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The burning question many small business clients have is:

What's the best way to sell my product/service online?

This month's newsletter will point you toward resources which highlight recent developments in the areas of search engine optimization, website design, online consumer preferences, and the buying process. We'll also offer suggestions that can make your website even more attractive to potential customers -and move them toward a purchase.

The Three Major Areas We'll Cover:

1. How to Be Found

Search engine optimization

Social media impact

Advertising

2. Keeping Potential Customers on Your Website

It all starts with your website

Top design trends for 2010

Website features

Eight seconds, plus or minus two

What not to do: fatal mistakes

Website marketing turnoffs

3. Moving People Toward a Purchase

Decision process

Customer value

Make it easy to buy

E-Marketing for Small Businesses - SECTION 1

How to Be Found

In the world of online marketing, your business is like the finest cheese shop in Anytown, USA, and in that virtual world the mouse is your best friend. If no one knows that your business exists it is probably because Google (or any “search engine”) has not led the “hungry mouse” to your cheese shop. In the age of online marketing, millions of people search the internet and expect to find a specific product or service provider list. If your enterprise is not at or near the top of the list the customer will not find it. How do you get your business to the top of the list?

Getting Online Marketing Help

Online marketers propose at least three methods that can help customers find your business. In the process called Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the online marketing companies promise that they know what to tell Google to keep your name at the top of the list so that customers can find you. Another method involves strategically embedding your product or service information in online texts or internet sites so that potential customers can click on it and find your website. A third approach recommends taking advantage of social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook to increase exposure to potential customers.

A business can pay big money to stay at the top of the list (e.g., Pay per Click) or use other non-paying methods (organic searches) to achieve high ranking status on search lists. Because SEO and embedding can cost thousands of dollars, Jean Rowan, a San Antonio based online marketing executive cautions that “Small businesses need to first understand what is being sold to them.” (See Primer on Paid Searches vs Organic searches, and examples of ranking results, courtesy of www.asenzmarketing.com, and for more details on

the search engine optimization process, visit [http://www.websiteoptimization.com/publications/.](http://www.websiteoptimization.com/publications/))

Small businesses first need to understand what is being sold to them - paid listings or organic listing. There is a vast difference between PPC (paid for advertising) and search engine rankings (organic and earned), here are the highlights:

	Paid Search	Organic Search
Key Advantages	You can “buy” your way in (guaranteed placement.)More control over editorial. Enables testing and optimization of various messages. Instantaneous results (campaign live within minutes)	You don’t pay for clicks (no ongoing media investment)Users may more readily trust organic listings Organic search tends to generate a higher conversion rate
Key Disadvantages	Requires ongoing tweaking and analysis for successSponsored ads may be seen as less trust worthy by some users	Cannot guarantee placement.Lack of editorial control. Requires long term, ongoing efforts. Unpredictable environment (search - engine algorithms changing, etc.). Off-site tactics difficult to influence (e.g. ,in-bound links.

Anyone can promise high rankings in PPC (Pay per Click) because the business is paying for that space. No one should promise high rankings for organic search engine rankings because these are dependent on a number of factors (Google has 123 criteria they use to rank a site and this is propriety information), not to mention the number of competitors in their space, the size and age of the website, etc.

Without a long lesson on how search engines work, the best advice is for the business

person to ask for demonstrated results, i.e. ,sites in their market area that are placing well for the most popular keywords.

E-Marketing for Small Businesses - SECTION 2

“It All Starts With Your Website”

You may already have your website in place, but take some time to focus on these questions:

- What is the profile of my target audience? (age range, professions, hobbies, interests, etc.)
- Which adjectives best describe this target market: conservative, liberal, youthful, fun-loving, rebellious, outdoorsy, homebodies, etc.?
- How would I like my site to appear differently, from a design standpoint, compared to those of my competitors? (See Website Features Comparison Worksheet)

<http://training.txsbdc.org>

Tailor your design and processes to meet the needs and preferences of your target audience.

Top Design Trends For 2010

Keep your users interested by integrating new elements to your website or giving it a drastic makeover. Here are a few favorites for 2010:

Personalized Experience	Interactive/Intuitive Design	More Multi-Media
Magazine Layout	Links, Links,Links	One Page Designs
Gigantic Logos and Headers	Enough White Space	Hand Drawn Sketches
Typography	Less Flash	Large Images and
Pictures		
Replacing Icons for Text	Context-Sensitive Navigati	Retro Design
Slab Typefaces	Change of Perspective	Modal Boxes

Talk to your website designer about any possibilities you would like to consider. Discuss

additional costs, speed and mobile platform considerations, and whether your users really need or would value these types of upgrades.



Example of Magazine Layout at

<http://www.cyberdesignz.com/blog/2009/12/8-web-design-trends-2010/>



Example of Real-Life Metaphors (C.L. Holloway) at

<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/05/20/web-design-trends-2010-real-life-metaphors-and-css3-adaptation/>

Top Web Design Trends for Small Business in 2010

<http://smallbiztrends.com/2010/01/top-web-design-trends-for-small-business-in-2010.html>

Web Design Trends 2010: Real-Life Metaphors and CSS3 Adaptation

<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2010/05/20/web-design-trends-2010-real-life-metaphors-and-css3-adaptation/>

Web Design Trends 2010

<http://webdesignledger.com/tips/web-design-trends-for-2010>

11 Excellent Solutions for Making Your Website Mobile Friendly

<http://webdesignledger.com/tools/11-excellent-solutions-for-making-your-website-mobile-friendly>

A Guide to Mobile Web Design Tips and Tricks

<http://mashable.com/2009/11/26/mobile-web-design/>

10 User Interface Design Fundamentals

<http://carsonified.com/blog/design/10-user-interface-design-fundamentals/>

How to Make Your Web Design Stand out from the Crowd

<http://carsonified.com/blog/design/how-to-make-your-web-design-stand-out-from-the-crowd/>

The Next Wave of Digital Marketing Trends

4 innovative marketing solutions that are just around the corner for small businesses

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/marketing/onlinemarketing/article206418.html>

10 Web Marketing Trends for 2010

Where to invest, what to test and which deserve a rest

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/marketing/onlinemarketing/article204480.html>

Keeping Potential Customers On Your Site

People hate to wait.

Studies have shown that most first-time visitors spend **at most 10 seconds** on a site before deciding whether or not it offers any value for them. So what are you doing to keep potential customers on your site?

Experts in growing small businesses recommend that you do your homework. First, visit the websites of direct competitors and carefully study the various factors outlined below. Then compare them to your own website design. Use the table below to rate your competitor(s) and see how your own website compares. (Rate from 1-10; 1 is the lowest, 10 the highest)

Website Features Comparison Worksheet

Website Features	Competitor 1 Rating	Competitor 2 Rating	My Website
Load speed			
Colors			
Intuitiveness			
Ease of use and navigation			
Scope of content			
Quality of content			
Level of professionalism			
Types of information shared			
Special links			
Other			

Adapted from "E-Commerce" tutorial prepared by the Texas Small Business Development Corporation. (<http://training.txsfdc.org>)

You must also have an online strategic/marketing plan. Ask yourself:

- What is my site all about?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Who will really come to my site?
- Will they understand the value proposition once they get there?
- What will compel them to linger on the site for any extended period of time?

<http://training.txsfdc.org>

Remember, your website is not designed for you - it has to be designed for your prospects and customers! Look at your website through the eyes of the prospect.

[Webdevelopernotes.com](http://webdevelopernotes.com) offers these tips, "if you run a site which sells products for the elderly, you should make the layout easy, the font size large and the design simple... Navigation should be such that visitors are able to find the information they are looking for in a maximum of three clicks. The lesser the number of clicks the better. Remember, frustrated visitors are quick to click on the browser "Back" button. So structuring your site content is essential for survival."

<http://www.webdevelopersnotes.com/design/index.php3>

Response Time: Eight Seconds, Plus or Minus Two

Slow response times and difficult navigation are the most common complaints by Internet users, according to Websiteoptimization.com. Users will bail out to look for a faster site after about eight seconds. Exactly how patient a user will be depends on many factors. How compelling is the experience on your website? Is there effective feedback? How fast is fast enough?

For an in-depth look at the psychology of delay and in order to discover why we are so impatient, visit <http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/1/> . The model below illustrates the four things Internet users look for and the balance between those aspects and the user's financial and social costs. When users make a decision about using a web site, they weigh how useful it will be, its perceived ease of use, its suitability to the task, and how much it will cost them.



Figure 1: Shackel's Acceptability Paradigm

<http://www.websiteoptimization.com/speed/1/>

http://www.digital-web.com/articles/speed_up_your_site/

<http://www.webreference.com/>

Internet marketing expert, Corey Rudl, author of "Insider Secrets to Marketing Your

Business on the Internet” and founder of www.marketingtips.com , says that a Web site should be like a newspaper story-what you’re selling and how it benefits people-should be the first thing your visitors see. That’s the best way to capture their attention and get them to read more. “Don’t make them look for it; hit them between the eyes with it!” To read his expert advice in the article “4 Fatal Website Design Mistakes” click here: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/ebusiness/sitedesign/content/article71474.html>

What Not to Do: Fatal Mistakes In Website Design:

FATAL MISTAKE #1: TRYING TO “DAZZLE” CUSTOMERS INSTEAD OF TRYING TO SELL TO THEM.

FATAL MISTAKE #2: MAKING YOUR SITE TOO LARGE.

FATAL MISTAKE #3: DESIGNING CONFUSING NAVIGATION.

FATAL MISTAKE #4: BURYING ESSENTIAL INFORMATION TOO DEEP WITHIN THE SITE.

Website Marketing Turnoffs

Forcing immediate registration website	The long URL	The unsearchable
Windows that don’t generate URLs e-mail lists	Limiting contact to e-mail	Lack of feeds and
No e-mail addresses as usernames	E-mails without signatures	High Prices
Dirty store (clean it up)	Poor customer service	Pushy salespeople

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/magazine/entrepreneur/2009/june/201614.html>

<http://www.impressivewebs.com/5-ways-to-turn-off-website-visitors/>

E-Marketing for Small Businesses - SECTION 3

Moving People Toward a Purchase

Why should someone buy from you?

Many factors meld together to encourage a potential customer to buy from you, or not. A decision to buy involves many rational and irrational processes going on in your potential customer's mind. The model that follows illustrates the overall process in a buying decision.



If this is a high-involvement decision, you need to provide a good deal of information about the positive consequences of buying. Stress the important attributes of the product, the advantages compared with the competition; and maybe even encourage “trial” or “sampling” of the product to help secure the sale.

http://tutor2u.net/business/marketing/buying_decision_process.asp

Basically, you must provide customer value:

Customer Value = Relative Performance - Relative Price (1)

(1)Best, Roger J. Market-based management: strategies for growing customer value and profitability. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.

So how does your product/service compare in the customer's mind? Think about your performance relative to your competition. Do you compete on price? Uniqueness? Speed? Social or emotional benefits? Service after the sale? Again, why should someone buy from you?

Make It Easy To Buy

Assuming you've taken care of the website issues discussed in our previous chapter

“Keeping Them on Your Website,” and your value proposition is acceptable to your potential customer, now’s it’s time to make the purchase process as easy as possible.

Keep it simple! Don’t require the customer to complete complicated forms or provide lots of extra information during the order process. You can always ask for additional information after you’ve closed the sale.

Make it Obvious

Don’t force your customers to search for the purchase options: put those options “above the fold” so that customers don’t have to scroll down to find them. Offer a variety of payment options. Don’t distract your customers from the primary objective of closing the sale. Here are some interesting ideas in this area:

<http://www.developer-resource.com/make-it-easy-to-buy.htm>

<http://www.developer-resource.com/general-marketing.htm>

<http://sbdcnet.org/SBIC/marketing.php>

For additional resources related to E-Commerce, Online Training, Business Strategy, Building Your Web Site, Finding a Web Host, Strategic Marketing, etc, please visit <http://sbdcnet.org/SBIC/e-com.php>

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