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1

Introduction

Successful Web site marketing efforts drive potential customers to a site, succinctly communicate the value of the products or services offered, instill confidence in the visitor, and ideally convince him to take the next steps to become a bona fide customer. The small business owner needs to familiarize himself with a number of important e-marketing components. These include Web site construction, search engine visibility, and offline marketing materials – brochures, signs, and advertisements need to effectively refer people to the Web site. Since small business owners typically have modest financial resources available to dedicate to marketing efforts, it's essential that these expenditures produce results. Unfortunately, much of the money spent by small businesses in cyberspace goes down the not-so-virtual drain.

Who Is This “Web Guy”?

Many small business owners have made the mistake of assuming their “Web guy” is well versed in all necessary areas of e-marketing, only to discover down the road that their cash outlay did not yield the desired results, and their Web guy isn't replying to their e-mails.

In 10 years of working in the Web development world I have encountered only a handful of Web consultants with a firm grasp of both Web site building and online marketing fundamentals. Those with strong technical coding skills (HTML, JavaScript, etc.) often lack design and marketing expertise. Those with strong graphic design skills often combine WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web page building software with a drug addict-like obsession with graphics, producing Web sites bloated with content that's not search engine-friendly. Small business owners don't need to know how to write HTML code or create graphics in Photoshop, but knowing enough to adequately supervise their Web guy makes for a wise consumer of Web site development services. The old adage *caveat emptor* (buyer beware) is certainly applicable in the age of new media.

Focus on the Fundamentals

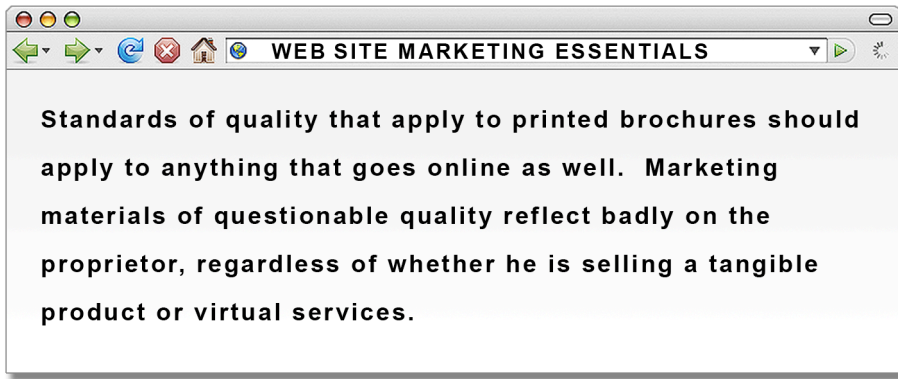
What we're talking about here is a need to focus on the fundamentals of Web site marketing. Paying attention to the fundamentals of anything is rarely sexy, and in the case of online marketing, things can appear straightforward, making the basics easy to overlook. In Major League Baseball, for example, players seem to focus on hitting home runs rather than fielding ground balls and throwing out base runners. The high number of errant throws from the outfield to home plate – allowing runners

to score – is the result of a lack of attention to the fundamentals. When professional athletes error they typically don't suffer financial hardship. Small businesses failing in their online marketing efforts, however, can suffer big time.

Return on Investment

Too many small business owners opt for the lowest cost approach when it comes to building a Web site. How many times have we heard someone say, “Yeah, my 15-year-old nephew built my Web site.” or “The gal who designed my business cards did my site for 600 bucks”? Such an owner might initially be happy with his site, but 12- to 24 months later he'll realize what it may *not* be doing for him.

Crafting an e-marketing strategy is significantly more involved than putting a few pages online and calling it a Web site. That same small business owner would probably not hire his nephew to write his autobiography (albeit the nephew knows how to use Microsoft Word), nor would he have his graphic designer photograph his wedding, even though she owns a digital camera. So why would it make sense to put a novice behind the wheel of his Web site? It doesn't.



This book is intended to give small business owners with modest marketing budgets a look at the essentials of Web site development and marketing so that they can start to ask the right questions of their Web consultants, ensuring they'll get what they've paid for. This book can also be a valuable resource for the professional or part-time Web developer who wants to make sure his grasp of the fundamentals is firm.

This book is not a comprehensive manual on Web site development.

Though it does cover a wide variety of topics, it is purposely more CliffsNotes than textbook, and more self-help than get help. Its primary aim is not intended to generate business for the author. Rather, the goal is to help other small business owners, who often don't have a full-time marketing person to rely on, grasp the fundamentals of online marketing to keep their Web guy, and their budget, in check.

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Effective Site Design: The Universal Home Page Formula

Around the time of the dot-com boom, the variety of site layouts and user interfaces one might encounter in an afternoon of Web surfing was mind-boggling. It seemed as if every Web site had been built in a vacuum. Navigating a site to find what you were looking for was often a waste of time. Mysterious plug-ins were required just to view annoying animations with obnoxious audio – never mind that you had to wait for pages to load over a dial-up connection.

Today, bandwidth is up, along with the quality and intuitiveness of Web site design. Many Web developers and site owners, however, still stumble when it comes to designing or redesigning their sites. They waste time starting from scratch, without a model to serve as a design guide.

Reinventing the wheel might lead to a unique site, *but at what cost?* On the other hand, some sites are built in just a few hours using rigid, ready-made templates that allow a person with no HTML experience to simply enter in text, upload a few images, and voilà, Baby Web Site enters the world for a few hundred bucks plus \$9.95 a month with little chance of long-term

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Search Engine Optimization Essentials

Google, Yahoo!, and other search engines are increasingly offering consumers new ways to find local businesses, to the dismay of printed directories like the Yellow Pages. Small businesses looking to prosper in the Web 2.0 world and beyond must build their Web sites for maximum visibility in such search engines' free listings. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of enhancing a Web site's content and structure to make it as easy to find as possible in the search engines. The SEO discussion presented below is meant to provide some essential insights when it comes to understanding this crucial component of online marketing. A wealth of information on SEO is available in bookstores and online at Web sites such as SearchEngineWatch.com.

How Search Engines Think

The goal of Google and other search engines is to help users find information on the Web by presenting them with a list of pertinent and valuable Web sites when they conduct searches. Search engines use complex algorithms to analyze Web sites' content and determine their relevance to search queries. The more relevant a site, the higher that site

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Selecting and Using Domain Names

When choosing a domain name, most business owners only worry about whether DesiredDomainName.com is already taken by somebody else. But the choice of a domain name can affect a Web site's ability to attract new customers. Users might be handicapped trying to remember a difficult one, and the choice includes search engine and offline marketing considerations as well. Therefore, being savvy about domain names is a Web site marketing essential, especially for the small business owner.

Domain Name Flavors

Domain names are one of the fundamental building blocks of the Web. They now come in many flavors, thanks to the more than 250 top-level domains. TLDs are the final portion or “extension” of a domain name, after the period. Over 60 million domains are currently registered using the “.com” TLD (the most common; about 75% of registrations), followed by “.net” and “.org” to name just three. Add to that a host of new TLDs for different kinds of entities (such as .mobi and .name) and a potpourri of

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Bloggng Is Beautiful

Blogs represent a giant leap forward for small business owners, offering them a new way to add content to their Web sites themselves. Adding content on a regular basis is great for maximizing search engine visibility and keeping things fresh for users. That said, business blogging is not very well understood by small business owners. Those who are casually familiar with blogging might know it as a frivolous undertaking by teenagers on MySpace.com. Blogs written by “journalists” are more reputable, but their diary-like style might not lend itself to the business Web site. Or does it? In the July 2005 edition of *Information Week*, General Motors’ Vice Chairman Bob Lutz said,



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Making Money Online: E-Commerce Made Easy

Engaging in e-commerce does not necessarily mean a Web site has a virtual shopping cart and sells products directly to the consumer. A range of opportunities exists to make money online without a direct interface with the consumer. Small businesses that do wish to sell directly online can do so far more easily than they used to, thanks to competition and innovation between third-party payment processors. You don't even have to have a Web site to engage in e-commerce.

Selling Made Simple with PayPal

The largest third-party payment processor online is PayPal, an eBay company (PayPal.com). If you have a Web site and you want to get started selling products online quickly, it's a great choice. Your customers pay PayPal and PayPal, in turn, pays you. You'll need to set up a PayPal account ahead of time and go through some painless verification steps, but once that is done, e-commerce is only a matter of deciding what to sell. PayPal enables a merchant to sell a single item via a "Buy Now" button or multiple items via a simplified shopping cart. Either option requires only

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Engaging Users with Interactive Features

The better sales-tool Web sites use interactive features. Small business owners can choose from a number of such features that are cost-effective, create interest, and generate more traffic to the site.

Photography-Based Features

An online photo gallery or slideshow composed of professionally shot images is relatively easy to implement. Providing thumbnail versions of each image allows the user to navigate through the gallery at his own pace in whatever order he prefers (see figure next page). A number of software applications are available to automate the photo gallery building process. Google and Yahoo! have photo sharing services called Picasa and Flickr, respectively, which require minimal coding to integrate a photo gallery into any Web site, including blogs.

A slightly more elaborate, but still cost-effective presentation, combines still photos to create a video, referred to as a slideshow video. Software applications to create such videos are inexpensive and fairly easy to use. Apple's iMovie software comes free with new Macs or is available as part of the iLife software bundle for less than \$100. Windows users can choose

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Communicating Through E-Mail and E-Newsletters

Everybody seems to know what e-mail is, but many small business owners are not using it as wisely as they could, especially when it comes to communicating with potential customers. These e-mails need to contain some graphics within an attractive layout in order to get noticed and avoid a direct path to the trash or spam folder. Sending plain text e-mails to customers is considered “old school.” Small business owners with limited resources need to ensure their electronic messages are received and (ideally) acted upon.

E-Mail Visibility

When an e-mail message arrives in a user’s Inbox he immediately sees two key pieces of information about it: the sender’s e-mail address and the subject. Most senders can figure out a catchy subject line when it comes to e-mail marketing, but some e-mail programs will truncate overly long subjects, so the recipient might see only the first part of it. The sender’s e-mail address is important for a couple of reasons. First, the address is typically the first thing the recipient sees when scanning a long list of new

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Making Contact Pages Magnets for Local Consumers

Most Web sites have a bland “contact us” page that provides the physical street address, an e-mail address, a phone number, and a link to a map on an external Web site. Those pieces of information should definitely be there, but making a few strategic additions can prove useful when it comes to helping local consumers find the site in the search engines.

Local Searching

More than one-third of searches performed in the major search engines include a geographic identifier as part of the search. Users frequently search for “pizza delivery 10012” instead of just “pizza.” This is not only because users prefer placing online orders from stores close to them (faster delivery), but they are also looking for brick-and-mortar stores to patronize in person. (Please refer to Chapter 3’s discussion on Google and Yahoo! local, page 39.)

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Measuring Success with Web Site Statistics

The computers on which Web sites are stored (Web servers) log a variety of data that can help us understand how well a Web site is doing from a marketing standpoint. Stats show how users found a Web site (i.e., referring Web sites), the keywords they used in search engines that led them to the site, and the Web pages visited. For small business owners looking for basic information about their sites and visitors, the best Web stats tool available is from Google, at Google.com/analytics. Best of all, it's free!

Google Analytics presents both basic and detailed statistics visually in charts, graphs, and maps and well as numerically in tables (please see figure on next page).

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Web Site Marketing Essentials Checklist

The preceding 10 chapters provide a number of suggestions for increasing the online visibility of Web sites and converting visitors into customers. Below are highlights for easy reference. This list can serve as a “to do list” for small business owners:

- Examine your home page** in terms of its adherence to UHPF
- Add or enhance plain text** especially on your home page
- Check <TITLE> tags on all pages**
- Check your site’s link text** for opportunities to add keywords
- Build a site map** and enhance it with additional text
- Check how your domain name is being written** (use caps for words within it) and **consider registering a second domain name** with keywords in it (then **redirect** the shorter one to the longer one)
- Research opportunities to get new external links to your site**, ideally with keyword-laden link text
- Start a blog** and add at least two entries every month
- Open a PayPal account** and sell at least one item, such as gift certificates, or perhaps develop a white paper or resource guide to sell for a few bucks

- Register with an affiliate program** such as Amazon.com's
- Add an interactive feature** if you don't already have at least one
- Start collecting e-mail addresses from clients/customers** if you haven't done so already; open a free trial account at ContstantContact.com and send out an e-newsletter
- Ensure that your outgoing e-mail messages appear to be sent from a custom domain name-based address**, such as You@YourDomain.com, not You@InternetServiceProvider.com
- Enhance your contact page with additional city names, zip codes, descriptive text, an integrated interactive map, and a printer-friendly version**
- Ensure phone numbers can be clicked and dialed on mobile devices**
- Open a Google Analytics account** and add the tracking code to your Web pages, then review your Web stats after one month

Appendix

Screen Captures of Web Sites Employing the Universal Home Page Formula

The Web sites presented on the following pages employ the Universal Home Page Formula with some variation (refer to Chapter 2). Small business owners can draw inspiration from these sites, benchmark desired features, and provide direction to their Web consultants, saving time and money on their own sites. Regardless of industry, as demonstrated by the eclectic range of home pages that follow, UHPF can be applied to maximize any Web site's appeal and effectiveness.

Many of the following sites do not heed the recommendations of this book when it comes to search engine optimization (see Chapter 3). These sites compensate for their lack of SEO efforts by extensive expenditures on other forms of advertising; expenditures that small business owners wouldn't normally be able to afford. Good Web developers should be able to create search engine-friendly sites using the designs and layouts shown as a guide.

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