

Internet Marketing White Paper: A Dynamic Market

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During the dot com bubble, there was a standing joke about businesses moving on "internet time", usually played out by hipsters in bluejeans and tee shirts mocking old fuddy duddies in suits running "old economy" businesses.

A decade after the bubble has burst, the joke is more or less on them, but not entirely. The internet is a disruptive technology in the classic sense; it provides more ways for people to connect to information than ever before.

The three most lucrative sites on the internet are Amazon.com, eBay.com and Google.com. Indeed, the last two have become so ubiquitous that they've become verbs. "I eBayed my level 65 WoW healer on my cell phone." "Oooh, you like that house? We should Google it.". Linguistic drift aside, the key thing those three sites have in common is that they're places where people shop. Shopping is the "killer app" of the internet.

It's also a killer app that can be applied to businesses in any niche, and which favors small businesses over large ones. If you're a small to medium sized business, you still need a web site. But you'll also need something much more important. You'll need an internet marketing plan.

First, we're going to talk about what **Internet Marketing** isn't. It is NOT a "magic recipe". You can't just stuff keywords in a static web page and expect it to reach the top of the page rankings; that might have been possible around the turn of the century, but the way the internet has grown as a social and entertainment medium means that those techniques don't work.

Instead, if you want people to buy your products and services off the internet, you need to think in terms of an integrated strategy. This strategy will boil down to internal choices and optimizations and external choices and optimizations, and the particular elements are constantly changing. For example, places like GeoCities allowed people to make personal web sites for free back in the '90s, but never reached the critical mass that Facebook and Myspace.com have. And by 2010, the odds are good that social networking sites as we know them now will seem hopelessly quaint.

Your internet strategy needs to be part of an integrated strategy. [Internet marketing](#) has some huge advantages; by carefully choosing which elements you do, you can ensure that the people who hit your site are pre-qualified as buyers, rather than window shoppers. By designing your site appropriately, you can remove the barriers between their desire for something and their ability to pay you for it. By using the interactive and social aspects of the internet, you can build something vastly more important than page ranks.

You can build credibility, and get your customers to drive new business to you.

The first steps of an Internet marketing plan are search engine analysis and optimization, coupled with web site optimization. [Web site optimization](#) is a balance between making it friendly for search engine robots and maintaining it as something a human would read. This means adopting a journalistic writing style, where you follow the classic newspaper article inverted pyramid with a good, descriptive headline, the most important information in the first sentence or paragraph, and then working your way to the more detailed or obscure information as the page progresses.

One of the simplest forms of web site optimization is having your business name in the web site URL; most people who hit a specific company web site get there either by searching for the company's name in a search engine, or by entering the company's name in their URL bar in a browser. There are other techniques, many of which are peddled by search engine marketing firms, but for the most part, the stuff that works for search engines should not impede the human-readable portion of your web site.

The second part of an internet marketing strategy boils down to external considerations. For example, hand submitting your web site to search engines will give it a higher initial page ranking than it would have otherwise. Maintaining your page rank means having contextually appropriate back links to your site. (There are still web marketing companies that, sadly, charge an arm and a leg to run a link farm, which most search engines have deliberately downrated since 2002.)

If direct submission to search engines isn't sufficient, the next part of getting placement is buying advertising. Google's business model has made the banner ad (or the skyscraper ad) nearly obsolete, but only Google can get away with listing paid links next to search items and make it work. This kind of advertising is based on buying link backs for search engine optimized keywords, and as search engine marketing and internet marketing has matured, this type of program has gotten more and more competitive. The wildcat days of internet marketing of 2006 are long gone; you're now better off trying to do multi-word keyword phrases. The aim is to ensure that you get qualified buyers in rather than window shoppers, and the more specific the keyword search is that someone uses to find your site, the closer they are to making that buying decision.

Maintaining your search rank, and promoting your web site are related topics and they both stem from a similar modus of operation: You want people referring to your site in their content, be it blog posts, article directories, or other sites. There's a fine line to be trod here, and a lot of less than ethical marketing companies use that line as a place to plant the pole and vault, but in a nutshell, all of the search engines count links back to your site, when the text of the link shows up in a grammatical context, and all of them will weight more recent mentions higher than older mentions. This is one reason why a lot of internet marketing companies perform "Astroturf" grass roots advertising with a "shill blog". A better way to do this is to simply run articles covering subjects of interest to the people who purchase or use your products in article directories. Articles can be expensive to get – writing is difficult work, and writing well requires more than diligence, it requires a bit of talent and an ear for the language.

All of these are pieces for an integrated internet marketing strategy, and should be considered in light of what your core business is...and whether or not there's going to be a fundamental shift in how people buy your product or service in the near future. (For example, the real estate listings in most news papers have all but been obliterated as more people have taken to researching property and house purchases online.)

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