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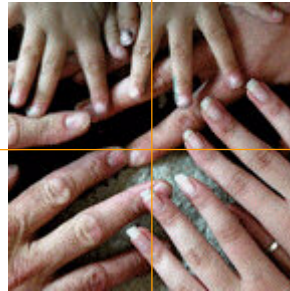
E-BUSINESS MARKETING

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Abstract

This guide is intended to help companies better understand the process of continuous marketing in an e-business environment. It highlights the principles of e-business marketing: such as conversational marketing, personalization, and making the most of your investment.

Introduction

The paradox of marketing in an e-business environment is that it's more complex than marketing directly to consumers, and yet fundamentally the same. The basic equation hasn't changed: you have a product or service to sell and you need to convince someone to buy it. In a retail environment, that's where the story often ends: getting to a sale is the focus and point of marketing. That's not true in an e-business environment. In e-business, you're far more concerned about long-term customer relationships and customer loyalty. And unlike the typical retail sale, for example, marketing can play a continuous, vital role in e-business, supporting customer interactions through the entire life of the relationship.

You begin by understanding the problems your customers (or prospective customers) are facing. You then articulate or help define that problem for them while building a solid business case for your solution. Once you've convinced a prospect that your solution is the best one—the one with the right features, the right price—you need to complete the sale by delivering your products and services. If you're astute about marketing, you'll want to follow up with your customer after the sale, offer help and support if necessary, and look for opportunities to cross-sell or up-sell.

That whole sequence is what we call the customer relationship cycle; and in e-business, marketing is a key part of every phase.

Continuous Marketing

Because of the Internet, you can continuously market your products and services around the clock to consumers located anywhere around the world, at every point in the customer relationship cycle. You can market to them during the hours when your business is closed. You can market to them on the terms they specify. With your help, customers can direct their own marketing and obtain from you information that will help them make more informed buying decisions, based on criteria that you can help shape. You can market to your customers continuously, in every interaction; so that when they come to your website looking for help on a technical support question, you can use that opportunity to introduce relevant products or services targeted specifically to their needs and buying history.

GENERAL ADVICE FOR MARKETING IN AN E-BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Now, we offer a little general advice. Keep this advice in mind and let it guide you when you're uncertain.

- Think big. But take small, measurable steps designed to deliver actual results or solve specific challenges such as making your website's home page more accommodating to first-time and returning visitors.
- Understand that e-business is an evolving process. Place educated bets on technology, then track your results, learn, adjust, and improve. You may not always get it right the first time.
- Constantly listen to customers and intended users to ensure that bite-sized initiatives are having their desired impact.
- Plan globally first, regionally second. Consider the needs of the entire global organization before making a decision that may work well in one region but is not appropriate elsewhere. Also, seek global brand consistency first, and then let regions tailor content as necessary.
- Work to optimise business processes, starting with the marketing/sales flow. Define typical customer interactions from initial touch to order processing. You may be surprised at how much "free" revenue results when you remove roadblocks that prevent the flow of information throughout the process.

To compete successfully online, today's firms must maximize their web presence. This means leveraging your website, integrating online and offline marketing efforts, and communicating effectively online. In a few simple steps, we will unravel the mysteries of effective online marketing and help you get the best returns from your website investment.

#1: There is no mystery.

Online marketing is marketing. Like all successful marketing efforts, you must develop a clearly defined goal for your website and must have an understanding of your online target market. What do you hope your website will accomplish?

Will it . . .

- Replace your sales and marketing kit?
- Close sales deals?
- Create a secondary revenue stream?
- Serve as your virtual storefront?
- Support other marketing activities by providing a professional online presence?

Keys To Success

Be clear about what you want your site to accomplish. Clarify your objectives and measurements so you can know if your investment brings you the expected return.

#2: What's more important, design or content?

The answer is both. When visitors arrive at your site, the overall look and feel determines whether they stay or move on. Your site needs to reflect your brand and be consistent with your other marketing pieces. Also, your site needs to be easy to use and navigate. So design is important.

Remember, however, that content is king. Once a visitor's decided to stay, your copy needs to grab them. It must be relevant to visitors and answer their questions effectively. Though the Internet allows people to control where they go and what they see next, your content should logically and thoughtfully lead them to important points and entice them with calls to action throughout the site.

Keys To Success

Speak to your target market—use language they use, anticipate the questions they'll have, address problems they have that your company solves, and speak to them so they feel like you "get it."

Effective web copy involves your visitors and sets the tone for your company. For the best copy, consider the following:

- Use "we" instead of "I" if you want to be perceived as a larger company.
- Keep content fresh and updated so visitors want to return.
- Keep copy brief and to the point.
- Include clear call to actions. Phrases such as "Call us," "Mark this page as your browser home page," "Sign up for our newsletter" and "Complete our survey" will prompt visitors to take action.
- Make it "sticky"—figure out how you can keep people on your site. Use a one-question survey that provides immediate results, direct them to helpful information and encourage them to browse your online store. Think of setting one up to offer your customers another way to get their hands on your products.
- Offer tips and advice. While some entrepreneurs are concerned about giving away their value for nothing, offering tips and ideas reinforces your expertise to your audience and inspires them to work with you. The more value you offer on your site, the more often people will come back.
- It's not about you. Make it about the reader. Sounds simple but look at your home page. Is it all about you and how great your business is and all the wonderful things you do? Then it's time to change that. Your home page must address the problems and challenges that your customers have—and tell them how you can solve them. Visitors should look at your home page and think, "They get it."

#3: I built it. When will they come?

Did you hope that once you had your website up and running your sales would explode? You're not alone. Unfortunately, just building a website isn't enough. The keys to getting the most out of your investment can be summed up in three words: Leverage, integrate and monitor.

Keys To Success

Leverage

Handle your website's launch just as you would any new initiative. Distribute a press release. Create an inexpensive postcard with a picture of your site, and send it to everyone in your database—be sure to include an offer that inspires people to log on. The offer could be to visit the site for a coupon for 10 percent off or a Top 10 list. The better the offer, the more likely you'll get traffic.

Remember to include a "What's New" section on your site and keep it updated. Add any new clients, events you speak at, articles you've written, and any other news of interest to your customers. When someone expresses interest in your company, encourage them to visit your website.

Link your site everywhere it makes sense—to professional organizations, local business publications, doing business in (your city) sites, industry publications, What's New sites. If you have colleagues you like to refer business to, offer to put them on your site and ask for a reciprocal link. The more relevant sites that link to yours, the higher you'll rank in search engines.

Integrate

Once you build your site, tell the world about it. Put your website's URL on every printed marketing piece you produce—business cards, brochures, direct mail postcards, Yellow Pages ads, invoices, coupons, articles you write. In addition, put everything on your site — if you run an ad, put a copy on your site and say: "As seen in...".

Include your web address in your e-mail signature and your voicemail greeting: "For more information, visit our website at...". If you have a storefront, hang a banner that includes your web address. Think about it this way: Wherever you put your phone number, put your web address there, too.

Monitor

When you invest money in something, you need to know if it was worth it. Statistics help you learn your return on investment. Most hosting companies offer stats as part of their package, and your web developer can help you interpret them. Be sure to review site statistics quarterly and look for trends. Do visitors look at a few pages, get to the "Services" page, then drop off? Think about what that means—maybe they come to your site thinking you do one thing, then get to Services and find out you don't offer what they want. Perhaps your Services page doesn't provide enough information. Look for trends and adjust your site accordingly. Then keep track of your adjustments and look at the results the next quarter.

Today's businesses can't afford to operate without a website. But before you invest in one, create a plan for how the site fits into your overall business objective and marketing goals. Then leverage, integrate and monitor.