



Smart Net Marketing

You may have heard the buzz words “Internet marketing” and “e-Business”; these terms both refer to doing business on the Internet. If your company hasn’t made a decision to move onto the Internet because of a lack of knowledge or a place to begin, then read on because this article was written for you.

The simplest way for a company to begin cashing in on the digital economy is to build a web site. This may seem like a straight forward and basic step, and many people don’t give it the credit it deserves. A web site is both a reflection of the company and a powerful tool for distributing information about its goods or services. If you build a web site without thinking through some fundamental business questions you will get a poor return on investment. Some critical questions to consider are:

1. Who is your audience? Are they customers, prospects, or both?
2. What type of information would these people like to get from your site? (Store hours, product information, services etc.)
3. What type of corporate image should this web site project? (Conservative, new age, progressive, professional, artistic etc.)
4. Will this web site be an extension of your current business, or will it be a new business with its own mission, branding, etc.?
5. What goals do you hope achieve as a result of this web site? (Cut costs of customer service calls, advertise, pre-educate prospects, generate new leads for your sales force, new sales channel, etc.)
6. How will you promote the web site?

As you can see, building a web site is more of a challenge than you may have imagined. Many companies who don’t ask these questions and equate building a web site to placing an ad in the yellow pages are missing a lot of opportunity and may potentially damage the image of their business. Answering the above questions will certainly put you on the right road to building a useful, relevant web site that will appeal to your customers, prospects, and target markets.

To accomplish your goals you will need a site that has traffic coming to it regularly, both new and returning customers. You will need to have a site that is well laid out and is user friendly to your audience. You will also need sharp copywriting on the site to insure you get prospects and customers to take action. Without action nothing happens.

Commonly, the next step in the Internet marketing process will be to sell products or services directly through the web site. If the web site has been designed properly this opens a world of opportunities. One issue that must be overcome if this course is chosen is to choose a reliable service provider to host your site and guarantee that it doesn’t malfunction and prevent customers from ordering. You will also need a tool to set up your product catalog and a shopping cart system to process orders and accept payments. There are many pre-packaged solutions available that fit the time and cost budgets of small businesses. Implementing an e-Commerce system can be very expensive, but can also be cost effective depending on the approach that is taken. Some issues to address before developing an e-Commerce solution are:

1. Can your goods or services be sold over the web easily? Are they items that a customer would potentially purchase online? Can they be shipped easily? Do you have the resources to process orders from a new channel?
2. Will you sell enough products over the web site to justify the expense of setting up an e-Commerce site? (This may be one of the most critical questions to ask yourself before deciding to move forward)
3. Will your customers be comfortable enough with computers and the Internet to make online purchases?

Answering these questions about your objectives and goals will put you on the right path to selecting a solution and strategy that will work for you. Many e-Commerce projects are not well planned with certain expectations in mind. Often, businesses decide based on the "herd" mentality: "Everyone else is doing it, so maybe I should be doing it as well." It is absolutely crucial to evaluate the ramifications of e-Commerce before making this decision.

Finally, some web sites progress into the elusive *e-Business* arena. In the next article I will be discussing stepping into e-Business, which is a considerably more complex and problematic area than building a basic web site or entering the e-Commerce arena, but also stands to offer the largest payoff for your company. Common buzz words in this arena are "*Extranets*", "*Intranets*", and "*Customer Relationship Management*". In next month's article, we will explain these concepts and how they can help your business grow.

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