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Creative Diversity Blog

Article
Online Marketing 101

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Online Marketing 101
Pointers, ideas and guidance on how you can optimize your online exposure and gain customers

What grade would you give your company? I'd like to share some easy ways you can evaluate your company's marketing strategies, processes and structure. In the end, you should have an outlined report that will define how well your company is doing with its online marketing practices.

Marketing has change dramatically and at a rapid pace. The Internet constantly evolves and changes the way we do business and how we communicate. Luckily, in today's economy the small business owner still has a chance. The Internet offers many affordable streams of exposure and if done properly, businesses can reap the rewards. Online ad spending is projected to surpass print for the first time in 2012.

Social Media - How can I start without mentioning it first? There are literally thousands of social media sites, but from a business standpoint I'll only cover a few of them. I believe all businesses should utilize the major social sites for exposure and for search engine optimization (SEO). You can't go wrong with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Flickr. Keep an eye on Google+ and read this article.

It's not so much *that* you use these sites but *the way* you use them. You should schedule your posts with regularity. Sites like Hootsuite can help you organize posts as well as provide metrics. Many businesses make a common error and write their posts in a monologue fashion, like a TV or print ad, instead of in a dialogue fashion. Try wording your posts so they stimulate conversation. Writing in question form can help, as well as including fun contests, polls, and specific questions on what readers want your site to be. Let your followers know they have value and that their opinion matters. This feedback can be very important. The style of your posts should be informal vs. formal. Most businesses or institutions write professional (formal) and are direct, but in the social media world you can alienate your followers and become an entity instead of their neighbor. As in life, you want to be approachable and inviting. This is a community, and the "mom and pop" feel is what people seek. You should humanize your posts and blogs with photos or by putting the author's initials below the posts. It's not about your company, it's about your followers and what your followers want from you. Above all, respond to any questions and be involved in the community you are creating. Some ideas are sharing your blog posts, relevant news articles, interesting material from other sites, newsletters, new products, parties and events, etc. Have fun and share, share, share!! Become the interesting person/company on the block.

Don't forget about branding, so try and design your pages with that in mind. Facebook is famous for changing the rules on how its pages are created, so use YouTube and search the web for the do-it-yourself methods. Many bloggers will give you free advice if you post a question on their blog. There are also many companies willing to charge you for their service if you don't have the patience.

Flickr is an easy way to help increase traffic to your site. Its results are heavily indexed in search engines, often surpassing other non-image links; Flickr can be a powerful SEO tool. However, Flickr is one of the least-utilized SEO tools around. Any site with over 40 million users and over *4 billion* photos uploaded is worth taking a closer look at. Simply upload more photos and tag them. Generally speaking, photos of your products, employees and events can all be published. It's worth the time, and it also allows the media, customers or vendors easy access to your library. Did you know that you could stream Flickr's photo gallery on your site? This is a nice feature for the small business. Slidemypics offers free HTML5 code. There are other sites that do the same, but they use flash, which is not compatible with iPhones and iPods.

YouTube, just like Flickr, can be utilized for SEO. Now that Google owns YouTube it has interests in video and has created more competition for fewer traditional search results. It has enabled sites with video assets—even sites that would otherwise score poorly in the Google index—to successfully achieve first-page rankings. In fact, Forrester research found that videos were 53 times more likely than traditional web pages to receive an organic first-page ranking. Unfortunately, it requires more effort and can be expensive to produce. Here are a few suggestions you can do to get yourself started:

- Google is fairly flexible in what it considers to be video content. You can use actual video footage, but screen captures, slide shows, animated PowerPoint slides, and other content will work just as well. Google can't actually "see" what's inside the video content, so it relies on title and other meta-data to determine what content your video actually contains. Look into what you have, and you might be able to upload something.
- Short clips of some of your events.
- Second voice-overs of your products. Use a few photos to get you started.
- Video versions of your eBooks.
- Tutorials of how to use your products.
- See these two Blogs for additional ideas: Blog 1 and Blog 2.

LinkedIn has many professional groups and an incredibly large network. You can join groups and use the forums to ask questions and learn what is going on within your industry. Think of it as a free consulting service. All companies should have a company profile. LinkedIn is highly indexed by search engines, so a profile will help your SEO. People think it's just a recruiter's site to locate talent. It's that and much more.

Blogging - is the best way to reach your target audience with useful, educational information — not to mention how much it helps your search rankings. Companies that blog achieve 55% more web traffic and 70% more leads than those that do not. Set up a schedule for your blog. The more often you do it, the better you are. I realize it's difficult to regularly create content, so assign responsibilities to your team and to others in the company. Don't be afraid to go outside your marketing department. Customer service, sales and technical support all have a wealth of information you can tap into. Tristan Higbee's blog *The Backlight* is a great resource for ideas and general blog education. Test your blogs by including them in your newsletter. Once you are comfortable that your objectives are attainable, make it your official blog. Consider this

your training period. Again, engage your readers in dialogue. A good business blog should become a hub for conversation; it's not only a great marketing tool, but it's a portal for your followers to be heard. The more you hear from your followers, the more you will know what they need and want from your business. I would recommend focusing on ways to engage your readers. Interview customers make polls, create tutorials, have contests, surveys and ask questions. You only need to be creative. Follow companies you respect and see what they're doing. Blogs don't need to be books; they can be short and sweet. Remember it's informal, too. The written word is powerful, and by virtue of publishing them you become instant authorities and gain credibility.

If you don't know how to incorporate a blog into your website and need a host, review this list. I use WordPress, and if you don't need a corporate brand design you can use their templates. WordPress uses PHP code and after some growing pains of learning it, I converted mine fairly quickly. For $10, I was able to convert my website using ThemesPress. It does all the hard work, but you'll need to be able to massage it. They really don't have support.

Mobile – You should have a mobile version of your website. 43% of all phones are smartphones, and 87% of individuals use it to access the Internet. Many businesses would benefit from a mobile App as well. By the start of 2012, 50% of Americans will own a smartphone. There are differences between the two options, and it can be difficult to understand. To learn more see this site for definitions.

Don't forget to create an iPhone/iPad icon of your website. It allows users to add a quick link to the desktop of their device for easy access. Don't let a hard-to-see screenshot (which is the default option) rob you of an excellent branding opportunity.

Include in your html a meta viewport tag for mobile devices. The meta viewport tag tells a mobile device how to orient a page when it's loaded. It also determines if a page can be scaled larger or smaller and if it should rotate as the user rotates their mobile device. There are so many different devices, so it's a good idea to put this tag in your html to ensure your website is presented as you intend. I use this code <meta name="viewport" content="width=device-width, height=device-height"> but there are many different options. Be proactive and purchase the domain name **www.companyname.mobi.** It will become very popular in the near future for mobile devices. My research indicates it will help your SEO.

White Papers and eBooks - eBooks can be shared easily and work well with tutorials and guides that either give out a general overview of something, or provide a compressive guide to targeted audience. They are easy to create and are typically written in a conversational tone, while white papers are very technical and tend to be in a formal format. Here are a few suggestions on topics you can write about:

- Tips you should know before you visit a museum
- How to declare a building a historical site
- Travels guide to New York
- Top 10 tips for cellulite removal
- Top 5 best diets for healthy skin care
- 10 winter skin care tips
- Top 10 ways to avoid premature skin aging

Review your search words and popular pages for ideas. I'm sure there are hundreds of possible ideas if you look.

Landing Pages - It's always a great idea to make [landing pages](#) for lead generation. Offering eBooks and white papers are a way to obtain leads/supporters. Have them fill out a survey with contact information for an eBook, contest, promo code or coupon. I could easily make this blog into an eBook and create a landing page for it to entice people to submit their contact information. You can develop social media campaigns and create landing pages for them.

Career Page - During these economic times a simple career page can help your SEO. You would be surprised how many businesses do not have one.

Search Engines - Search engines look for fresh content so that they can serve it up later in search results. If they don't index it, results won't show it. The more fresh content you create, the more often search engines will come back looking for more. How often do you update and add to your site?

Alt Tags – You should have alt tags on all your images. Images are invisible to search engines, and alt tags are an easy way to tell search engines what your page is about. Tuck in a keyword between some alt tags and maximize the impact of the images on your site.

Keywords – Not to confuse you but does Google use keyword meta tag in its web search rankings? Most people think yes, but that is not true. Read this article from [Google](#) to become informed.

News and Events - A simple news and events portal on your home page is a good way for new viewers to see a quick snapshot of your company's latest news. It's a great historical listing that will help with SEO by adding more content to your site. An [RSS feed](#) is recommend as well. Usually things like awards, events, press releases, new products, TV exposure and major YouTube video posts can be put here. I usually recommend this for the large companies.

Newsletter – Newsletters are an amazing way to connect with your current followers. However much you think a newsletter is all about your company, it is really all about your followers. Your newsletter is considered a "soft" selling platform, meaning you should be offering up content your recipients actually care about, as well as the latest and greatest about your company. I like to think of it as a summary of what happened in the past month and what will happen in the present month. Here is a list of general topics to include in your newsletter:

- Repurpose blogs
- Events past and present
- Platform to introduce new customer services
- Promotions
- Tips
- Product launches
- Highlight a product of the month
- Trivia question of the month - engage followers for the chance to win some swag, coupons or tickets
- Contests
- Feedback links, which can be landing pages on your site
- Invitations to events or focus groups

Much of these things can all be repurposed along many marketing avenues. Don't worry about duplication because your followers will choose how he/she wants to receive your information. You will now be offering your followers/fans options and at the same time helping your SEO. It will also force you to create content, which is an incredibly powerful tool. Don't forget you can publish it on Facebook and Twitter, too. Make links back to your site, and you will gain more web traffic.

Emails – In case you have not caught on, there is a common theme with online marketing, and email is not any different. Try to keep promotional material to a minimum, stick to the publishing schedule, and don't overload subscribers with too many emails. You must always include opt-out options for your subscribers. There are several email services; I prefer Campaigner because it has an HTML option. I researched many services and from my experience they all have issues. When you deal with HTML, it's part of the game.

Backlinks – All of the above will help build your backlinks, but including any affiliations or prestigious groups can't hurt.

mozRank - is on a scale of 1 to 10 and is SEOmoz's 10-point measure of link authority and popularity. Every link to your site is another vote in the giant popularity contest that is the Internet. The more sites that link to you, the better you will rank. Keep on creating and sharing all that great content, and you'll keep moving closer to the top of the charts. Want to see what your score is? Go to check-domains.com for a full report on your mozRank and how well you are doing with SEO. This is a great site.

Web performance test – This is something I run and then give to a webmaster. It provides a lot of backend data. I like to use webpagetest.com. A lot of times it will catch things like missing a 301 redirect. To a search engine, "craigslist.com" and "www.craigslist.com" are not the same thing. Set up a permanent redirect (also known as a "**301 redirect**") so that you get full credit for what's on your site, no matter how it's accessed.

Pay-Per-Click – is a great way to advertise your site. I'm a believer that if you're doing everything in this blog, it means you are optimizing your SEO to the fullest and in turn your organic searches will be very good. You must analyze your Google analytics and do a lot of research to get the most out of your Adwords campaigns. You have to be smart and think about your objectives. Google is very helpful and will hold your hand through the process. It is a great supplement to all of your efforts. Depending on your business, the impact may not be as beneficial to you. I have included several articles for you to review at the end of this blog.

Press Releases - are a powerful and frequently overlooked promotional tool that can be valuable for just about any type of business. It is one of the quickest and most cost-effective ways to get the word out about your milestone, service, product or event. Press releases are almost always picked up by other newswires, so it helps your SEO and lets you reach other markets you haven't even thought about. There are many newswire options. I've always preferred PRWeb and PR Newswire. Other services that are more affordable and even free can be found on blogs called Mashable and best free marketing tips.

Branding - This is a big topic, but I would be remiss if I did not touch on it before I concluded this article. It is important that companies be consistent with its inward and outward communications. Using the same fonts, colors, photo style and templates will help build your brand.

Style guides and production manuals are always a good idea. If your logo does not translate into all media formats, you will have some tough decisions to make.

In conclusion, the name of the game is content and how well you execute it by utilizing specialized sites. If you break it all down and use my topics as a checklist, you can score yourself to see if you are addressing everything you can to get the most out of your efforts. Marketing can be a difficult thing to measure success, so whenever I consult for companies I immediately go through this checklist to determine direction. It's very easy to see if a company is doing something or not. If there's anything I have left out of this blog, please let me know. I tried to cover the main online marketing criteria everyone should know. Good Luck!

Additional articles you should read:
All through this blog I have included links to help you along. I encourage you to review them all.

- 50 Ways to Get Your Site Noticed
- Hubspot is a great resource for information on inbound marketing. I obtained a lot of my knowledge from them. Download and sign up for a few of their eBooks. They lead by example and will teach you a lot about online marketing.
- Email Marketing Best Practices to Generate More Leads
- mozRank how is it scoredPay-per-click best practices business
- Is Pay-per-click worth your time?
- Is Pay-per-click worth it?
- 17 most common PPC mistakes web marketers make
- 11 ways to create a mobile friendly website
- 10 great tools to create a mobile version of your site