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EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW WITH
SCOTT ADAMS

DILBERT FIRED! STARTS HIS OWN BUSINESS



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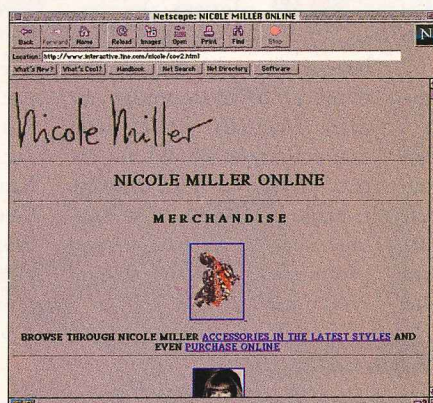
On-Line Chic: A Web-Page Makeover

IN FASHION, SAYS KERRY Clark, assistant designer at upscale clothing maker Nicole Miller, "the eye is always growing tired. What it sees one season, it doesn't want to see the next." It's just the same with Web pages, Clark says, only the "season" is much shorter. Which is why some of the graphics on Nicole Miller's Web site (<http://nicolemiller.com>)—the patterns on the neckties, for example—change monthly.

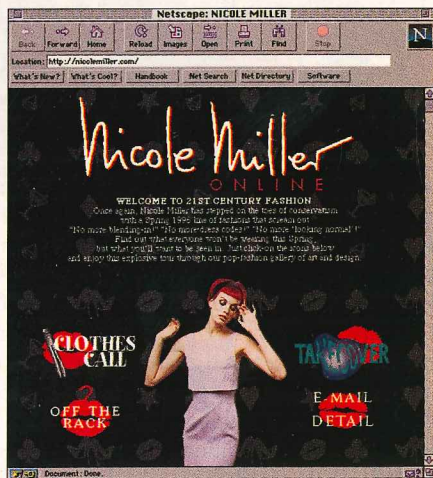
The company wasn't always so Web savvy. It gained its expertise the old-fashioned way: through trial and, mostly, error. In its rush to be the first fashion site on the Internet in October 1994, the company put up a page that in hindsight "wasn't very well thought through or representative of the image we want to convey," explains Clark. Nicole Miller the company hired an outside firm to design the site and spent \$10,000 on a home page that Nicole Miller the entrepreneur today characterizes as "crap." The fashion house realized its mistake almost immediately.

The company decided to play a more active role in its on-line efforts the second time around. Rather than relying solely on the discretion of an outside contractor, it designated an in-house per-

son—Clark, who was hired in November 1995—to oversee the Web-page makeover. Clark spent time working with Miller herself and with a new outside designer to refine the original concept until it had the look they were



The initial Web site (above) and a current home page (below).



after. The cost for the new site has yet to be determined, since, says Clark, the new work has been done on spec. "We're proceeding carefully and trying to keep costs to a minimum this time," she

says. Eventually, the Web expenses will come out of the \$60-million company's \$1.2-million advertising budget.

Clark says the graphics of the old site "look amateurish to us now" when compared with those of the new site, which went up on February 15, 1996. The new site is filled with interactive bells and whistles, like images of TV screens that, when clicked on, depict clips from fashion shows, with models making their way down the runways to the rhythm of hip music. Traffic there is up 150% compared with that at the old site, Clark estimates. The page, which is an advertising, as opposed to a sales, vehicle, is not set up for on-line sales of clothing, although an 800 number is offered for those wishing to buy licensed items like umbrellas and garment bags.

Clark doesn't use the term *makeover*, because she says it implies a "before and after" rather than the "continual evolution and growth with technology" that the redesign represents. "Redesign, per se, is never really over," she says, "just like fashion." She is still in contact with the outside designer every other day and in weekly meetings to continually update the site. "That's what makes computer media so exciting; you've never really figured it out," she says. "Just when you think you've created the coolest site in the world, you find out there's something even cooler." □

WANTED: MODEL CIO

Two years ago Los Angeles database marketer Lexi International was growing fast enough to be ranked #329 on the *Inc. 500*. "We required a very complex multimillion-dollar telemarketing system and couldn't afford to hire the wrong person to handle it," says founder Robin D. Richards. The headhunters he contacted lacked the expertise to help him find someone, however, and when Richards read applicants' résumés, his eyes glazed over from the technical jargon.

"I'm a marketing finance guy; I don't know technology," he concedes. When he saw three people on the cover of *CIO* magazine, he thought, "I need someone like this." It dawned on him that reading magazines would be a great way to prospect without spending hours checking applicants' qualifications or paying headhunters. After an hour scanning the covers of the 45 computer magazines he receives, he found an article in an IBM magazine about Terrence Knecht, who had built a system similar to Lexi's. Richards thought, "This is the kind of person I need!" Over the next month Richards contacted six story subjects before he offered the position of chief information officer to Knecht. Knecht accepted and oversaw the integration of the new system without a hitch.

Not surprisingly, Richards is enthusiastic about his novel technique, which he is now using to fill another position. "It's probably the greatest recruitment tool on earth for a principal," he says. "It's also about the cheapest."

—Robina A. Gangemi

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