

A Simple Site

Getting Started with Internet Marketing

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By now, you've most likely heard about Internet marketing, and probably agree that you need to do something about it for your own business. But with so many competitors online, and so many opinions about what works and what doesn't, how do you get started?

Start by making sure your website is search engine friendly and then focus on usability. Being search engine (and user) friendly gives your site a great foundation that you can build on later.

You may need help from a designer or webmaster to build or redesign your site, but the following will help start you in the right direction.

1. Think about your business goals. What do you hope to change or improve this year or next? How can a website help achieve this? For example, we evaluate business goals and then use Behavior Models to understand how a site fits within the consumer process. This allows us to create web goals that fit the target audience, as well as tie directly back to the stated business objectives.

2. Start with a simple website. Think of five to ten pages that could hold 150 to 250 words each. The content should be informative about your business and industry. This helps with search engines, but well-written content will also strengthen your brand in the mind of your consumer. In fact, many studies show that informative content that educates site visitors has the most profound affect on your site's ability to convert visitors to customers.

3. Create a simple layout with text navigation. Navigation should primarily be on the left of the website, and should not include Flash or JavaScript. Search engines cannot read JavaScript or Flash, and many users can't view the site as you intended without the right programs installed on their computer.

4. Think about how you want your customer to use your site, and think about how the design and content will support this

- Learn about your business;
- Learn about your industry;
- Purchase from you;
- Interact with your business (social networking); and
- Become part of a community (social).

5. There should be at least two different ways for website visitors to contact you. Some common options are:

- Contact us form;
- Send us an email;
- 1-800 number; and
- Live chat (interactive customer service chat system).

6. At the end of content of each page, be sure to lead the visitor to a next step or call-to-action (how to contact you, what they might want to read next, etc.).

Believe it or not, people want to be led when they're online. For this, your site should focus on creating a desired path that takes a visitor to pages relevant to

their search and which quickly lead to a conversion opportunity (call-to action).

Marketing Your Work

Once you have a simple site structure with basic content to work with, you can move into many types of marketing. I'll discuss each of these in greater depth in future columns:

- Organic optimization;
- Link development;
- Sponsored ads (Pay-per-Click);
- E-media (banner ads, video ads, etc);
- Blogging;
- Social media; and
- Offline push to web (TV, radio, print, business collateral).

Which should you do first? It depends. What are your web goals and what kind of budget can you allocate toward web marketing?

Organic optimization is the best long-term strategy, but it takes time to succeed at this. Link development assists in organic optimization, but it also creates great partnerships that increase site traffic and build business.

Pay-per-Click and E-media needs effective planning and strategy, but can give immediate results and offer near real-time tracking. Blogging and social media channels can be wonderful traffic generators and work well to build brand, but this strategy isn't effective for everyone. It takes many hours of managing each week, and requires an audience interested in regular interaction with you and your site.

There are many ways to use offline and online channels together. Most importantly, be sure your website address is listed on all business cards, letterhead, brochures and the like. If you market via traditional channels (i.e. television), be sure that your website address is prominently displayed.