

Web Success

A Guide For SMBs

It takes a lot for a business to find success online, and simply having a Web site isn't enough. Businesses that have effectively increased both online visibility and online sales have wrapped their Web site into a larger online marketing strategy designed to drive traffic to the corporate Web site. And it's not something that can be done in a week, a month, or a year. It's an ongoing process that takes time and long-term dedication.

Your site should be more than a place to project information about your company, products, and services. Companies that embrace the interactive and information-sharing nature of the Web 2.0 climate are often the most successful. By engaging users and offering collaborative content and tools on your Web site, you can make a visitor's experience more meaningful, useful, and memorable, which can potentially lead to more inquiries and sales.

"The biggest mistake is to treat your Web site as if it's a digital brochure. When you do that, you're really not leveraging the fact that the most powerful thing the Web can do for your business [is to] create connections. That's the most powerful thing. It is a proxy to leads," says Adam Singer of TopRank Online Marketing, creator of The Future Buzz blog (www.thefuturebuzz.com).

Finding true success with Web presence includes mixing content marketing, SEO (search engine optimization), social networking, and online advertising. All of these efforts combine to increase site traffic and sales inquiries.

Content & SEO

The content you add to your Web site should be linked to a comprehensive SEO strategy. An SEO strategy aims to rank your Web site high when certain keywords are queried. By including the right combination of keywords and phrases on your site, potential customers will be able to quickly find your products and services when researching their options. Because



Your corporate Web site should have a blog to drive consistent traffic to your site and better your SEO. This example is from Proteus Marketing.

B2B organizations, such as the Greater Omaha Chamber, have found success using Facebook and other social networking sites.



many industries don't adhere to standard vocabulary, it's important to research which terms are most commonly used by your audience. Then, include a broad range of those terms and phrases in the content you produce for your site.

Pete Fabian, the creative director for Risdall Advertising Agency (www.risdall.com), says comprehensive research must be done before the Web site creation process starts. The biggest mistake SMBs make, Fabian says, is hurrying through the initial research process and jumping right into the design and deploy stages. "Some of the strategic thinking, and the time spent discovering what the Web site needs to be, gets rushed because the client wants to get something up, and they rush right into design," Fabian said. When the goals and objectives for the site are clearly defined, it makes the design and deployment steps smoother and more successful.

Your initial research will also help you pick which types of content are going to be the most beneficial to potential customers. Content can include white papers and case studies, videos, podcasts, slide presentations, webinars, and press releases. By providing resourceful and valuable content, you are reducing the perceived risk of doing business with your organization and enhancing the chances that your audience will pass on the content to other potential customers.

In addition to engaging content, having a corporate blog that is updated frequently is also important. Not only does it add to the credibility of your company, it's also a way to draw people back to your site on a regular basis. And finding subjects for your blog posts is easier than you might think. Blog entries don't have to (and shouldn't) focus solely on the products and services you provide. You can blog about industry trends, news, and future technologies, in addition to posting about the white papers, case studies, and other data on your Web site. When you do talk about your products, Singer recommends emphasizing the benefits your product will bring the user, rather than just the product features.

If you have an interesting case study or white paper, or other information uncovered by your company, Derek Edmond, managing partner at KoMarketing Associates (www.komarketingassociates.com), suggests breaking it down into three or four blog entries. Not only does it help you come up with topics for

multiple blog posts, it can also increase SEO keywords and phrases that help your Web site turn up in both broad and specific queries. Edmond also advises putting together an editorial calendar to be sure your site stays up-to-date and doesn't stagnate.

Purposeful Networking

For some SMBs—particularly business-to-business companies—getting into social networking might not seem like a productive way to spend limited time and resources. However, social networks can play an important role in increasing visibility and credibility as part of your SEO strategy because they offer a new space for page referrals and dynamic content.

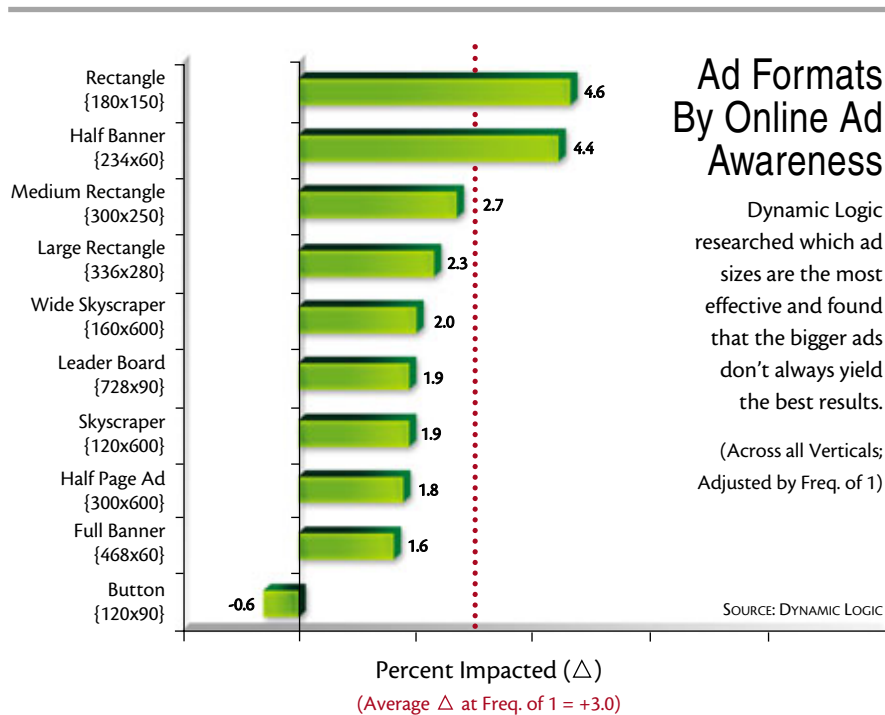
"Certainly social networking has value because you can reach a variety of different audiences," says Edmond. "You can reach different decision makers by getting to different communities, or the users of the products or solutions that you provide. But purely from the SEO world, we are using social media and social networking sites with our clients to find link opportunities."

For businesses with limited resources, Singer suggests using Twitter and Facebook as outposts for existing material on the Web site, and not new content. Regardless of whether you have new or recycled content on your social networking page, it will increase

your chances of ranking highly on search queries and provide another chance to be discovered by potential customers. It also shows prospects that you "get" social networks and their value—provided that you are engaged in the right way.

Like content creation and SEO planning, you need to find out which social networks your audience participates in so that your own participation in those networks can maximize ROI. Because there are so many social networks to choose from, it's better to focus on two or three places your audience is most likely to be, rather than try to be everywhere. Additionally, when you post content to social networking sites, it's important to provide ways your audience can link back to your corporate Web site. You don't want them to spend too much time consuming content on the social networking site because your corporate site is where they will submit sales inquiries and get more detailed product information.

Social networking falls under the umbrella of social media. Social media can be used to define any type of interactive online communication, which may or may not be part of your corporate site or a social networking site. Galen De Young, managing director of Proteus Marketing (www.proteusb2b.com), says B2B companies wanting to engage users through social media need to recognize the





Google Analytics can show traffic sources, visitor location trends, and number of visitors.

same study uncovered that ads with rich media and videos had a stronger impact than those with simple Flash usage or without video. So-called “reveal” ads (in which numerous frames are displayed sequentially, ending with a

company brand or logo) were the least effective, while those with simple messages and human imagery were the most effective.

Using Web Analytics

Once your content and SEO strategy is implemented, you’ll need to track its progress and find out what’s working so you can fine-tune the process as you go along. Many organizations establish success metrics for increasing sales inquiries by a specific amount over a specific time period (three to six months, generally).

Web analytics programs, such as Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics), provide information such as how people get to your site, how they navigate through it, and how they become customers. Additionally, you’ll find trends regarding which sites are producing the most links to your site, how many returning vs. new visitors you have, and the number of page views. Analytics programs can also help you discover which keywords and phrases are drawing attention and driving traffic to your site. You can sign up for a Web analytics program that will charge you per month (anywhere from around \$20 to a few hundred dollars), or you can use a free program, such as Google Analytics.

In addition to Web analytics, you can also track referral sources and where sales are coming from in a spreadsheet or marketing application. When you understand

where sales leads are coming from and which referral pages are producing the most leads, you can make your SEO and content management strategies more efficient and increase your online marketing ROI.

A Marathon, Not A Sprint

SEO, content marketing, and online advertising all require research, preparation, and follow-through. If ranking highly on a search engine or increasing your visibility and traffic is important, consider getting help from an agency that focuses on online marketing. For an advertising agency to build a Web site for you using an SEO and content marketing strategy, you can expect to pay between \$15,000 and \$50,000, says Fabian. Otherwise, surround yourself with people who are well-versed in online marketing and know how to implement a successful strategy. The key is getting a plan in place and then dedicating time and resources to keep it relevant and useful to potential customers.

by Tessa Warner Breneman

broader sense of community it represents. De Young says your company should spend the majority of its time focusing on contributing to the community, as opposed to always benefiting from it through promotion. This will send the message that you are a strong community contributor, which is another way to increase your credibility.

For example, American Express’s Open Forum campaign aims to help small businesses be successful. Open Forum (www.openforum.com) is a site where business owners can congregate to share ideas, network, and learn new strategies for their companies. If you head up an SMB, consider what you can contribute to your community using your resources and expertise.

B2B Online Advertising

Online advertising is another way to increase your Web presence. Although 2009 Internet advertising revenues were down 3.4% from 2008 totals, according to the Interactive Advertising Bureau and PricewaterhouseCoopers, the 13.8% surge in Q4 over Q3 last year showed that the demand is increasing once again.

Because online advertising is still relatively new and constantly changing with Web usage trends, it can be difficult for SMBs to figure out what works. Marketing research firm Dynamic Logic (www.dynamiclogic.com) tested and researched the effectiveness of more than 170,000 online ads and found that the creative aspect was more important than size and placement. Also, note that the same creative principles apply to both online and print advertisements.

According to Dynamic Logic’s report, the most effective digital ads are those that were integrated into the content of the page, including ads that were relatively small. Half banners and rectangles outperformed the larger leaderboard and skyscraper ads. The

The Open Forum Web site by American Express is an example of a social media campaign.

