

Successful Website Marketing

Project Overview

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In today's web-focussed world, internet sales and internet marketing must play an important aspect of any company's growth plans. Effective use of web technologies and opportunities can have a massive impact on company profile, visibility and in the end, profits. There are steps and methods to taking advantage of the internet-based potential, which if managed correctly, can drive a company forward with amazing pace. The key to managing a successful website marketing campaign is knowledge: knowing the technologies and tricks available, and knowing when and how to implement them.

Driving Visitors to Your Website

There are a wide variety of methods and steps to encouraging internet users to visit your website. Below is a list of some of the more useful ones:

1) Search engine submission: Google is by far the biggest search engine. Google allows internet users to submit URL's (uniform resource locator) or web addresses for inclusion in search engine listing. This is often a first step to increasing your website's visibility on the internet. It can take up to six weeks for Google to pick up your website and there are no guarantees about placement (or even inclusion) but it is still a worthwhile step and it usually only takes a week or so (perhaps even less). Although there are thousands of search engines available, it is best to focus on submission to Google, which is the most commonly used search engine.

2) Site optimisation for search engines: Google uses a variety of parameters and complex algorithms to conduct searches and are constantly improving and updating its search methods, so it is important to stay abreast of its methods to insure that your site maintains a high standard of optimisation. The main tool for optimising search engine interaction is Meta tags. Meta tags provide search engines with all sorts of information and directions on how to interact with your site. The Meta tags for keywords and description provide search engines with information about your site. There are Meta tags

that encourage the search engine robots to find and index your site; conversely there are tags that prohibit robots from doing the same. The key is to use the right tags in the right way to make sure that your site interacts with search engines in the way that you want. For more information about making your site Google-friendly, do a Google search for 'Google webmaster tools'.

3) Exchange links to improve search engine listing: Another search parameter employed by search engines is the number of sites that link to your site. The greater the number of legitimate websites that link to your site, the more important your site appears to a search engine. The more important your site, the higher up the search engine listing it will appear. So, exchange links with non-competitors, suppliers or related parties to improve your search engine listing.

4) Keep the site up to date: There are two main reasons to keep your website up to date. Firstly, visitors to your site will be encouraged to stay longer, read more and interact more with your site if they know that the contents are relevant, accurate and recent. Equally important, if not more so, Google considers an active, up-to-date website a happy, important website and will therefore return that site higher in search results.

5) Use a blog: Blogging is a great way to drive traffic to your site and to keep it there. Regular and relevant updates, in the form of short articles, 'thoughts of the day' and other 'little gems' can be a great way to increase your website's (and your business's) visual presence on the internet. It's also a great way to encourage your customers to visit your website on a regular basis. There are a variety of free blogging (Blogger.com) sites and there is plenty of free blogging software like WordPress or TypePad. Both blogging options will require a bit of tweaking and learning to make them your own, but with a bit of practice, they are wonderful web publishing tools.

6) Engage with pay-per-click advertising: Google (and Yahoo via their company Overture) offer a service called pay-per-click advertising. Although rather difficult to completely explain on paper in a few sentences, pay-per-click is a relatively simple scheme. You bid on words and phrases that search engine users employ to find what they are looking for. Should a search engine visitor then click from the search results page through to your site, you are required to pay the bid. If the search engine visitor does not click through to your site, then you do not pay for the placement. Hence, you only have to pay the bid when visitors search on your key words and then click through to your site. (There is an additional, more detailed paper available on this topic should you be interested.)

7) Keep atop the current industry trends: There is a veritable treasure trove of free information available on the internet about practically every topic imaginable. Better yet, there are countless free list-serves and newsletters about all sorts of industries and professions. A good way to keep with your industry is to find these list-serves, blog sites or newsletter distributors and sign up. You can check on the latest trends, see what the competition is doing and get ideas on how to improve not only your own website but perhaps your business practices as well. Moreover, if you can contribute to a worthwhile blog or newsletter, you increase your own (and therefore your website's) visibility over the internet.

Converting Visitors into Customers

Whilst getting visitors to your site is an important step, it is using your site to convert those visitors into customers that will dramatically increase the value of your site. What follows is a descriptive list of actions to make that all important conversion.

1) Monitor web stats: By monitoring the usage statistics of your website, you can identify the most popular pages on your site, see how long visitors are staying, and learn how they came to your website. You can use these web statistics to fine tune your site by placing key messages, sales offers, new items, etc. on the most visited pages of your site. Most web hosting packages offer some sort of basic web statistics as part of the hosting package. It can be very worthwhile to obtain more detailed statistics than typically provided as part of a basic package.

2) Encourage interaction with site visitors: A website is, in many ways, like a shop. When visitors come to your site, what are you doing to encourage them to engage more actively with the site? Question forms, plentiful 'Email us for more info' links and even a login page all are good ways to enticing visitors to the site to make direct contact with you. Moreover, if you can encourage visitors to log in, you can easily track where those specific customers have visited and in turn communicate very directly about their needs or wishes.

3) Collect email addresses from your website: Utilising the email address collection potential of your own site is key. Encourage visitors to your site to sign up for free newsletters or email correspondence. This can be done by offering something of value for free – your latest quarterly catalogue delivered direct to their inbox, a discount voucher for new users who sign up, etc. When collecting email addresses from your website, it's best to do so in keeping within the parameters of the Data Protection Act.

4) Update the site regularly: An up-to-date website is the best website. Visitors to the site are less likely to engage with your site or to peruse it thoroughly if it is out of date. Additionally, search engines do measure how often page content is renewed or updated – search engines think a busy, frequently updated site is active and important. So, frequent updates also help with search engine placement.

5) Place online catalogues and other materials in PDF format: By placing catalogues and brochures online in PDF, you are providing visitors to your site with a print-friendly method to reviewing your work or sales pieces whilst away from the computer. Also, placing your online catalogue in a PDF, or including your latest brochure or postcard as a PDF, gives search engines extra pages to use in boosting your search engine placement.

6) Exchange links to increase the benefit to your site visitors: Visitors to your site, and in particular repeat visitors or customers, will look to you for recommendations on related projects or services. If you can help your clients and customers find what they are looking for, you are strengthening your business relationship with them. If you refer clients along via your website, those to whom you refer clients will be more likely to send some business back your way.

Email Marketing

Email provides even small companies or sole traders the opportunity to reach out to existing, new, or potential clients on a regular basis with a minimum of cost. When done properly, email-based marketing can serve as a key tool in your marketing campaign. In order to ensure maximum results, it is best to keep in mind the following items when conducting an email marketing campaign:

1) Make regular email contact with those on your distribution list: Take advantage of your email distribution list by making regular contact with your list. Sending a newsletter or update, passing along a voucher and mentioning upcoming sales are all good ways to interact with your list. Make sure that you are sending the right amount of information, in the right format and in the right schedule. Be careful not to spam your distribution list.

2) Be aware of HTML formatted email pitfalls: Be aware that not all internet users like to receive HTML formatted emails (the emails with fancy fonts and images). Some find those annoying. Additionally, there are technical reasons not to send them: (1) they are often blocked by email servers for security reasons and (2) they are not always interpreted properly by the recipient's email client so your fancy formatting might be thrown askew. Give your distribution list users the option to have emails sent to them in HTML or plain text format.

3) Use email addresses connected to a name: When sending out marketing emails, consider using an email connected to a name – particularly if you are a small company. Recipients often like to know that they are interacting with a person and not just a massive marketing machine. Have the emails come from you or one of your colleagues. It adds a personal touch.

4) Allow recipients to quit the list: As your email marketing campaign is meant to be a service to clients, it is important that you allow the recipients of your marketing emails to remove themselves from your distribution lists. Make sure that you include a way to do so with each of your email shots.

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Non-Internet Related Marketing

In a marketing campaign, it is best to consider the internet as one aspect of the campaign rather than as the entire toolset. It is important to market your company and website through other, non-internet based methods.

1) Prominently feature your URL on all of your marketing materials: Your business cards, your stationery, your brochures and your sales receipts are all excellent places to place your web address. In a sense, each item is like a mini-marketing piece, so be sure to take advantage of each. Make your URL as visible as possible to clients and potential clients.

2) Use direct mail to drive traffic to your website: A bright and colourful postcard or a well-designed flyer sent to clients and potential clients can drive visitors to your site. Just as email shots are a way to reach out to new and existing clients, it is important to do so through a variety of other methods and media. Direct mail campaigns are a proven method of driving traffic to your website.

3) Distribute business cards: Business cards exist to encourage those we meet to buy our wares. Make sure that you are distributing your business card wherever possible. Whilst it is important to do so in a manner that is not pushy or overtly sales-focused, do keep in mind that everyone we meet is a potential best client.

4) Take advantage of press coverage: It's important to encourage journalists who write about your products or business to make sure they also mention – in fact, highlight – your web address. This is, in effect, free advertising and you will want to make the most of it. You can then monitor your web statistics to see if a particular article caused an increase in web traffic.

About lbdesign

Founded in September 2001 by Liam Dempsey, lbdesign is the culmination of creative energies geared to work with organisations, businesses and individuals with a shared vision of taking an active role in improving the quality of life for all humanity. Liam has built lbdesign around providing top quality design solutions to businesses and charities on a realistic budget.

lbdesign relocated from Chicago to London in the autumn of 2002. lbdesign quickly developed a reputation for creativity, efficiency and value for money. lbdesign has worked with a variety of small creative companies and individuals including Cockpit Arts, Kali Theatre Company, Katie Adams Ceramics and Ruth Williams.

lbdesign has extensive experience in both print and web design and brings this unique blend of experience to each and every project it takes on.

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Last updated: 15 April 2007

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