

Internet Marketing for Local Small Businesses

By David Frey

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Not long ago I was speaking to a C.P.A. friend of mine who had invested a significant amount of his marketing budget to build an online presence. He spent a lot of time carefully designing the site and providing information and graphics to bring it alive.

Once the site was completed and the switch was turned on there was a sense of pride and accomplishment with high hopes that the website would provide a marketing spark that would help to increase his client base.

After several months, with next to no traffic, my C.P.A. friend confided that he regretted investing so much money in something that brought so little value. After all, he mentioned, it's not like he was selling his services to clients outside his local town.

After consulting with him I offered several strategies that he could use to increase the amount of local, hometown visitors to his website. If you are a small "offline" business you may find several of these innovative strategies useful to your local Internet marketing efforts.

Strategy # 1 - Free Vacation Drawing

Set up joint ventures with local businesses to give away a ticket for a free two-night, three-day vacation drawing to their customers as a way of saying thank you for doing business with them. You provide the free vacation drawing tickets and they give them

to their customers.

The ticket, which has a special code on it, instructs the customer to go to your website and enter in the special code to sign up for the drawing. The free vacation certificates cost \$10 (admin fee) and you can get as many as you want from Roger Aderholt at <http://www.TheVacationMan.com>

Lest you think these mini-vacations are a scam, I have used them myself and had a great time. Many (very nice) hotels would rather have a free occupant than no occupant because it introduces the visitor to their hotel. So they give away free mini-stays.

A similar technique was used just recently between Microsoft (to introduce the X-Box) and Taco Bell (to introduce their quesadilla), which netted hundreds of thousands of unique visitors to the X-Box website. Taco Bell gave a ticket with a code on it to everyone who purchased a quesadilla. The ticket holder then took the ticket home, went to the X-Box site, and signed up for a free X-Box giveaway.

When you announce the winners (which cost you \$10 a winner) they will be required to come to your office to pick up the certificate. So not only did you drive them to your website but you got a face-to-face visit with them and a little goodwill.

Strategy # 2 – Business Card Drawing

Ask local businesses such as restaurants and dry cleaners to sponsor a monthly business card drawing giveaway with you in exchange for an electronic list of their customers.

The restaurant, for example, would have a small bowl or box for business people to submit their business cards for the free giveaway. You commit to paying for the two free lunches and to converting the business cards into an electronic customer list for the restaurant.

The restaurant commits to sponsoring the business card drop boxes and to an endorsed monthly emailing to their customers plugging your business.

Once you have the endorsed mailing you can continue to email market (or send an informative ezine) to those people again and again with the email addresses from

the business cards.

Strategy # 3 – Local High School Sports Website

If your small town is anything like my small town, people are high school sports crazy. Unfortunately, there isn't one central location where you can access local sports scores and highlights.

Offer to pay the development and maintenance cost for a local high school sports website which can be maintained by a joint high school web team using volunteer high school students.

You can call it "YourTownHighSchoolSports.com." Of course you will have banners and links leading to your site because you are the sponsor.

I'll bet other local businesses would be willing to help sponsor the site in exchange for a little traffic to their website as well. Not only do you get local website traffic, you'll receive a lot of valuable goodwill as well.

Strategy # 4 – Referral Email Marketing

Start collecting the email addresses of all your current customers. One way to do this is by setting aside a day or two, which is solely dedicated to calling customers and offering to send them a coupon via email in exchange for their email address.

A second way to collect your customer's email addresses is to send out a physical newsletter and extend a great offer to everyone who sends you an email within the next 48 hours.

Put a viral marketing spin on it by sending your customers an offer for a free gift that they can receive only if they forward your email offer to three local friends using a tell-a-friend or refer-it script.

Strategy # 5 – Flyer Marketing

Contact the local Boy Scouts and offer to sponsor a fundraiser activity by attaching door hangers on homes in the local area. The flyer will offer a \$10 mini-vacation (same as in Strategy #1) to those who go to your website

and enter in a special code that was given to them on the flier.

Again, with this strategy you would simply send them to <http://www.thevacationman.com> to pick up their \$10 mini-vacation certificate after entering in their special code on your website. Make sure you create a customized landing page with an offer on it for your free vacation visitors.

Strategy # 6 – The Voting Page

Watch your local newspaper very closely for controversial topics. Once a super-controversial topic hits, develop a quick one-page polling website that allows visitors to vote on how to solve the controversy.

Put your banner on the website and also code in a pop-under page to expose visitors to your site every time the visitor leaves the polling website.

Now call the local newspaper (or write a press release) and let them know about your voting site. Recently a fellow at the U. of Alabama took advantage of the recent quarterback controversy and set up www.whichquarterback.com for people to vote on which quarterback should start. He recieved 3,000 visitors overnight!

Strategy # 7 – Free Site

Develop a FreeYourTown.com site which posts coupons, free offers, and discount services of local vendors. You can charge the vendors for placing coupons on the site and of course your links and banners will be on the front page because you are the primary caretaker of the site.

Make sure you get a lot of free publicity for the site. You might even ask your advertisers to giveaway handouts about the site to their customers. Have your FreeYourTown.com site sponsor local youth sports teams with the domain name on the back of their shirts.

Strategy # 8 – Local Exit Traffic Exchange

Start an exit traffic exchange between local vendors. Once a visitor leaves the site of one local vendor, an exit popup or popunder appears of a second local vendor.

The more local vendors you sign up, the more traffic everybody gets. Make sure you sign up vendors that only do business locally.

Another twist to this strategy is to develop an exit newsletter signup form. Once a local visitor exits the site, a newsletter signup form pops up offering the visitor the opportunity to sign up to newsletters generated by local merchants.

Strategy # 9 – Joint Email Endorsed Mailings

Simply partner with another local vendor whose services you trust and would recommend and suggest a joint-email endorsed mailing.

You send an email endorsing your partner's services with a link to her site and she sends an email to her customer base endorsing your services with a link to your site.

Choose partners whose customers would benefit and potentially purchase your product and service. In email marketing, as well as direct post mail marketing, the list determines, in large part, the success of the offer.

Strategy # 10 – Search Engine

Optimize your website for your product or service and the name of your town or city. Many times I have found great suppliers in my own small town using the Internet.

Two examples of this recently were when I searched and found a local patent and trademark lawyer who drove right over to my house after I contacted him on the web. My search on Yahoo was "patent lawyer" and "Friendswood."

A second example was finding a great audio and video supplies and duplication service that was right down the road from my house. My search on Metacrawler was "audiocassette supplies" and "Houston."

Conclusion

All it takes is a little creativity and effort to draw attention and visitors to your website. Of course you could

just spend a lot of money and advertise your website address but the most successful, low cost, alternatives to drawing traffic to your website are joint ventures with local business people who also have a web presence.

In fact, it doesn't even have to be with local businesses. Local high schools and churches are always looking for different fundraising and promotional activities.

I purposely didn't include the strategy of putting your website address on all your promotional materials. It's not that I forgot it. I figure that is just a given. If you're going to have a website, put it's address everywhere you would normally have your business name.

Some of these strategies are easier than others and produce better results than others, but they all are viable and absolutely doable. Your website can be a powerful marketing tool. Now that you've made an investment in your website, you might as well get the most out it.

Happy local Internet marketing,

David

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David Frey has helped hundreds of small businesses literally double their revenues in six months or less. To get your lifetime FREE subscription to the web's leading small business marketing newsletters just send an email to subscribe@MarketingBestPractices.com or visit <http://www.MarketingBestPractices.com>

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