

Online Sweepstakes - Ed McMahon has nothing on you

By Pete Prestipino

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Synopsis - Conduct a search for "online promotions" and you will be sure to find droves of self-proclaimed experts. What most Internet businesses don't initially grasp is that some things, like the success of sweepstakes, never changes.

Conduct a search for "online promotions" and you will be sure to find droves of self-proclaimed experts. What most Internet businesses don't initially grasp is that some things never change. What works offline, still works online; you don't have to read Dr. Nunley, Dr. Wilson or Pete Prestipino to know that either. That's why this month we are focusing on a traditional method of promotion: SWEEPSTAKES!

A sweepstakes is commonly used to encourage people to register for something in exchange for a chance or chances to win a prize. Whether your business is B2B or B2C, to operate a successful sweepstakes program, you should aim at these goals:

1) increase awareness for your brand, 2) increase your leads database, 3) generate market feedback, 4) educate your prospects, and 5) drive sales.

Internet technology helps the sponsor accomplish these goals faster, and for less money than with their offline promotion cousins.

The advantages of running online promotions are many. Since it's paperless, online registrations, which can be automated, are easier to manage and cheaper. It's also easier to follow up with entries through email, which can integrate well with your system.

There are four key phases to an online sweepstakes:

- Strategy Phase - Production Phase -
- Promotion Phase - Post-promotion Phase -

----- Strategy Phase

Select a prize that will bring the right people to your sweepstakes. Customize your prize offering to the niche market that you service. If you promote bed and breakfasts, give away a night at a local b

and b, not airplane tickets to Bora Bora.

The next step is to determine what information you want the registrant to provide. The more information you require, the deeper you'll understand your participants, however, very few people will complete a registration form when you ask for a lot of information. So decide what information will best benefit your business.

Depending on your goals of the promotion, you'll need to decide how you to present your offer to the participants. Ecommerce technology can make the awareness-offer-sale progression seamless and does wonders for branding.

----- Production Phase

In this phase, the creative team makes the concept a reality. Graphics are created, copy is written, advertising is planned and bought, and promotional materials are completed. The promotion may also have to be registered in some states. Bonding and escrow may also be issues in some states. Legal work must also be performed, such as writing the official rules and the privacy statement.

----- Promotion Phase

It's time to get the word out. Banner ads, email blasts, tie-ins, and offline marketing techniques can all drive people to register for an online sweepstakes. The more effective sweepstakes utilize both online and offline components to generate participants, even if the entries are primarily collected online. The promotion phase ends when you stop accepting entries. Selecting the winner(s) soon follows.

----- Post-promotion Phase

So you have a list of entries, and one or more happy winners. The goal here is to receive adequate value through increased awareness, sales, and/or market feedback. It's ROI time. What can the sponsor do with a database of people once the sweepstakes is over? You have several options: 1) do nothing, and hope you raised sufficient awareness through the promotion
2) continue to market to the participants with compelling offers,
3) study the demographic information and feedback you acquired, and 4) add the qualified participants to your main prospect database.

Follow these simple guidelines and we're sure that you're online promotion objectives will be met. Remember, above all else, Ed McMahon has nothing on you.

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