

# Bridging the Online/Offline Gap

By Joe Bingham

Bridging the Online/Offline Gap

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For some businesses, it's almost like making a lifestyle change. A company born online glues itself to the Internet with a passionate belief that it's the way of the future.

Conversely, many brick and mortar businesses hold on to their traditions of face to face business, and refuse to look into online promotion.

Smart business owners, however, see how dual promotion can be extremely beneficial.

Naturally, there is both an online and offline component to all of our lives. Many of us are narrowly focused in each of these aspects. We have our routines of where we go, what we do, and this, then, dictates our exposure to advertising. What we never see online, we may see around town. What we never knew existed in our own city, may attract us online.

This only gives more credence to the fact that promoting our businesses both online and offline will reach more people. More people equals more customers and that means better success.

What does it take, however, to move your business, whether online or offline, out of its traditions and into a dual promotion mind set?

First consider your product or service. Physical products are more easily understood by both markets while a digital information product, for example, is harder to explain to an offline market.

However, anything can be done. There are print publications that cater to Internet users. This market would understand digital products, and may include many people that your online promotion has never reached.

You have to think in terms of who would be interested in what you

have to offer, and then seek out publications that target these same individuals.

## TAKING ONLINE TO OFFLINE

The major offline tool that can be added to an online business' promotion is print advertising. Print classifieds are still widely read by consumers. From local newspapers to print publications from other online companies, classifieds can make an impact. Also, some publications accept well written product or site reviews.

Other tactics include printing your own business cards, flyers, postal mailings, signs, and even radio and television depending on your product, budget, and target market.

Of these, business cards are great because of their professional and personal touch. Flyers, signs, and postal mailings are more costly and especially costly are radio and television. For small business, print classifieds is the main cost effective and reasonable solution.

## TAKING OFFLINE TO ONLINE

Online promotion requires a web site. From their, ezine classifieds, search engine placement, and inclusion of the web address in print advertising makes the difference.

For an offline company, going it alone on the web would most likely require dedication from a full time employee. Setting up a site, getting a domain name, making updates, and promoting are time consuming tasks at least to begin with. After things are set up, promotion becomes the major job. However, unless it is continued on a daily basis, it may or may not be worth the initial effort. A web site is great, but it's easily forgotten about unless it's continually promoted and updated.

Hiring a successful outside service is a realistic solution for many who want to add a web presence to their marketing, but who don't want the added work.

All in all, bridging the online/offline gap should not be considered that major of a problem. There are services that can help. It's just a matter of reaching out to a different market and expanding your promotion. No matter which direction you are going in, it can bring further credibility to your business as well. The web is becoming an important place for offline customers to get more information, and seeing an online business mentioned offline can bring in more people that your online promotions may never reach.

Dual online/offline promotion is the true way of the future. In a competitive business world, it's those that seek new markets and

expand their promotion that will be successful. The Internet is here to stay, and there will always be an offline world. It only makes sense to bring your business to them both.

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Are you considering expanding your market?

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