



THRIVING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

E-MARKETING FOR EVERYONE

by Nick Lane

Gone are the times of sliding by with simply posting your print materials online. These days, electronic marketing really is marketing, and it's more than a few snazzy Java-driven graphics or putting some Flash into your web site. It takes planning, strategy, and yes, a bit of marketing savvy.

So what makes a good electronic marketing campaign?

Understand your audience. Know what sites they visit for information, how they like to receive their information (web, RSS feeds, e-mail, podcasts, etc.), and even what they are searching for. Search out data on keyword searches and other factors relative to your market, both at the local and national levels. Recent research shows most food industry decision makers seek their information from industry-specific sites.

What's next? Realizing Elvis has left the building and content is king. Fancy graphics and slick animation may spark your customers' interest, but the actual content you are offering is what will seal the deal. Use the flexibility of the web to discuss your product offerings in more targeted ways. Elaborate on your points of differentiation, and speak directly to your users.

Then give some serious attention to link building. Most major search engines, as part of their search result algorithms, will not only look at your web site's content, but also factor in the relevancy of sites that link to yours. The more credible sites that link to your pages, the more highly regarded your web site will be to the search engine. With this in mind, make a point of promoting your campaign to other blogs, forums, or industry sites that would be interested in what you have to offer.

Finally, fall back on something close to every marketer's heart: creating buzz. It works on the web like it works nowhere else. Content/interest can travel fast via the web. Think in terms of exponential reach, then think beyond.

What's in a good e-marketing strategy?

A good e-marketing strategy is tailored to the product, the audience, the market, the company—in short, it's all about you. So there's really no knee-jerk answer here. That said, a few tactics to consider:

Banner ads. Whether static or animated, their classic approach has been proven time and again. And users of all technology levels are comfortable with them.

E-mail blasts. No, not spam. Targeted, these-are-my-customers-and-I-want-to-reach-them e-mails, with meaningful information that raises eyebrows and opens minds to your business.

Newsletters. A great way to solidify and maintain relationships with existing customers. Their trust has already been established, and they're the most likely to purchase again.

Grassroots. More guerilla-type, targeted efforts that speak directly to your people. Think blogs, forums, social networking (YouTube, Facebook), and even industry-related sites.

Dedicated web sites/pages. Content totally devoted to your campaign or product that could speak in much greater detail.

What's the latest and greatest?

By the time I write this and you read it, it will have changed. But for the moment, the true techno-gurus are salivating over social networking for help with finding niche markets. Also turning heads: Web 2.0 (RSS feeds, user-generated content) integration with offline strategies like mobile applications and access to content.

Common pitfalls to avoid

Blending in. As true online as it is on the shelves. The web can become information overload. A bunch of words on a page will not differentiate you, your product or your company. Staying at eye level requires a campaign to truly stand out from the rest of the clutter in order to be effective and have reach. Don't settle for just a web site. Give it meaning, whether it's through a technical or recipe database, an industry trends blog or whatever keeps your customers coming back.

Underestimating customers' attention span. You have mere seconds to grab users' attention and an even smaller window of opportunity to convert that view to a click-through or turn that site visitor into a product purchase. Don't undervalue the importance of quality e-marketing materials, from both a visual and functional standpoint. Make sure your materials present your company or product in the proper light; make sure your electronic marketing materials are programmed and functional. Any obstacles or distractions (broken links, browser incompatibilities, etc.) could make or break the sale.

How do you spell success?

S-U-C-C-E-S-S, just like anyone else. How do you measure it? Luckily the web is meant to be measured. All types of e-marketing initiatives can be tracked, and to a certain degree, everything is quantifiable. Even better, results are immediate. You'll know who's visiting your site, where they're coming from, where they're looking, how long they're looking at it and more.

Consistently measuring your success from click to purchase/sign-up is an absolute necessity.

Count on making adjustments to your campaign throughout its life-cycle. You may learn that

certain keywords offer more queries with less competition or that a buy button on the header is not getting as many clicks as the larger button on the product page itself. Understanding your users' actions and having the flexibility to mold your campaign around these avenues is critical to continued success.

e-marketing vs other marketing

More flexible

More targeted

More detailed

Greater reach

Easier measurement

More competition

Ever-changing technical requirements



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