

Online Marketing Methods That Work

Business owners are facing a harsh reality: A website in itself offers no guarantee of business. "If you build it they will come" is a cliché that has misled many into believing all a company needed was an online presence to succeed. However, without a strategic marketing plan and a tactical approach, you're more likely to fail than to reach your goals. Proper planning will not only improve your chances of success, but it will also keep you from throwing away money on e-commerce fiascos.

The first step of planning is to define your goals in light of the target market you aim to reach. As you classify your target, you should determine the core needs of that group and observe the buying behavior that occurs among your potential purchasers. Characterizing their purchasing habits enables you to position your business to appeal to your target market with compelling information before they buy from another resource.

Several online resources can help you place your business in the forefront of your target audience. The process, however, can be complex because a variety of online vehicles, if utilized properly, can help you yield the results you desire. Also, the key to successful online marketing is in developing a diverse marketing plan which takes advantage of several approaches to deliver your message. Components in your marketing plan should include such elements as search engine marketing, pay-per-performance, ad placement, joint ventures, targeted traffic, e-mail marketing, media marketing, optimization and copywriting.

Search engine marketing has been one of the most highly visible forms of online marketing. With millions of businesses employing search engines to gather information daily, search engine placement for key terms has been a major business generator for companies who properly place themselves in the search engines under the right terms relevant to their market offering. An obstacle to being ranked at or near the top, however, is that thousands can be competing for the same position. And with the search engines changing their algorithms often, achieving placement on the first page for the terms relevant is extremely difficult without a solid working knowledge of and experience in the search engine marketing field. Consequently, one should not solely rely on ranking.

Another marketing technique on the rise is pay-per-performance advertising. This is a method for which you pay per click, impression, or visit that a site refers to your site. The application works best if the placements chosen are locations that directly connect with the target market you desire to reach. Advertisement rates are based on an auction format in that the highest bidder obtains the top placement. If your bid is \$1.00 for every time someone utilizes your link while your competitor bids \$1.01, your competitor will gain a better placement than you. If 100 individuals click your link, you should understand that you will owe \$100 whether they buy from you are not. Pay-per-performance advertising clearly requires a full understanding of your conversion ratio to determine the budget necessary to commit to such a program.

Ad placement is similar to pay-per-performance in that you pay for advertisement on sites or newsletters. The difference is that you typically pay for impressions and market reach. Impressions encompass how many unique visitors view the location in which your ad is placed. The market reach refers to the number of individuals accessing that website or newsletter over a period of time. However, you have no guarantee of the number of visitors who will follow your ad to your website. The concept is similar to traditional print ad placement in that advertisers have no guarantee that people exposed to their print ads will visit their places of business.

Another method, joint ventures, can be highly effective in helping businesses obtain referral customers. Joint ventures can be as simple exchanging links with another website or as complex as assembling a tiered affiliates program.

Targeted traffic marketing is an additional online marketing tool with two main applications. The first involves the purchase of a demographic defined list. Such a list will contain individuals that fit a specified demographic to whom you have permission to send information freely either through an e-mail campaign or a sales call. The second form of targeted traffic entails the purchase a specified number of unique visitors to your site who fit a demographic. This is a mass marketing or shotgun approach. Using either approach requires a skilled implementation of marketing content or your conversion ratio will be low, meaning you'll be wasting money.

The most criticized but still effective form of online marketing is e-mail marketing. Too many marketers utilized this method improperly by imposing upon individuals who had no interest in their products or services. The answer to marketing effectively using e-mails lies in ensuring you have permission before sending to the individuals on your list.

A more effective method would be to utilize media marketing in which you write articles, white papers and other content relevant to your industry to be published. Sharing valuable insights and information rather than out-and-out selling helps to validate your company's expertise as you also acquire free brand exposure.

Finally, marketing effectively online requires the right kind of preparation for your website. Many sites fail in that they generate traffic but they lack the kind of relevant content that retains the visitor, educates the prospect, and/or encourages the prospect to take action. Developing content that relays a clear message to your visitors is critical. Copywriting professional Sallie Boyles states, "Lead with your punch line. Be clear. Be concise. Rather than covering each page top-to-bottom with solid content, use windows and links to provide detailed explanations as needed. When people gather research online for an immediate or future purchase, they want ease and efficiency—or they'll leave the site and go elsewhere."

In developing your next online marketing plan, follow these key steps to success: First, define and research your market. Second, prepare your site for action. Third, position yourself in the marketplace utilizing several marketing methods. Fourth, be prepared to follow up and close the deal. A world of e-commerce awaits!

About the Author

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