

Marketing Your Web Site

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Your Web site has been developed and maybe even has been registered with some search engines. Now what? When will the traffic start coming to your site? Before you try to deal with the ongoing challenge of Search Engine Optimization (**S.E.O.**), you should first check your site against some of the basics:

Marketing Fundamentals

As you may have found out, attracting traffic to your Web site is only part of the battle. While you should continue your efforts to optimize your sites for search engines, don't neglect the bigger picture – marketing fundamentals.

- Think about what people want. Decide what you want visitors to do when they arrive. I know, you want them to buy something, but.....
- Most visitors don't buy on the first time they visit. Put yourself in their position. If your site doesn't have a clear sense of direction, a trail to follow, they may leave -without doing anything.
- They may be temporarily impressed by a pleasant Web design, but without converting them into paying customers, your site may not realize its full potential.
- If you are lucky enough to find a Web designer who understands both the principles of good Web design and marketing fundamentals, you're miles ahead.
- Forget about trying to convince every visitor to buy immediately. What you want from them is to be interested...for you to tell them more. You literally want them to give you their name and contact information, if they don't buy on this visit.
- Once you get this info, you begin a follow-up process. Therefore, you convert your Web site from a passive brochure to an active lead-collecting mechanism.
- In order to obtain their contact info, you need to:
 1. Give them a reason to contact you.
 2. Give them a choice of ways to contact you.
 3. Clearly ask them for their contact info.
- Here are some ways to achieve this:
 1. Make sure you have a professional Web presence. Today, there are thousands of inexpensive Web design templates available. Compare your site with these designs and ask yourself which looks more professional.
 2. Clean compelling text goes hand-in-hand with a professional design. The blend of these two elements will shape your visitor's first sense of your business. Good copywriting is convincing without being too pushy, gently leading them to the next step.
 3. A lot of people still choose to talk with a real live person. Consider adding a toll-free number and re-enforce that it is toll-free, by putting the words "Toll Free" next to the phone number. Display it prominently on every

page of your Web site. Include some copy encouraging that they can call you, just to ask questions.

4. Consider offering “live chat” on your Web site and put the live chat button right next to your toll-free number on each page. Millions of people converse with chat services every day. Every time a client has tried it on their site, they have been delighted by the results.
5. Automate the info collection process by placing an opt-in-box in a prominent position, on every page of your Web site. The easiest way to do this is with a service like **Constant Contact**. You can routinely schedule follow-up emails, sent at predetermined times, and track the response to your various follow-up communications.
6. Give your visitors an inducement to subscribe to your mailing list. Give them something of value in exchange for their important information. Some ideas are: Newsletter or eZine, Catalog, additional product information, promotional merchandise or sweepstakes entry for a product that you sell.

Pull In Qualified Traffic

Qualified traffic is different from ordinary traffic. A person who goes to a search engine and enters a specific search term like “Lefton lighthouse” is probably interested in buying a Lefton lighthouse. On the other hand, people who come to your site via banner ads, pop-ups, and print advertising will be much less qualified than those who find you through a search engine. However, there still could be a large variation in the possibility of them pushing the order button depending on the search terms they use.

- If they enter a specific search term like “Lefton lighthouse” versus just “lighthouse”, they probably already know what they want. If you have the strongest selling environment and your price is competitive, you will be in a good position to convert this prospect into a customer.
- If your competition has a strong selling environment or a better price, you may lose this order despite the prospect being qualified. But, price isn’t everything. Stressing that the item is in stock with same day and/or free shipping, can often close the sale.
- What about the other prospect, the one who searched for “lighthouse”. This person doesn’t know exactly what he wants. If your pricing is higher than your competition’s, then this search term may turn out to be more profitable for you. Since he doesn’t know exactly what he wants, he probably hasn’t done any price comparisons. If your offer is attractive, you may be able to convert him into a customer, even though your price is higher. The lesson is that you can’t make the assumption that more specific search terms will always convert better.
- A lot of people make the mistake of focusing on search terms that are too general. The problem with general keyword phrases is that it is often hard to achieve search engine placements for them. There are just too many

competing for the top rankings. Specific search terms would be ideal, providing there are enough people searching for that specific phrase.

- Selecting phrases so specific that no one is searching for them is another common mistake. Ideally, you should be some where in between. Optimize your Web site for search phrases that are used often enough to make them worthwhile, but not so general that they become unattainable or have an inadequate conversion rate.
- A great source of keyword phrases research is a service called **WordTracker**. They maintain a vast database of search terms. You can enter a keyword phrase and it will tell you how often that phrase is searched and how competitive it is on the various search engines. It will also give you a list of related terms and a competitive analysis for each one.

Track Results and Adjust

- Tracking exactly where your sales are coming from is crucial to any online marketing program. Actionable information steers you towards a specific action that can increase your bottom line. It's great to know that 1,000 visitors came to your site from Google, but what can you do with that information? The information becomes actionable when you know how each visitor found you and what they did after arriving.
- It's important to know which of your search terms are yielding paying customers, and which are bringing window-shoppers. You need to concentrate your efforts on the search terms that are producing the most money. To obtain this information and make intelligent decisions, you'll need an accurate tracking system.
- A good choice of system to track the source of your sales is called **Hitslink**. It is a Web-based service that makes the task of analyzing your log files much easier. A special tracking script is inserted in each of your Web pages. They also offer an Enterprise Edition that includes advanced e-commerce tracking features.
- The Hitslink Enterprise Edition will track your visitors from the point where they enter your site all the way through to the point of sale. If they don't buy on their first visit, it will track the person on later visits and will remember where they originally came from. When you get an order, you'll find out exactly where the sale came from, including the name of the search engine and the exact search phrase they used. You can therefore learn which keywords and search engines are most profitable.
- You can also set up unlimited "Campaigns" and track visitors from Pay-Per-Click search engines, banner ads, and other forms of advertising. Why throw away money on campaigns that are losing money?
- By being more knowledgeable about where your sales are coming from, you will have an advantage over many of your competitors. The actionable information will enable you to create even more sales, while cutting any unprofitable campaigns.

- Take this e-commerce info, refine your marketing and continue to measure the results. The more you measure and refine, the more profitable you will become.
- Beware of content that is dynamically generated by a database. The big problem with a dynamic Web site is that they are not nearly as search engine friendly as static sites. Some search engines will not index them or will index only a limited number of pages. (A typical dynamic Web site will have hyperlinks to the detail pages containing a question mark or other specific symbols.) Unfortunately, some search engines won't index pages containing a question mark or other special symbols, or, they may limit how deep they will spider such sites. Obviously, search engines will not be able to utilize a search box (conduct a query), and they will miss this content entirely.
- The way to get around these two problems is provide access to all your Web pages by doing nothing more than navigating links. You will need to have one or more pages organized by product or category, that eventually drills down to every page in your database that you want indexed by a search engine. A Site Map (Table of Contents) will achieve this result. The other solution is to use a URL rewrite script that will allow you to feed the search engines URLs that appear to be static, but are actually dynamic. The program that you would use depends on the type server that is hosting your site. For Apache servers it would be a "mod-rewrite" module. For the Microsoft IIS server, the program would be a "ISAP rewrite". It is important to understand that there is no re-direction taking place. It is simply a URL translation.
- You can never offer your visitors too many ways to navigate around your site:
 1. If you have a very simple Web site design that was created with a proprietary site builder or store builder tool, investigate replacing it with one of the many professional looking Web site templates that are available and which can be updated using FrontPage 2003. (Result would be more flexible site management.)
 2. Use a combination of navigation systems:
 - Left and/or Right side navigation bars (buttons), with Sections (Left) and Sub Sections (Right), along with various Info pages (Left).
 - Bottom and/or Top navigation bars (buttons), with Home, Contact, Site Map, etc.(Top and Bottom), and footer with address, phone, email, copyright, etc. (Bottom)
 - Text links to continuation or related pages within the page body.
 (Result would be an easier to navigate site, with more navigation options available to your visitors, from all page areas.)
 3. Use a limited number of buttons in your Home page's Left navigation bar, with short titles in the button text. (Result would be streamlined look with only Section level buttons visible on Home page.)
 4. Use relatively short pages (50-75K) with Product Galleries and links to continuation or related pages. (Result would be less scrolling required.)

5. Add an opt-in box to each page. (Result would be to collect valuable visitor info.)
6. Have all internal page links open in the same window and all external page links open in a New window.

I hope that you now can see how much more important using sound marketing fundamentals throughout your site is, than just having an attractive design or search engine registration. For more information about Search Engine and Keyword Optimization, Building an E-commerce store, and Protecting your site and computers against Viruses and Spam, request our other articles.