

Internet Marketing Basics

By Aaron Turpen

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With all of the marketing articles I've read and written, I have yet to find one that covers all of the basics at once. I think that this may be because there is just too much information to cover in a few words. Despite this worry, I'm going to attempt it. Obviously, this article will be an overview, not an in depth affair.

I will cover six basic marketing subjects: Market Research, Search Engines, E-zine Advertising, Email Marketing, Local Promotion, and Offline Marketing.

Market Research

This is the most basic part of any marketing campaign – whether it be a \$50 e-zine advertisement or a \$5 million dollar blitz. If you don't know your target market and how to reach them; if you don't know the value of the message you're attempting to convey; if you don't know the answer to all the pertinent questions...your advertising will fail.

The most basic step in researching your market is to first have a "target." This means you know who you're aiming for (their likes, dislikes, general age group, income, business type, etc.) and have a general idea how to "hit" them. Sample target markets would include:

Males age 18-30 with an interest in technology. This market group would have an average income of \$20,000/year with a discretionary income (money to spend on frivolous items) of around \$4-5,000/year.

Women age 12-16 with a love of animals. This market group would have an average income of less than \$1,000/year but all of it is discretionary and is supplemented by what their parents are willing to spend over-and-above that amount.

Middle-class persons age 30-50 who own their own business. This market group would have an average, middle-class income (\$40,000/year or higher), would probably have a family (marriage, children), and a busy lifestyle. Their discretionary income would depend on whether you are marketing towards their business needs or their personal/family needs.

Once you know who your target is – the more information the better – you're ready to get into the nitty-gritty of market research. There are five basic ideas in market research: "Primary,"

“Secondary,” “Combined” (all types of research) and “Qualitative” and “Quantitative” (ways of gathering the information). A quick definition of each:

Primary research is research conducted by the primary user of the information (in this case, you). Secondary research is gathered elsewhere and used by you (purchased, leased, etc.). Most small businesses conduct both of these types of market research – customer surveys for primary information and by researching free or paying fees for secondary information. This is called “Combined” research.

Qualitative research is usually exploratory and has a direction or goal. It generally aims at specific issues in the subject matter and gives you a better idea in which direction you should proceed. This type of research is “loose” and is geared more towards finding a market or narrowing your market than it is towards getting specific information on that market and where your product fits within it.

Quantitative is much more rigid than qualitative marketing. This research gets much more accurate statistical results and information and is best used when your target market is already narrowed and you wish to find ways to reach or explore that market as well as find specific information on your product as it relates to that market.

Generally businesses conduct qualitative research during the exploratory research and development phase of their product to see if it is viable on the market and what they need in order to reach their market more fully with the product (colors, shapes, uses, etc.). Once the item is ready to hit the streets, qualitative research is used to fine-tune the market niche and begin offering the product for sale.

Conducting your own market research is time-consuming, but is very well worth it if you have a need for information or if you are spending any considerable amount of money on your marketing for specific products or services.

Search Engine Marketing

This has, for a long time now, been a “buzz phrase” in online marketing circles. I’m not sure why, since while it is generally an important part of a presence online, it is not the end-all-be-all of marketing on the Internet. Search engines have become one of the most expensive forms of advertising on the Web, but have also become one of the most effective. Great search engine marketing (read: placement, strategy, etc.) is done by professionals and takes a lot of time to do correctly. There are two types of search engines to market towards: search engines/directories and pay-per-click (PPC) engines.

Search directories (Yahoo! for example) and engines (Google is an example) require a lot of patience to market effectively. Even if you are paying for your listing, it can take weeks to appear on their site. Further, your positioning on their site can change regularly as their indexes change or they change the rules of “ranking” on searches. On top of all of that you have paid advertisements and paid listings (see PPC below) that can usurp your position or push you further down in the results.

Pay-per-click (PPC) engines are much easier to use, but also more expensive. A campaign on Overture, for example, can total hundreds of dollars in a single day. These engines, however, can usually get you a higher listing on a regular search engine (such as Yahoo!) much faster and with steadier results.

Whichever course you take (I would recommend both if you’re serious about search engine marketing), be prepared to spend a lot of time and a goodly amount of money in your endeavor. A listing at Yahoo!, for example, is \$300/year and the average per-click cost on Overture is about

\$0.75.

E-Zine Advertising

In my experience, this is by far the most effective form of advertising at very low cost online. That said, be leery of offers to “get your ad in 50 email newsletters for only \$25.” I doubt you’ll see one response for your \$25 since most of the “readers” of these e-zines are probably other people who paid for advertising as well.

If you have researched your market well then you know the general wants and desires of your targets. Using that information, you can find the online newsletters (email or web-based) that these people would be interested in. Chances are that publication takes advertising. There are three basic types of advertising to a newsletter list: solo ads, top-line ads, and classified ads.

Solo ads are sent to the entire (or a part of, depending on the options given) newsletter list – these ads contain ONLY your advertisement or perhaps your ad plus an article to get the reader interested in looking. These are the most effective type of advertising through most newsletters, but are also the most expensive. Expect to pay \$20 or more per 1,000 impressions in a good publication.

Top-line ads are just that: ads that appear at the very top of a newsletter or at the top of an article in the newsletter. These are also highly effective and are fairly cost-efficient at about half the price of a solo advert.

Classified ads are the most useless of the three options given. They’re usually very cheap, but almost always appear at the bottom of the newsletter and are generally bypassed by the readers who rarely read that far into the publication. These are cheap, though (\$5/issue is not uncommon) and can be effective when combined with one of the other two options to spread your advertising over several issues.

Email Marketing

Marketing online using email is a touchy affair and can easily lead to many problems. Despite this, it is by far the most effective form of advertising online – bar none. An email advertisement to a targeted and strong list of people can generate responses of close to 1/3 (1 response for every 3 targets). That’s phenomenal in ANY form of advertising.

There are three types of email marketing: SPAM/UCE, opt-in, and newsletter marketing.

SPAM/UCE (Unsolicited Commercial Email) is something that everyone, whether savvy online or not, has heard of. The word SPAM has risen from “questionable meat in a can” to “plague of the Internet” in the past three or four years. Despite its bad name – and any personal feelings I may have about it – SPAM is a very effective form of email advertising. If it weren’t, it wouldn’t exist. Doing it correctly, however, is expensive and requires much thought – using it even just once can affect your business for better or worse for the duration of your time online.

Opt-In email advertising is extremely effective and carries very little of the weight of SPAM marketing. The idea is pretty basic: you create a list of email addresses and send marketing messages to them occasionally. The hard part is getting those names to start with. Usually other forms of advertising get your website going and this type propels it forward.

Newsletter marketing is similar to opt-in marketing, but includes useful information such as articles or insights. In fact, you’re probably reading this article through a newsletter that is being used to market a business of some type or another. Newsletters can be time-consuming, but are well worth the effort. Some newsletter publishers supplement their income by running advertisements in their publications (see “newsletter marketing” above).

Of these three types of marketing, I have had the most success with newsletter marketing followed closely by opt-in advertising. That said, be VERY wary of “email lists” for purchase or hire that claim to be “opt-in.” Generally, these are NOT what they appear to be and you will receive several complaints of SPAMming if you use them. Building a list of names and emails for opt-in or newsletter publication is difficult, but very much worth the trouble for the payoffs in the long run. I have run my own newsletter for over a year now and receive more comments, input, and business through that than I do any other venue excepting word-of-mouth. If done right, a proper newsletter or opt-in list can greatly increase your success online. If you feel you don’t have the time or skill to publish your own newsletter, there are those who will do it for you (including myself!).

Local Promotion

When you do your marketing, do not forget that promotion around your local area can also be very important. Many new business owners or entrepreneurs focus so greatly on the “world-wide audience” online that they forget their local one. In the end, selling to your geographic area is much simpler than selling to the world since people generally trust businesses or advertising they can see in traditional ways more than they do the “fly-by-night” appearance of most Internet advertising. Be sure to advertise in printed newspapers and magazines, business guides, on your business cards, through press releases, etc. It will pay off faster and with more gusto than most forms of Internet advertising will.

Offline Marketing

Speaking of the above, we come to offline marketing techniques. Classifieds in newspapers are the most commonly used form of “real world” advertising. I would not recommend you use them, though, unless the publication is very focused towards your intended market or the cost is very low. In my experience and in the experience of many that I’ve spoken with, classified ads are very ineffective.

Print advertising, billboards, movie theater slides (between shows), URLs on your car, and other forms are highly effective if used correctly. In addition, you can use these forms in a co-op with other, related businesses to lower your costs.

Conclusion

Advertising online and off is a very time-consuming affair, but essential to your success. If you don’t advertise, your business will fail. There are no exceptions to this rule. Some form of advertising takes place for every business type without exception. Marketing requires thought, time, and effort to succeed but as an essential part of your business, it’s directly related to your rewards at the end of the day!

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