


Marketing Online - Many ways to skin a cat (Part 2)



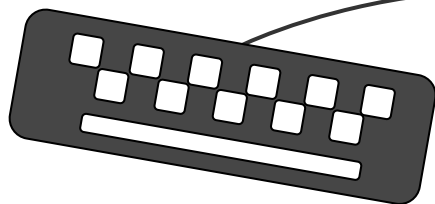
In our last issue of Interact! we discussed some online marketing tools and the importance of integrating the online and offline marketing mediums appropriately. In this issue, we discuss more online marketing options including

- Blogs
- Affiliate Marketing
- Referral Marketing
- Community Marketing

Blogs

Depending on your business, starting a blog could be a low-cost method of boosting your profile with potential customers and helping your website's ranking in "organic" search results. You should see your blog as a way to educate your customers of what is out there. If there is a product that is better than yours in the market, talk about it. It will increase your blog's credibility and bring people to it.

Keep in mind also that the topics need to be updated regularly with interesting information that people want to know about. Simply "selling your product" on your blog will not bring customers.



You can advertise on popular blogs that are focused on your target market. This gives you a narrow reach but possibly quite effective results.

Another method is to actually find blogs that are pertinent to your industry and then answer posts on a regular basis. You need to be careful here though because you do not want to be viewed as a participant who is using the blog as merely a plug. You need to add value to the site.

Some industry specific blogs that you can look at and see how marketers use them are as follows:-

- ▶ <http://www.travelblog.org/Asia/Singapore/> - for the traveler in you
- ▶ <http://www.chubbyhubby.net/2006/01/watch-this-space.html> - for the food fiend

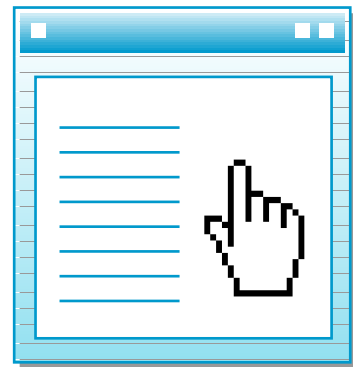
In order to search for blogs that you can advertise on, simply go to a search engine, type in the category and search the World Wide Web. Else, ask some of your customers which blogs they visit for their interests. Then see how you can get yourself on them.

Affiliate marketing

Affiliate marketing is a popular method of promoting web businesses in which an affiliate is rewarded for every visitor, subscriber and or customer provided through his efforts. It is a modern variation of the practice of paying a finder's fee for the introduction of new clients to a business. Compensation can be made on a pay per click basis or a pay per lead basis or a pay per sale.

This is a highly effective method of marketing because remuneration is tied to some level of success. The best would be to link to businesses that are complimentary to yours.

Suppose you have a site that sells bikes, then you can link to a site that sells bike parts, or magazines that talk about biking, or even to health sites. This sort of marketing is also effective in terms of getting listed on search engines.



Referrals

If they seek referrals at all, most small business owners think only of their clients. Now, your existing clients can be a good source of referrals. When you think about it, who better to sing your praises than someone who has actually experienced your abilities?

The problem though is that your existing clients may not have much motivation to do so. Hence, it is important for you to think about who is, or can be convinced to be, highly motivated to refer business to you.

In most cases, the best referral sources, those that can be motivated, are businesses that offer complementary services to the same target market. These non-competing businesses could be courted like one of your primary target market sectors.



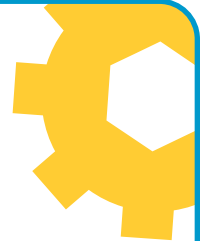
TV / Magazine / Newspaper Advertising

This is one of the ways you can blend above the line and online advertising very effectively. Suppose you're running a TV commercial you can devise a campaign that actually drives viewers to participate in a lucky draw with a gift with purchase or huge discounts off purchases from either your online store or your brick and mortar store. An effective technique that will probably give you more bang for your above-the-line marketing bucks.

Community Marketing

The World Wide Web is just that, a world of information. And like the real world, it is made up of communities. In these different communities, we share information in the form of web-based forums, newsgroups, mailing lists, instant messaging, email and other various technologies. So create communities around your product or affiliated with your product. Alternatively, join a community that is relevant to your product and talk about what you are offering. Stay relevant. Be a resource for customers and build tools that will help them in their day-to-day needs.

It's about building trust through direct, transparent communication. It's about listening, acknowledging, responding and serving your audience. It's about involving your customers with your product teams as they are just as much an integral part of growing your company.



To maximize these relationships and shared environments, Community Marketing can take several forms.

1. **Active Community Marketing** – This engages forum members in discussions and asks the community for their opinion on your product and services.
2. **Reactive Community Marketing** - Reply to forum messages that ask for your product/service, that talk about your competitors, etc...
3. **Passive Community Marketing** - Using forum messages, solicit what other community members think about your product and service or what they expect from your company.

Example of a community forum

► <http://4x4singapore.com/> - for the Jeep Fanatic – Jeep Nation

You need to respect the members of the community that you are trying to infiltrate. This form of marketing is a delicate balance and if done improperly may backfire as it can be perceived as spam. That's bad for your site and your brand!

Commerce helper is a tool that understands how to utilize this technology to its maximum and promote your products and services so as not to be misunderstood or written off as junk advertising. If community marketing is viable for your business, Commercehelper.com can help you utilize it properly.

We hope the above list has given you some food for thought. If you are looking for affiliates, appropriate forums, useful blogs etc, all you have to do is go out and search the World Wide Web or alternately, drop us an email and we will guide you in your search.

See you next month.

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