

Search Engine Marketing
Website Design
Ecommerce

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Top 10 Tips for successful Web Marketing

Introduction:

Web sites are not a new idea and the concept of using the internet is familiar to all of us but it seems that the use of the internet for proactive marketing is still an under utilised resource.

Our marketing strategies normally have a promotional mix made up of: Advertising, Direct mail, Sponsorship, events, seminars (and so on) and of course a web site. The website is often just a 'brochure online' and does not collaborate with the other activities.

Today I believe web sites to have moved to the 'centre ground' to sit at the core of all marketing activities. Whatever your business your website plays a role to assist and support other marketing and business initiatives.

In these times of recession I also believe that there has been a shift in spend as the web is a relatively minor cost when compared to direct mail and advertising. The return on investment is very measurable and particularly when using search engines to attract sales and leads the upside of business growth can be very exciting.

The following are my Top 10 Tips for successful web marketing

1. Planning

Who is the website for? what role does it play? What should it achieve and how do you envisage it will achieve that?

Tip: Think of the website as a member of staff or as a collection of resources:

Salesman, marketing, account management, support. The website is more than an advertisement for the business: it can win new business but also keep in touch with existing or past customers to encourage repeat business. The site can perform an account management role by alerting customers to new information concerning them or allow them secure access to personal information in the same way we now use the bank online for all our transactions. You can use the website for streamlining business processes from managing support calls to transacting a sale and collecting money. Planning how the site should assist the business but also enabling the technology to 'scale up' as your business evolves will pay dividends further down the line.

2. Market research

Customer profiling

Customer profiling is vital and often missed as the excitement and keenness to get a website designed, built and published is overpowering, but to me this is probably the most important task as it identifies the intended audience for the website. It might seem obvious to you but it really is worth committing the "customer Profile" to paper as a sanity check to ensure all the design and functionality of a website is focused on the customer groups.

Tip: Segment your customer audience into more than vertical markets. Break down your audience into individual demographics even if they are business to business customers; what wine do these people drink, what cars do they drive, what do they do for entertainment, what is their level of education? Split out segments so you have a good understanding of the different individuals on your site and the terminology they might be using for searching and expect to see in the content. Remember "corporate customers are consumers in grown up clothing"; identify the purchasing patterns of your customers on the website. Their loyalty, their behaviour on the web that might be different from direct selling. Understand the groups of people who buy from you and those that don't. There may be unforeseen opportunities and considerations. For example, the web might be allowing you to enter a global market requiring a different workflow.

Sales Research

They say it's easier to sell what you have sold before to the type of customers who have bought from you before - that's obvious but measuring this can reveal interesting

statistics on margins, lost opportunities and an idea as to what marketing activity works. This exercise never fails to surprise owners/managers and shows how the business may have changed .

Tip: What did your customers buy and why over the past 6 months? What percentage of your business is repeat business and what is new. Where did these new customers come from? What is the proportion of web business versus telephone business or other channels? Are there any key trades where you are perceived as the experts and thus business comes to you through reputation? Ensure you get reports from your accounting or ERP system of the margins by product or customer segment.

3. Keyword Research

Now that you have researched your customer base you will be certain of the terminology they may use. This is very relevant for business to business organisations where the customer may have a significant understanding as to the industry specific language, product names, industry jargon or common phrases employed in that industry. Consumer sites tend to focus on more generic terminology.

Tip: don't get caught up in your own jargon. Nothing puts off customers more than terminology they don't understand. This is important to understand for the content of the page but also to research the keywords used on the search engines.

4. Research Competition

Search engine competition, regional competition, direct competition and lateral competition. Regional and Direct will be familiar to you as these are the usual culprits so it is worth looking at their websites to see how they are differentiating and how they have designed the navigation and the content.

Search Engine Competition is who is listed in the top spots on Google and other search engines for what would be your customer's search term. It maybe a small company, even a 'one man band' can get Google No 1 if their site is structured well.

Tip: Getting SEO listings against the competition is like playing football in the premier league; you don't have to be any good at football – just better than everybody else!

With SEO you can examine even the finest detail of your competitor's site from the code structure- to navigation & content- to the inbound links.

Lateral competition is when you are competing for a customer's money or time say a pub competing against a gym or vice versa depending on the customer's mood!

5. Design with the visitor in mind

Your site should interact with and establish a relationship with your visitors at the earliest stage. Many visitors leave your site within a minute of arriving at it. The experience should be a positive one allowing easy navigation and quick downloads. Wherever possible this should also involve you giving valuable information in return for sharing their needs and marketing identity with you.

The job of any retailer is to create an environment where by the customer is comfortable and is encouraged to buy. Online is no different. Whatever the objectives of the site the experience the visitor has on the site is key to getting your message across.

As humans we are sensitive to many things; colour, movement, sound as well as the written word so all areas of the design from the images you use to the navigation should be thought out with the visitor as well as the site's objectives in mind.

Tip: Don't make your visitor frustrated or confused with inconsistent navigation. Help them get to where they want in the site. Incorporate functions to save them time or assist with visual impairment by enlarging text.

With ecommerce you have an ideal opportunity to link products to encourage more sales and to offer promotions and loyalty options to encourage repeat purchase. A good example is – people who bought this... also bought these...

The objectives for good design and build are:

- *To build awareness of the site and get more visitors.*
- *To get more sales (or leads) from these visitors*
- *To make the basket size bigger for greater sales*
- *To encourage repeat custom*

6. Search Engine Optimisation

It is important that an understanding of the way in which search engines work is integrated into the fabric of your website design and structure. Web pages have to be registered with and then indexed by the search engines. When invited, search engines send their electronic robots to "spider" your individual pages. They explore for common themes in the content and page structure and then report back to the search engines who index them.

*Tip: Poor search engine listing almost totally wastes the site owner's investment, particularly where the creative design has taken precedence over the way in which the internet works. Guess what - **8,100,000,000** pages exist out there for the search term 'home' indicating a lack of understanding on how to structure a web page. It is*

essential that your site is found for search terms that relate to your business, services and products, and most importantly in the 'language' of the customer.

7. Good Content

It has been said on many occasions that the three most important things to get right with websites are: Content, Content and Content. Well search engines love content so that is key but it's about getting a balance of content. Don't throw in rubbish just to get the word count up or litter the page with key terms if it makes no sense to the reader.

Tip: Be educational, be interesting, be informative, be entertaining, but above all be authoritative about your industry, products or services as this will give you the credibility and create sales or leads.

8. Functionality

The wonders of the technology are such that you are restricted only by ones imagination. Websites these days can do all sorts of wonderful things; selling goods, sharing information, aiding communication, galleries, gathering opinion polls, live news, web cams, video blogs, knowledge bases, to name but a few. Content management systems enabling fast customer client controlled updating of website content.

Tip: Don't just have technology for technology's sake. Chose the best way to develop functionality to aid the site, your business and improve customer experience.

9. Links

We are happy when searching the net to follow links from site to site, exploring new information and learning more. Links however have a big influence on search engines as Google especially, will reward those sites with a good link structure. What I mean by this is that to have good inbound links from other sites gives you better listings.

It is a way of Google electronically getting a reference on you; if other sites are prepared to link to you then you must have something worth linking for!

Tip: Get links that are relevant. A link from a baker to a super yacht designer wont aid the visitor so won't impress the search engines. Make them relevant and from good sources and you will get the SEO benefit. Also links from large sites and highly

respected sites such as .org's, .ac.uk's work well. Getting an article published in an online newspaper with a link back will be great.

You can also search for links that go to your site or indeed your competitors: Search in yahoo link:www.mydomain.co.uk

10. Ongoing updates

All the above seems like a lot of work but it will be worth it. When it goes live don't leave it there; the best sites like BBC get updated every second. Don't leave yours a year with no updates. Regularly changing content will encourage visitors to return expecting new and improved functionality and content.

Align other marketing activities such as pay per click (PPC) campaigns and email marketing to the website. This can generate lots of traffic and is especially useful around specific events or promotions.

Tip: the concept of freshness is also adopted by the search engines so if your site is up to date the search engines will know and better listings may result.

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