the scrutiny of heavy-duty industry marketing types who can help get these products off the ground and into—literally "onto" the air, either through further development funding or advanced marketing strategies, or both.

Perlstein adds, "The general idea is for these innovators to go home with a deal from a big company that will guarantee their marketing success. It will also ensure that the best of the new products and services get worldwide exposure."

SWIMMING WITH SHARKS— WEAR A KEVLAR WET SUIT.

By Edward Easton

Make no mistake, there are sharks in the marketing waters, and some of them are "Great Whites" that can reach 25 feet or more in length. They can smell the blood of ignorance or naiveté from miles away. They can also swallow a little guy whole in one gulp.

Forewarned is forearmed. And the best way to do that is to be educated in their ways.

You have an innovative product or a service that you know will fly in the marketplace, but you lack funding to develop it, or marketing expertise to sell it. How do you know that the guy offering to provide these things is not a "Greek bearing gifts"? Without competent legal advice, you *don't*. You want your funding, but not if it includes a "Trojan Horse".

Contracts and legal documents can be confusing and embedded with time bombs. Licensing arrangements, participation deals and various enfranchisements are fraught with these.

Before you describe your invention in detail or lay out your plans before a potential benefactor, be sure they sign a *non-disclosure agreement*. A reputable company or individual will always sign such a document, but the knock-off "Great Whites" will not. And they will offer a hundred seemingly pertinent reasons why they can't—or won't—and they're experts at making *you* feel like a fool for even asking it of them.

In the above event...

Run! Don't walk, for the nearest *exit!*

YOUR SUCCESS IS OUR SUCCESS...