

# THE MAJOR AREAS OF ONLINE MARKETING – A SUMMARY GLANCE

## INTRODUCTION

The internet is increasingly the leading information resource for many people across the world especially in the areas of business, education, and professional services. In the changing global economy it is essential for businesses to leverage the internet as a key marketing and sales target in order to enjoy growth in the years that follow. In the area of online business consulting there are many services to be offered and providers to be found. The challenge is finding a provider that will fine tune these various areas to your business needs and integrate them with your current marketing initiatives and long term goals.

Any organization's online presence is made up of many parts that are often missed when developing a strategy for online sales and marketing. Organizations tend to suffer from the blind man syndrome wherein each person is aware of their part of the "elephant" but do not grasp the entirety of the animal. Ultimately the greatest return for any company's investment in the internet is derived from understanding all the parts of their presence online and coordinating them in the same way that an elephant coordinates the actions of its trunk, ears, legs, and tail. The cornerstone of any effective online presence for organizations of any size is its main information repository, the company website.

## USER CENTERED DESIGN & TESTING

Too often visitors to a web site become frustrated trying to find the information they need and look elsewhere instead. Web site and email advertisement design, and information architecture often become the responsibility of design teams experienced in the design of graphic elements or print layouts which do not provide the interactivity internet technologies offer. Through the application of industry standard techniques and design principles based on extensive studies and user testing, web sites can be transformed from static "book like" presentations into exciting interactive sites that provide the information the user wants without extensive cross referencing and research.

The percentage of visits to a web site that do not result in continued exploration of the information that web site offers is known as the "bounce rate". The most likely cause of a web site having a high bounce rate is that the visitor believes he has arrived at the wrong destination and that the information they seek is not available there. It is essential that the visitor know where they are, in terms of which web site they are at, and also where in the web site information architecture. For these reasons it is important the site be tested and if necessary redesigned to ensure that it is properly branded for name recognition and that its content is structured in an easy to navigate and easy to search manner.

Visitors should never have to wonder where they are or how to get to the information they need within the company's web site.

## SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION / SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

The implementation of industry standard recommendations, some published by Google and others the result of extensive research by major marketing firms, can raise the profile of any company doing business or promoting its business online. Optimization of web sites through content keyword research, appropriate and content specific meta / title tags, search engine friendly URLs, and well structured information architecture can visibly and statistically raise a company's rank in the search results of all major search engines including Google, Bing, and Yahoo.

In addition to the highly prized "organic", or unpaid, search result rankings, business can take advantage of the pay per click (PPC) advertising systems the major search engines offer. One system is the ads that are placed directly in the search result above or to the side of the organic results. The other form is that of the ads placed throughout content networks such as Google Adwords. Major search engines allow web site owners to carry their ads using targeted or context based placement.

The results of these efforts are statistically evident. When coupled with good analytics results can be tracked from keyword search or paid ad, through web site navigation, to point of purchase and actual sale.

## ANALYTICS & OTHER USER INFORMATION

One of the best ways of knowing which information visitors are looking for and how easy it is for them to find it is through the use of statistical information that can be gathered through server logs, the use of cookies, or both. This includes information about the sources of traffic to the web site, navigation throughout the web site, geographic, and user system information among other metrics. These in turn can be used to provide guidance on design elements, consumer interests, and site usability.

Technologies range from in cost from "Free" to tens of thousands of dollars including software licensing, implementation, and training. The payoff is in having the resources to make your site the best place for online visitors to get the information they want so they will not bounce to other sites and become loyal to yours instead.

## EMAIL CAMPAIGN MARKETING

A frequently over used yet highly effective online marketing technique is the use of email to promote goods and services. Often companies and other organizations send email "blasts" to anyone and everyone who's provided an email address for any reason. This is very ineffective getting messages across to the recipients and often damages the reputation of the sender making them known spammers whose messages are filtered out before ever reaching their intended recipients. Segmented lifecycle email campaigns do away with this problem and turn a potential problem into a valuable resource which provides people with only the information they want while giving you an eager outlet for your company's message.

Advanced email campaign services include segmentation by recipient interest lists, automatic subscribe / unsubscribe with request confirmation features, database driven metrics, and content management integration.

## SOCIAL MEDIA – WEB 2.0

User generated content, also known as social media or web 2.0, is the current wave of online information resources. Instead of visiting corporate web sites or doing online searches, people are increasingly relying on more

personal sources of trusted information for advice and knowledge gathering. While user forums and blogs have been the leading edge of this trend, social networking sites are among the most popular sites on the internet today as they provide an easy channel for personal contacts share their likes and dislikes.

Topic based user forums, blogs, and social networking site such as Twitter and Facebook are an invaluable resource for monitoring company reputation and consumer interest, and sources of visitor's to the greater information resources of a company's web site. Blogs can also make a great difference on how a company is perceived by the online community. Careful participation in these kinds of web sites can build a company's reputation as a reliable authority in their fields of business.

Social networking sites are primarily consumer oriented so it is common for direct to consumer (B2C) organizations to send daily messages to their Twitter followers, maintain a company page on Facebook, and depending on their field or industry also have a profile on MySpace allowing them to target market to new consumers and repeat customers. Business to Business (B2B) organizations are likewise using these outlets to manage their online reputations and keep track of public concerns regarding their industries.

## CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Often the most difficult part of maintaining an effective online presence is in managing the content that is presented across multiple online outlets. It is essential to maintain accurate information on web sites, emails, PPC ads, and blog postings. Companies lose credibility if information presented in one place is not matched in another. Many companies maintain mini-sites for special campaigns or separate product lines. Often multi-nationals will have separate sites for various nations or regions. The information that all these sites and outlets share has to kept in sync for the consumer and brand reputation.

Content management systems provide a wide range of multi-user functionalities that allow content to be generated by authorized creators and then published, modified, or archived by others authorized to do so for their particular target audiences on social medial sites, emails, geographic regions, and other segments as needed. Enterprise web sites benefit from enhanced accountability, security, and workflows. Smaller web sites benefit from increased ease of website management.

## CLOSING

Companies make large investments in information technologies and online business enterprises. Often the marketing of great products and services are overlooked by the consumer or business clients because marketing through traditional media is very different from marketing online. The benefits of investments made in the realm of online business are maximized through the application of marketing strategies designed for new media and the technologies of tomorrow.