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# Options site sees Net gain - 'Information clearinghouse' makes the product understandable, attractive

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*By Sandra Guy April 20, 2008 Publication: Chicago Sun-Times (IL) Page: A30 / FRONT  
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A Chicago Web publication has seen its audience soar 12-fold in its first year by publishing and podcasting news on a decidedly unsexy topic: Options.

TheOptionsInsider.com enjoyed the jump in online traffic and listening audience partly because credit and recession fears sparked a resurgence in interest in options, said company founder and editorial director Mark S. Longo, 32, a Connecticut native who came to Chicago in the early 1990s to trade options at the Chicago Board Options Exchange (CBOE).

The company declines to disclose exact figures for its online traffic. Longo spent a year researching how to turn options -- the "bad boy" of finance -- into an understandable product, primarily for investors scared of taking a risk outside of stocks and mutual funds.

"Financial planners, brokers and advisers often don't recommend options to their clients," said Longo, who argues that a wise use of options can reduce risk.

## Targeting younger audience

TheOptionsInsider gives no investment advice, but it does provide activities alerts and news that's hot.

"We consider ourselves an information clearinghouse with expert insights for anyone from retail traders who are curious about options to managers of hedge funds," Longo said.

By doing so, the company is aiming to attract a younger audience to an industry dominated by men in their 50s and 60s.

The company launched a podcast, "Options Insider Radio," that listeners can download to their desktops or to their mobile devices. Listeners post their questions for the guests on the Web site's discussion board.

The 45-minute podcast, updated every two weeks, has featured big names such as Danny Rosenthal, co-CEO of Options House; Scott Morris, CEO of the Boston Options Exchange; Henry Schwartz, the founder of Trade Alert, and David Mortimer and Jeromee Johnston, the CEO and the president, respectively, of 3D Markets.

"It's not dry 'Wall Street Week' stuff. We try to keep it conversational," Longo said.

TheOptionsInsider.com also designed an options news ticker with headlines and links to a variety of news services. The news ticker can be posted on outside Web sites.

Contents are free

Longo decided to launch TheOptionsInsider.com as a free content Web site with advertising-supported revenue, an unusual model in an industry known for paid subscriptions to newsletters, brokerages and other services.

The publication relies largely on word of mouth for readers.

Longo said he was surprised to find that many of the options and derivatives exchanges had no online content to which TheOptionsInsider.com could hyperlink. So he partnered with local production houses to develop online content.

The company hired hurriKane Solutions of Chicago to design its Web site, and it uses local technology companies to maintain the site.

TheOptionsInsider.com, self-funded by Longo and three partners, has been profitable from the start with help from advertisers such as ETrade, Charles Schwab & Co. and OptionsXpress.

Jim Binder, communications director for the Options Industry Council, an educational cooperative for options, said TheOptions

Insider.com has become a social network of sorts for options traders.

"It is independent, unlike many sites that are tied to a brokerage, and it's doing things that fit well with the type of community and information people are looking for," Binder said.

Photo: Keith Hale Sun-Times / Mark S. Longo, founder of TheOptionsInsider.com, stands outside the Chicago Board Options Exchange, 400 S. La Salle. ;

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