



Article 166

December 5, 2010

A Manageable Approach to Online Marketing

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Many business owners remain unsure how to market their companies online, even though they know that today's consumers use the Internet to research products and decide what and where to buy. They know a static online brochure won't generate business, but many perceive social media as a waste of precious time.

The middle way between the set-it-and-forget-it website and the time-sucking demands of social media is an effective and manageable approach to online marketing. This approach recognizes that more than 70 percent of shoppers use Google to tell them who provides the desired product in their local area. Meanwhile, phone book distribution has been decreasing steadily for at least five years as fewer people use the traditional Yellow Pages to do this research.

Put Google to work for you

The primary aim of Google's search engine is to deliver "relevant" search results. Google delivers local results to searches based on a visitor's Internet Protocol (IP) address. Local results often appear higher in search results than results from companies farther away.

Providing frequent, focused content about a business's products or services makes its website relevant and maximizes search engine optimization, or SEO. This requires a business to devote time to creating content for a website platform that supports content creation and sharing. Blogs are made for doing this.

An interactive Web platform

The questions businesses commonly field about products and services can be used as subject matter for blog posts. Employees with expertise in products and services can share this information with potential customers, approaching them as resources rather than salespeople.

Many readers will get useful information from a 500-word blog post written in clear, understandable language that reads as an ongoing conversation with prospective clients or customers. Businesses serious about this marketing tool set aside a few hours each week to write blog posts. Two posts per week can reap SEO benefits within a few months.

Businesses should choose a platform that integrates a blog into the business's website so that traffic attracted to the blog benefits the website as a whole and attracts search engine "spiders." (If a business blogs at a separate blog site, traffic to those accounts doesn't benefit the business's website.) Using a platform like the WordPress open source application (wordpress.org) installed on the business's Web host account gives the business control over the blog under the business's domain name.

Each time a new blog post is published, Google is alerted to the new content, and the search engine sends a searchbot to catalog it for searchers. A company that alerts Google about the new content a few times each week is soon recognized as a producer of frequent, focused content. Google ranks the content as more relevant, presenting it nearer the top in search results. And that means business.

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