

Making the Sale

by Mike Jones, President, GTS

If you haven't heard lately, Internet marketing is the place to be if you're looking to build your business or keep your customers from going to the competitor. But why?

Recent statistics tell us that 59 percent of your audience uses the Internet first when looking for a local business listing. That's almost two-thirds of your audience. When you combine that with the knowledge that 6 to 9 billion Internet searches are performed every month in the United States, you begin to realize that the Internet is critical to your business. But why is the Internet so much better than other available methods of advertising?

A Trip Back

Let's go back a few years; before Google became a household name. Back when the phone book was used for more than just a door stop.

You're the manager of a successful, locally based, full-service glass business. Your goal is to drive traffic to the store, so what do you do?

Chances are, you'll put the lion's share of your marketing budget into phone book ads, maybe run some radio advertising on one or two local stations, then toss the remaining funds into a targeted print ad. Now you wait.

In a week or so, you begin trying to track your return on investment. You see if you can prove increased business on the days your radio ads played. You know you got a few phone

calls from people who found your ad in the paper, and you try to prove that they actually came in or purchased something. You then use the results from these marketing strategies to plan for the next campaign; but do you really know what worked?

Going Dot Com

Now let's move forward to today. What if each of the radio stations, newspapers and phone books you advertised with sent you a report at the end of each month? The report tells you how many people heard or saw your ad, how many took action and visited a store and, of those that visited, how many purchased an item.

With a little bit of tracking on your part, the ads even tell you which products or service a customer purchased, how much profit you made on each sale and what your actual return on investment is based on each advertisement.

Seems pretty crazy, right? Not with the Internet. With the help of a professional Internet marketing agency, you can track just about everything down to your profit or loss. Getting a bit more advanced, you can use multiple tools and processes to track visits from offline sources like print ads, radio, television, etc. Track visits to every important page of your site, track usability and funnel analysis and pinpoint success and failure of each of your marketing campaigns. Can the phone book do that?

Effective Internet marketing also tracks offline success. This is important since a 2007 study showed that 89 percent of Internet users look for a website after seeing a print ad. Sixty-five percent said they would do the same after hearing a radio ad. Putting effective tracking in place allows you to better understand the profitability of each campaign.

So-called search engine marketing firms are popping up in garages or basements in just about every neighborhood. You may have taken (or avoided) a few sales calls from some of them lately. Watch out for these guys. Cheap, automated programs are not the way to go.

Put It to Use

Professional Internet marketing services will cost anywhere from \$500 per month to \$500 per hour (or more). It depends on the services you need, the complexity of your site (e-commerce or informational) and many other factors. To get great results, you'll need to invest some money, but remember—these services will likely cost far less than your phone book ads, plus their performance can be tracked and proven.

Many people can learn the basics of effective search engine marketing and might even be able to implement pieces of it. But understanding more than just the search engines—the markets, the engines, the tracking tools—and being able to implement and manage each campaign

effectively, takes experience and know-how.

You can do a lot online on your own; you simply need to decide if your business can afford the inevitable learn-as-you-go mistakes and delays of do-it-yourself online marketing, or if it would be more cost effective to hire an experienced Internet marketing partner to help propel your online business.