GET**NOTICED**

HOW TO MARKET YOUR BUSINESS IN AN **OVERLY-MARKETED WORLD**

by ANN FOTTLER-PIERCE

Xtreme
BRANDmakeover.com
Your source for serious branding & marketing.

Welcome to the Get Noticed, *How to Market Your Business in an Overly-Marketed World.* **I hope you find it to be a concise and information-packed guide to business-building marketing strategies you could be using for your company.**

The idea to write a book started innocently enough a few of years ago when I was getting serious about building my own design business after having taken time off to stay home with my new son. After returning to the workforce as a graphic designer, I soon realized that there must be a better way to serve my clients. How could I offer my clients more value? How could I differentiate myself in a crowded marketplace? I've always been interested in marketing and business strategy, but I had no formal training in those areas. So, I decided to go on my own informal training adventure. The result is several years of reading articles, books, blogs, and online research as well as attending seminars and conferences about branding, marketing and multi-channel marketing that have been extremely educational. It has completely changed the way I approach projects, prospective clients and my own business promotion.

After my informational field trip, I amassed enough knowledge to share with my clients and other marketing professionals.

This book is an overview of current and upcoming marketing methods and trends. It gives you information on all the hot topics you've been hearing about and, maybe, some you haven't come across yet. It also includes valuable resources and links to find out more about the topics you think might be right for you.

I hope you get a lot out of reading this book, I know I did by writing it. Please feel free to contact me with questions or comments at ann@xtremebrandmakeover.com.

Sincerely,

Ann Fottler-Pierce

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Introduction

Today, business is more competitive than ever. Small business is the fastest growing segment in the country and, thanks to the Internet, your competitors are not just the company down the street, they can be a business in another state or even another country. This intense competition means that consumers are being deluged with advertising messages. Every day it becomes harder to reach them as they tune out more messages. Your marketing can no longer cater to the masses because the masses aren't listening. On average, people look at a print ad for no more than two seconds before moving on to the next thing that catches their eye. They spend no more than 10 seconds viewing a web page before deciding to stay or continue surfing. In order to succeed in this hyper-competitive arena your ads, brochures, direct mail, web site, or any marketing campaign, have to stand out from the clutter and get noticed by the *right* people.

Most consumers now research offerings on the Internet before ever entering a store, calling a salesperson or making an online purchase. Advertisers no longer control the flow of information, the consumer does. Old-fashioned advertising techniques won't be enough to break through to this new, self-informed consumer.

How can you persuade these consumers? Success is possible, if you develop a strong, unique branding and positioning program for your company's product or service and target the right prospects. You must then devise a multi-touch, multi-channel marketing effort to get your message in front of these valuable decision makers.

This integrated marketing strategy raises response rates in several ways:

- It maximizes the odds that your message will reach your prospect by using the communication channels they prefer

- It overcomes the issue of timing by delivering your message on an ongoing basis

- Multiple exposures to your mesage greatly increases memorability of your brand

Once you have their attention you must engage them with your message or offer. This approach is the best way to get a response from this limited pool of decision makers.

Multi-channel, multi-touch marketing is a must in today's business climate. This book will show you how to get started. We'll start with your company's branding and positioning to show you how to stand out from the competition and create an effective marketing strategy. Then we'll show you the tactics available today to efficiently execute that strategy and market your product or service. By the end of this book you'll be ready to go!

What Is Branding and Marketing Strategy?

We hear the word BRAND a lot in association with big corporations such as McDonald's™, Nike™ and Microsoft™. But what is branding really, and how can it help small to midsize businesses?

A **brand** is not a logo or a tagline. It is much more. It's the combination of your company's image, products, personality and values. Brands serve as emotional triggers for customers looking to decide what to purchase. McDonald's is the family-friendly restaurant that serves a quick, consistently good meal, "I'm lovin' it". Jif is the peanut butter for *choosy* moms. Staples is the world's largest office products company. They carry just about everything you could need and will even deliver it to your business. Their simple slogan is "That was easy". They even have the easy button featured in their commercials for sale in their stores. Your brand is embodied in the look and feel of your facilities, in the behavior of your employees and in the tone of all your communications – intended or not.

Every point of interaction between a company and its customers is an opportunity for its brand to be evaluated, either positively or negatively. Your customers are forming opinions and attitudes about your brand today that may last forever. You will usually get only one chance to capture a new customer, satisfy their needs (or better yet, exceed their expectations), and create a loyal customer who will give you repeat business and even recommend you to others – "the holy grail of marketing!" Your brand identity is as important as the product or service you sell. If someone is making a product choice where there is no obvious difference between the offerings, brand preference will win the day. If your brand has a stellar reputation you won't have to compete on price to make the sale. Investing in your brand identity and increasing awareness of your brand is invaluable.

What can a Strong Brand Deliver?

Having a strong brand allows your company to rise above commodity status. Strong brands thrive in good economies and weather slowdowns well. They are able to charge premium prices. They help attract great employees, business partners and customers. Strong brands capture market share, offer cross-selling opportunities, inspire customer loyalty and fend off competition.

They are forgiven mishaps and increase bargaining power with retailers and distributors (for manufacturers). A strong brand can be worth its "weight" in gold.

A close cousin to branding is **positioning.** Positioning your company involves identifying and gaining an understanding of your **target audience**. Who are you trying to attract? Your target audience should not be everyone. You need to be more specific in order to spend your marketing dollars wisely. Disneyland tries to appeal to families by offering fun and friendliness through their tagline "The friendliest place on earth". They are selling safe, fun, memorable family vacations and everything they say and do emphasizes that point. You won't see them marketing to singles or seniors. They've identified their target audience and design everything they do to appeal to them.

Target audiences are usually chosen in one of two ways: demographically or behaviorally. Demographics involves identifying certain traits your prospects are likely to share: age, income, geography, job title, education, etc. One of the demographic profiles I targeted as a designer was marketing directors at mid-sized businesses in Southeastern Massachusetts. Behavioral targeting is more on the psychological/lifestyle side. You may need to contact women between 29-40 who are unsatisfied in their current career and are open to change. Maybe it's men 18-30 who consider themselves trendsetters and must have the latest electronic gadget, no matter the cost. Your target will simply be the people you believe have the most potential to buy what you are selling.

Your brand's positioning statement identifies this audience and states how you would like to be perceived by them. A women's apparel shop may want to appeal to women between 22-35 with an average income of $50,000 or more. They may want to be perceived by these women as THE place to go for trendy, European-style clothing. Notice that they are not trying to appeal to women in general, just a select audience of profitable prospects.

Is Your Company Passionate?

Once you've defined your brand and positioning you need to know one more very important thing: the reason why anyone should care! What is it that you do differently from your competitors? What is your organization passionate about? Instead of classifying yourself as a generic financial planner, try saying "I create long-term, easy-to-follow investment plans for newlyweds" or new parents, or small business owners. Whatever it is that you really want to focus on, that you believe in, and that will bring you plenty of profitable clients. Don't be afraid to be specific, no one can be appealing to everybody. If you narrow your audience you can concentrate your marketing budget on a smaller, more interested target.

Let's use the male trendsetter as an example. If our company is an electronics store we could appeal to this target by having a special spot on our web site where these early-adopters could post reviews of the products they buy from us and gain a following among later shoppers who read and vote on the accuracy of the reviews. This would appeal to their interests, boost their ego and increase their loyalty to our store/brand, all by being a little unique.

Your USP must be relevant to your customers' needs, compelling enough to cause them to change, and most of all, true.

Although we may hate to admit it, most of what competing companies do is the same. They all strive for good management and customer service and price themselves competitively. They all try to offer quality products or services that people will want. Performing well is just how a company stays in business. It is not unique. It's what you do *differently* from the competition that constitutes your **Unique Selling Proposition (USP)** and that's what you'll base your strategy on.

A USP is a relevant and compelling reason why prospects should choose you over the competition. It can't be a temporary situation such as a sale or special offer. It shouldn't be generic like "great customer service". It needs to differentiate you from your competitors in the minds of your target audience and make you the natural choice for them to make.

Some companies find their Unique Selling Proposition by deciding to focus on an under-served niche in an otherwise crowded market. Nokia, for example, was the first to treat cell phones as a fashion accessory with changeable faceplates.

Fashion-conscious consumers responded enthusiastically and sales increased. They used style as a USP to stand out in the glutted consumer electronics market when everyone else was busy hyping tech features. That's differentiation.

Have you seen the new Dutch Boy® paint containers? Someone at Dutch Boy® saw that traditional paint cans are just plain annoying! Why were all the paint manufacturers using this terrible packaging? Habit, tradition, nothing more. They used this design flaw to introduce an easy-to-use plastic paint jug. Sales went way up, and Dutch Boy® got more distribution at higher retail prices. They created a USP by changing the customer experience with their product, not the product itself. Pretty smart. Can your company dig into the customer experience in your industry and come up with a key insight that would make you the obvious choice among prospects? It's definitely worth a try.

The easy-pour Dutch Boy paint jug helped differentiate the brand and lead to higher sales.

You don't have to have a revolutionary idea; the point is that you must have a way to stand out from the crowd. You need to give people a reason to choose you. What are some of the reasons current customers enjoy doing business with you? Are you easy to use, have more efficient processes, supply truly unique technology? You can take any of these concepts and turn it into your USP. But, remember, it must be relevant to your customers' needs, compelling enough to cause them to change, and most of all, true. Once you've found your USP, don't keep it hidden. Get it out there where it can be seen on a consistent basis by your target audience.

Fear of Uniqueness

It can be scary to be unique. Most companies follow the competition's lead and produce similar ads and offers. It seems safe, but it actually assures that you'll never overtake the competition; that takes innovation and daring. Unless you have an effective strategy and a unique message, it doesn't matter how many brochures you send out or how many salespeople you hire. You won't get the results you need to move your business forward. If you dare to be unique, in a manner relevant to your prospects you just may leave your competitors in the dust.

The Logo – Your Company's Visual Persona

The logo, that little doohickey that means so much. Your logo is an incredibly important part of your company's marketing. Just think of everywhere it may appear - stationary, business cards, web sites, vehicles, signage, ads, brochures, packaging, billboards, uniforms and more. Although your logo isn't your brand itself, it is the visual representation of it. People make conscious and unconscious judgements about your company in a split second based on how you choose to represent yourself and your company visually.

Logos are also referred to as identities, and with good reason. They are the visual persona of your company and are capable of conveying any message you want. Is your company humorous, trustworthy, fast, established and dependable, cutting-edge, high-end? A good logo will begin conveying your brand's personality and attitude to prospects before they read a word of your copy. So, what would you like to say?

A good logo will represent you well now and in years to come. Longevity is an important aspect of logo design. A company's logo should be unique, avoid imagery that is too literal. Just because you own a bakery doesn't mean your logo should have a rolling pin in it. You may find such imagery very limiting as your company grows and changes over the years. You will be investing a lot of money in your logo over time. You may have letterhead, marketing materials, building signage, vehicle signage, uniforms and more that use your logo prominently. You'll want to get it right the first time to avoid spending valuable marketing dollars re-branding down the line.

A logo needs to be well thought out and executed. A great logo will enhance your image and reinforce your branding message, directly contributing to the bottom line. A bad one will leave a lasting negative impression that will be difficult to overcome, and who needs another obstacle to overcome in today's business climate?

So, how can you tell a good logo from a bad one? Evaluating a logo can be very subjective, but there are some qualities most good logos share. Start with the shapes involved, the cleaner and simpler the better. Even an all-type logo treatment is a shape at first glance. Overly-complicated, intricate logos

The late 90's was the era of the swoosh logo. Observe the logos you see this week, I bet you'll still see swooshes.

are harder to recognize and remember. They are not effective in most signage applications. They are also harder to reproduce in some printing applications and will not reproduce well at small sizes - something all logos should be able to do. Simple, interesting designs will be the most effective. Avoid the latest design trends. The late 90's was defined by the Swoosh Logo, everyone had to have some kind of arching swoosh in their logo. They became impossible to tell apart and differentiated no one. Right now the trend is fades, reflections and metallic looks. These logos will look dated in just a few years. The best logos appear to be timeless.

To properly evaluate a new logo you should first view it in black and white only. Color preferences are very subjective and shouldn't be considered until the logo itself has been decided on. You could eliminate a great logo design just because you hate the color scheme. Once you have a strong, simple logo that possesses just the right attitude you want to convey, you can then feel confident moving on to color selection.

Your choice of corporate colors is just as important as the logo choice itself. Take the time to think ahead to all the current and likely future applications of your logo. You will probably want to use these colors, along with one or two complimentary ones, in all your marketing materials, your web site, vehicles, signage, etc. Making careful, informed decisions about color now will payoff in the future. You will most likely have to reproduce your corporate colors in spot

colors (PMS), 4 color (CMYK), and web (RGB) applications. Picking colors that look good in all these situations will help you avoid potential headaches. Make sure your designer takes this into account.

The colors you select for your logo shouldn't be based solely on personal preferences. Just because the V.P.'s wife hates green doesn't mean that green isn't the right color to convey your message. In order to overcome some of these personal color objections back up your choice with a little science. There

> **Trying to please everyone will lead to over-compromising on the design which will result in a mediocre design everyone can live with, but no one really loves.**

are always trends in color that we see all around us, currently light blue and dark brown are favorites in home decor, just pick up a Pottery Barn catalog and you'll see it. But, beyond trends, colors do have meanings associated with them, use those associations to your advantage.

Many companies find it helpful to have a memorable tagline or slogan that explains what their company does quickly and effectively when their name doesn't make it instantly apparent. If you have a tagline make it part of your logo design project right from the start. Be sure to evaluate versions with and without the tagline to cover the various applications your logo will be used for.

Choosing a new logo is an important process that deserves serious time and consideration. That being said, resist the temptation to overanalyze things. Keep the amount of people involved in the approval process to a minimum. The more people, the more opinions, suggestions and personal tastes will have to be taken into account. As the old saying goes "too many cooks spoil the broth". Trying to please everyone will lead to over-compromising on the design which will result in a mediocre design everyone can live with, but no one really loves.

The best way to evaluate a logo is the way your customers will, with a quick glance at first. Avoid the temptation to stare at the designs and look for things to criticize. Feel free to get opinions from various people, but in the end, leave the final decision to a select few. When you've narrowed it down to one or two options mock-up some expected usages of your logo – ads, brochures, web sites, packaging. Seeing a logo design in context will help you evaluate its

suitability for your company's most important applications. Keep doing your best to remain objective when evaluating the logo. Remind the decision makers that it represents your company's brand and objectives, not any one person, even if that person is the CEO (tread lightly, of course).

At the end of the process if the logo you've decided on is simple, clear, unique, functional for your applications and a good representation of your company's persona, you've succeeded in navigating what can be a very stormy sea. Congratulations!

Color Meaning Chart:

Black: serious, distinctive, elegant, bold, powerful, sophisticated, expensive, night, death

Dark Grey: conservative, classic, responsible, dull, somberness, authority,

Light Grey: neutral, logical, rich, practical, reserved, trust

Blue: authority, nautical, dignity, security, confident, classic, stability, trust

Light Blue: calming, patient, cool, water, contentment, trusting

Green: healthy, fertile, freshness, environmentally conscious, nature, reliable, appetite

Light Green: calm, soothing, refreshing, young

Teal: serene, sophisticated, water, coolness

Brown: earthy, wholesome, delicious, rich, rustic, warm, natural

Orange: fun, cheeriness, sunset, exuberance, spontaneous, optimistic, speed

Amber/Gold: history, autumn, earthiness, richness, tradition, conservative

Yellow: youth, friendly, positive feelings, sunshine, surprise, cowardice, energetic, caution

Hot Pink: exciting, playful, tropical, flirtatious

Light Pink: romantic, sweet tasting, femininity, innocence, softness, youthful

Purple: sophistication, mysterious, spirituality, dramatic, wealth, royalty, youth, creative

Light Purple: romantic, sentimental, nostalgic, fragrant

Dark Red: rich, refined, tasty, expensive, luxurious

Red: aggressiveness, passionate, sexy, strength, powerful, assertive, vitality, fear, speed, danger

Ivory/Cream: classic, soft, comforting, natural, smooth

White: purity, truthfulness, faith, pristine, contemporary, refined, airy

Silver Metallic: sleek, modern, classy
metallics can't be reproduced online

Gold Metallic: rich, expensive, valuable, prestigious
metallics can't be reproduced online

Creating Your Marketing Strategy

Now you have a brand identity, positioning, target audience, USP and a fantastic logo. It's time to come up with a marketing strategy or plan that will grow your business. Your marketing **strategy** is the way you'll promote your products or services to the public, but not simply by running an ad. Creating a real strategy involves selecting the most cost-effective, efficient and *audience-appropriate* ways to reach your target prospects with your USP. It will give you a powerful advantage over the competition.

Tactics are the elements you will use to execute your strategy. They can include: direct mail, print ads, PR, sales training, promotions, event sponsorships, holding seminars or webinars, email marketing, blogging, etc. You'll use a combination of tactics to get your message out there and get your prospects to take the action you want such as; call, email, visit a store, download a brochure. Using more than one tactic to reach your audience is called **Multi-Channel Marketing.** Be sure to think of your audience when choosing tactics. Are they heavy computer users, radio listeners, commuters who pass billboards, coupon cutters, magazine readers? Use their habits to determine your tactics.

12 Great Tips for Creating Your Strategy and Targeting Prospects

The two most important factors for small to medium size businesses to focus on are **awareness** and **relevant differentiation** (USP). Either one alone is ineffective; together they can be a powerhouse. These tips will help you create a strategy to achieve just that.

1. You can have the best product or service in the world, but if no one is aware of you, you won't be successful.

You can build awareness in a variety of ways: advertising, PR, newsletters, signage, direct mail, product samples. But, have you thought about producing a webinar, writing an article, sponsoring an event, branding your vehicle (a traveling billboard) or co-marketing with a complementary product? Be on the lookout for great promotional ideas and strategies used by other industries and see if you can adapt them to your advantage. Awareness comes with time and repetition, so the important thing is to keep at it. Make sure your company is

being seen and talked about on a regular basis, in various places your target audience is likely to see it.

2. Once people are aware of your product, why should they choose it over all the others?

Awareness is great but it isn't a magic bullet. People choose products that stand out in relevant and compelling ways. Your USP should be based on your knowledge of your prospects, their needs, problems, anxieties and expectations. Then you fill those needs, alleviate those anxieties and exceed those expectations. Try thinking like a customer. Jerold Panas said it well in his book *Making the Case* "People don't go to a hardware store to buy a drill. They go to a hardware store to buy a drill because they need a hole."

The key to a good USP is having a clear message that highlights your unique strengths and explains to prospects why your product is the best choice. You'll find it more effective to tell them how your product or service solves their problem rather than just listing its features. Keep their perspective in mind, not yours. If you have a case study of how your product has solved the problems of others, even better! That can give you the credibility you need to make the sale.

3. How, exactly, do you get your message to the audience?

You'll need to gain some knowledge about your prospects in order to reach them. You need to find out:

- Who the real decision-makers are (there may be more than one)
- What or who influences this target audience's opinions
- What motivates him or her (speed, price, ego, style...)
- Where he or she gets information about your product category (trade magazines, internet sites, conferences...)
- The type of message they are likely to respond to: product samples, coupons, free evaluations, etc.

Use this knowledge to get the right message to prospects as efficiently as possible through the channels they use to gather information.

One way to determine all these facts is to hold an informal focus group with some of your current customers. This could be done by a phone, mail or email survey, or even by taking a select group of customers out to lunch, independently or as a group, to discuss these issues. Ask them where they get their information. For example, how did your prospects find out about some of the other products or services that they purchased recently? What web sites do they turn to for information? What keywords do they use to search for your type of product? (You'll learn the importance of these keywords later). What trade associations do they belong to? What trade shows do they attend? What publications do they read regularly? You can rent these publications' mailing lists, advertise on these web sites and visit or exhibit at these trade shows. This process of getting to know more about your existing clients will help you decide what methods to use to reach others like them. Don't fall into the trap of assuming you know the answers if you haven't actually asked your customers – they may surprise you.

4. Perform your own analysis of the competition.

It's always a good idea to keep an eye on the competition. Start by reading local newspapers, trade journals, industry newsletters and visit web sites in your category to request information. Check who comes up in the top 30 results for Google® searches your potential clients are likely to use. You can learn a lot about your competition through their own advertising and PR. The idea here is not to copy them, but to know what you are up against.

5. Say it loud and say it often: multi-touch.

Once you know who you are selling to and what methods or tactics you will use to reach them, you'll need to contact them at regular intervals using several channels (tactics). Frequency of contact (multi-touch) is important simply because people forget. It takes an average of 7-9 impressions to make an impact. Even when you have piqued their interest, if they don't act immediately they will forget you in a week or two. Also, remember your prospects' lives are constantly changing and their needs change unexpectedly. Just because they didn't need your product or service two months ago doesn't mean they don't need it now. A multi-touch approach will build the brand awareness you need.

6. Say it here, say it there: multi-channel.

Be sure to use more than one method of contact or "channel" for your marketing. Your prospects are bound to have different preferences in how they like to receive information: email, print ads, direct mail, etc. Multiple channels allow you to communicate more often. The more often you interact with your prospect and the more relevant the information you provide, the more effective your campaign will be at rising above the clutter.

All of these communications need to make an offer and give your prospects a clear Call-to-Action. It doesn't hurt to state it again and maybe again. It may sound obvious but be sure to tell them what you want them to do: call, order, visit a store, attend a webinar, doing so will raise your success rate.

Design and copy are the translation of your brand and positioning to your audience. They add meaning, they inform and persuade. They evoke an emotional response. They are your brands voice.

Measure, refine and optimize your marketing channel mix. Spend wisely and calculate your cost per generated lead in each channel. Then stick with the most successful ones that produce the highest ROI. Implementing a good campaign will not only help your message reach the client at the correct time, but also extend the reach and improve the effectiveness of your sales force.

7. Anticipate objections.

Ask your salespeople (or yourself) what your prospect's main objection to buying usually is – cost, fear of change, reliability – and address it up-front in your marketing. Then direct them to where they can find more information, request a brochure, visit your web site, etc. Many people won't call a sales rep or visit a store early in the decision making process because they're afraid of getting a hard sell. Give them a painless way to learn more.

8. Sometimes less is more.

No matter which channel you're using, don't overwhelm your prospect with too much information at once. Company history and mission statements can wait. Tell the prospect what problem your product or service will solve for them, what benefit they will derive, and use your USP to make you the obvious choice for them to make.

I received this postcard in the mail a couple of years ago and have kept it as an example of the Less Is More tip. It's actually painful to look at!

If you have several benefits to extol, try different campaigns emphasizing one benefit in each. You can still use the text of the piece to mention the additional benefits, but if you give equal emphasis to everything, nothing will stand out. Test to see what benefit gets a response from what target audience. Then you can target more effectively. Always ask the prospect for an action or response. You want them to call, mail or visit your web site to sign up for a newsletter or class, download a white paper, get more information or order your product. In any case, you now have a true sales lead to follow up on.

9. Make it easy for an interested prospect to contact you.

Always consistently display your brand's logo, tagline, contact information and web site address at all customer touchpoints, from letterhead, business cards and emails to company vehicles, signage, ads, etc. Provide several ways to respond to your offer – call, visit our web site, mail a response card, let them choose what they prefer.

10. Details matter! Professional design & copywriting enhance your strategy.

It takes more than strategy to build a brand. You'll need the right words and visuals as well. After putting all this thought and effort into your brand, strategy and marketing tactics, don't fall into the trap of skimping on the execution. Design and copy are the translation of your brand and positioning to your audience. When done well they add meaning, they inform and persuade. They can engage the reader and evoke an emotional response. They are your brands voice. Poor design, copywriting and printing make you look like a fly-by-night operation they may want to avoid. Not the emotional response you intended.

Understanding and managing the creative process will give you a distinct advantage over the competition. Use it to achieve maximum brand-building results with each project. In order to get the most out of your designers and copywriters, you need to involve them as early on in the process as possible. They have the experience to craft your message visually and verbally for maximum effect. If design is applied at the end of a project as an afterthought it will only serve as decoration that won't add to the effectiveness of the piece. Design can be used to overcome communication problems, positioning problems, change perceptions and add differentiation if you make it an integral part of your strategy. Professional copywriting will give clarity and add interest to your message. It will help prospects identify with your brand and its message.

Both professional design and copywriting add value by providing distinctive content and credibility. Consider them a good investment of marketing dollars. These are strategic advantages – a way to stand out from all the other communications that are bombarding your prospects each day. It directly contributes to the bottom line.

Every marketing piece potential customers come in contact with must look professional and worthy of their time to view it. Having a professional appearance in all your marketing efforts will instill confidence and reinforce your brand's reputation while giving you the most mileage out of every marketing dollar you spend.

Consistency is key. You will want to convey a consistent message, tone and visual look in all of your projects. Tying all these disparate materials together with design and a common voice creates brand harmony. This will turn your USP into a compelling visual as well as verbal message.

If all these tasks seems too daunting or expensive, redesign and rewrite the pieces one at a time, as time and budgets allow. But don't miss out on this important aspect in implementing your new marketing strategy.

11. Performing a brand harmony audit–not as painful as it sounds.

There is an easy way to determine how consistent your current marketing materials are: perform an audit. Gather together all the materials your company puts in front of customers on one table. Find all the brochures, ads, direct mail

pieces, catalogs, signage, web site, packaging, trade show exhibits, etc, (take photos or use printouts where necessary). Start sorting them by visual style. Is your company's brand and USP coming through? Does one item relate to the next, or do they look completely different? Is the quality of the printed pieces up to your standards? Start reading the headlines and copy. Does the copy have the same tone or "voice" from piece to piece? You may find that some pieces are working well together, but maybe the signage or web site needs to be brought in line. Or, you may find a huge kaleidoscope of design styles and copy tones. In either case, you now know if you are using design, photography, copywriting and printing to their fullest potential and you can start producing materials that are based on your strategy.

Now that you are in auditing mode, why not take it a step further and compare your materials to the competition's? Collect sales and marketing materials from your rivals and examine their web sites. It's always a good idea to get on their direct mail and email lists. Do their materials look and sound alike? Are they all making the same claims? Don't duplicate them, be different and beat their offer or benefit. Appeal to a niche not being well served or solve a problem they aren't addressing. This is where your USP comes in. Use it to stand out from this crowd.

Getting it done.

Sales is a process of communication, not a one-time event. You've got to stay in front of your prospects through repeated contacts – whether that's direct mail, sales calls, online press releases or, more likely, a combination of several tactics. That's the essence of multi-channel, multi-touch marketing. Not just any contact will do. You need meaningful, informative, educational, persuasive contacts that address the issues and concerns of your prospects through your USP.

Smaller or newer businesses on tight budgets can approach these goals in stages as time and money allow. Start with your USP to set yourself apart. Define your goals, determine some tactics to achieve them, then start with your next marketing piece or activity. Take every opportunity to align your efforts with the new strategy until all your marketing efforts have brand harmony.

Regardless of whether you sell B2B or B2C, marketers are finding out that it's all about people. Tap into your target audience as a person, not just a title or statistic. If you connect with them emotionally, by solving their problems and addressing their concerns, you'll succeed.

Choosing the Right Tactics

Now that you've gained all this marketing information and formed a strategy, you will need to choose the tactics or channels you will use to deliver your message. Response rates and costs vary greatly from channel to channel. You will need to analyze the data you've gathered from your existing customers and target audience to decide which tactics you will use to reach them.

In the following chapters we'll examine many tried-and-true marketing channels and tactics as well as some newer, more daring ones you may want to use.

Brochure Design

There is hardly a company out there that couldn't make excellent use of a good product or service brochure. In fact, a well designed, informative brochure is often the cornerstone of a company's marketing effort. They can be used for a single purpose, such as a leave-behind piece for sales calls, or for multiple uses. They can be mailed to prospects to spark interest, handed out at events and trade shows, mailed to fill information requests and more. A really good brochure can do a lot of heavy lifting for marketing and sales, the operative word being GOOD.

A marketing piece as important as this will be viewed carefully and will reflect the quality and value of your company's products and services in the recipient's mind. It can establish your credibility and professionalism, or destroy it. It can make the big sale, or break it. So, when it's time for your company to produce a new brochure, make it a top priority to get it right the first time.

A quality brochure will use a combination of design, visuals, text and layout to create a look and feel that emphasizes your marketing objectives - introducing a new product, selling a service, creating brand awareness or soliciting donations. The objectives can vary as widely as the designs, what matters is that your brochure communicates effectively to your target audience. Often, having an outside firm write and design your brochure will help you avoid the trap of using industry jargon and acronyms. They will help you to view things from the prospect's point of view instead of a salesperson's.

When starting your brochure project begin by identifying your target audience. Who is this brochure aimed at? CEOs, housewives, human resources managers, affluent males over 50? Know your audience and speak to it, specifically. You may find that you have more than one distinct target audience you need to engage, such as a CEO and an IT manager. These two individuals would have very different concerns and levels of technical expertise. In that case think seriously about creating more than one brochure to appeal to each audience and address their specific questions and concerns. Remember, you need this heavy-hitting brochure to be effective. Creating more than one version may get you a higher ROI than producing just one, all-purpose brochure.

When you've determined who you are talking to select the most valuable benefit they derive from your product or service. You may want to do research here with past customers to determine that benefit, it's not always what you think it will be. Your product may help a busy executive stay organized, but the real benefit to the customer may be the time your product saves him, or the freedom that organization gives him. If you take the time to identify why past customers bought your product it will pay off with new prospects. Then your new brochure can make use of text, pictures, colors and design to emphasize what that benefit will mean to them.

In the initial design process be sure to involve any high-level decision makers right from the start to get the buy-in you'll need for approval.

In the initial design process be sure to involve any high-level decision makers right from the start to get the buy-in you'll need for approval. This will help you avoid costly redesigns and other changes at the end of a project when they are the most expensive and time consuming to make.

As we said in the beginning your brochure will do some heavy lifting for your sales and marketing departments, so don't strain it too much. Avoid the temptation to overload your brochure with every fact, feature and detail of your offering. Give prospects the information they need to get excited about your product and persuade them to take the next step in your sales process. That could be calling to place an order, visiting a web site, setting up a sales appointment, or visiting a store location. Whatever your sales cycle calls for, make sure your brochure prominently asks your prospect to move forward - this is a Call To Action. That's what you're really after, so be sure to ask for it.

A brochure allows you to leave a lasting impression on your prospects. That means a poorly executed brochure will actually do more harm than good, costing your company much more than the price of producing a high-quality piece in the first place. Be sure to check out the materials of the competition. The idea here is not to copy them, you always what to differentiate your company, but to make sure that your materials are as good or better than theirs.

You will get the best ROI by using professional designers, photographers, copy writers, proofreaders and printers for your project. Help them gather all the information they need about your company, brand and product, then with guidance from you, let them do their stuff! The next time a prospect asks you for more information, you'll be proud to present them with your impressive new brochure and you'll know your well on your way to a new sale.

Direct Mail...Still Important to the Mix.

What is one of the first things you do when you get home at the end of the day? I bet you get the mail! It's part of almost everyone's daily routine. Mail is still one of the easiest ways to reach decision makers. It's tangible, portable and can be read at the prospect's convenience. An email has to get past spam filters and actually get opened to be effective. Direct mail goes right to the mailbox and can start the sales message on the outside of the envelope or on the front of the postcard. Direct mail is also great for driving traffic to your web site and gathering opt-ins for your email campaigns.

Studies by the United States Postal Service (USPS) and other independent groups found that traditional consumers as well as the more internet-savvy still consider mail a very relevant and useful source of information. People enjoy the physical aspect of viewing mail and many prefer it to email communication and telemarketing. Studies also showed that combining mail with online efforts can have a substantial impact on web site traffic. Using these two tactics together will definitely improve your results.

Direct mail is an effective tactic, but, just like an email inbox, your customers' mailbox gets pretty full as well. So you'll need to stand out here too. Some ways to accomplish this are:

• **Teaser Copy.** Why send an envelope with just address information on it? Why not use that valuable real estate to start the sale at first glance? Try using headlines that will engage your audience..."Do you know the 5 steps to..." or appeal to their curiosity "Find out why so many of your colleagues...".
If you already have a relationship with this prospect make sure to call that out. Even printing a line on the back of the envelope lifts open rates.

• **Stand Out.** Did you know that 3/4 of all envelopes that are mailed are 24 lb., white, #10 size? Dare to be different, it will pay off. People will open an intriguing envelope. Try a #12 envelope, or one with bubble pack, or unconventional sizes and colors. You'd be surprised what can be mailed. People have mailed barf bags, anti-static bags, burlap bags, even a life-size cardboard cutout of Elvis. Just be sure to bring a test piece to the post office first to avoid any surprises.

• **Catalogs.** Even though people do a lot of their buying online, catalogs are still crucial to selling merchandise. Alone they are a great vehicle to show your products, but when combined with online efforts their effectiveness only grows. Catalog mailings can be highly targeted with the right mailing list and the ROI is very measurable.

The USPS estimates that 37% of e-commerce dollars come from catalog recipients. More than 40% of Americans shop using both catalogs and the Internet (I know I do), and in your target audience the percentage may be even higher. Even retailers that started solely as online stores such as Amazon.com, Ebay and RedEnvelope have used catalogs to gain more sales online. They know that mailing catalogs helps attract new, profitable customers.

• **Postcard Campaigns.** They may have less real estate for your message than an envelope mailing, but you don't have to worry about people not opening them. They are also very easy for people to save or pass on to another interested party. Try an oversized postcard or a die-cut shape to stand out.

• **Interactive Mail.** These include zip-pull envelopes, scratch-off cards, sticky notes, stickers, etc. The longer a person interacts with your mail piece the more message retention and response it will generate.

• **Dimensional Mail.** This type of campaign can triple response rates and message retention. The cardboard Elvis mailer would be a dimensional piece. Other examples would be sending a premium gift – mailing a sports water bottle with a letter inside, or one walkie talkie with an offer to have the other delivered by your sales rep when the prospect responds. If you're trying to reach executives you must remember they get a huge amount of unsolicited mail, which is then sorted by an assistant. An important or valuable-looking package is never thrown away like a generic DM piece; it makes its way to your intended recipient. As long as you have a great strategy and message, once your mailer is opened, you should hit your sales goals.

• **Personalization.** Variable Data Printing technology has come a long, long way. It used to be cool just to inkjet the recipient's name in the mail piece. Now, you can go far beyond that. New digital presses can change the text and even the imagery of your piece based on each recipient. It's even possible to automatically generate unique URL's (web addresses) that can be printed on each piece, putting a prospect's name right in the web address of your site's landing page. Smart use of this personalization technology can raise the response rate of a campaign by up to 450%. If a 2% response rate is good, an 8% rate is exceptional! Personalization will increases the cost of your campaign, but the increase in response usually more than makes up for the added expense.

• **Get the Right Mailing List.** Your list accounts for 40-50% of the campaign's success rate. If your budget is extremely tight target your list more specifically so you can spend more per person. It's more important that your piece stands out in the mailbox than that it goes to more people only to be ignored by them because they are the wrong people. When you have a quality, highly targeted list it's safe to assume that many non-responders may actually still be your best prospects. That's why smart direct mailers will keep mailing to the same list over and over, they get more responses the more they are seen by the same people.

• **Segmentation.** All prospects are not the same, some will be more profitable than others, so spend accordingly. Segment your prospects and try a concept that can be executed on two different cost levels. Maybe one is an elaborate envelope with variable data printed material inside that is sent to prospects your research shows will be more valuable. Then re-purpose the printed material without VDP for a simpler mailer for prospects that are likely to be less profitable.

• **Make it Easy.** Everybody has their preferences so give people multiple ways to respond to your campaign; web site, physical address, response card, toll-free number, etc.

• **Don't Skimp on Execution.** Using full-color printing makes your piece much more attractive and pulls higher response rates. The cost of 4-color printing is very affordable these days due to new technology and heavy competition in the industry. If you are mailing to a small list try a printer with a digital press. You'll get 4-color output on small runs for a very reasonable cost.

• **Fulfillment.** If you are a small business and only have a few hundred prospects you may feel comfortable handling your own mailing. But most businesses will need professional fulfillment help. Mailing is a complicated business. Drop dates, postal rates and regulations, conforming to postal automation techniques, personalization software programs, all these issues can best be addressed by using a printer or mailing company that is extremely familiar with the industry and it will save you money in the long run.

Print Ads vs. Banner Ads

This chapter will discuss the similarities and differences between traditional print advertising in newspapers and magazines and their online counterpart – web banners. Print ads work on the pricing model of Cost Per Thousand (CPM) impressions or views. So you are paying a set cost for each 1,000 people who see your ad. Print ads have traditionally been priced by the size of the ad, where it appears in the issue, and the circulation numbers and reader demographics of the publication. Advertisers had little or no way to track the effectiveness of such ads. They could measure a general up-tick in sales after an ad ran, but these numbers were never concrete evidence of an ads total reach.

Most web banners use the Cost Per Thousand (CPM) pricing model as well. You may find some sites offering a Cost-per-Click (CPC) model where you pay based on the amount of click-throughs your ad receives, or a Cost-per-Action (CPA) model where you are paying for a certain action such as a completed purchase or download.

The advent of web banner advertising allowed advertisers to track click throughs from each and every banner ad they placed. Banner ads started out with relatively similar fees to print, about $20-$60 CPM, but as more sites appeared the content providers began slashing prices. Some sites now offer ads for as low as $1 CPM. It's debatable whether these online ads deserve such lower pricing or whether print publications charge so much just because advertisers are used to paying them so much to get exposure. Either way, the bottom line is online ads are cheaper than print and provide easier ways to measure ROI.

In both print and web advertising targeting your audience is key. Newspapers have a very wide readership demographic so they are not considered to be targeted to any particular niche. Magazines on the other hand, can help you narrow those demographics down to a more precise niche: teens, hunters, gamers, homeowners, entrepreneurs, almost any niche you can think of can be reached in an appropriate magazine. Readers also tend to spend more time with a magazine and the smaller page size and 4 color printing give your ad more impact. Serious content web sites track visitors and their demographics so you can target here as well.

Fast Company is a very popular business-niche magazine, and like most traditional publication it has an online version of the magazine that is very popular and includes features such as blogs and forums that add value to the online presence of the magazine. Their print advertising is based on a paid ratebase of 725,000 and the online site has about 1 million unique visitors per month.

There are certain business categories that are expected to be found advertising in newspaper and magazines such as grocery stores, jewelers, restaurants and car dealerships. These businesses might suffer a drop in sales by not participating in traditional media. But for most businesses putting their budgets into online advertising, or a combination of traditional print and new media, is the best way to go.

Fast Company Magazine 2009 Ad Rates

Print Version

Placement	Black & White 1X	Four Color 1X
Page	$51,570	$76,980
Spread	$103,140	$153,960
2/3 Page	$39,710	$59,720
1/2 Horiz	$30,420	$45,410
1/3 Page	$20,630	$30,790

Online Version

Placement	Ad Unit	Spec	Net CPM
Homepage	Leaderboard	728x90	$80.00
	Wide Skyscraper	160x600	$85.00
	IMU	300x250	$100.00
Homepage Top of Page	Welcome Screen	600x600	$160.00
Resource Center	Leaderboard	728x90	$70.00
	Wide Skyscraper	160x600	$75.00
	IMU	336x280	$90.00
		300x250	$50.00
	Vertical Banner	120x240	$45.00
	In-between Page Superstitial		$100.00

Print Ad Tips:

- Use a short headline written to grab the readers attention.
- Promising a benefit in your headline is more effective than using the name of your company or product.
- Use a high-impact visual to draw attention and reinforce your message.

Over time, people have begun to question the effectiveness of banner ads in the same manner they question print advertising. Is the only value a click? Or, do the thousands of impressions that don't result in a click still have an effect on brand recognition thereby effecting future sales? I believe those impressions do have value in niche markets. They can get an unknown player immediate credibility and awareness with a targeted audience, that's value right there. The average click rate for banner ads is only about 0.25%. Targeting by location or site content can raise that by more than 200%, so targeting your niche audience will be crucial for success.

Banner Ad Tips:

- Keep your file size low, under 12 KB if at all possible. If a visitor scrolls down or leaves a page before your ad loads you've lost an impression you've paid for.

- Animation is an aspect of banner advertising that print can't offer. Movement in your ad will grab attention but keep it small. You don't want to annoy people with garish flashing ads and any animation you use will also add to your file's size, so keep it simple.

- Promise a benefit in your headline and keep your copy short and enticing. Their should be a "reward" for taking the time to click, but that doesn't mean a prize or contest. It can be information, tips, or other content your audience would find valuable.

- Always include a Call-To-Action. It may seem self evident that you want viewers to click on your ad, but by actually putting the words "click here" or "sign-up now" will increase the number of clicks you receive by up to 20%. Using words like "Free", "Limited Time Offer" or "Secret" will also raise your results.

- Change your banner ads often so frequent site visitors won't become immune to them. Keep many of the same elements for branding, such as logo placement and offer, but vary colors, images and headlines to keep it interesting.

- Your banner ad should be linked to a landing or squeeze page specifically designed for this campaign. If the visitor lands at a generic homepage they will most likely just hit the back button and they're gone!

Whether you decide to use print ads, web banners, or a combination of both, your success will depend on targeting your audience and having a presence where ever *they* go to find the content that interests them.

- Copy length can be tricky. You don't want your ad to be too dense and a chore to read, but you do want to include enough copy to pique interest and make your point. Using a professional copywriter and designer will get you better ROI than going it alone.

- Effective use of white space and layout will draw more attention to your ad while keeping it easy on the eyes.

- Pick your publications carefully and run your ads repeatedly. This is a very important part of your print ad strategy. A one-off ad strategy won't get the results you need. People need to see your ads on a continual basis in publications they know and trust before you will get a significant response.

- You will spend a significant amount of money on these ads. Starting out with professionally designed and written ads will pay dividends in the future.

Why a High-Quality Web site is an Absolute Must!

More and more people are turning to the Internet to get information on the products and services they need. Web sites are becoming the *most important* touchpoint you can have with potential customers. Your site should not just measure up to the competition's, it should be a well-organized, information-packed, lead-generating machine.

13 things you need to know to make your site more effective.

1. First Impressions – Your Brand

Potential clients form their initial opinion of a company based on its web site. A professional look, relevant content and ease of use are essential. Is the site up-to-date with the latest news and info? Is the company attentive to detail? Poor grammar, typos and broken links give a bad impression that is hard to overcome. Is the company up to my standards? If it's not they are gone in 10 seconds or LESS. Only when a prospect forms a favorable first impression of a site will they go on to evaluate the company's offerings. This is where your branding, strategy, design and USP reel them in.

2. Offline and Online Marketing

All of your print ads, direct mail pieces and promotions should be driving prospects to your site. They should contain a compelling Call-to-Action directing them to your site for more details, etc. You should go a step further by using a unique web address or landing page for each marketing campaign. It helps you measure the effectiveness of each effort and actually raises success rates for campaigns. Techniques like this will help you refine your marketing efforts, making them more profitable.

3. Relevance

Now that your offline marketing is driving qualified prospects to your site, your core message and content must be seen, found relevant and remembered! You know from your own research on the web that you'll probably visit several sites to gather information, but there's always that one that you keep going back to that seems to address all your questions in a well organized and attractive manner. That's the kind of site YOU want to have.

4. Lead Generation

Determine who the primary visitor to your web site is and make sure they can quickly and easily get what they want. When a consumer goes to your site you want them to take action. This may include signing up for a free newsletter, a consultation, registering for an event, requesting a brochure or inquiring about a purchase itself. A well written and designed web site will help elicit these actions and is a necessary step to convert someone from a web site visitor into an actual customer. Talk to your sales force. Find out what your prospect's typical preliminary questions and obstacles to buying are. Your site should address these up front to help pre-qualify leads and convert visitors into buyers. Raising your conversion rate from just 1 to 2 percent is the same as doubling your web site traffic, and it is usually much easier and cheaper to do.

5. Don't just Regurgitate your Brochure onto the Web

Visitors will expect a greater benefit if they take the time to check out your web site. A good web site uses compelling and succinct text, interactively, intuitive navigation systems, etc. Everything on a landing page must be designed and written to entice a visitor to click. Using active words such as "Learn", "Ask", "Browse", "Sign up" encourages your visitor to explore your site. Use "you" and "your" to keep your focus on the prospects needs; avoid "we" and "our". Keep copy short and use descriptive links to pages that have more information. Remember, you just want to engage them so they make that first click and start exploring what you have to offer.

People read text on web sites very differently than they do text on a page. In fact they rarely read at all, they scan. Studies have shown that people pay the most attention to headlines and subheads when viewing a web site. So make sure these two important pieces of your copy engage visitors. Bullet points and photo captions are also popular with scanners so pay special attention to them as well.

Include keywords your prospects are likely to use in Internet searches right in the headline and page title and put the keyword as close to the beginning of the headline as you can. By doing this you assure visitors that they are on a relevant site. It also favorably effects your site's search engine ranking.

Try not to sound like an ad. Highlight benefits rather than features. Talk about how your product solves problems and make an emotional connection with the prospect. Make your headlines easy to read. For example, instead of "Brand X delivers unprecedented storage density, industry-leading scalability and unrivaled performance!" try "Three easy steps to truly secure data!" By testing different headlines and tracking results you will see which ones lead to actual sales and which ones cause people to leave your site without making an inquiry or purchase.

6. Images are Great but don't forget the Web site Copy

Many businesses put too much emphasis on their web site's graphics and fancy Flash animations, but then don't have enough text to back it up. Although on an initial visit people will just scan headlines and subheads, when they find a site they like, informative text will assure them of your competence and provide (take out the s) excellent content for search engines to evaluate when ranking a site (see Search Engine Marketing). You want your graphics to capture their interest, then your copy must satisfy their need to know. If you anticipate and answer the questions and concerns they have you will earn their trust and loyalty. Think like a prospect and ask yourself, "What would I need to know if I were in the market for this product or service"? Thinking this way will change the way you write and organize your content.

One company that adjusted its web strategy is The Scotts Company. Their website was nothing more than a corporate who's who and not visitor-friendly. Now, gardeners, farmers and homeowners can access the information they need to become better growers. The new site is designed with the customer in mind. It's vibrant, inviting and informative, a resource customers will return to again and again for their gardening needs.

There are other good ways to add relevant, reassuring content to your site. To highlight the benefits of your product or service, consider adding case studies to your site describing how a customer was able to solve a problem or overcome challenges by using your company. Try adding a "Frequently Asked Questions" page. These FAQ pages can be a great marketing tool. Use them to address the questions you think customers might or *should* ask about your industry. Answering questions they haven't even thought of yet will make you a resource in their eyes instead of just another vendor.

Writing articles and white papers related to your business and publishing them on your site can put you in the enviable situation of being perceived as an authority. It's also a way to add relevant content to your site on a regular basis.

Consider asking visitors for their email address in return for access to these articles. If you don't want to require registration for free downloads like white papers, try sending an automated thank-you email with a sign-up form offering future articles, updates and special offers. These are great ways to grow your email list.

Using these content-heavy techniques will help differentiate you from other competing sites. As visitors go about their research, they will look for information on issues, benefits, and features that they first learned about on your site. If a competitor's site doesn't sufficiently cover these topics, you will have gained an important edge.

7. Fear of Fraud

Security experts say using your credit card online poses no greater risk of fraud than using it at a store or restaurant. But customers' fear of fraud on the internet *is* real and still needs to be addressed. These fears can be countered by placing third-party assurances such as "VeriSign secured" or "BizRate.com customer certified" on your site. You can also use a third party service such as PayPal to receive payments. These options

give prospects the confidence to make a purchase. Testimonials from previous buyers also help to alleviate these fears of fraud.

8. We're All a Little Lazy

Most people won't scroll down your web page to find what they are looking for, so your most important content must be "above the fold".

You should also be sure to keep any registration forms short. Limit your fields to the six or seven most important questions and don't require too much personal information like phone numbers. Including an e-mail privacy statement link on your forms reassures people that you won't share their information with spammers, making them more likely to opt in.

9. Stay in Touch with Newsletters and Blogs

Newsletters
Visitor conversions don't always happen immediately. Keep your visitors coming back by offering an email newsletter or special promotion sign-up on your landing page. If customers like your site or products enough to opt-in to these regular communications they are telling you they are a good prospect. A newsletter is a great vehicle for staying connected and continuing customer interest. Some suggestions for making newsletters engaging include:

- *Offering subscriber-only discounts during slow periods for your business.*

- *Having an industry expert be a "Guest Author" for an article.*

- *Partnering up with a complementary product or service that does not directly compete with you but shares the same target audience.*

- *Sharing information that only you have; white papers, FAQs, case studies, survey results or other special data that may interest your customer and keep them coming back to your site.*

Blogs
Blogs have begun to reshape the Internet by enabling millions of people to have a voice and share their ideas and opinions with others.

Wikipedia Definition:
A blog is a type of web site where entries are made much like a journal or diary, then they are displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news...A typical blog combines text, images and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic.

Hosting a blog on your site is a great way to add fresh content, position yourself as an industry expert and keep in touch with prospects. Think of a blog as an online, interactive newsletter for your company. RSS syndication allows visitors to subscribe to your blog and receive updates immediately after you post a new article. Blog hosting services make it easy to create a blog right from your browser window. Companies can post their latest articles, press releases, announcements, and have them instantly available to interested parties. They can also use a blog to get customer's opinions and ideas for bettering their product or service.

Blogs are interactive because users can link to your blog posts, giving you a great source of incoming links that will raise your site's page rank. They also allow users to post comments about your content. You can choose whether or not you want to allow these comments and you can delete any you find objectionable. Many companies are afraid of getting negative feedback but it's a great way to find out what your customers really think. If you address negative feedback in a positive, problem-solving manner, you can gain the trust and loyalty of readers. This kind of service can differentiate you from your competitors and potential customers may see it as a real plus.

Staying in touch with current customers and prospects with various offers, news, articles and discounts will help you build a relationship with them that will lead to more sales.

10. Search Engine Marketing...Increase your Visibility

When people look for information on the Internet, and that's where they are looking today, they usually start by entering a topic or keyword into a search engine like Yahoo™ or Google™. You'll want your site to be in the top results of that search. This is achieved through a process called **Search Engine Marketing (SEM).**

SEM is the practice of setting up and running a successful online presence while gaining maximum **search engine visibility,** i.e. the position of your site in the search engine results for certain keywords or phrases people enter when

looking for information on products and services. Everything depends on how deep you are listed in these results. If you appear on the first couple of pages of results it's very likely this visibility will bring a lot of traffic. If you are the 556th result it's likely that people will stumble across you only by accident.

SEM programs usually consist of three main strategies: Search Engine Optimization, Paid Inclusion/Paid Advertising and Web Analytics.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is both art and science. By changing the content, HTML code and structure of your site SEO experts make your pages more compatible with the robots (spiders) search engines will send to read and rank them. The content of your web site and the way keywords are used in it determine whether or not the search robots will consider your content relevant and not just spam.

Paid Inclusion is different. You pay the search engine and it guarantees the inclusion of your site in the index. Many search engines also offer advanced pay-for-performance programs like the "sponsored results" that you often see at the top of your results page, and ads next to the organic results (pay-per-click ads) the most well known of these are GoogleAds.

A very important part of any SEM program is **Web Analytics** – tracking and analyzing visitor behavior on your site. You can find out the bounce rate for your landing pages – people who arrive at your landing page but leave almost immediately. By analyzing this data over time you'll learn what's working and what is not. Use this information to make improvements and raise traffic and conversion rates so that your site becomes a money maker, not just a business expense. Most web site hosting companies offer these analytics programs as an upgrade to your hosting plan; take advantage of them. Google™ Analytics is also a great way to track your site's visitors and discover what keywords are working best for you.

See the section titled: *Search Engine Marketing and Search Engine Optimization... Don't Leave Home without Them* for more information on this very important topic.

11. Automated Emails

Don't miss out on a possible good prospect. Use auto-responders to trigger an automatic email message for people who came to your site but didn't buy, abandoned a shopping cart, downloaded a white paper or filled out a survey. Contacting them when your site is still fresh in their mind, with content specific to their area of interest, may convert them into customers.

12. Multiple Landing Pages or Squeeze Pages

When people are coming to your site you want them to immediately see what is relevant to their needs. Creating specific landing pages for every ad, paid search term, direct mailer or email campaign you conduct will lead to more sales. Many campaigns fail to convert visitors into customers because they send them to an overly general landing page which does not meet the customer's expectations of relevancy. Although unique to your campaign, your landing pages should include some branding elements and helpful navigation to explore the rest of your site so visitors will still understand who you are and what else you have to offer.

13. Set up a Follow-Up Program to Act on Leads and Track Web site Performance

Once you've developed your lead-generating web site you'll need a systematic way to follow up on these prospects. You can start with auto-respond emails to any inquiries letting prospects know that you received their inquiry and will be following up appropriately. There are lead capture programs than can import information gathered from forms on your web site and add them to your database. Assign someone to either follow up on these new leads in a timely fashion or distribute them to your sales force. But don't let those leads get stale.

Conclusion

Your company's web site is a critical aspect of the overall impression a prospect forms about your company. You not only need to be online but you also need to be doing the right things online for the right reasons; in other words – strategy. A well planned site with relevant content can outperform its deep-pocketed rivals who are less focused and savvy with their online presence. Don't ignore this opportunity to gain a real competitive advantage.

Email Marketing...Is it Right for You?

Email marketing can be a very effective, low-cost, timely and efficient way to communicate with current and prospective customers when done the RIGHT way, otherwise it's just annoying! You can use email to do just about any kind of advertising you would normally do; advertise a new product, a sale, service, charitable fundraising, etc. What email offers that traditional media doesn't is the potential for immediate interactively. Your recipient is already right there at the computer. They're just one click away from your site and making the critical connection to you. Toll-free numbers, pre-paid reply cards, or web site addresses just don't compare to the immediacy of a link in an email. Nothing is easier than just clicking right now!

So, how do you get them to click?

Building Your Own List with Opt-In Compliance

It's really not hard to start an email list for either newsletters or email marketing campaigns. You just have to encourage people to sign up every chance you get. This includes on your homepage, landing pages and any direct mail or print ads you run. You probably already have some customers you could send your first campaign to. Be sure to include a reminder that you have done business together in the past, that you want to send them relevant, useful information, and include a prominent way for them to unsubscribe. You certainly don't want your new campaign to alienate your existing customer base. Remember, current anti-spamming laws insist you provide adequate contact information for your company and an easy way for recipients to opt out of future campaigns. These laws are subject to change and vary from country to country. In order to stay in compliance and avoid being labeled a spammer it's best to use a reputable email campaign provider.

There are many other ways to grow your list. Include a link for people to forward your offer or newsletter to interested colleagues and friends. Collect business cards in a basket or keep a sign up sheet prominently displayed at your place of business. Encourage staff to ask customers to sign-up. Offer special benefits for sign-ups: free white paper downloads, coupons or exclusive offers and giveaways are great for this purpose.

When someone does give you their email address it's a great opportunity to either develop a relationship with that prospect that could lead to sales, or, to alienate that potential customer and become persona non grata. Be sure to respect the people on your list. Stay in contact with them on a regular basis, but don't overwhelm them with offers. Make sure each communication you send contains relevant and useful information.

Most people who subscribe to your list will open the first few emails you send to see if they are interesting; if you haven't captured them by the second or third one and proven your worth to be allowed in the inbox they won't continue to open them. They may just delete your subsequent emails and newsletters, or even unsubscribe from your list. There's real danger in sending irrelevant communications and/or sending too frequently.

If you don't have the time or staff to grow your own list try hopping onto someone else's. You can place an ad in a third-party newsletter whose content is relevant to your prospects. You'll get qualified leads and gain credibility by being included in the emails of a source your prospects already respect and trust.

Your email has to compete with all the others in the inbox to get attention. Are you up to the challenge?

Here, again, content is king! These tips will help you gain an edge over the competition.

• **Getting the Right Look and Feel.** Using some simple design and copywriting techniques can help your email campaigns succeed. Most companies use far too much text in their campaigns. People naturally tend to scan emails, they seldom read all the text. Your emails should be concise, uncluttered and easy to read. The reader should know almost instantly what's important – your main message. If your emails are too busy and hard to focus on they will be deleted and your opportunity will be lost. See if the following ideas would help your email's image:

- Don't be afraid of a little white space (blank areas that allow the eye to rest).

- Your sender's details are an important part of convincing people to open your email. Both the Name and Address fields should be clear, informative and inviting. Example: Name: XtremeBrandMakeover
Address: X-News@xtremebrandmakeover.com

- Make sure your subject line grabs attention and has relevance. Look through your own email and think about the kind of subject lines that get your attention. Can you adapt them for your use.

- Try cutting your initial text by at least 30%. I bet it still works.

- Make judicious use of headlines, subheads and bulleted lists, as they attract the greatest attention.

- Use links to your web site to finish long articles by putting the headline and an excerpt or summary in the email.

- People tend to prefer light-colored, neutral backgrounds with dark body copy. It's easier on the eyes. Headlines and subheads can be in an attractive, brighter color. Many email campaign services have templates available that can help you with these design issues.

Now that you have a nice, clean design for your campaign don't forget to add some relevant, professional-looking images. Using only text in your emails will make them seem dry and boring. Images attract visual focus, so captions and text that appear next to images gets read. Use this to your advantage. There are many stock photography sites on the web that can provide you with great-looking images for your emails. If you sell unique products, getting professional pictures taken of these will serve you well, not only for your online efforts, but also for direct mail, signage, packaging, etc.

Remember to always send yourself a test email of your new campaign before sending it out to your list. View it in the preview pane of your email program to make sure that your important message will be visible in that small window without scrolling. You'll see for yourself how important a great headline is to your readers. Also, preview your campaign with images turned off to make sure your message comes across well to people who prefer to leave images turned off.

• **Targeting for Results.** Take the time to target your emails by dividing your subscribers into interest groups or segments. Set up your email opt-in form to allow subscribers to choose from several specific interest groups or topics. Make sure they can choose more than one if they wish. If you currently have an email list, review your readers' histories. Investigate what they have responded to in the past. You could also send them an online survey to learn more about which topics interest them. Explain how you'll use this information to keep them updated on interesting topics, and cut down on unnecessary emails! Who doesn't want that? You will then be able to segment your list into categories and supply your readers with what they want. You can always continue cross-selling other products and services in an appropriate spot on your site. By sending them only valuable, thoughtful communications you will increase open rates, click-throughs and sales rates. This approach builds loyal readers and makes your email marketing efforts welcome and effective.

• **Writing a Compelling Subject Line.** Your subject line needs to tell the prospect the purpose of your email and entice them to open it – all in 50 characters or less. Some great words to include in subject lines and headlines are: "You," "New," "Exclusive," "Introducing", "Have you seen this...", "Learn how to...", "The 5 things you should know about..." and good, old, reliable "FREE". If you have a special offer put it right out there - "FREE Shipping in July", if it's a newsletter lead with a great topic - "X-News examines Viral Marketing in 2010".

Test different subject lines over time and you'll learn what your prospects will respond to.

• **Calls-to-Action and Landing Pages.** Each new email campaign you conduct should have one defined goal – the action you want the reader to take. Do you want them to visit your web site, buy a certain product, attend an event, download a brochure? The best way to get them to respond the way you want is to have one goal per campaign and make it known with a Call-to-Action. This Call-to-Action should be prominently displayed in the beginning, middle and end of your message to make sure readers know how to respond to your offer. Try using action phrases like "buy it now", "click here to find out more" or "sign up today" to make it even more compelling.

Once your reader clicks on the link to your site you'll want to have a specific landing page designed just for this email campaign for them to land at. Continuing the sales experience started in the email lets the prospect know they are in the right place on your site. Sending this hot lead to a generic homepage is a sure campaign killer.

Things to Avoid at All Costs in Your Email Campaigns:
- *Irrelevant content*
- *Generic landing pages*
- *Cluttered design*
- *Broken links*
- *Bad writing and too much text*
- *Overly-frequent contacts*

After you've sent a few campaigns you'll want to analyze the statistics supplied by your email campaign provider. See who's opening and responding to what. You may want to test some different variables such as headlines, subject lines (very important), offers and Calls-to-Action to see if you can boost response rates.

Overall, email campaigns and newsletters are a great, low-cost way to promote your business and grow your sales. Just remember to take the time and care to do it right and you'll see your subscriber list grow.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Don't Leave Home Without Them

These two concepts have become unbelievably important for companies today. This chapter will explain the important terms and acronyms you've been hearing about and help you get started in the world of search.

Most businesses have a web site built in order to gain more exposure for their company. They hope their great new site will bring in throngs of new visitors. They are very disappointed when that doesn't happen. It won't happen unless your site has been specifically written and designed with Search Engine Marketing in mind. Beware of web designers who are not familiar with the in's and out's of Search Engine Marketing and Search Engine Optimization.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

SEM is the practice of setting up and running a successful online presence while gaining maximum **search engine visibility.** Your visibility on the web is made up of two different factors: **organic search engine rankings** and **paid listing and advertising.** Organic rankings are what you get for free. When you publish a web site a search engine robot will eventually find it (either by itself or as a result of your paid submission). The robot will "read" your site, analyze its content and add it to the index. Now your site will be found when people use that search engine and query it for some words contained in your pages. Your place on their search results page is your organic search engine rank. The closer your rank is to number one the more traffic you'll get.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

SEO techniques can be used to raise your ranking in the search engines' organic results. SEO is an ongoing process of reviewing your content, keywords, design and web site coding to increase the page's relevance and raise it to the top of search engine results pages. Each page of your site is ranked separately, so you can (and should) optimize each page for different relevant search terms. If your company sells furniture you should have separate pages devoted to living rooms, dinning rooms, bedrooms and so forth, and each of those pages should be optimized for their own specific search terms, not for furniture in general.

In your quest for site traffic beware of Black Hat SEM/SEO. Techniques such as stuffing your page with keywords, or signing up for hundreds of incoming links

from an online service will only backfire. These techniques are always quickly identified by the major search engines who will then penalize your site with poor rankings, or blacklist your site entirely from their results. It's just not worth any short term success you might achieve.

Web Analytics is another strategy that is used for both SEM and SEO. It involves collecting, analyzing and using information about your site's visitors to increase traffic and/or sales. By analyzing their surfing behavior, the ways they have found your site, the efficiency of your links and advertising, your conversion rates and other eCommerce information you can alter aspects of your site to make it much more effective. Tracking this data over time and putting your resources behind what's working and changing what isn't can produce tremendous results. Many hosting providers offer these traffic analyzing packages as an option for your hosting account. There are also numerous third party providers with robust traffic tracking products available. Any serious web effort must include web analytics to succeed.

Online Advertising – The World of Pay-Per-Click

Advertising your product or service online is a great way to get your target audience to notice you. The web allows you to be very specific about where your ads will appear and who is likely to see and hopefully respond to them. Once you've optimized your web site according to certain keywords and phrases your customers are likely to use to search for you, you can now target advertising to those customers using those same keywords. Many search engines offer advanced pay-for-performance programs such as "sponsored results" that you often see at the top of your results page, and sponsored links or ads next to the organic results (pay-per-click ads). Google AdWords is the best known name in the game, although there are many others out there.

In these Pay-for-Performance advertising programs listings/ads are guaranteed to appear in response to particular search terms next to the search results, or on certain web sites in a Placement Targeting campaign. Where and when they appear depends on how much you are willing to pay. In a Pay-Per-Click (PPC) campaign you specify the maximum amount you're willing to pay for each click and you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad. Pay-Per-Click listings
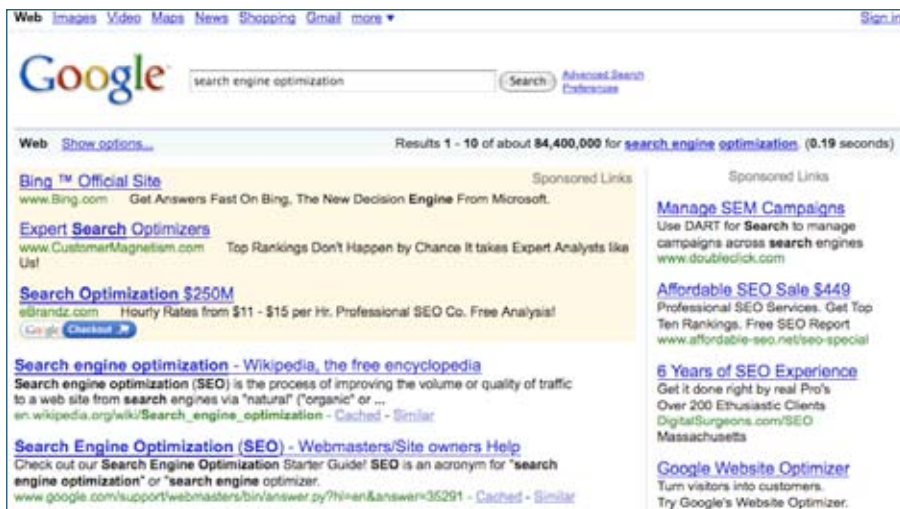
This Google search illustrates the need for SEM and SEO. It brings up 84 Million results, no one wants to be number 83,000,099 .

are usually offered by search engines in an auction format where keywords and phrases are associated with a cost-per-click (CPC) fee. The higher you bid for a keyword, the higher your position on the webpage will be. There is also a Cost-Per-Impression (CPM) model used by many content sites where you pay per 1,000 viewings regardless of whether or not visitors click on your ad. Both of these models let you set a maximum budget per day, so you won't get a surprisingly large bill.

Smart web marketers try to use both organic optimization and paid strategies, in the correct amount, to get maximum results. What can you expect from each strategy?

For raising your rank in organic listings:

- Increase the amount of traffic to your site.
- Increase the *quality* of the traffic by gaining high rankings through SEO for those keywords your prospects are using.

For paid listings:

- Monitor your keywords to gauge the amount of traffic they are bringing. Switching off advertising for under-performers will help you spend wisely.

- Find the right keywords that have been proven productive in your ads and use them in your site's content to help improve organic ranking.
- Increase brand awareness by being seen on relevant, trusted content sites.

Local Search

A major problem for smaller companies with limited SEM budgets is that big corporations usually dominate the search results for common keywords. If your product or service is used locally, applying local search techniques is a great way for the smaller guy to stand out. Examples of local search terms could be "Boston hotels", "Italian restaurant 02346", they are much more specific than a general search. You can use this information when optimizing your site's pages by including local search terms in your text, page titles and page descriptions.

There are also a growing number of local search services online. They're all a little different, but in general you select a business category and a geographic area and the site will give you a map and list of relevant links for your category. At the top you will most likely find paid ads that are targeted to your search criteria. Sites like local.com even offer banner ads and user reviews. MerchantCircle offers tools for advertisers including landing pages, coupons, blogs and more to improve the effectiveness of your local effort. CitySearch. com provides local information to major sites such as MSN, ask.com, Expedia. com and others. You'll want to make sure your business is listed there and that all the information is current.

Small businesses will want to take advantage of any free listings these sites offer, then weigh the benefits of their paid options on a site by site basis.

Some SEM terms you may want to learn are:

Keyword Prominence: The measure of keyword importance that indicates how close a keyword is to the beginning of the analyzed page area. Prominence is calculated separately for each important page area, e.g. page title, body, etc. As an example for page titles let's look at two.

Cooks Expo - Kitchen appliances at affordable prices.
Kitchen appliances at affordable prices - CooksExpo.com

If your keywords are "kitchen appliances" the second title will have 100% prominence because those are the first words that appear in the title.

Keyword Density or Weight: A measure of the percentage of keywords to the general number of words on a page. You want high keyword density while maintaining natural readability for your visitors. You will also want to avoid

Keyword Stuffing: Artificially inflating the amount of keywords on a page in order to fool a search engine into giving you a high rank. This is considered spam by the search engines.

Keyword Frequency: The number of times a keyword is used in the area of the web page being analyzed. Unlike density, this does not depend on the number of words in that area, it is an absolute index. If you repeat your keyword 5 times your frequency will be 5.

Keyword Proximity: Some engines, including Google, measure how close keywords that make up your key phrase are to each other. In other words, if you have a key phrase of "brown spotted horses" Google will give a higher rank to sites that use those words as one phrase instead of separately, as in "Mr. Brown was recently spotted at an equestrian event where various local breeders were showing their horses." That page would rank much lower for keyword proximity.

Link Popularity: The number of links from other high-ranked pages to your site. This has become more and more important to search engine rankings as a way of measuring the quality and relevance of your content. Just like with keyword spamming, getting hundreds of irrelevant links from some companies promising you high rankings is risky business with the search engines. Quality is more important than quantity here.

All of this optimization must be done while still assuring that the content sounds natural to your human visitors.

It's great to know some of the lingo and techniques involved in Search Engine Marketing and Optimization but, this is just the tip of the iceberg. You may want to hire a professional for the job. Either way SEM is not a one shot deal, it's an ongoing process. Continually changing and fine tuning your pages will help you achieve maintain positive results.

When is a Press Release not just a Press Release?

The Internet seems to have changed every aspect of marketing and communications. Even the stale, old press release has been transformed by it. It's become a marketing powerhouse and you should be taking advantage of it.

Press releases used to be written to appeal to the editors of the publications you were praying would run the release. You often had to include third party reviews or independent studies of your product or service in order to get published. The Internet has completely changed that scenario.

Now marketing departments and business owners can release their information directly to the public on their own web sites. They can also submit them to services that will spread them far and wide over the Internet. Even editors and journalists now look to the web first for new stories that they will publish in print or on content-driven web sites. Your press release can now focus on pleasing the end reader, not just the editors.

There are several good reasons for using press releases as a part of your marketing strategy:

• If someone is taking the time to research your industry they could be a potential customer, you don't want them to miss you.

• Posting your press releases on your site gives you instant credibility with visitors.

• To provide content for journalists searching for new information about your company or industry. They may choose to write about it, either for a web site or print publication. Either way, it's free advertising for you!

• Posting your press releases to your web site gives you a source of new content, and this is very important to search engine page ranking. Your release should be in a searchable format and keyword-rich. Many companies find that their "News" page is one of the most visited pages on their site. Make sure it has quality content.

• If you're using an online press release service (and you should) make sure to include live links in your text directing people right to your site or offer. That way, when people come across your release in a search, they can go directly to your site for more information.

• Putting these live links directly in the text of your press releases serves another important purpose – raising your link popularity. Your site's page rank in search engines like Google (how deep your site is when someone searches for your category/product) is largely dependent on incoming links to your site. This is called Link Popularity.

All these press releases floating around in cyberspace will be incoming links. People reading your release may put a link to your site on their site as a resource for their readers, giving you more incoming links. This particular aspect of Search Engine Marketing is cheap and very effective in raising your page rank.

So, when should you issue a press release?

Anytime something of note happens at your company. When you introduce a new product or service, win an award, hire a key new employee, publish a white paper, conclude a study or survey, launch a new web site, sponsor a workshop or land a big new client (with their permission). Issue a press release anytime you have something to say that your target audience may find interesting. Be sure to archive your older press releases on your site in a searchable format for as long as the content seems relevant.

Use a journalistic style when writing your release; avoid seeming too promotional. Use keywords and phrases in the title, headlines, subheads and text that people are likely to use as search terms on Google or Yahoo. Stay away from corporate jargon and acronyms, they may be popular around the

> **There's just no downside to trying this tactic. Press releases are a low-cost, high-impact way to gain publicity, link popularity, credibility and expert status.**

office but if they aren't widely known by your audience they won't help your effort. Also, don't forget to include your contact information–a simple, but often overlooked step.

You can post your releases directly to your site's News section, but you should also consider using some press release services to get the word out. These are some of the most popular services:

PRWeb www.prweb.com
MarketWire www.marketwire.com
BusinessWire www.businesswire.com
PRNewswire www.prnewswire.com

Compare the various services and decide which one will be best for reaching your target audience. Most of these services also offer RSS feeds for your releases. This will make your information available to content-driven sites, blogs and individuals who have interest in your offerings. How can you beat that?

Keeping an eye on the publicity you're getting is always a good idea. Try using a **Buzz Monitoring Service –** Services that will email a client regarding their status in an industry. Most of these publicity monitoring services will email anytime a company's name, executives, products, services or other keyword-based information on them are mentioned on the web.

Google Alerts (google.com/alerts)
Yahoo! Alerts (alerts.yahoo.com)
CyberAlert (cyberalert.com)
Carma (carmainternational.com)

Some services charge a fee; others, such as Yahoo! and Google Alerts, are free.

Now that you're taking advantage of the internet, don't forget the traditional approach. Submit your press release, a one-page company profile and owner/CEO biography to traditional print outlets such as newspapers, relevant magazines and trade journals. Tell them why your press release will be interesting and relevant to *their* audience. They may publish your release or, if you're lucky, write an article about your company.

There's just no downside to trying this tactic. Press releases are a low-cost, high-impact way to gain publicity, link popularity, credibility and expert status. You should consider making them a regular part of your Multi-Marketing Strategy.

Social Media

Social Media is the new buzz word in marketing circles, but what does this phrase really encompass. Ask 10 different people and you may very well get 10 different answers that overlap each other in several places.

Wikipedia defines Social Media as:
"Social media is content created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies. At its most basic sense, social media is a shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content. It's a set of technologies, tools and platforms facilitating the discovery, participation and sharing of content. It is transforming monologues (one to many) into dialogues (many to many) and the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. Social media has become extremely popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form relationships for personal and business. Businesses also refer to social media as user-generated content (UGC) or consumer-generated media (CGM)."

"Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies include: blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, and voice over IP, to name a few. Examples of social media applications are Google Groups (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking), MouthShut.com yelp.com (product reviews), Youmeo (social network aggregation), Last.fm (personal music), YouTube (social networking and video sharing), Avatars United (social networking), Second Life (virtual reality), Flickr (photo sharing), Twitter (social networking and microblogging), Open Diary (blogging), and other microblogs such as Jaiku. Many of these social media services can be integrated via social network aggregation platforms like Mybloglog and Plaxo."

What is included in the definition tends to vary, but there's little debate over its increasing popularity and relevance to marketing executives. Consumers are sharing their thoughts and experiences on every brand and product you can think of on forums, blogs and networking sites around the world. They are rating products, writing their own reviews on sites like Amazon.com and other consumers are listening. This online word-of-mouth is an ever-

112,486,327 Number of views the most popular video on YouTube has received.
133,000,000 Blogs indexed by Technorati since 2002.
200,000,000 Active users on Facebook.
100,000,000 Log on to Facebook at least once a day.

increasing factor in what consumers decide to purchase and participate in. It's effect on the way people make purchasing decisions is only going to increase.

Many businesses are harnessing Social Media as a new channel to market to potential customers. Webinars, blogs, customer forums and podcasts are just a few ways to get into the Social Media Marketing mix.

Wikipedia defines Social Media Marketing as:
"...In the context of Internet marketing, Social Media refers to a collective group of web properties whose content is primarily published by users, not direct employees of the property (e.g. the vast majority of video on YouTube is published by non-YouTube employees). Social media optimization (SMO) is a set of methods for generating publicity through social media, online communities and community web sites

Social media marketing has two important aspects. The first, SMO, refers to on-page tactics through which a webmaster can improve a web site for the age of social media. Such optimization includes adding links to services such as Digg, Reddit and Del.icio.us so that their pages can be easily 'saved and submitted' to and for these services.

Social media marketing, on the other hand, is about building ways that fans of a brand or company can promote it themselves in multiple online social media venues..."

"...The premise of social media marketing is engaging with the consumer and providing value. It is important to maintain the sanctity of conversational economy..".

Before You Enter The Social Media World

It is tempting to dive right in to Social Media when you start finding relevant sites and blogs. But, it is always better to have defined a set of objectives you wish to reach as well as a list of tactics for getting there. These objectives and tactics will probably change and evolve as you go about your plan, but it is important to have a clear starting point at the beginning to work from. This will avoid a lot of wasted time and effort on your part.

Objectives

Are you trying to drive traffic to your site? Generate qualified leads for the sales team? Create buzz around a product launch? Become a known expert in your field? There are any number of reasons you may want to launch a social media initiative. Your reasons will determine which tactics you should use. But, once you've chosen them, how can you measure their effectiveness?

Web Analytics can track your page views over time to see if there are spikes or general increases in traffic when you post to blogs, leave comments or otherwise engage in social media. You can track the amount of RSS subscriptions your blog is getting. You can even track inbound links from others to your site or pages. Use Google Alerts to tell you when and where you or your company are being mentioned on the web. These are just some of the ways to get a handle on ROI in the Social Media world.

Basic Forms of Social Media

Social Networks -
These sites allow people to sign up and build their own personal profile or webpage with their own content, sometimes including pictures, videos, links to other sites and more. Users can then connect with friends in the network to share their profile or invite outside friends to join. Examples include: LinkedIn, MySpace and FaceBook.

Social Media Release / Online Newsroom
These tactics represent more than just a regular press release or recent news section of a web site. They are press releases that include rich media such as photos (high resolution for print media, low resolution for web sites), audio, video, animation, bookmarks or other social tools. Posting these to your online newsroom provides readers and journalists with great content to link to, share, or use to write articles about your company easily.

Social Calendars
These are tools that allow people to find and share events that relate to a specific category or interest. They can be live events at a specific location, or online events such as webinars or video releases. You can monitor social calendars about your industry to see what prospects and competitors are doing or even launch your own to make your site a more valuable resource in the industry.

Wikis -
These web sites are all about collaboration and user input. They allow users to add content and/or edit the information on them. The best known of these is Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia.

Videos
Videos can be produced and placed on your site and on sites such as YouTube. Be sure to tag your videos with the keywords you believe your target audience will use to search for such content. Produce them for product demos, training, lectures or any topic you think may be of interest. Examples include: Veodia, UStream, Kyte, BlogTV, Veotag.

Podcasts -
These are audio and video files made available by subscription on sites such as iTunes. Users can download them and view them at their convenience. Businesses can produce a podcast to mark a company milestone, share case studies, executive interviews and more.

Webinars
Webinars are used to conduct live presentations via the Internet. It is typically one-way, from the speaker to the audience with limited audience interaction. A webinar can be collaborative and include polling and question & answer sessions to allow full participation between the audience and the presenter. In some cases, the presenter may speak over a standard telephone line, pointing out information being presented on screen and the audience can respond over their own telephones. There are web conferencing technologies on the market that have incorporated the use of VoIP audio technology, to allow for a truly web-based communication experience.

These online broadcast are great for lead generation and brand awareness. People sign-up to view your webinar at a specific time live, or to view a previous one archived on your site. Consider producing a webinar to introduce a new product, solve a common industry-related problem, discuss an important industry issue, any topic that will be relevant to your target audience. It is important to provide informative and useful information to your viewers. They are "attending" to learn, not to view a hard-sell commercial for your product or service.

Forums -
The oldest form of online social media are forums - online discussion sites, often organized around a specific topic or area of interest such as coin collecting, music and software applications. They can be self contained or exist as a feature in a web site. Unlike a blog, forum content comes from its users who post questions and receive answers from other forum members. To find forums in your area of interest try the forum search engine Board Tracker.

Content Communities -
These communities exist to share a particular type of content such as popular bookmarks, photos or videos. As in social networking sites, you register and receive a homepage, then you upload the content you want to share. Examples include: Flickr (photos), YouTube (videos), Digg (news) and del.icio.us (bookmarks).

Content sites usually allow tags or tagging - users can attach keywords to label content in order to help others organize and search through it.

Social Bookmarking
A method for Internet users to store, organize, search, share and manage bookmarks of web pages on the Internet.

In a social bookmarking system, users save links to web pages that they want to remember and/or share. These bookmarks are usually public, but can be saved privately or shared with only specified groups. These bookmarks can usually be viewed chronologically, by category or tags, or via a search engine. Some social bookmarking services also draw inferences from the relationship of tags to create clusters of related tags or bookmarks.

Many social bookmarking services provide web feeds for their lists of bookmarks, including lists organized by tags. This allows subscribers to become aware of new bookmarks as they are saved, shared, and tagged by other users.

As these services have matured and grown more popular, they have added extra features such as ratings and comments on bookmarks, the ability to import and export bookmarks from browsers, emailing of bookmarks, web annotation, and groups or other social network features. Allowing users to easily bookmark your web site, forum or blog will help you gain visitors and popularity.

Blogs -
One of the most well known and widespread social medium, blogs are online "journals" with entries appearing in chronological order, often archiving old entries. Many blogs allow the posting of comments that give them great interactively with users.

Although most blogs are not revenue generators there are a growing number that are. These blogs are actually businesses employing writers to generate content and accepting advertising targeted to their reader demographics.

You can use Google Blog Search or Blog Pulse to find blogs covering the topics you are interested in. When you do find a blog that suits you check out its Blogroll - a list of recommended related blogs. Now you'll have many to choose from to find the ones that are right for you.

Microblogging -
Like its name suggests, microblogging involves small posts of content or updates that are distributed online as well as through a mobile network. These posts are also available through RSS subscriptions. Think of it as a combination of blogging and instant messaging. Many news sites are using microblogging and it was also part of the Obama '08 campaign strategy.
Example: Twitter, Jaiku, Tumbler

Mashup
A mashup is a digital media file that contains any or all of the following: text, graphics, audio, video and animation, drawn from pre-existing sources, to create a new derivative work. Digital text mashups, for example, appear by the thousands every day as users of blogs and forums copy and paste text in posts

and comments on their topics of interest. Video/audio mashups are a major portion of YouTube's content.

Collage Tools
These online tools allow you to create your own mashup by integrating many different types of content into a single, portable format. These streaming "channels" can include photos, video, audio, text, RSS feeds and more. You can then place your collage or mashup on your web site, blog or social networking page where others can experience them. Examples: Sprout.com, SplashCast

Using Social Media to Your Advantage

Social Media initiatives require a drastically different approach from that of traditional media. You can't just enter a forum and start broadcasting you USP or mission statement hoping that people will respond. They will respond... negatively that is. These savvy users don't tolerate spamming or hard sell content. Consumers are there to share information and opinions, their cynical and tired of being blasted 24/7 with advertising messages. They want useful information from their peers or from experts in a particular field. So, give it to them. Don't think of it as another advertising campaign but as a two-way conversation with potential customers. Be sure to be honest about who you are and who you represent and you'll gain respect.

When identifying where on the web to participate in social media don't guess or take a shotgun approach. Ask your current customers what online sources they use. Research where and what is currently being said about your company and/or industry. Companies like BuzzLogic allow the tracking of keywords and phrases on blogs and social media sites. You can also take advantage of Google Alerts, alltop.com - an online magazine rack of popular topics, compete.com - tracks traffic on web sites, to find the right places to begin.

Spend significant time monitoring these sites to learn the tone and attitude of users before you join in the conversation. Once you do begin start slowly, putting out content and comments that are valuable to your target audience. You're not just communicating with active users, your content is also being read by "lurkers", people who read the sites content but don't actively participate in conversations. These "lurkers" far out number active users.

Use social media to your company's advantage. Everyone involved in the initiative should see themselves as a brand ambassador, so make sure they are all on the same page as far as positioning, goals and attitudes. Remember, in all social media situations you want to be seen as informative, positive, honest and helpful.

Ongoing participation by your brand ambassadors is extremely important to your success. Long-term, meaningful involvement in a network will get you the kind of online reputation you're looking for. Everyone involved should meet regularly to discuss current activities, results and future opportunities. This kind of initiative will have a positive effect on your search engine ranking as the fresh content, comments, trackbacks and incoming links all count in your favor.

Conclusion

Many businesses have shied away from Social Media for fear of negative comments or feedback. Yes, if you start a product forum or blog on your web site you may see some negative content sometimes. But it is better to know what customers really think of your company and products, and to address it in a positive, helpful way, than to remain ignorant of their opinions and problems.

Social Media is an important force that is only growing stronger, much like the Internet itself. The technology and applications are ever-changing but the opportunity for marketing your product or service remains the same – opening relevant, honest conversations with existing and potential customers to drive brand awareness and sales. The story of your company will be told on the internet whether you participate or not. Wouldn't you want to have a hand in writing it?

Conclusion

I've learned an enormous amount while compiling this book. After all this research, my humble conclusion is that companies need to move to a **multi-marketing strategy** founded on a real differentiation from the competition. No single channel will do anymore if you want to be successful in today's crowded marketplace.

The Internet allows consumers to search out product and service providers like never before. They will no longer just settle for the supplier nearby, they will search for the best. Pricing has also become transparent. How will you justify charging more than the next guy? You must be different from the next guy, and you must shout it from the rooftops in **multiple channels** – the channels your customers prefer, whether it be newspapers, direct mail, blogs, web sites or trade publications.

You also need a **multi-touch** approach within those channels to make contact on a consistent basis to stay top-of-mind and gain brand awareness. A one-shot effort will not provide the results you're looking for. Providing relevant information and offers, over time, will gain you credibility and trust with potential customers helping you form the all-important relationship that leads to sales.

Use your selected channels and frequent contacts to drive traffic to your new web site. This well-designed, content driven, search engine optimized site will be key to your success by converting your prospects into customers.

I hope this book has given you some new information and inspired you to build your company's brand through thoughtful positioning and a great USP. If you take the time to develop a powerful marketing strategy and select some killer tactics to execute it, you will have gotten serious about marketing!

Resources

General Business & Marketing Resources:

Books:
The Brand Gap, Marty Neumeier
The Purple Cow, Seth Godin
Rules for Revolutionaries, Guy Kawasaki

Magazines:
Fast Company
Entrepreneur

Web sites:
www.fastcompany.com
www.MakeMineAmillion.org
www.clickz.com
www.imediaconnection.com
www.entrepreneur.com
www.startupnation.com
www.marketingprofs.com
www.chiefmarketer.com
www.kiplinger.com/businessresource
www.sethgodin.com
www.imediaconnection.com
www.trendhunter.com
www.alltop.com

Blog Resources:

Sites that Index Blogs
www.technorati.com
www.blogdigger.com
http://blogsearch.google.com

Blog Service Providers
www.TypePad.com
www.Blogger.com

Direct Mail Resources:

Web sites:
www.the-dma.org
www.nedma.com
www.delivermagazine.com

Web site Resources:

Web sites:
www.sitepoint.com
www.lynda.com
www.verisign.com
www.bizrate.com

Magazines:
Wired Magazine
Email Marketing Resources:

Web sites:
www.constantcontact.com
www.sharpecopy.com

Books:
The Copywriter's Handbook:
A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Copy That
Sells, Robert Bly

Press Release Resources:

Web sites:
www.micropersuasion.com, a PR blog by
Steve Rubel
www.webinknow.com
www.DavidMeermanScott.com
Press Release Service Providers:
PRWeb www.prweb.com
MarketWire www.marketwire.com
BusinessWire www.businesswire.com
PRNewswire www.prnewswire.com

Article Distribution Resources:

Web sites:
www.scquidoo.com
www.hubpages.com
www.ezinearticles.com
www.GoArticles.com
www.buzzle.com

Buzz Monitoring Resources:

Web sites:
Google Alerts (google.com/alerts)
Yahoo! Alerts (alerts.yahoo.com)
CyberAlert (cyberalert.com)
Carma (carmainternational.com)

RSS Resources:

Web sites:
www.rss-specifications.com
www.feedster.com
www.blogdigger.com

Search Engine Marketing Resources:

Web sites:
www.google.com/analytics
www.google.com/trends
www.google.com/insights/search
www.seochat.com
www.seoworkers.com
www.smallbusinesssem.com
www.digitalpoint.com
www.compete.com
www.hitwise.com
www.citysearch.com
www.insiderpages.com
local.yahoo.com
maps.google.com
merchantcircle.com

Social Media Resources:

Web sites:
www.socialmediamagazine.com
www.theFutureBuzz.com
www.fastpitchnetworking.com
www.chrisbrogan.com

xtreme
BRANDmakeover.com
Your source for serious branding & marketing.

Attracting New Customers can be an Elusive Goal...
Xtreme Brand Makeover is the Way to Reach It

Xtreme Brand Makeover offers the latest internet marketing techniques along with the tried-and-true traditional strategies to create powerful marketing campaigns for businesses interested in real growth. Logos, brochures and direct mail campaigns are available right along side website design, copy writing, email marketing, social media campaigns, search engine marketing packages and more. We'll get your company noticed by the right audience and help you make the right impression with your brand.

Our Learning Center section can help you decide which marketing techniques are right for your company. Then you can review our products and services to implement your new marketing strategy, all from one convenient location. We look forward to working with you to help you grow your business!

Are you ready to explore new ways to grow your business? Contact us today to set up a FREE 15 Minute Consultation.

Ann Fottler-Pierce
Principal/Creative Director – Xtreme Brand Makeover

4 Stacey Road, Middleboro, MA 02346 • Tel: 508-801-2353 • ann@xtremebrandmakeover.com

About The Author

Ann Fottler-Pierce, Founder and Creative Director, has over 15 years of design and marketing experience. Her award-winning work has been published in the annuals of Graphic Design USA and Print Magazine. Throughout her career she has designed for a wide variety of industries including software, fashion, electronics, manufacturing, finance and healthcare. Ann has an innovative design sense which is balanced by an affinity for strategic thinking and business marketing. This has evolved into the formula behind Xtreme Brand Makeover – combining the best marketing techniques with great design to create effective, efficient marketing strategies for our clients.