

## ithought.com takes word-of-mouth global; Data Return keeps the information flowing

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**Michael Pusateri**

*CTO*

*ithought*

“**T**he weather—everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it!” Lately, it seems to be that way with ‘service’ too. Everybody talks about it, but nobody does anything about it. Until now. Meet ithought.com—the biggest, fastest, most-experienced friend and advisor consumers have ever had.

Think about it. In a world in which we are all bombarded with advertising all day (and all night), what is the first thing we usually do to learn more about a business, a restaurant for example? We try to find someone we know who has been there, or someone who knows someone who’s been there. It’s true. Simple word of mouth has more credibility than advertisers can even imagine, much less conjure up. And yet word of mouth suffers from the same virtue that makes it so strong. It is personal—and, therefore, limited in its reach. Or it was until now.

In September 1999, a team of experienced professionals saw the opportunity to combine one of the greatest ‘experience’ resources in America—the ‘influence’ power of word of mouth—with the greatest disseminator of information the world has ever seen, the Internet. The result of their efforts is ithought.

How well did they do with their idea? Consider this. From start-up just over a year ago, there are already five million businesses in over 400 categories ready to be rated online. And PCDataOnline has already ranked ithought as the seventh best rated directory on the Internet. To understand why ithought has been so successful, let’s look at how the benefits are created and distributed to everyone involved—consumers, businesses and the nonprofits that are raising money by helping ithought grow. More about that in a moment.

Listen to what Co-founder and Vice President of Marketing Paige Dawson says: “For consumers, ithought provides the power to post their business-service experiences for the whole World Wide Web to see. And, of course, by using the information posted by others, consumers can choose service providers in the future based on the past experience and recommendations of others. Consumers can create their own business directory of information, addresses, and phone numbers. They can also keep track of the businesses they rate, to be able to refer others to their favorites. And they earn entries toward sweepstakes drawings by rating businesses.”



ithought.com, a wholly owned subsidiary of Dallas-based Clipscom Inc., is rapidly earning its name as the Yellow Pages Powered by Consumer OpinionSM. Dedicated to empowering consumers to voice their opinions on businesses next door, across town or throughout the country, ithought offers business information and consumer-driven ratings for more than five million service businesses in the United States. The site gives consumers an outlet to express their views on everything from mechanics to day care centers, enabling users to research businesses they are thinking about trying, or find and grade businesses they have already visited. The site also offers tips on a variety of topics as another way to help consumers make informed purchasing decisions. ithought’s mission is to be consumers’ last stop before making an offline buying decision, and businesses’ first stop in improving customer service and loyalty. In support of its efforts to become one of the largest and most powerful web-based consumer voices in the country, ithought needs the best provider of advanced managed hosting solutions in the marketplace. That provider is Data Return.



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**For more information on  
ithought, please visit their  
website at  
[www.ithought.com](http://www.ithought.com) or call  
972-450-9724.**

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There's more. The site also features a broad range of consumer tips, other interesting content, and valuable links to other consumer-related sites.

For businesses, ithought offers plenty as well—services designed to help businesses build customer bases, increase revenues and improve customer service, for example:

- E-mail alerts every time the business has been graded, with a link to customers' grades and comments. Businesses gain instant feedback from their customers;
- A summary and full detail of every grade and comment the business has ever received. Businesses see trends and patterns in the service their customers receive;
- A competitor analysis, so a business can see what consumers are saying about them. Businesses gain competitive intelligence to help tailor service offerings.

Plus there are ithought's IntelliQpons™ that businesses can customize based upon a customer's feedback. For example, if a business receives a rating less than what it hoped for, it can increase the value of the coupon to hopefully entice the customer to come back and try again.

And remember the part about nonprofits? Here's what Paige Dawson has to say about that: “ithought is committed to building better communities through better businesses. We launched a fundraising program for nonprofit organizations to spread the word about ithought and to encourage supporters to grade businesses. ithought pays nonprofits for businesses graded by their supporters.”

So far, hundreds of nonprofit organizations have joined the program and are earning funds. Any type of nonprofit can participate, including churches, schools, humane societies, athletic clubs, awareness groups, and Girl and Boy Scouts. Plus there are over 4,000 other websites that have joined ithought's affiliate program, where they refer members.

When asked about how ithought selected Data Return, CTO Michael Pusateri says, “With the complexities of several million businesses spread over 400 categories, constant searching and rating by consumers and zip code sorting, we had to have a managed hosting solution that was incredibly strong, flexible, and scalable, and one that could support our need to return queries quickly and in several formats. We built our own solution around Microsoft technology and we know ithought is very good at what it does, so we had to have a hosting platform that was just as good. Our business depends on it.”

Pusateri continues: “Data Return's level of service has been excellent. From the very beginning, we were assigned an account rep that stayed with us and made sure everything was handled quickly. And since going live, Data Return has been able to add servers quickly as we grew, and with no downtime. They understand that this site isn't just a part of our business. It *is* our business. We are very pleased.”