Web Marketing:

5 Ways to Maximize
Your Online Strategies

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For many people today, the Internet has become the primary tool to not only research a product or service, but also to request more information or place an order. As a result, a website is perhaps your single most important marketing vehicle.

What is the best way to create a new website or upgrade an existing one? How do you select a domain name or increase your chances that a search engine will direct viewers to your site? Once you've attracted visitors, how can you entice them to stay longer and learn more about you? And, what are the advantages of local listings, and can pay-per-click advertising work for you?

The answers to these questions will help determine your success in Web marketing. In this guide, we'll address them one by one.

#1: Make The Most Of Your Site's Domain Name

If you are new to Web marketing, you'll need to choose a domain name, or URL (Uniform Resource Locator), which serves as the address of your home page on the World Wide Web. Example: www.acmeexpertplumbing.com.

Prospects and customers will use this address to find you on the Web. What's more, a domain name is the first thing a search engine, such as Google, reads when it "crawls" your website. Here are some things to consider when choosing your domain name:

- Create a URL that is simple and easy to remember.

- Limit your domain name to five words or 20 characters. Google, Yahoo and other search engines do not respond well to longer domain names. Also, studies have shown that shorter URLs get better search engine rankings and more Web viewer click-throughs.

- Include keywords to optimize your domain name. Often, the best keywords are those that define your services or your target demographic. For example, when looking to attract business in a local area, www.chicagoplumbers.com is better than www.acmeexpertplumbing.com. By adding local keywords, you're also much more likely to find a domain name that is available for purchase.

- Avoid abbreviations. Prospects keying "lock repair" and "Fort Worth" into Google are not likely to find www.locksmithfw.com, as abbreviations such as "fw" mean little to search engines.

- Think ahead when choosing your domain name, especially if you are considering expanding or relocating in a few years.

- Find the keywords that are most popular among prospects and customers by going to Google AdWords: Keyword Tool and performing a keyword search. Type in the keywords you think are most popular, and Google will show you the number of times those words have been searched, along with results for similar keywords.

- Balance the popularity of a keyword with specificity. For example, "Toronto" will be a popular keyword, but if your auto repair business is located in Markham (near Toronto), you are bound to attract more qualified local prospects by being more specific. Few customers, of course, will want to drive across town for an oil change.
- Only use dashes or hyphens in your URL if you are having a difficult time finding an available domain name. Generally speaking, dashes are not ideal but they can be an effective way to separate keywords and increase your chances of obtaining a URL that works for you.

#2: Attract More Prospects With Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization, or SEO, is key to attracting visitors to your website. When prospects type in keywords on a search engine, such as Google, you want to obtain the highest possible ranking. Here are tactics you can employ to maximize your potential:

- Include keyword-rich content in your website. For search engines to find your site, you'll need to use keywords and keyword phrases. (These are the words someone types into a search bar.) Strive for 5-7% "keyword density" (five to seven keywords and/or keyword phrases per 100 words of text).
- Use your keywords in the first paragraph of your website's body text. Try to weave them in seamlessly. Do not artificially stuff an opening paragraph with keywords; the search engine could flag it for "keyword spamming." By stuffing, you may also negate your efforts to present a concise and convincing message.
- Include your business address twice on all pages, in a prominent spot on the page and in the footer. Abbreviate the province (ON) in one of the addresses, and spell it out in the second (Ontario).
- Add a geography section (geo block) to your site, like a "Contact Us" page, that includes all of the cities, counties and suburbs you serve. On it, make sure to include additional ways in which people search (Toronto and T.O.).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): What is it?

On a search engine such as Google or Yahoo, people type in keywords related to their interest in a product, service or information. The search engine then scans the Internet, matching the user's search criteria with corresponding websites.

Because hundreds or even thousands of sites may correspond to the keywords, the search engine employs sophisticated software to rank the matches. Of course, those websites that obtain a posting at or near the top of the search engine's list will gain the most visitors.

Employing a series of simple and cost-free techniques, search engine optimization or SEO helps you increase your chances of gaining a coveted high ranking on a search engine.

- Get citations, or links to your website, placed on other local sites or directories, such as chambers of commerce, libraries, associations/networking groups, organizations you support, etc. Call them and ask if there is an opportunity to list your website and logo on their site. In exchange, offer to add their organization to your site, if appropriate. The more links the better when it comes to SEO.

- Create social networking pages, like Facebook and LinkedIn, for your business and link your site to them. Note that search engines such as Google do not care how many posts or followers you have; for SEO, it's all about the links.

- Submit local business listings. (See #4.)

- Avoid too much "Flash" animation on your website. JavaScript and Flash navigation may look good, but search engines don't read them very well.

- Update your site frequently (at least once per month) with specials, blog posts, press releases and more. Google and other search engines favor sites that are current and refreshed often.

- If you are going to have a "resources" section on your website, place as much content as possible on the actual page instead of just adding links to PDFs or other downloads. This adds to your site's "searchable" content.

- Include a site map with text links that navigate through the pages of your site. It's another effective way to repeat keywords and keyword phrases for optimization.

- Simplify your website. Keep the most important pages in the main navigation areas and do not bury them deep within your site. Visitors and search engines shouldn't have to go through more than four pages to view your most important information.

- Check the analytics of the site and its pages. If a page doesn't seem to be getting as many visitors as you'd like, make some adjustments. For example, if you find people are not moving past the home page, add more "sticky" content, like an offer, sign-ups for newsletters, etc. (See #3.)

- Gain a better understanding of how well your website is doing in regards to SEO by running a free "Website Grader" report from HubSpot. Go to: http://websitegrader. com/.

#3: Engage Visitors With A "Sticky" Website Experience

Having worked hard to draw visitors to your website, you'll want to engage them to stay and entice them to come back again and again. Here are some tips on creating a "sticky" website:

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- Include a call to action. According to Web marketing expert Seth Godin, you should "design each and every page with one and only one primary objective." This can be accomplished with a clear and obvious call to action. Godin calls them "bananas" and users are the "monkeys." The goal is for the monkey to find the banana in less than three seconds, before they give up and leave. A call-to-action button should be prominently displayed on the upper portion of a page and employ an action verb. Examples include: "View demo now." "Download now." "Sign up for a free…" "Take a tour."

- Develop a page devoted to tools and resources. On it, post videos, white papers, how-to articles, tip sheets and tutorials. (Remember for SEO, place as much content on your site as possible instead of links.)

- Determine if you want visitors to "register" in order to access data or downloads. But note as you require more user information, fewer readers will continue. You need to decide whether you want people to simply download your information (with no registration required), or if you want to use your site as a lead-generation tool (and thereby include a short registration form).

- Make the navigation of the site easy with obvious ways for visitors to locate information.

- Create a bookmark button for all pages. These allow visitors to quickly and easily mark pages for easy reference and future visits.

- Include useful content, and refresh it regularly for relevancy and accuracy. If visitors know that your content is updated frequently, they are more apt to return.

- Include links to social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn) on your website for additional ways to interact.

- Think like a customer. Determine your target audience(s), and build the site around their needs and interests.

- Create a blog that includes pertinent information for your target audience. This should be updated on a regular basis (some suggest daily posts; others say at least once per month) to maintain levels of interest and curiosity.

- Make your site interactive. Build a message/discussion board and forum for visitors to comment and communicate with each other. You can also post polls or surveys. The questions should pertain to your business offerings and be updated on a regular basis.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is an increasingly important complement to Web marketing.

On popular Internet-based platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter and MySpace, you can advertise your products or services, conduct contests, make announcements, address customer concerns, and more.

Marketers who use social media effectively focus their efforts on creating content that attracts attention, generates discussion, and encourages viewers to share their online experience with friends and family.

Many believe the marketing messages that spread from viewer to viewer via social media resonate better because it is coming from a trusted source, rather than from the company itself.

Social Media is easily accessible to anyone with Internet access. It may reach a target that is difficult to reach through other media. Social media listings are free. What's more, it offers organizations a unique opportunity to obtain direct feedback from customers.

#4: Publicize Your Site On Local Online Directories

Local search sites (Google Maps, Yahoo! Local) are an excellent way for you to promote your business or organization online. Research shows that:

- 54% prefer the Internet and local search to traditional phone books and printed directories.
- 70% of online searchers use local search to find offline businesses.

Here's how to make the most of these no- or low-cost opportunities:

- Submit your business listing to as many local online directories as possible. When doing so, be sure to make all contact information identical. If not, the search engines won't be able to verify that the information is correct and you'll lose spots in the ranking. Be sure to include videos, photos or any other information you can in your listing. They all contribute to better placement. Here are the most popular local search engines:
    - Google Local Business Center – http://google.com/places
    - Yelp.com – https://biz.yelp.com/signup
    - 411.ca - www.411.ca
    - Infogroup - www.infogroup.com
    - Yahoo Business Listings ($10/month) - http://listings.local.yahoo.com/
    - Universal Business Listing ($30/year) - http://universalbusinesslisting.org/
- Link your website to these directories (citations) to increase your local search results. However, do not stop with this list. Look for additional opportunities locally to add your link to other websites as it helps with local search as well as your SEO efforts.
- Ask your customers to write reviews of your business on Google. Go to the Google Maps results, click on "More info" and you'll see a "Review" section. Citations and good reviews contribute to your rank in the local search results.
- Take steps to remove any bad reviews written about your business or organization.

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#5: Consider Search Engine Marketing (Pay-Per-Click)

Search Engine Marketing (SEM), also known as Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, can be an effective part of your online marketing mix. But research* shows that SEO and local search are more effective channels and as such, deserve your highest priority:

- 70% of search engine users report that they visit search engine-located sites on a daily basis.

- 80% of search engine users report they never click on PPC results. Seventy-four percent of business searchers click on an organic or free search engine listing, versus 19 percent on a paid listing.

- The overall conversion rate of sites using PPC is three times less than that of sites using organic SEO. In other words, you'll make three times as many sales using organic SEO than you would if you used PPC.

- 72.3% of search engine users feel Google's organic listings are more relevant than their paid results. The longer an individual has been using the Internet, the more relevance they place on organic search results.

Many PPC campaigns focus on the number of "impressions." Impressions are the number of times your ad was displayed. Of course, in regards to ROI, impressions are meaningless. Number of clicks is a more useful measure as it tells you how many people actually clicked on your ad and went to your website. According to the Direct Marketing Association, the SEM average cost per click for lead generation is $1.98.

The Pay-Per-Click Advertising Option

Pay-per-click (PPC) ads are often displayed to the right of the free listings on Google, Yahoo and other search engines, often under the header "Sponsored Links."

PPC ads are keyword specific, so that advertisers can arrange ads (for example, Bob's Discount Kitchen Cabinets) to appear when search results are shown for keywords such as "kitchen remodeling."

PPC ad keywords are sold by search engines at auction to the highest bidder. Using the example shown above, you would bid against others for the right to gain a top-page listing when users keyed in "kitchen remodeling."

The Advantages To PPC Ads

- Readers connect quickly with PPC ads that meet their search criteria. In doing so, you gain a prospect whose interests directly align with your product, service or organization.

- PPC ads can be quickly posted. Within a short while, a new PPC ad can be directing new visitors to your website.

- PPC results are readily measured. With a little trial and error, you can soon discover what appeals work … and which messages need tweaking.

- You pay only for those PPC ads that viewers click on, hence the term pay-per-click.

If you choose to explore this option, here are some helpful tips to help you maximize the overall ROI of SEM:

- Manage your budget. If your budget is $200 per month and you bid $5 per click on a certain keyword, know that your budget could be used up fairly quickly. Once your monthly budget runs out, your ads will not appear until the next month. If the clicks are good and you're getting high-quality leads, add more to your budget. If not, go back and re-examine the cost per click for your keywords.

- Conduct keyword research. Create a list of keywords that relates to your primary products or services.

- Focus your campaign locally. You don't want your ad showing up for someone in Windsor if your business is in Kingston.

- Create an effective ad. There's a science to writing effective ad copy, but some important points are to keep it simple, target it based on the keyword, highlight what makes you unique, include a call to action and test different ads. Ad examples:

  - 10% Discount For New Customers! Click here for details: www.yourwebsite.com

  - 2-For-1 Special On Lunches! Download a coupon at www.yourwebsite.com

- Check out your competitors. Run a few searches with your top keywords and see who comes up against you. Do the same competitors keep appearing? Where do they appear? Adjust your budget and keywords accordingly.

- If using Google, do not allow your ads to be shown under the "Content Network." This puts your ad on sites that usually do not relate to your target audience.

- Track the results at least weekly. You'll want to adjust your budget based on what you see, as well as analyze how your keywords are performing. You will likely also discover new keywords that you'll want to add to your campaign.

*SEM statistics from:
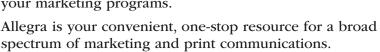http://www.xlabinteractive.com/articlesmedia/moneyfornothing.pdf
http://www.zeroonezero.com/services/organic-se-marketing.html
http://www.relevantads.com/results/search-stats.aspx

Where Do You Go From Here?

Given the effectiveness of Web marketing, it probably belongs near or at the very top of your marketing mix. You can, of course, elect to do it yourself. However, managing a successful effort can be time-consuming, while using multiple resources or freelancers may be cost-prohibitive. The most effective use of your staff, time and dollars is found in consolidating your program with a single source to develop, produce and deliver your marketing programs.

Allegra is your convenient, one-stop resource for a broad spectrum of marketing and print communications.

When you call on us, you gain access to highly-trained professionals who provide a wide range of marketing solutions and technologies. The result is a single source for strategic marketing advice, as well as the resources to execute your marketing programs in the most timely and cost-effective ways.

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