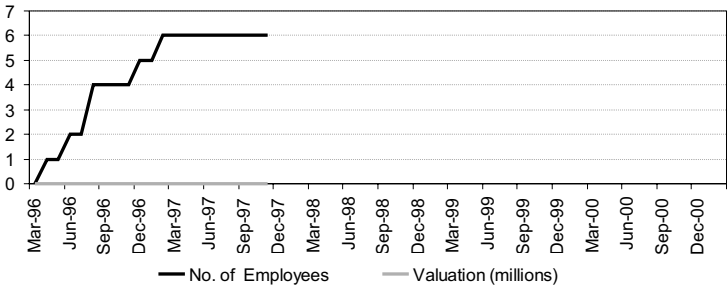


November 1997



Seller, Beware: The Buyers Rule E-Commerce

The laws of E-commerce are being written by buyers, not sellers. The future won't be pretty for companies that don't start paying attention now . . . Some cutting-edge companies will find ways to leverage this new buyer-centric environment to their advantage . . .

Fortune
November 10, 1997

Tweening



The moments we felt strongest always seemed to coincide with the moments we were most vulnerable.

In addition to the difficulty of filling in our technology team, we had other new challenges to meet. Compared to the nearly infinite data available on the Internet, our previously deep and robust product catalog on CD flattened to a shallow, sparse database.

Jeff and I had started in a relatively secluded and manageable nook in healthcare, radiotherapy, which mostly involved using big scary machines to shoot carefully aimed, invisible beams of radiation at cancer tumors. Due to the fact that so many of our website visitors were also connected to the much larger radiology business, which included a broad spectrum of diagnostic equipment, we had begun collecting information on products and manufacturers too. Several of us spent most of our evenings entering new information in our databases.

But however energetic our efforts were, we could only gather information on a couple of thousand products from a few hundred manufacturers. This represented a small subset of the products available. And many of our radiology visitors also wanted information on products that were outside the boundary of the radiology department.

There were several companies that sold comprehensive, paper-based directories of healthcare products, but I couldn't think of a way that we could afford to pay them enough for them to allow us to republish that information freely to our visitors. In fact, I was certain that they would see us as their competitors.

Then I noticed that these directories used information from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the government agency that regulates all healthcare products, and wondered how they acquired their information. It turned out that the FDA website published into the public domain all the information they had regarding all