Building an Effective Web Presence

Step #1 – Define Your Ideal Client

In today’s online environment, having just a web site doesn’t usually cut it. As a business owner, your ultimate goal should be to build an effective web presence by integrating your website, social media, and other online interactive media or applications. There are many options and you have limited resources, so it’s important to define what elements of a web presence will provide the best return on your investment of time and money.

The most effective way to begin this process is to clearly define your “ideal” client. It sounds very basic, but this step is often overlooked. As you build your web presence, you want to target all of your activities around this ideal client. If you don’t, there’s a good chance you’ll waste time and money.

Defining your ideal client will not only help you with your Search Engine Optimization (SEO) efforts, it will also focus your energy in the right places, help you allocate limited resources appropriately, and will be a win-win for your company because it increases your referral business … the BEST kind of business!

When you define your ideal client, be as specific as possible. The more specific you are, the better your results will be. Initially it can be difficult to narrow down the “ideal” client. It can be easy to say that your ideal client is anyone who will pay you for your services. But is this really true? I know it isn’t for me!

Try this exercise to help. Think about your FAVORITE or BEST client from the past few years. What is it that made them your favorite? What are the specific characteristics that made them best? Write down the traits that make them stand out. Next, think about your worst experience with a client and write down the traits that made that experience stand out. You will rapidly be able to paint a picture of the type of client your business LOVES to work with and profits from the most.

Think about it … isn’t working with an ideal client a win-win? They love working with you and you love working with them. They are not just happy about your product or service, they cannot live without it! They tell their friends about you, who in turn become your new clients. Referral business is the best business and building your web presence (as well as other marketing efforts) around your ideal client ultimately yields a better return on investment because of this.

Once you have clearly defined your ideal client, use these practical applications for your business web presence:

First, focus on getting found online by your ideal client. Organically optimize your website for the very specific search terms your ideal client would use to try to find you. As an example, let’s say you have an auto repair shop at the Lake and your ideal client is a luxury car owner. Think about the difference in your chances of ranking #1 in Google for the general term “auto repair”, versus “auto repair Lake of the Ozarks”, versus “BMW repair Lake of the Ozarks”. Yes, the number of searches for the latter term will be fewer, but if this is your ideal client, your conversions will be MUCH higher because your organic SEO efforts are built around that ideal client!

Next, find out where your ideal client “hangs out” and interacts online, then make sure your business is there! Use Facebook ads, Pay per Click, or other social media avenues to get your business in front of that ideal client when they are online. Capture their information by building fans and followers across the social platforms. This enables you to engage with your ideal client and build credibility with them in real time online. It also gives you a free venue to regularly announce deals, sales, specials, and events to your ideal client!

In the following months, I will continue to offer concrete and practical tips that you can use to maximize your web presence and increase conversions from your website.

Remember, if you start by defining your ideal client up front, you will have much greater success in your journey through the web!
Building an Effective Web Presence

Step #2 – Define Specific Goals for Your Web Presence

Previously, we identified step 1 in the process of building an effective web presence: Define your ideal client. Step 2 is equally important: take the time to identify very specific goals for your web presence. The goal of “getting more business” isn’t specific enough.

Having concrete goals enables you to take very specific actions to achieve those goals. Some possible goals for your web presence may include the following:

**Goal: Get Found Online (seems obvious, right?)**
Actions to Achieve: Work on optimizing your website for the best possible placement in Google. This takes time and ongoing effort, so be consistent and patient. While you are working on that, run Google AdWords, Facebook ads, online ads with the Chamber of Commerce, or ads on other websites where your “ideal” clients hang out. The idea is to use every avenue (online and offline) that you can to get your website in front of your ideal clients. As an added benefit, your online advertising efforts outside of Google can actually improve your Google rankings.

**Goal: Capture Information From Site Visitors That Can Be Acted On (most overlooked goal)**
Actions to Achieve: Include an online form for your visitors to fill out. This can be as simple as a newsletter sign-up (using a third party service like ConstantContact.com or MailChimp.com), or as complex as a free quote request form for your service. If you are on Facebook, don’t forget to include a “Like” button on your website (recently replaced the “Become a Fan” button), so you can capture prospective clients in social media. Don’t forget to include a clear call to action for your site visitors. Tell them what you want them to do (fill out the form) and why they should do it (what’s in it for them?).

**Goal: Build Credibility and Establish Trust (most effective over time)**
Actions to Achieve: Social Media has made building online trust and credibility MUCH easier than it used to be. If you are not taking advantage of Facebook for business, you are missing a huge opportunity. As you build fans to your Facebook business page, you have the opportunity to connect and engage existing clients and prospective clients on a regular basis. I will include more about Facebook in future articles, but what you need to know here is that every time a “fan” logs in to Facebook, they will see your business posts. Take note, building trust and credibility does not come from constantly pitching your services on Facebook. It comes from starting a conversation with your fans, asking them questions, and providing resources and information of value to them. It doesn’t happen overnight … it requires a consistent and sincere effort. As an added benefit, your business social media efforts will improve your Google rankings over time.

As you start defining goals for your own business web presence, consider adding a way to measure them. This allows you to really focus on what improvements need to be made to accomplish them. For example:

- **Get found online … on page one of Google.**
  Use Google Analytics and monitor your progress. Using analytics allows you to make informed decisions about changes that might be needed on your website.

- **Capture information … get 10 free quote requests per month from your website.**
  If you have 500 unique visitors to your site each month and you are not getting 10 quote requests, improve your call to action or give them an incentive to take action.

- **Establish credibility … write 3 informative and valuable business Facebook posts per week.**
  How do you know if they are informative and valuable? Your fans will respond and interact with your posts. Try to improve your posts each so your fans are motivated to engage.

Goals for your web presence are just like goals in your life. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know exactly where you have to concentrate your efforts, and what changes you may need to make along the way.
Building an Effective Web Presence
Step #3 – Create a Clear Call to Action

The third step is often the most overlooked – create a clear call to action!
We touched on this idea briefly in the last article, but let’s take a closer look here.

What is the one thing you want your ideal client to do when they get to your website?

Have you actually thought about this? When I ask this question of new clients, most tell me they want people to browse through the website and learn about their business. The problem with this is that it’s a very passive approach and not likely to lead to a lot of conversions.

Your business website should purposefully drive site visitors to a very specific call to action.

Developing your website with this idea in mind can dramatically increase your conversions. This is especially true when that action is tied directly to the primary goal(s) of the website.

For example, if the goal of your website is to cut down phone calls for routinely asked questions, you should have a Frequently Asked Questions page on your website, and the prominent call to action on your home page should immediately drive your site visitors to those FAQs. If your goal is to build a social media following so you can engage your customers daily or weekly, then you should have a clear, bold, prominent call to action on every page to “Like” your business on Facebook, or to “Follow” your business on Twitter. If your goal is to use your website to collect qualified leads, then you must provide an online form and proactively guide your visitors from each page of your website to that form.

A call to action is a very simple improvement for most websites:
1) Decide what you want your ideal client to do when they get to your website;
2) Tell them what you want them to do; and
3) Give them a reason to do it.

Make your call to action prominent. Make your call to action clear. Make your call to action easy.

Traffic vs. Conversions: Rather than trying to increase site visitors all the time, consider trying to improve conversions from your existing visitors.

It’s easy (when you aren’t getting what you want out of your website) to immediately think, “I need more traffic!” But it’s much more effective (and usually less expensive) to first take an honest look at the traffic you are already receiving. Then, take steps to improve the conversions from the visitors you already have.

Creating a prominent call to action is a very simple way to do this. Rather than your site visitors passively browsing your website and leaving, they will become active and engaged on your website, giving you the opportunity to create a new customer.

Do it today! Create a prominent call to action on your website.

1) Decide what you want your site visitors to do. (Make sure it’s tied to your website goals)
2) Prominently (and visually) tell them what you want them to do. (Make it obvious and easy)
3) Give them a reason to do it. (Reward them or tell them what they’ll get by doing it)
I am confident you’ll quickly see a dramatic increase in conversions!
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Step #4 – Give Customers What They Expect

The fourth step may seem obvious, but consider how many websites you visit each week and don’t find what you are looking for. What do you do when you don’t find what you want? You probably leave and move on to the next one.

Step 4 - Give Customers What They Expect.
Ask yourself this question. When a prospective customer gets to your website, what do they expect to find? Make sure you give it to them, or make it VERY easy to get.

The obvious but often overlooked:

- Professional look (first impressions still count)
- Error free (spell check, links work, no error messages or plug-ins required)
- Consistent navigation
- Basic business information (Hours, Contact Information, Location)

Google is now a verb, not just a search engine. This verb often replaces the phone book. People look to Google to find local businesses. This means your website may be the first impression a prospective new client has of your business. Does it have a professional look that represents the quality of your business services or products? Or does it look like you attempted to do it yourself and gave up halfway through? Think about the first impression your website gives … you want it to be the right one.

Is your website error free, spell checked, and do all the links work properly? If not, take the time to fix the problems. Nothing deflates your credibility more quickly than an error-laden website.

Is the navigation consistent and intuitive across every page of your website? You do not want prospective customers to get lost or stranded attempting to find their way through your site. There are few things worse than getting to a page on a website with no obvious way to get to another.

Are your hours, location, and contact information listed on every page of the website? If not, consider adding them … to every page (not just the “contact us” page). The website itself is rarely going to close the business deal for you. It’s the contact, interaction, and relationship that you build with the prospective customer that closes the deal. If starting a dialog with your prospective customer is the primary objective, then the how, the when, and the where to reach you should be the easiest information to find.

People buy from people, not from companies. Instead of thinking of your website as one way communication (for example - this is what I do, you should buy from me), think of it as an introduction … a first impression. It’s the first step in the relationship marketing process.

Your website should START the dialogue with your prospective customer. This means you want to get rid of the obstacles on your website that would prevent the customer from wanting to engage.

Give customers what they expect… don’t give them a reason to leave.
Building an Effective Web Presence
Step #5 - Be a Better Communicator

We continue to talk in terms of your “web presence” rather than just your “website”, because a web presence encompasses everything you do to market your business online. This definitely includes your website, but it also includes your email marketing campaigns, your social media efforts, blogging, and more.

Effective communication is not a one way process when you are face-to-face, and it shouldn’t be online either. Too many businesses exercise one way communication online by pushing the common message, "I'm the best, buy from me." Truly successful businesses work online to engage their prospective customers for the purpose of starting a dialogue, building a relationship, establishing trust, and positioning themselves as experts in their fields. When you let consumers reach their own conclusion that you are the best, the real long-term, profitable business relationships develop.

A few tips to instantly become a better online communicator:

Auto-Responders
Stop using generic auto-responders, unless you are on vacation and need to let people know why you are not going to respond for a week. Nothing says, "Your inquiry is not special … I may contact you on my own timeline," quite like an auto-responder. By their very nature, auto-responders are one way. There definitely are appropriate and advanced uses for auto-responders in internet marketing, however most businesses don’t use them this way and should forego the temptation to simply setup a generic auto-responder. Personal and thoughtful replies are best.

Email
Several of my clients receive leads from advertising efforts. Many call and tell me they contact leads and never get a response. My very first question is, "Did you ask them a question?"

Think about how many solicitation emails you get in a day. How many do you respond to? If you are not getting responses to your sales emails, take a good look at what you are writing. Is it all about you? Did you genuinely try to start a dialogue by asking relevant and interesting questions? Did you call the person to action or give them a reason to reply? If you make an effort to change the verbiage to a more inquiry based approach by asking the prospective customers more probing questions about them and their needs, you will see a better response and conversion rate in your email marketing efforts.

Social Media
I will talk about social media in future articles, but for this article’s purpose the most important consideration in your social media effort is using this powerful platform to engage people rather than sell to them. Since the resounding theme across this article is that effective communication is not one way … it is important to understand this is true in your social media efforts, as well. Try using social media to engage and interact rather than posting one way sales messages to consumers.

Be a better communicator … try to establish a dialogue with your prospects. Treat your online efforts much as you would face-to-face meetings. Ask probing and relevant questions, pose solutions to problems, and position yourself as the expert in your field. When you take this approach in your online communications, you won’t need to sell so much. Establishing a dialogue, and building a relationship of trust and value, leads the consumer to decide for themselves that you are the person to do business with.

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