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# Better Business Basics

**ERIC ABRAMS**

Sunday, January 13, 2002

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## **Buying pineapple can be demanding**

[Securing your computer](#)

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You all have read about supply and demand determining prices in markets of varying degrees of competition. So what happens if the business doesn't do the supply side of the business properly? Correct! Demand and prices don't mean a thing. I think you'll get the idea from the following true story.

I recently spent a summer conducting research and teaching in Iowa. Toward the end of my trip, I realized my sister's birthday was quickly approaching. She lives in

Massachusetts and loves fresh pineapple. Unfortunately, her taste for pineapple comes at a cost as she has a reaction to the acid in the pineapple -- her mouth itches. During her last visit to Hawaii I introduced her to the joys of sugarloaf pineapple, which has very low acid content. Never has she enjoyed pineapple so much in her life. Her only reaction was "mmmmmmmm."

Combine my sister's love for sugarloaf pineapple, my love for my sister, her approaching birthday, the noticeable absence of sugarloaf pineapples in stores in Massachusetts and Iowa, and you reach with the same conclusion I did -- I have to find an online retailer of sugarloaf pineapple. Of course there are other solutions, but this is the one I was after and it's my story.

After conducting an exhaustive online search, I found an online retailer who ships sugarloaf pineapples. This retailer looked even better when I priced the pineapples, including shipping. The total price was acceptable so I placed the order. The retailer's Web site allowed for my credit card information to be entered securely (a necessity these days). I was somewhat surprised at not receiving an e-mail confirming receipt of my order almost immediately -- or at all, as it turned out -- but I was hopeful the order would be received by the end of the week as her birthday was that weekend. I placed the order on Monday.

By Friday evening my sister still hadn't received her pineapples. I e-mailed the retailer. "The order wasn't received. Was it shipped?" The reply. "Wait until Monday as sometimes it takes a couple extra days." This was not what I wanted to see, as I paid for second day air, not that I was given a choice.

The next Monday came and went and off went another e-mail. This time the reply stated the supplier was short on pineapples the week I placed the order and I was now at the top of the list. By Friday my sister should have her pineapples.

Why didn't the retailer know he had a supply problem? He needs supply chain management. The supplier could indicate how many pineapples he picked so the retailer could determine how many orders could be filled that week. Supply chain management would also help with customer service. It would allow the retailer to contact the customer based on information from the supplier. Perhaps if I had known of the supply problem, I would have sought other methods of getting pineapples to my sister in time for her birthday.

I'm sure this retailer thought of how wonderful the Web is and how he can make his fortune by using it. What he apparently didn't consider is that the Web can also harm a business. Online retail is a detail-oriented endeavor and if a detail is not considered, customers are affected.

The retailer also needs an improved customer service policy as I should have been e-mailed that the order was received. When the delay was imminent I should have been notified. Later, I should have received a UPS tracking number.

The morale of this story is: forget about market research and pricing strategy, and demand forecasts for a while. If you don't handle the supply side of the business properly, your customers go elsewhere.

That's all for now. I'm off to find some lobsters (from Maine, of course). I think I'll search online.

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# Securing Your Computer

**RICK MARINE**

Sunday, January 13, 2002

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## **A resolution to protect your computer will pay rewards**

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There's been a great deal of conversation in the mainland press over the past several months about "homeland security" and I'd like to bring the subject a little closer to our Island home. With the new year upon us, perhaps it's time to look a little more closely at a potential security hazard that we can all do something about.

The issue I'd like to address concerns personal computers -- those boxes that sit on nearly

everyone's desk at home or at the office.

Though the likelihood of a terrorist attack in your Honolulu office or North Shore home is remote, if you're on DSL or cable modem the odds of your computer being probed by a stranger is 100 percent if you don't pay attention to security. This is not the rant of an alarmist, it's just a fact of life that any network engineer can explain.

Though broadband connections -- which allow us to be so much more productive -- are ubiquitous in Hawaii, most businesses do not pay attention to the other side of the coin. Leaving your computer on 24/7 is great for getting instant e-mail but without a firewall or other measures it's akin to leaving your most intimate personal correspondence or confidential business ledger open to the world.

Unbeknownst to most people, hackers use specially developed programs to incessantly probe the Internet for open ports that may lead to the computers of unsuspecting users.

Some of the hackers are innocuous. However others are looking to steal credit card numbers, Social Security numbers or other data.

Some nefarious types may even want to plant a "Trojan horse" -- malicious code that might be used to hijack your machine in a "denial of service" attack on computer servers.

It's easy to illustrate this point.

Just download a free program such as of ZoneAlarm ([www.zonelabs.com](http://www.zonelabs.com)) or BlackICE ([www.blackice.com](http://www.blackice.com)). Follow the instructions and you'll instantly see how many times a day someone is probing your system, looking for an open port to gain entry.

In addition to lax network and home PC security there are other issues that concern me. In a recent survey our company completed of 50 Hawaii businesses over the past 18 months, 80 percent of those firms lacked planning for major disasters such as fires, hurricanes or criminal scenarios.

Other highlights of the survey include:

>> 20 percent of companies did not automatically update antivirus software, which in effect makes the software ineffective against attacks by new forms of computer viruses, worms and other malicious code.

>> 70 percent of companies that operate Web sites with their own servers have not updated their systems with current patches (software

improvements), thus rendering them at risk to intrusion and other security threats.

>> 90 percent of businesses do not engage in proactive vulnerability assessments against intrusion by hackers and other security risks.

>> 50 percent of companies failed to test their uninterruptible power supply gear, which provides emergency electricity during power outages.

The upshot is, whether you run a Bishop Street enterprise or a mom and pop store in Kakaako, if you haven't done so already, add another New Year's resolution to your list. Take a close look at your IT security and your disaster recovery plans, and if you have any concerns do something about them.

Most likely the solution will not be expensive but it will surely save you a great deal of grief somewhere down the road.

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