

Internet Marketing For Newbies

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Internet Marketing and Reputation Management

An essential component of effective Internet marketing is managing your reputation and your company's reputation online. Consumers often engage in Internet research before choosing a product or service as well as the provider of that product or service.

It is quite common for a consumer to research your company name, your name and your URL before making a final decision as to whether or not to use your company. This fact makes it essential that you engage in effective reputation management.

Reputation Management – Know What is Being Said

You have to know what is being said about you (both positive and negative) in order to manage your reputation. It is impossible for you to check all the different websites that people post comments and reviews on. Luckily for you, you can set up a Google alert to notify you anytime your name, business' name or URL appear somewhere on the net. Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts> to set them up.

Reputation Management: Handling Negative Postings

Negative postings will appear from time to time about you or your business. You should address them head-on but never get personal with the person who posted the comment. You should address your company's shortcomings and mention how you plan to make things better in the future.

You should let people know that you take customer service seriously. You can offer to help the customer receive some type of satisfaction if at all possible. The key is to show people that your company listens and actually cares.

If you get into a battle of jabs and insults you will always lose. Do not get baited into such a situation.

Reputation: Post Positive Information Fast and Often

You want to make sure you distribute positive information about you and your company as often as possible. Make sure the information is honest and pertinent. The information you post on the Internet can be about charitable donations, new product launches, awards won, etc. The key is you want this information to appear in the search results above the negative postings.

Frequent positive postings are the best way to combat negative publicity. Online press releases, articles, social media sites and pages, forum postings and blog postings focused on your name and your company's name will go a long way towards helping manage your reputation online.

Your Internet marketing strategy must include allocating resources towards reputation management for you and your company.

Know Your Buying Cycles

Internet marketing is a powerful way to grow your business. Your insight into your target market is a key component to succeeding online. If you know the buying cycle of your target market you will be able to effectively market to them at all stages of it.

Beginning of Buying Cycle

Every industry will have buyers that start their buying cycle with some basic research about the products or services they are interested in. By doing some keyword research you can identify these early-stage buyers and capture their attention before your competitors do. Here are the types of search terms they will use:

- Printer reviews
- best DVD players
- luxury sedan comparisons

The terms they use when searching will clearly identify the fact that they are in the information gathering process. Provide them the information they want on your site and via e-mail so you can follow-up market to them.

Mid Stages of Buying Cycle

As consumers progress in the buying cycle they will start narrowing their online searches. For example they may use terms like:

- Color laser printer
- Sony DVD players
- Lexus models

At this stage they have narrowed in on what they want but have not necessarily made a final selection. This is an important stage in the buying cycle where you need to give consumers information that will push them towards purchasing.

Stages of Buying Cycle

This is the stage that most people focus on. The final stage of the buying cycle is when a consumer is ready to buy. The types of search terms at this point are:

- Epson Stylus 900
- Sony HD-9180
- Lexus LS 450

The consumer identified what they want to buy and are now looking for where to buy it. This is when they need to know why they should buy it from you. You want to focus on service, price and reputation.

If you focus your Internet marketing efforts only on the end stages of the process you will lose the opportunity to capture the interest of and loyalty of potential customers in the early stages. Take the time to give consumers at the earlier stages of the buying cycle the information they want and they will reward you with consumer confidence and loyalty.

All stages of the buying cycle should be part of your Internet marketing strategy.

Professional Appearance

The Internet has billions of web pages all competing for the interest of web users. Within any given industry there can be thousands or millions of websites that can be found. Once they are found your site visitors will make a snap decision as to whether or not they want to continue viewing your website.

The Initial Impression

The immediate impression someone gets of your website will determine whether or not they stay on your site or hit the “back” button. It is important that your site be easy on the eyes, easy to navigate and clear in its purpose.

Skip the flash introductions that people get frustrated waiting for. Though they will impress a handful of people, most people will ignore them and resent having to wait for them to load. Have a clean and clear landing page and you will be able to capture the interest of more people.

Make sure it takes less than 1-second for someone visiting your site to know what you are about. If you sell watches make sure there are watches on the landing page. If you are a lawyer make sure your landing page says where you practice and the type of law your practice. You have less than 2-seconds to make an impression so make it count.

Contact Information

Contact information is important. If you have a website there is no reason to use Gmail, Yahoo, AOL or other similar email addresses. Have an email address set for your specific domain. People will question the credibility of a website that uses this type of email address.

When contacting clients or potential clients make sure your email address is from your domain and is professionally written. You will lose credibility if your email is poorly written or comes from a Yahoo, Gmail, Hotmail or other type of account.

Have a phone number on your website even if it is for a virtual phone system that takes a message or forwards the calls to your home or cell phone. Consumers want to see phone numbers on websites.

Quality of Content

The quality of your website content is vital. Make sure it is well written, error-free, clear and concise. Your failure on any one of these three points will make you lose credibility in the eyes of your target market.

Consider the above factors and make sure your site appears professional to your target market.

Basics of Link Building

A component to succeeding online is to have a network of websites that link to you. This will help you generate traffic and rank better in search results. Before you start link building you need to know the different methods as well as their pros and cons.

Manual Link Building

There are a number of different ways to link build. The most established way is requesting a link from a website owner or webmaster. You want to find websites that are on the same or similar topic as yours and ask them for a link to your website (you may want to offer one to them in exchange).

You need to send an e-mail to the contact person you find on the website and make the request. Chances are you will need to follow up more than once before getting a response. If you do not get a response after 5 or 6 requests you may be better off moving on.

The pro of this type of link building is that it is considered a fairly ethical practice. The con of this type of link build is that it is very labor intensive.

Buying Links

As you can imagine, there have been some very industrious people who saw an opportunity to make money and have created networks where people can buy links on other people's websites and sell links on their site.

In a matter of minutes you can buy links to your website from websites on a similar topic (the only value in link building is if you get links from sites on a similar topic).

The major pro with this type of link building is that it is fast. The major con is that Google specifically forbids it and will penalize or ban any website caught doing it.

Links Through Content Distribution

Distributing articles and press releases is a great way to build links to your website. If you write (or have written) articles and press releases that are relevant you can build a considerable network of links into your site. The better the articles and press releases are the better the results will be.

The major pro for this type of link building is that it is effective and ethical. The major con is that if you are not a good writer you will need to find one.

Importance of Landing Pages

Landing pages are an essential part of a successful Internet marketing plan. It is quite common for a website to have different landing pages with marketing efforts focused on driving specific traffic to specific landing pages.

Multiple Pages

Most websites sell a variety of products or at the very least different models. For example, a fashion website may sell pants, shoes, shirts, skirts, blouses, etc. A website that sells watches may sell gold watches, silver watches, divers' watches, etc.

You want to bring consumers to a specific page on your site. Someone looking for a leather skirt does not want to land on a web page that does not immediately show them that you sell leather skirts. Someone looking for a gold watch wants to land on a page that makes it clear you sell gold watches.

In short you need to give people what they want from the very first second they arrive on your website.

Content and Images

Try to get in the mindset of your target market and make sure your landing pages speak directly to that target audience. If your primary target market is females 18 – 24, make sure all images appeal to girls ages 18 to 24. If your target market is men and women 40 – 55 years old, make sure your images appeal to that target market.

In addition to your images appealing to your target market you want to make sure the content appeals to them as well. Your target market must feel comfortable with your site in order to build consumer confidence and loyalty.

Your Call to Action

Every landing page must include a call to action. A call to action can be to click on a link to learn more, add something to a shopping cart, leave their e-mail address, etc. You must identify what action you want the website visitor to take and make sure it is easy for them to take it.

Everything you want a consumer to do should be 1 to 2 clicks away at most. If they need to navigate through too many pages there is a good chance you will lose their interest before you got them to the final call to action.

The bottom line is to make sure you have landing pages that appeal to all segments of your target market and you should see an increase in your conversion rates.

Internet Marketing and Online Customer Service

People do not always think about customer service as part of their marketing plan but it should be. Customer service plays an integral role pre and post-sale. The more opportunities you have for someone to contact you for customer service or technical support, the greater their confidence will be in your company. The better you handle customer service inquiries the better their loyalty will be and that is a key goal for Internet marketing plans.

Online Customer Service

Online customer service is a great way to show consumers you are serious about offering them the help they need. In a nutshell there are a number of different ways you can add customer service to your site. There are some software packages that can be integrated into your site or you can have a customized option created.

You want to give people the option to chat with someone from your company without requiring them to make a call. Since many consumers search the net while at work, this makes it very convenient for them to speak to you rather than move on to another website.

What to Handle

Not all customer service inquiries should be handled over the net. If there is something sensitive that needs to be discussed, you may want to request the person call you or allow you to call them. This will show them that you are taking their customer service needs seriously.

Who Should Handle the Inquiries?

Though it is possible to outsource your online customer service you may wish to handle it in-house to ensure the highest quality. You and your staff will be best situated to answer most questions or get the answers the customer or potential customer is asking.

Make sure whoever is handling the customer service inquiries is professional and does not take anything personally. If they take things personally then they may offend a current or potential customer.

Online Customer Service – The Bottom Line

The bottom line about online customer service is that if it is handled properly it is a great way to increase consumer confidence and loyalty. Providing easy access to customer service and technical support can set you apart from the competition.

Consider adding online customer service options to your website and highlight it as one of the reasons why consumers should choose your company over the competition. This is an important goal of Internet marketing.

Affiliate Programs

Affiliate programs can be a very good way to add revenue streams to your website. You can earn more money from your website or websites as a publisher (you publishing the ads of affiliates on your site) or as an advertiser (your ads being placed on other people's websites), or both.

It is important to choose the affiliate network or networks you join carefully in order to maximize the opportunity for success.

Affiliate Program Publisher

If you have a website that gets traffic you can monetize that traffic by joining affiliate networks and publishing affiliates' ads on your site. It is important that you publish ads relevant to your site's traffic if you want to succeed.

Keep in mind that you will have a limit to the "real estate" on your website where you can place ads. Do not get enticed by large payouts from affiliates. Focus specifically on the affiliates' ads that will most likely result in a conversion (someone from your website clicking on their ad and buying something from their site).

Irrelevant ads on your website can turn off your website traffic. Too many ads can also have the same impact. It is important to hone your affiliate marketing program to ensure that only the highest converting ads remain on your site.

Affiliate Advertising

Website owners that can benefit from increasing the number of potential clients that visit their website should consider affiliate advertising. Every affiliate program has different rules and costs associated with joining their network. The start-up costs can sometimes be expensive but are typically worth the investment if you handle your affiliate program properly.

You want to join affiliate programs that have a large publisher list. The more websites that use the affiliate program the more likelihood you will have good affiliates. Remember, not everyone willing to place your ad is a good affiliate. A good affiliate publisher is a site that targets the same target market as you do.

Work with publishers to create graphics and text links they can use. Your best affiliates can and should be rewarded with extra commissions, benefits, etc. Remember there are many advertisers vying for limited real estate on websites. You want to make sure the publisher chooses your site and keeps it.

Affiliate marketing is a very effective form of Internet marketing that should be considered by websites owners to increase sales.

Google Analytics

Internet marketing efforts need to be tracked so you know if you are using your resources wisely. Google analytics is a good, free tool you can use to track traffic sources, conversion rates, etc.

Make sure you have Google analytics or some other type of analytics installed on your website.

Traffic Sources

You want to know where your traffic is coming from and where it is not coming from. This will help you allocate your resources properly. Google Analytics is able to track where your site visitors are coming from, where they go on your site, etc.

A few examples of where your traffic may come from:

- Search Engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc)
- Pay-Per-Click campaigns
- Twitter, Facebook, etc
- Articles and press releases that include links
- Websites that have your links
- Etc.

Having this information can help you have a more effective Internet marketing plan.

Easy Come, Easy Go

It is easy to find out where the traffic comes from and what page they leave from. Both of these pieces of information are valuable. Knowing them can help you identify if your Internet marketing strategy is working.

The page people enter your site on is important. You want to make sure they arrive on your website on a page that has a focused message for what they are looking for (most websites have multiple entry points, each focused on a different search term). Pay careful attention to what page your visitors land on and make sure it is well designed and well written.

The page visitors leave your website on is also important because it may identify a problem with your site. If you find that a certain page is the primary exit point you want to see if there are any technical or other issues with that page that make people leave your site.

Conversion Rates

Though it is important to learn about where your traffic is coming from it is more important to know where your sales are coming from. Conversion rates in Google Analytics are tracked by traffic source. You can see where your actual buyers are coming from so you can put more emphasis on those resources.

Google Analytics is important to add to a website. Learn about your website traffic, conversion rates and more so you can make important tweaks to your Internet marketing strategy.

Online Press Releases

Internet marketing plans should include online press releases to introduce new products, launch websites, promote new services, etc. A well written and distributed online press release can introduce your products or services to a large audience.

If you are going to take the time and invest the resources in distributing online press releases you want to make sure you do it right.

Writing the Release

First and foremost if writing is not your strong suit you should invest in hiring a writer to do your online press releases for you. They need to be well written and include all the essential elements.

Make sure your online press releases have a catchy headline that will grab your target market's attention. Also, make sure the first sentence makes the reader want to continue on.

Editors looking for content for their websites, newspapers, magazines, radio shows, etc will need to immediately be interested in what you have to say in order to get your release picked-up.

Keep your press release concise, professional and informative.

Distribution

There are a number of free press release distribution websites. Quite frankly, you get what you pay for with these. It is generally a good idea to invest in one of the online press release distribution websites.

Typically there are different levels of distribution depending on what your goals are. You need to review the different distribution levels carefully and choose the one that makes sense for your specific goals.

Another benefit to the paid distribution sites is you can track whether or not the press release was picked up which can be a good marketing tool. Consumers are impressed when they are informed that your products or services appeared in a particular newspaper, magazine, etc.

Bottom Line about Online Press Releases

The bottom line with online press releases is that they are an effective way to introduce new products, services, websites, sales and promotions, etc to the market. If they are well written

and distributed properly that can be one of the most effective ways to bring traffic to your website while also improving overall consumer confidence.

Online press releases can also help your website rank better in search results since they will provide a valuable link to your website from the websites that picked up your release. You should definitely include online press releases as part of your Internet marketing strategy.

Getting Traffic from Twitter

Internet marketing was dramatically changed with the introduction of social media sites including Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. Since Twitter was first launched people have wondered how they should use it as part of their Internet marketing plan.

The Basics of Twitter

Twitter allows you to post to your followers messages of up 140 characters in length. You may be wondering how much you can say in only 140 characters. Join the club. Everyone wonders that until they get the hang of it and you will. Follow a few simple rules and you will do just fine on Twitter.

What to Tweet

It is important that your tweets be more than a constant barrage of promotional messages. You will quickly lose your followers. The general rule to follow is the 80-20 rule. 80% of your tweets should be either useful or entertaining to your followers. The other 20% of your tweets can be direct promotions of your products and services.

An effective Internet marketing plan using Twitter should include humor. Humor can help you maintain long-term online relationships with your followers. People appreciate humor even if you are just providing links to humor sites, video clips, etc.

Promotional Tweets

What you say in the 140 characters of your promotional tweets is important. If you do it properly you should be able to bring targeted traffic to your website. Your promotional tweets must entice your followers to click on your accompanying link to read more about the promotion. Do not try to close a sale in 140 characters. Get them to your website. That is your sole goal.

Grab your followers' attention quickly with a catchy line. Use questions (Do you want to save a bundle on a gift for Mom?), or exclamations (A sale so HUGE you won't believe it!). The key is grabbing their attention and making them want more information.

How Often do I Tweet?

At the very least you should tweet four or five times per day. You want to stay active on Twitter in order to get more followers and to keep your current followers engaged.

If you tweet five times per day that would mean you post four general information or humor tweets and one promotional tweet. If you follow these rules you can generate traffic from Twitter as part of your Internet marketing plan.

Importance of Testing E-Mail Messages

E-mail marketing is a highly effective way to increase sales and market to existing customers and other members of your e-mail database. If you are going to take the time and utilize the resources to create an e-mail marketing campaign you want to make sure you do it well.

Testing e-mail messages before sending them out to your full distribution list is a great way to maximize the impact of your e-mail marketing efforts.

What to Test

You should start with the basic e-mail you want to distribute. It should have your core message including promotions, etc. Once you have this core e-mail together you want to make a few variations of it. You can use different images, e-mail subjects, highlighted text, fonts, colors and text.

Try to place things in different places of the e-mail so you can see what placement is most effective when you run your e-mail tests.

This is also a good time to test different promotions. You will want to see what promotion speaks to your customer base the best. They can include things like a certain percentage off; free shipping; Buy 1 Get 1 Free; Free Gift with Purchase, etc.

After you run your e-mail marketing campaign over a period of time you will already know what promotions work the best and will not generally have to test this aspect much more.

You want to send the e-mail variations to at least 25 to 100 people on your e-mail list. This means you will be sending one of the versions to 25 to 100 people. Do not send multiple versions to the same people.

You need to monitor the results of the e-mails and see which are the most and least successful. Once you have identified the most successful e-mails you will want to see what is similar about them so you can pinpoint what is working best.

This information should help you make your final e-mail to be distributed to the remainder of your list.

How Often Do You Test?

You do not have to test every e-mail message you plan to send but you will want to test the most important ones or the e-mail messages that will be the basis your overall Internet marketing strategy.

Take the time to test different e-mail messages and you will benefit with a higher conversion rate which is the key to succeeding with an e-mail marketing campaign.

Viral Marketing

Viral marketing is a goal for virtually all Internet marketing experts. Finding or creating the next big viral marketing video can be harder than finding a needle in a haystack. Your goal should not be trying to come up with the next YouTube sensation. Think smaller and you can succeed.

Consider having a YouTube contest!

The YouTube Contest

A YouTube Contest will enable you to harness the collective creativity of the contestants. If you offer a great prize and promote your contest well you should get a good number of entries.

The contest should be set up so that contestants submit their entries to your website (make sure they do NOT post them on YouTube). This will enable you to check the quality and appropriateness of an entry before it appears on YouTube.

The contest can be the creation of a 30-second commercial for your company or a product demonstration. Establish rules to protect your copyrights and brands and make sure it is clear that you own all rights to any videos submitted.

After reviewing all the entries choose the finalists (try for at least 10 finalists) and post the videos on your YouTube channel.

The Voting Equals Viral Marketing

Each finalist video will be on your YouTube channel, plus you should create a separate blog entry on your blog for each video. Voting is based on the number of views multiplied by the rating of the video on YouTube plus the number of social bookmarking votes on the blog (from Digg, StumbleUpon, etc).

Basically you are setting up a voting system that will prompt the contestants to market their entry for you. They will send out the video link and ask that their contacts keep forwarding it off to their contact lists and so forth. This is creating 10 viral marketing campaigns or more depending on how many finalists you have.

Keep the voting period to about 60 days before announcing the winner.

The Results

The results need to be tabulated carefully. Once you have tabulated the votes you should announce the winner or winners and the prize they received.

A YouTube contest is an easy way to create multiple viral marketing opportunities based on the creativity of your contestants. Make sure you market the contest well to maximize the number of entries and the quality of them. This is a great system for Internet marketing you can consider.

E-Mail Marketing

Internet marketing constantly evolves. Some popular Internet marketing tools lose popularity and new ones emerge. Even the most enduring forms of Internet marketing change over time. A prime example is e-mail marketing.

Once the darling of online marketers, e-mail marketing became less popular as more people feared spam guards and blockers. However, e-mail marketing is a very powerful and viable form of Internet marketing.

The Basics

E-mail marketing is the best way to stay in contact with existing customers or potential customers. Your potential customer list should be people who specifically requested e-mails from you (do not buy e-mail lists).

The two key components to successful e-mail marketing are growing your list and staying in contact with your list.

Growing Your List

Growing your e-mail marketing list is essential. You do this by offering people who visit your site something of value in exchange for their e-mail. There are a number of things you can consider, here are just a few:

- A coupon code or discount code
- Pre-sales event information
- A free trial offer
- A complimentary evaluation
- Free software or other downloadable files
- A whitepaper or report

It is also important to let people know that you will not sell their information or give it to anyone else. You should treat your e-mail list like gold because if you handle it properly it can be like gold.

Contacting Your List

It is important to stay in contact with your e-mail list. It is also important that you do not go overboard with that. If you overuse your e-mail database they will start to remove themselves from your distribution list.

The frequency you contact your e-mail list will depend on your business. For example, a real estate agent knows there is a window of opportunity to get a buyer. That window of opportunity may be only a couple of weeks so daily contact is appropriate. A clothes retailer has a much larger window of opportunity in fact the window never closes. Daily contact would be too much, weekly or bi-weekly contact is more appropriate.

Make sure your e-mails are different every time. Do not rehash the same information or promotions or you will turn off your e-mail list. If you keep these rules in mind, you can engage in effective e-mail marketing as part of your overall Internet marketing.

Images and Video

Pictures and video are an essential component to Internet marketing. If a picture is worth a thousand words a video must be worth a few million. The proper use of images and video on a website can increase consumer confidence and loyalty.

Consumers are visually stimulated and are more likely to notice images and video on a website rather than read the site. Most web users skim the text of a site but notice the images and will generally watch a short video clip.

Effective Use of Images

Images need to immediately capture the eyes and interest of your target market. You want to place the images prominently on your website and make sure they are large enough that your target market can identify the contents of them.

Consider your target market carefully when choosing images. The pictures should contain people, products and other images that your website audience can identify with. If your target market is primarily female you want the images to be of females. If your target market is of a particular demographic make sure the images include people from that demographic.

Do not try to replace website content with images. It is important to have content even if it is only skimmed. A serious buyer will take the time to read further.

Videos

It is easier than ever before to add videos to a website. Videos are a powerful way to convey a message. The videos can be client testimonials, product demonstrations, service explanations, company profiles, or anything else you deem important.

The videos can be hosted on a site like YouTube or you can host the videos directly on your server. YouTube hosting is acceptable though slightly less professional than hosting the video on your site directly.

Your videos should look good and be professional. Avoid poor camera work, dark images and poor audio quality. A good video can be an effective way to impress people. A bad video is a fast way to lose the interest of someone on your website.

Videos can be scripted but only if you are hiring professional actors. Videos tend to be much more effective (especially testimonial videos) if the person is speaking naturally and using their own words.

Add some videos to your website as part of your Internet marketing strategy and see how your target audience reacts. Add or remove videos as needed for maximum impact.

Internet Marketing on Facebook

Internet marketing has changed dramatically as a result of social media websites like Facebook. This social media site is a force to be reckoned with as millions of people from around the world are on it at any given moment.

The very nature of Facebook makes it an Internet marketing jewel, especially for pay-per-click ads. With scores of information about every user the site can be used to pinpoint your audience for advertisements.

Internet Marketing with Specificity

Pay-per-click ads can be placed on many websites and search engines including Google, Yahoo and Bing. These search engines reach billions of people which make them powerful. The one thing that is lacking is the ability to place your ads only in front of your specific target market.

On Facebook you can be highly specific with targeting your ads. You can dictate who sees your ads based on criteria including:

- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- Interests and hobbies
- Education level
- Geographic location

Your ability to place your ads only in front of a defined target market makes Facebook a great Internet marketing tool.

Know Your Market & Learn Your Market

The first step in placing effective Facebook ads would be to know your market. You should have a deep understanding of who your market is and who it is not. The more you know about your target market the more effective your Internet marketing will be.

You can use Facebook to learn about your target market. By identifying customers on Facebook you can start to see what interests them by the groups they join and participate in as well as the types of things they post.

Create your own Facebook group and invite people to participate in it. This is an invaluable way to learn about your target market.

Grow Your Facebook Fan Base

Grow your Facebook fan base by offering them incentives to join your group. You can offer discount codes and “inside information”. If you give something of value people will become a friend and fan of yours on Facebook.

Using Facebook is a great way to reach your target market and learn about your target market. Take the time to create a good profile and fan page. Update your pages often and stay in communication with your fan base and you will reap the rewards of Facebook.

What is Search Engine Optimization?

Search engine optimization (SEO) is something we hear about often when researching Internet marketing. For someone new to Internet marketing, SEO may seem like just another acronym in a sea of acronyms. So, let us begin with the basics.

Search Engine Optimization Defined

Anytime you enter a search in Google, Yahoo, Bing or any other search engine, the search engine must determine which websites will appear in the results page. The way search engines do this is with a complicated mathematical formula that compares all the pages on the Internet against each other.

The comparison of web pages is done to determine which web pages are the most relevant for the search term you entered in. The factors that are considered in the formula include:

- The words in the URL
- The words used in the text
- The tags placed in the coding of the site
- The links from other sites that go to your sites

Search engine optimization is a series of tools and practices that enhance your site's score in the formula so your website appears in the search results.

Why SEO is Important

Search engines divide the search results on a webpage to include sponsored listings (pay-per-click ads) and natural listings. Most consumers know the difference between the sponsored listings and the natural listings.

Consumers generally equate a website's position in search results with the quality of the company. Though there is no real correlation between the two, the perception is an important one to be aware of.

SEO is also unlike pay-per-click because you do not have to pay every time someone clicks on your listing in the search results. Though you may hire someone to do your SEO campaign, their fee is the only cost associated with getting traffic through search engine optimization.

Pitfalls of SEO

It is important to know that SEO takes time to reap results. Unlike Pay-Per-Click ads that can bring traffic to your site in minutes, SEO generally takes several weeks to many months to bring traffic to your website.

Many website owners view SEO as an essential long-term marketing initiative rather than an immediate, instant traffic initiative like PPC or taking out ads on other websites.

If your goal is long-term success online your Internet marketing plan should include search engine optimization for your most important search terms.

Understanding Search Results

You have probably read about search engine marketing, search engine results, search engine advertising, etc. Understanding how search results work is the first step towards making the right Internet marketing decisions for your business.

Pay-Per-Click Advertising

The three major search engines (Google, Yahoo and Bing) all include sponsored or paid results along with natural search results when someone does a search through their search engine. Typically the sponsored results appear at the top and to the side of the natural results (and are designated as "Sponsored" or "Paid" ads).

Most consumers understand at this point that the reason those websites are appearing on the results page is that they paid to appear there. Generally speaking, consumers review those ads but first look in the natural or organic listings to see if any websites fit their needs.

Local Listings

The three major search engines have recently began to ad local listings in the search results. The search engines are able to determine where someone is searching from (based on their IP address) and will display local results just above the organic listings. Consumers are looking at these results and are clicking on the sites that appear.

You want to try to get your business listed in the local results for your keywords.

Search Engine Optimization

The organic listings on the search results pages are those that appear in the very center of the page. These are the web pages that the search engine determined are the most relevant for the search entered. This is based on how the website scored against other websites in a complicated mathematical formula.

Appearing in the organic searches is important because consumers equate ranking in the organic listings with quality. Though there is no correlation between the quality of a company and their search engine ranking the perception is an important one to note for Internet marketing purposes.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a system of tools and practices that enhance your website's score in these formulas. You should consider engaging in a SEO campaign as part of your overall Internet marketing strategy in order to maximize your position in the organic listings.

A comprehensive online marketing strategy will include trying to get your website in the organic listings, local listings and even the paid listings. The more opportunities you give potential customers to find your site the more traffic you will receive.

Customer Testimonials

Internet marketing is about gaining the confidence and trust of a consumer so they will buy your products or services. One way you can do this is with putting customer testimonials on your website. If presented properly, these testimonials can turn website visitors into customers by gaining their trust and loyalty.

Make it Personal

Testimonials are an excellent way to gain consumer confidence. Many websites have customer testimonials on them. Rather than just give a quote and a name, you should make it more personal. Having a picture of the person giving the testimonial makes it more personal and therefore more powerful.

Request a photo of the person offering the testimonial and confirm with them that you have their permission to use it on your website. This will make your customer testimonials more powerful.

Ratchet Up the Impact with Video

If a picture is worth a thousand words a video must be worth a million. It is extremely easy to add video to websites. Consider having video testimonials from your happy customers. The personalization of the testimonial will give it great impact.

A simple, short, honest video testimonial can have a dramatic impact on your potential customers. Have an entire page of video testimonials and you can see your conversion rate soar.

Make it Natural

Do not script or write testimonials for your clients. Consumer will read right through that. You want the testimonial to be natural and unforced. This will give it much more credibility and that is the primary purpose you are adding testimonials to your site – credibility.

If you have customers that are interested in giving testimonials but they are not sure what to say you can give them some talking points for ideas, but do not script it, especially if they are doing a video testimonial.

The bottom line is that customer testimonials are a powerful Internet marketing tool that can help you gain consumer confidence and credibility. The more personal the testimonials are the easier it will be for potential clients to identify with the person giving the testimonial. If someone identifies with the person giving the testimonial it will have greater impact.

You should definitely include obtaining and posting customer testimonials as part of your overall Internet marketing plan. The more testimonials you have and the more personal they are the more impactful they will be.

Internet Marketing Timelines

Every website owner investing resources in Internet marketing wants to know when they will see a payoff. Some online marketing tools can yield fast results while others may take longer.

It is important to consider both the timeline and the return on investment when deciding your online marketing strategy.

Fastest Results

If you are selling a product that has a short lifespan you need fast sales. To do this, consider Pay-Per-Click (PPC) campaigns. PPC campaigns can drive traffic to your website within minutes. It is the fastest results you can expect from online marketing.

The downside is that PPC campaigns can be quite expensive. You are paying for every click to your website from the search engine regardless as to whether or not they convert to a sale.

Some search terms have a low cost per click like \$0.10 per click but competitive terms are typically anywhere from \$5 to \$200 per click or more. This means your PPC campaign can become quite expensive quite quickly.

Social Media & Content Distribution

Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a way to drive targeted traffic to your website. By engaging potential customers on sites like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter you can drive them to your website.

SMM takes time and energy but it is something you can potentially handle in-house which means the only cost associated is the value of your time. Make sure you factor in the value of your time when doing a cost-benefit analysis.

Article and press release distribution is another way to bring targeted traffic to your website. A well-written article or press release that includes a link to your website can bring you targeted traffic. The only costs associated with this are the cost of distribution of the press release and the writing costs, if any.

Search Engine Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a very cost-effective way to bring targeted traffic to your site but it also is one of the slower ways. Typically SEO is part of a long-term online marketing plan.

SEO includes a series of tools and strategies that when implemented will help your site rank higher in search results on the search engines. It can take several months or longer before your website starts to rank better though SEO, but once you do there is no cost per click.

Analyze your options and associated costs and you can determine your best short-term and long-term Internet marketing strategy.

How to Test a Landing Page

Landing pages are the most important pages on a website. It is vital that your Internet marketing efforts include the creation, testing, and tracking of landing pages. You can directly equate the success of your landing pages with your conversion rate so your attention to detail is important when it comes to your landing pages.

Testing Landing Pages

The best way you can test landing pages on your website is to create multiple versions of the page to be tested. Your pages should differ in style, content, offers being made, images, etc.

Once you have your landing pages set up you should install Google analytics on them. The analytics will help you see how traffic is responding to the various landing pages you set up.

Create a PPC campaign on Google that sends traffic to all four landing pages and run the campaign for at least 4 weeks. Make sure each of the landing pages is receiving around the same volume of traffic.

Seeing the Results

Examine the results to make a determination about the success (or lack of success) of each landing page. You want to see your bounce rate (the lower the bounce rate the better), your conversion rate (the most important statistic) and how long people spend on each landing page.

Start to identify your most and least successful landing pages. Look for similarities among the most successful pages and the least successful pages. This should help you start to identify what does and does not work.

Adjusting the Landing Pages

Put together a couple of different variations of your most successful landing pages to run the experiment again. Pay careful attention to things like what images are being used and where, what if any video is being used and where, calls to action, etc.

Run the campaign for another 3 to 4 weeks and analyze the results in much the same way you did earlier. At this point you should be able to pinpoint what is and is not working on your landing pages.

Create your final landing pages based on what worked the best and run them for at least 8 to 12 weeks. After approximately 8 to 12 weeks you may want to create new versions of your landing pages and test them again. You will have “fresh eyes” at this point and may identify new things to improve the success of your landing pages.

Web Writing

Writing for the web is a skill that some writers have and other writers do not have. You want to keep some simple rules in mind when writing website content, blog content, online articles, etc.

Your ability to stay within some simple rules will help you write effectively for the web.

Website Content

Website content (the text on your site) has to be written for two distinct “audiences”. You are writing for the people who visit your site and you are writing for the search engines. Both are important audiences.

First and foremost make sure your content is well-written or your website visitors will lose confidence in your company. The search engines may not know the difference between good and bad writing but the visitors to your site will.

You typically want to write on a reading level between 6th and 9th grade. Keep your sentences short and clear. Paragraphs should never be longer than four sentences and your content must flow.

Your content should include keywords. Keywords are the search terms that people would enter into Google, Yahoo, etc to find you. You should use keywords on all of your pages but do not cram them in. If you overuse keywords you may get your site penalized by Google as SPAM.

A good rule of thumb is to keep your keyword density around 3%.

Blog Content

There are similar rules for blog content. In addition to the rules for website content you also want to make sure you do not exceed 400 – 500 words for a blog posting. You can write a concise and informative blog posting between 200 and 400 words in most cases.

Make sure your blog has links into other pages of your site and is written in a conversational tone.

Article Writing

Perhaps the most important rule for writing articles is to write articles that have value. Writing words for the sake of writing words has no value and the impact will be negligible for your business.

Article writing can be an effective form of Internet marketing. Distributing well-written and informative articles will enhance credibility and provide you with valuable links into your website. If you are not a good writer you should consider hiring article writers for your site.

Consumers that read concise, well-written articles will reward you with confidence and loyalty. Make sure you keep this in mind when writing for the web.

Internet Marketing and the Use of Humor

Humor is an effective tool for Internet marketing. Website owners sometimes take themselves way too seriously. Of course, not all websites should use humor but for those that can it is an effective way to put your audience at ease and make them relate to you better.

Humor can be used on virtually any page of your website, but is best on pages that are less important on your site. You can identify these pages as those that can show personality without appearing unprofessional (this will depend on your industry). You can consider using humor on About Us pages; Contact Us pages; Blog entries; Profile pages, etc.

Humor can also be effectively used in e-mail marketing campaigns and social media campaigns.

The Webs Funniest Videos

Funny videos are something web surfers love. They are more than happy to send out links to videos they find funny. If you have or can have a funny video made that is appropriate for your business it is a great way to spread the word about your company while also helping people feel more comfortable with you.

Consumers like to relate to the people they are doing business with. Make someone laugh and there is a near instant connection.

Some Thing are Just not Funny

No matter how funny you think some things are, there are some topics that should be off limits, even in self-deprecating humor. These topics include: age, disability, gender, race, religion and sexual orientation. It is also not advisable to make jokes about your competition as they may be seen as being petty.

Offensive humor can trigger significant backlash online so be extra careful with the humor you choose to use on your website. If you have any doubts then err on the side of precaution and do not use that particular piece of humor.

Humor on Sites – Bottom Line

The bottom line is that humor is an effective tool online. You do not have to be a comedian or comedienne to add humor to your website. If you are not naturally funny you can hire a writer or ask a friend for help. Do not try to be slapstick funny and avoid inappropriate humor.

The proper use of humor on a website can increase consumer confidence as your website visitors are put at ease and feel a connection with you after sharing a good laugh.

Coupon Codes

Every website owner that sells products should offer coupon codes. Online consumers search for and wait for coupon codes and will shop at the retailer that offers them.

If you have a website that sells products you can drive people to buy from you and learn about the sources of your business with coupon codes

Online Coupon Codes

Online retailers need to offer coupon codes. They build consumer loyalty and increase sales. You can use coupon codes for different reasons ranging from moving a specific line of products to selling off your clearance items.

When you are offering a coupon code you want to make sure you promote the virtual coupon well. You can use different coupon codes for each source of traffic so you can also track where

your customers are coming from. You should post coupons on your social media accounts, blogs, e-mail distribution lists, etc

Offer a coupon to the most popular blogs in your industry. Exclusive coupons can motivate a blogger to post about your sale or promotion (offer them a commission through an affiliate program as even more incentive).

Drive them to Your Store

Printable coupons are a great way to drive people from your website to your store. You will start to see how many people are visiting your site based on the number of coupons that come into your store.

Consider having different coupons that are printable based on the source of the potential customer. You will be able to identify if they found you on a particular social media site, blog, advertisement, etc.

If you make the coupon something sent via e-mail you will be able to follow up market to them as well.

How much and How Often to do Coupons

Consumers are savvy. If you offer them a bogus coupon they will be able to tell immediately and you will lose that customer. Do not try to play games with your potential clients. Give them an honest coupon code and gain their confidence.

Typically you want to offer coupon codes regularly on different product lines. Do not offer coupons too frequently on the same line of products or consumers may prolong the purchase in order to see what coupon comes out next.

Coupon codes can be for a specific percentage off, for a free gift, free shipping, etc. Give a coupon code of value and promote it well and you should be rewarded with sales.

When to Pull the Plug

Internet marketing has a higher return on investment than any other form of marketing. Though this is true it does not mean that all forms of Internet marketing will have a high return on investment for your particular business.

It is important to know when adjustments are needed to a marketing strategy including when it is time to pull the plug on a particular aspect of your marketing plan.

In a nutshell you want to make sure your marketing efforts are being fruitful.

Measuring Success

There is one key statistic for you to focus your analysis on – the cost per conversion. You want to measure what each of your Internet marketing efforts are costing you for every conversion. A conversion is a sale. When setting up your various Internet marketing initiatives you want to make sure you know where each conversion is coming from. You do this by installing website analytics such as Google Analytics.

Pay-Per-Click campaigns are easy to measure the success on. In fact, Google and Yahoo will tell you the cost per conversion as part of their standard reporting. This is an important tool.

Other forms of online marketing will require you to set up your analytics properly so you can identify each source of a conversion and the cost of that conversion. If you have a search engine optimization plan in place that is costing you \$1,000 per month, you want to see how many conversions you had that month from search engines (non-PPC) and determine the cost per conversion for that campaign. Do the same with social media campaigns, email campaigns, etc.

Measure the True Costs

When you are analyzing your costs per conversion make sure you put in all costs including shipping costs, advertising costs, the value of your time, etc. If you are engaged in social media marketing, for example, and you are putting in 40 hours of time per month on the social media sites you need to determine your hourly rate (what your time is worth) and factor that into the analysis.

You may discover that some of your marketing efforts are resulting in sales but not profits. Since every business wants to make money you need to hone your marketing efforts to ensure that the only marketing efforts you allocate resources to are those that have a positive return on investment. This is how you manage your overall Internet marketing initiatives.