

# An Action Plan For Marketing Your Web Site

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## AN ACTION PLAN FOR MARKETING YOUR WEB SITE

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Build it and they will come. That might have worked in 1995 when the Web was new, but today that's a fallacy. With more than 3.2 billion Web pages competing against yours, if you don't promote it, no one will come.

Outlined below are some tasks to add to your marketing checklist. I will begin with the most obvious--you wouldn't believe how many people don't think of these things!--and will finish with some more advanced techniques that really work.

## DESIGNING SEARCH ENGINE FRIENDLY WEB SITES

Getting listed in the major search engines is important, but do not fool yourself--it is not the "be all." How many times have you conducted a search and ended up with over a million results? If your site is listed at 999,000, how many people do you think will visit? If you rely \*only\* on the search engines for your customers to find you, they probably won't.

That being said, there are some things you should do before you submit your Web site to the search engines. To make your site competitive, you need to "optimize" your Web pages. What does that mean? It means making your pages "search engine friendly."

Although meta tags do not weigh that heavily anymore in search engine rankings, they are still

important. The two tags that \*must\* be included in each of your Web pages are:

**Description Meta Tag**--Summarize your Web page using lots of keywords. This tag is very important, because many of the engines will use it to summarize your site in search results. (Note: The recommended number of characters for the description meta tag is 150.)

**Keywords Meta Tag**--Because of abuse by unscrupulous Webmasters, the keyword tag doesn't play as big a role as it did in the past. To avoid being penalized (e.g., banned), there are some rules you must heed. For example, do not repeat keywords more than three times and avoid using the refresh tag as most engines view it as spam. (Note: The recommended number of characters for keywords is 874--of course, this number varies according to the search engine in question.)

I highly recommend taking the time to research the meta tags of your competition. Don't steal their tags; just look to see what they're doing to get ranked where they are. It is best to use phrases versus individual keywords. What phrases do you think your visitors will use to find you? I think this is an excellent activity for a brainstorming session with your peers, employees, and friends--better yet, your customers. Once you start showing up in the search engines, reexamine your tags to see if you can tweak them to rank higher.

For an excellent overview on meta tags, visit:

WebLecturer.com

<http://www.weblecturer.com/lecturenotes/meta.html>

For help choosing the right keywords, visit:

Wordtracker

<http://our.affiliatetracking.net/wordtracker/af.cgi?2581>

**Title Tag**--More important than meta tags is your title. The title tag displays your Web page's name. Be sure to include lots of keywords in your title tag, because most search engines consider these keywords in their relevancy calculations. (Note: The recommended number of characters for your title is 60.)

## SEARCH ENGINE SUBMISSIONS

Although there are automated services that promise to get you listed on thousands of Web directories and free-for-all (FFA) links pages, it is recommended that you manually submit your site to the top search engines. Be forewarned that it takes weeks (sometimes even months!) to get listed.

For a list of the top search engines and a link to their submission page, request my article, "Site Promotion 101," <mailto:sitepromotion101@sendfree.com>

In addition to the search engines, you should get your site listed in specialty directories--this also helps in link popularity. For a directory of thousands of specialty search engines, visit:

Search Engine Guide

<http://www.searchengineguide.com/>

## ADD YOUR URL TO YOUR MARKETING MATERIALS

A couple of months ago, I met with a client who launched their Web site in 1999. They were

discouraged because their site was generating poor traffic. When I asked them if they had added their URL to their stationery and marketing materials, the answer was no. To me, this should be a no-brainer, but it's not.

Don't forget to add your URL to the following business and promotional pieces:

- Answering machine/voice mail greeting
- Office stationery (i.e., letterhead, envelopes, note cards, business cards, invoices, receipts, reorder forms, etc.)
- Company marketing materials (i.e., brochures, leaflets, flyers, post cards, etc.)
- Fax sheets
- Phone book listings
- Sales letters
- Storefront
- Web decals
- Uniforms and hats
- Christmas cards
- E-mail signature file
- Promotional items (e.g., mouse pads, coffee mugs, t-shirts, pens and pencils, etc.)

## STRATEGIC LINK CAMPAIGN

In my experience, the second most important online marketing strategy (after search engine submissions) is establishing link exchanges. A number of key search engines--Google being one of them--rank sites according to the number of high-quality links pointing to it. For this reason, links are becoming increasingly important.

Establishing reciprocal link partnerships with other Web site owners is time-consuming but worth it. There are tools to automate the process of finding and requesting links, but I strongly advise against using them, because the links pages often look generic, unprofessional and identical to all the others generated by the same software--so much for originality! Plus, I've read that some search engines ignore automatically-generated links pages.

So, how do you find Web sites to swap links with? One technique is to visit your favorite search engine and type "add URL" plus your keyword phrase in the search box. Go ahead--try it! Before you know it, you'll have thousands of linking prospects. Be picky with whom you choose to link, though. Remember--one high quality link weighs more heavily than dozens of poor quality ones.

In my opinion, a good links page will add value to your Web site. It also provides content. There are some people who will argue that providing links to other sites is directing your hard-earned traffic elsewhere. Although this is true, do you really think people are never going to leave? Of course they will. And if they leave your site to visit another site that you recommend, that is certain to leave a positive impression on them. I truly believe a good links page will bring traffic back to your site.

If your goal is to rank well in the search engines, I recommend that you put establishing linking partnerships high on your marketing to do list.

For more information, visit:

Links4Trade

<http://www.links4trade.com/>

LinkMe

<http://www.linkme.com/>

LinksManager.com

<http://www.linksmanager.com/>

## CLASSIFIED ADS

Although you can advertise in some media for free, my experience is that it's best to target your ads to the audience you hope to attract. If you're selling horse shoes, for example, promoting your wares to people who do not own horses is not a good use of your time or money.

Online Classifieds--In the early days of the Internet, classified sites were very popular. I don't know how popular they are today, but they still exist. Although you might not sell a lot on classified sites, it doesn't hurt to use them--especially if they're free.

I've used Yahoo! Classifieds in the past and was impressed with their services. When you post an ad there, it will be posted for 21 days, at which time Yahoo! will send you an e-mail asking whether you want to renew or delete your ad. Yahoo! also offers an online payment option called Yahoo! PayDirect, which allows you to send or receive money online.

For more information, visit:

Classifieds For Free

<http://www.classifiedsforfree.com/>

Yahoo! Classifieds

<http://classifieds.yahoo.com/>

E-Zines Ads--E-zines are another excellent media for advertising your products and/or services. Advertising in E-zines is relatively inexpensive. The hard part is locating publications to advertise in. Some E-zines have huge, targeted readerships, and obviously, those are the ones you want to be in.

For more information, visit:

The Ezine Ad Auction

<http://www.ezineadauction.com/>

In addition to fee-based E-zine ads, there are others that will publish your ad for free. For more information, download the free e-book:

The Ebook of Free Ezine Ads

<http://www.freezinesite.com/ezdir/freeads.html>

Newspaper Ads--Buying ad space in newspapers is more expensive than e-zine ads, but on the plus side, some newspapers also post classifieds on their Web site, so you get two for the price of one. If your business is located in a neighborhood that publishes a weekly newspaper, you may find their ad space very affordable--it's also a highly targeted audience.

## BANNER ADVERTISING

The click-through rate on banner ads is low, so you will need to weigh the pros and cons before going this route. On the plus side, Web sites that rely on advertisers to stay alive are begging for

people to buy ad space. You can probably get it for a bargain--as compared to a couple of year's ago.

If, on the other hand, you're more interested in branding your site versus attracting qualified prospects, you may want to consider a banner exchange. The plus side is it's free. The negative is that you have no control over the types of banners displayed on your site. In addition, you will probably notice added download time to your Web page.

For more information, visit:

bCentral Banner Network,  
<http://www.bcentral.com/services/bn/default.asp>

## WEB RINGS

Depending on your market, a Web ring might be an excellent traffic generator. The one negative, in my opinion, is the "ugly" ring code you will need to include on your Web page. If you can live with this, I think Web rings are a good way to attract traffic from related sites.

For more information, visit:

WebRing  
<http://dir.webring.yahoo.com/rw>

## NEWS MEDIA

Press Releases--If you have something to say that is newsworthy, you may want to consider promoting your news with a press release. Dr. Kevin Nunley, <http://www.drnunley.com/release.htm> , provides a service where he will write your press release and submit it to 5,000 radio, TV, talk shows, news programs, daily and weekly newspapers, syndication services, and e-zines for under \$300.

Radio Interviews--If you are a specialist in your field, why not call your local radio stations and give them your name as an expert. The radio is a particularly good forum for social workers, psychologists, politicians, professors, financial analysts, nonprofit organizations, etc.

The following options--as compared to the ones above--are more expensive, but if your company has the money to spend on marketing, they are highly effective methods for branding. Even companies like Coca Cola, General Motors and IBM--all household names--spend millions of dollars a year on advertising.

- Radio ads
- Print ads
- Television ads

## PERMISSION MARKETING

If you haven't already done so, you need to start an opt-in e-mail campaign. This is an excellent way to get the names and e-mail addresses of highly qualified prospects and leads. Furthermore, these people are giving you permission to contact them, so they want to hear from you. E-mail is a highly effective way to communicate--it's fast and it's cheap. Use e-mail to send your clients and prospects your newsletter; friendly reminder notices; information about upcoming sales and promotions, etc.

Managing a mail list is easy with automated listserve software. I use Majordomo and love it. Once I started using Majordomo to manage my e-mail lists, I noticed an increase in subscriptions. Majordomo makes it easy for people to subscribe/unsubscribe and makes my job easy, because it automates the management of my e-mail lists.

There are free services that do the same thing as Majordomo, but one word of caution: I used to use Listbot until a few months ago when they went from free to fee-based. I think it's only a matter of time before the other free services follow Listbot's lead, so be careful, because it can be a pain to transfer your list once it's been established.

For more information, visit:

Majordomo

<http://www.greatcircle.com/majordomo/>

Yahoo! Groups

<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

Topica

<http://www.topica.com/>

If you're new to E-zine publishing, request my article, "Publishing Your First E-Mail Newsletter," <mailto:firstnewsletter@sendfree.com>

## SHARE INFORMATION

Sharing information with your clients, peers, and prospects is an excellent way to build relationships and credibility.

Articles--One of my articles was recently featured in WebProNews <http://www.webpronews.com/>, and I was astounded by the exposure. In two days, I had more than 100 new subscribers to my newsletter, 20 qualified leads and more than 1,800 visitors to my Web site. Those numbers prove the power of words!

There are a number of excellent Web sites and E-zines that will help you promote your articles to publishers looking for fresh content.

For more information, visit:

Article Announce

[http://www.egroups.com/group/article\\_announce](http://www.egroups.com/group/article_announce)

Ideamarketers

<http://www.ideamarketers.com/>

MakingProfit.com

<http://www.makingprofit.com/>

White Papers--Promote white papers and other special reports on your Web site to encourage visitors to provide their e-mail address (this ties in to your opt-in e-mail campaign).

News Groups--News groups are great because you learn from the expertise of others. They also

provide an opportunity for you to share your knowledge and expertise. I have noticed an increase in traffic when I participate in online forums.

For a huge directory of Usenet groups, visit:

Google Groups (formerly Deja.com)

<http://groups.google.com/>

If you are a Webmaster, I highly recommend:

SitePoint Community Forums

<http://www.sitepointforums.com/>

Mail Lists--Similar to news groups, mail list messages are delivered directly to your in-box. Since some groups are pretty active, I highly recommend subscribing to the digest version (if possible).

Here are two mail lists that I have found invaluable:

Adventive

<http://www.adventive.com/>

Linkexchange Digest

<http://digest.bcentral.com/>

Speaking Engagements--Offer to speak for free at conferences, meetings, or seminars. If you distribute handouts, be sure to add your URL.

## NETWORKING

As in traditional business, your online business will benefit from networking. Some excellent venues to network include:

- Trade shows
- Chamber of Commerce and other commerce-related organizations
- Membership associations

As you can see, promoting a Web site is hard work. The myth "build it and they will come" is not true anymore. If you build it and then promote it, you will see your traffic steadily increase and that's good for business.

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