

Developing Your Website As An Effective Marketing Tool

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You've determined you need a new website. Perhaps you've been spurred on by any or all of the following reasons:

- Sell a product or service
- Provide information
- Brand your organization
- Entertain
- Obtain advertisers

Telling the World About Your Site With Online Marketing Techniques

Okay, so you've established strong reasons to build a site, and now you're the owner of the most beautiful website in the world. Success? Well, it depends. If your target audience is having trouble finding your new site, your investment in time and cost may be worthless. Establishing upfront how you'll tell your audience about your site is one of the most crucial steps in the Web development process. Unfortunately for site owners, it also happens to be the step that is most often neglected.

In an effective web development process, you need to consider from the beginning the methods you are going to use to drive your prospects to your site. In other words, how are people are going to learn about your website? You need to know the answer to this question before the construction of your website even begins. Why? Because how you choose to tell people about your site affects its design and content. It's at this stage that

you're building the foundation for your site's success. Neglecting this step will surely lead to disappointment in your site's marketing performance.

So what are some of the ways to drive people to your site, and have them stick around for awhile when they get there? Here are seven suggestions that use online marketing techniques that will help bring people to your site, build stronger relationships with your target audience, and obtain a better return on your web development investment.

1 Develop A List of Key Phrases That Lead Prospects to Your Site

First and foremost, you need to consider the top key phrases that you want your website to appear for within the search engine results. You want to make these decisions early because these keywords and key phrases should be implemented throughout your website's content (this is one of the primary methods used in proper search engine optimization). Optimally, you'll want to dedicate a page of content to one or two of your specific key phrases.

2 Create Landing Pages to Optimize Your Offerings

For most websites, the homepage is the default "landing" page. It's generally the page that appears through search engines or is mentioned through word of mouth. But the fact is, the homepage is not always the most appropriate page to present to a visitor.

The benefit of specific landing pages is that their content can be tailored for special offers or more focused areas of interest. For instance, if you're having a sale on a specific product, you might link an advertisement to a landing page that is dedicated to providing

relevant information about only that product. Also, you can determine the effectiveness of that particular advertisement by tracking the click-through rate to that landing page.

3 Gather Contact Information from Your Visitors

Rather than just looking to sell a product, think in terms of building a mutually beneficial relationship and increasing the lifetime value of a customer. Maybe you can provide a loss leader product at a discount (or for free), or perhaps you can offer a beneficial free report or special offer if a visitor to your website provides their name and e-mail address. This way, instead of selling them a one-off product and never hearing from them again, you have an opportunity to increase the lifetime value of the customer through cross-selling, up-selling, and perhaps through the provision of referrals.

4 Develop Your Expertise, Resourcefulness, and Credibility

Offering relevant information about your industry on a broader level puts you in a better position to develop relationships with your audience. As a provider of such information, you establish yourself as an expert resource that your target audience wants to hear from.

For example, a merchant that sells a product that helps with back pain, wants to sell as many units of the product as possible, of course. It's important that they offer as much information about the product as possible, to help users understand its benefits and how to use it properly. But what might happen if they widen their scope a bit and write articles about the benefits of various stretching exercises for the back? What if they write about the latest developments in back pain treatment? Becoming a

provider of broader health information in this way increases their credibility, expertise, trustworthiness, and also happens to be an effective marketing tool.

Dispersing information that is beneficial to your target audience through online article directories, magazines, newsletters, RSS feeds, press and news releases, and other websites and blogs can help drive interested prospects to your website by the inclusion of a “resource box” within your information. A resource box usually contains a snippet about your company, yourself, and the all-important link back to your website.

5 Develop Quality Links Pointing to Your Website

Having incoming links to your site from other websites is very important for search engines, in particular Google. The more relevant links you can get coming into your website, the higher you will be ranked by search engines, and the more targeted traffic you’ll receive.

More important than the quantity of links is the quality of links. You want to try to obtain links from relevant websites that are highly ranked themselves. One way to find appropriate sites to target would be to go to a search engine like Google, type in a key phrase that you would like to be found for, and take note of the top ranking websites that appear. From there, try to negotiate a link from their site. That way, you’ll be targeting more directly your prospective audience.

6 Use Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing is a cost-effective way to drive people to your website. By using a pay-per-click service through search engines like Google, Yahoo, or MSN, you bid on various search terms that you feel may be used by people looking for your particular

product or service. Done effectively, you can appear almost immediately near the top of search results under the sponsored ads, or within the content of other sites that relate to your offerings. The icing on the cake for search engine marketing is the fact that you are only charged for the service when someone clicks on the ad to go to your site (and all your traffic is targeted). You can also set a limit on how much you want to spend, and you can alter your search terms or stop at any time if you're not satisfied with the results. If your business is more locally oriented, you can limit your marketing to specific geographical areas. These services typically have excellent tracking tools, to help you keep an eye on the effectiveness of your search engine marketing.

7 Use Affiliate Relationships

People may be interested in earning commissions by marketing your product or service. Because of this, you can get other people to help you market through affiliate relationships. Online companies like worldwidebrands.com, doba.com, and clickbank.com (for digital products) act as brokers to help you get the word out about your products. Such companies act as a liaison between the original provider (you) and the affiliate, usually handling the majority of the payments, paperwork, and tracking services.

Not only can you set up affiliate relationships where your affiliates sell your product or service from their own website, but you can also have relationships where the affiliate's aim is to drive traffic to your site through links within the content of their own site. In this case, the affiliate gets paid a commission whenever someone clicks on their link and follows through on a predetermined conversion path (i.e. signing up for your newsletter on your site or buying your product).

A Final Word

There are many ways to increase the marketing effectiveness of your website. We've briefly taken a look at a few online techniques to increase traffic to your site. Establishing ways to help people find your website is critical to your success. Unfortunately, the vast majority of web owners go through a web development process that fails to address these issues from the beginning, and either never address them, or address them inappropriately after they realize the ineffectiveness of their site as a marketing tool. It's of critical importance to the success of your site to address these issues from the onset, before any structural development ever takes place. By doing so, you'll be doing all you can to assure that your website is a powerful marketing tool in the success of your organization.

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