

A Web Based Marketing Strategy For Your Bricks and Mortar

Business.

By Robert Hopper

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Let's imagine for a minute that you own a hardware store in whatever city you happen to live. Now, this is a nice hardware store, good product selection, friendly service and reasonably successful. But...it's just one of a dozen or more hardware stores in your town. And, if your town has a population of, say 100,000 or more, yours is probably one of several dozen.

So, here's the problem. How do you set your business apart from all the rest? How do convince prospective customers to do business with you instead of your competition?

With the traditional linear marketing model, you would advertise in things like newspapers, TV, radio, direct mailing, bill boards, etc. If you've done any of this kind of advertising you know how expensive it can be. And, you only have so many column inches or so many seconds to make your case.

Because of the space and/or time constraints with traditional advertising, people would try to at least drive a prospect to a telephone number where somebody could provide more information or mail out a sale brochure.

What if you wanted to run a different featured product or service on a regular basis? Your advertising costs would eat you alive unless you have some impressive profit margins, and most retail businesses today don't. And, to make matters worse, the Internet is quickly transforming people's shopping and buying patterns.

I talk with retailers and small business owners almost daily. And, not surprisingly, most of them think the Internet is the biggest curse ever visited on their business lives. They think that people are just logging onto the net, finding the cheapest bargain out there and ordering it. In many cases that's true, but in many cases it's not.

The problem is that most of these business owners are still thinking in terms of the old linear marketing model. And because they have been so embittered by what they perceive the Internet to be doing to their businesses, they're ignoring it instead of embracing its promise.

Many recent studies have shown that, by and large, shoppers want to support their local merchants. They still enjoy the human interaction, and they would like somebody locally to hold accountable in the event of questions or problems.

There is also another interesting characteristic of online shoppers today that, although not unique to the times, the Internet has given them the opportunity to express it like never before. And that is the desire for anonymity, or privacy, if you will. And believe me, they will take full advantage of it. They don't want to talk to a human until they are close to making a buying decision. Shoppers today, and particularly those on the Internet, are far more sophisticated shoppers than you are a sales person.

These people have access to a vast array of information resources, from email, to Usenet, to rebel websites, to competitors, to whatever.

In short, your job is not so much to "sell" these people. Your job is to make it as easy as possible for them to do business with you. Forget the old linear model. There's a new kid on the block. He's called "The Web-Centric Marketing Model."

While this model is similar in many respects to the linear model, its focus is different and it offers much greater economy.

Like the linear model, the same advertising channels are still utilized, however the focus of your advertising isn't so much to get people to buy your product or visit your store. Your focus is to get them to your website; A much easier task than trying to sell them, and one requiring much less expensive advertising.

Your website is where a prospect can gather a great deal of information about your products and services, and learn more about you. And, because they're not being shadowed by a sales person, they are likely to be more relaxed and to take more time to shop.

If done properly, your website can be the most cost effective marketing tool you'll ever have. Your customers can shop or get information 24 hours a day. They're not tied to your business hours. You can feed them with more information about your products and services, and what makes you special among your competition than you would ever be able to in person.

Now, all that said, there are some definite do's and don'ts:

Don't get your 15 year old computer whiz nephew to design your website. After all, you wouldn't let him design your TV commercials would you?

Do have your website designed by a professional. It's not that expensive, and it will pay you back many times over.

Don't skimp on the information. Information is what the visitor came to your website to get. Don't disappoint them.

Do be sure the information you provide is solid, to the point and helps your visitor make an informed buying decision. Here again, you might want to hire the services of a professional copywriter.

Don't oversell. After all, one of the main reasons they came to your site in the first place was to avoid the hype and the high-pressure sales tactics.

Do provide compelling reasons why the visitor should do business with you rather than your competition. This is where you set yourself apart from all the rest and establish your USP, or Unique Selling Proposition.

Don't leave your visitor hanging once you've convinced them to do business with you.

Do make it as easy as possible for your customers to do business with you. Accept online credit card transactions, electronic and fax checks, phone orders, mail-in orders, etc. Give them as many choices as possible.

If you thought Internet marketing was just for the virtual businesses or the Wal-Mart's and Sears and businesses with multi-million dollar ad budgets, you're wrong.

Although we used a hardware store in our hypothetical scenario here, I can show you how take any local business and simply by refocusing their marketing strategy, increase their business and profits significantly.

Put me to the test. Go to my home page and fill out the simple

form for your FREE initial consultation. But, do it before your competition catches on.

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Robert Hopper is the CEO of theBestOfBreed.com and the managing partner at JPR Marketing Group, LLC, a leading ecommerce software and marketing solutions provider.

If you're tired of all the hype, dead-ends and empty promises, come talk with us. You'll find real people willing to have a real conversation with you, and it won't cost you a dime.

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