

21 ways to market your business online

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Our nascent fascination with search stems back to the internet's earliest days when algorithms didn't reign supreme. Back then, it was far simpler to be found on the web. It didn't require all of the technical know-how, breadth and awareness of hundreds of ranking factors in order to be discovered relevantly in an online search.

No, back then it was far simpler.

However, today, with the evolution of Google's core search algorithms, and in the wake of major adjustments that have gone by names like Panda, Penguin and Hummingbird, being found on the web has become likened to obtaining a doctoral degree in physics or mathematics.

As entrepreneurs, we all know that the best way to market any business online is to be found organically through a search at the top of Google's search engine results pages (SERPs). It's free and offers near-limitless traffic to those who can master this highly-convoluted field of online search. But doing that has also become a monumental undertaking.

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On the other end of the spectrum, many of us are online-searching sleuths. We're professionals, able to gracefully surf the world's annals of information effortlessly and with ease. We can tap into the vast knowledge available at a moment's notice from powerful, blazing-fast pocket computers, on cue and at any time. Yes, we most certainly know how to conduct a search.

However, as a business owner or professional, you know quite well that this isn't the case for being found. Appearing relevantly for highly-competitive

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keywords has become an ever-increasingly difficult task. But how else are we supposed to market our businesses online if we can't appear competitively on Google's SERPs? And how is that some people seem to dominate Google's searches while others seem to falter and fail?

Clearly, it's not easy. That might also be the reason why the world's foremost SEO specialists can command thousands of dollars per hour to analyze, tweak and optimize sites for specific keywords. Surely, this is no small feat. What people don't realize is that there are fundamentals building blocks in place that make it difficult to make considerable traction over a period of weeks or even months.

Translation? Anyone who's interested in dominating search must know that it takes years and years to build up the type of link profile, authority and content to rank almost effortlessly for specific keywords. The truth of the matter? You need to do the most amount of work for the least initial return if you're serious about gaining any traction with organic marketing online.

The problem? We're the product of an instant-gratification society. We want things, and we want them now. This is partially born from our genetic makeup, but further fostered by media and societal norms that highlight the hedonistic pleasures associated with enjoying life's most primal urges to eat, earn and procreate.

Yet, in order to succeed in business or in life, you need to do the most amount of work for the least initial return, not the other way around. You need to endure the pain if you want to experience the pleasure. And when it

comes down to marketing your business, you'll most certainly experience tremendous amounts of pain if you don't know what you're doing.

How do you market your business online?

What does it take to market your business online? Without waiting years and years to move up the rankings on Google's SERPs, how can an entrepreneur get the proverbial word out? There are definitely some ways to market your business that will offer a better return on the investment of your time than others. Some will take weeks to pan out; while others will take months and years.

No matter what method you choose for marketing your business on the web, as long as you ensure that you're adding value along the way, and you're , you'll eventually reap the rewards of your work over time. It won't happen overnight. But then again, nothing worthwhile ever does. Below you'll find some the best methods -- in both the short and long term -- for driving that all-important traffic to your site and pages online.

1. Create a blog and post high-quality content regularly.

Clearly, the most important way you can market your business online is to build a blog where you can post and share high-quality content that adds an exceeding high amount of value on a regular basis. This is definitely a very long-term strategy, and it won't pay off overnight, but every entrepreneur needs to understand the importance of embracing this online marketing method.

Not only does building a noteworthy blog in any industry or niche help to drive traffic by peaking the interest of Google, but it also leads to creating authority. If you can become an authority in your industry, you'll garner the attention of consumers, the media and business owners alike. That, in turn, will snowball, build more authority, and eventually, enormous amounts of visibility and sales.

2. Market your content on Medium and Quora.

If you're looking to get some early traffic, and you have a fairly new domain -- less than 2 years old with little authority built up -- you should work on marketing your content on sites like and . How does it work? Write one high-quality piece of content on your website. Make sure it's keyword-centric, insightful, unique and adds a lot of value. Ensure that whatever you're talking about helps people in some way, shape or form.

Once you've done that, write another article on a site like Medium or Quora, also making sure that it's keyword-centric, insightful, unique and adds a lot of value. Create one link from that article using a primary or relevant keyword back to the main article on your site or blog. This is called content marketing, and it's the most powerful method for gaining traction on Google's SERPs, while also reaching large existing audiences through these authority sites as well.

3. Connect with others on LinkedIn groups.

LinkedIn groups are a great way for quickly connecting with others in your industry or niche to help spread your message. You can promote your content through LinkedIn groups as long as you don't come across as

spammy. It's best to add value to a conversation or discussion before trying to drop your links.

LinkedIn groups are also a great way of contacting people who you might not have mutual connections with. You can message any other member in the group without being connected, which can become a huge asset depending on the particular circumstances. Share updates often in the group, and be sure to stay in the spotlight without oversharing.

4. Use Facebook ads and strategically-targeted landing pages.

Facebook ads, while not free, offer a great opportunity for reaching the right demographics for your business. As long as you know your customer well, you can use metrics like interests, geographic location, marital status, age and many others, to locate potential consumers to send to strategically-targeted landing pages, also known as squeeze pages.

Experiment with micro-spends to see which ad copy and squeeze page receives the best responses for dropping consumers into your sales funnel. It might take a considerable amount of time to find the right mixture or recipe when it comes to advertising on a platform like Facebook, but once your campaign is profitable, all you need to do is continue to scale.

5. Leverage the power of Instagram influencers.

Today, with the ever-pervading power of social media, you can instantly reach droves of people from across the world at a moment's notice. But we also know that algorithms and visibility are working against us, especially

when we don't have the reach of hundreds of thousands or millions of followers.

To reach those people, we need amplifiers, power users and influencers to help spread our messages. While this won't be free, it will give you instant access to a wide audience in your specific niche as long as you select the right Instagram influencer to help spread your message.

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6. Create useful video tutorials on YouTube.

YouTube offers a great resource for marketing your business on the web. While you might find some friction at the outset for building your audience, if you focus on creating useful video tutorials, eventually, you'll reach a vast amount of people. Again, you have to focus on adding value without much concern for generating profit.

YouTube is a great resource for tutorials because you can teach people just about anything in an easy-to-understand format. Whether you're screen-sharing to teach a digital skill, or you're capturing something in the real world, just ensure that the quality of the recording and the overall content is high. Also, be sure to drop a link inside the description back to relevant content on your site.

7. Develop a relationship with your customers through email marketing.

Email marketing is something that every business owner should be engaged in, but it's no easy feat. To succeed with email marketing, you need to give

something away for free in exchange for the consumer's email address. It needs to be something of value. If you are serious about collecting emails, take the time to create a free report or ebook that will help people in your industry or niche. Then, develop a relationship with that consumer through drip-fed campaigns using a system like , , or . However, don't try to sell at every corner and turn. Connect first, then focus on selling.

8. Use Angie's List or TripAdvisor.

Sites like and offer an avenue for just about any business to reach an enormous audience of potential consumers. These sites are a great resource for finding any local business, giving you the opportunity to have consumers leave reviews based on their experiences with your company.

If you're selling services, try Angie's List. If you're in a travel-related field, why not list on TripAdvisor? Not only are these links good for SEO, but you'll also gain access to a large audience of consumers that are looking for products or services in your industry or niche. Take the time to create a good listing, and drive customers there to post authentic reviews based on their experiences with you.

9. Build consumer trust on platforms like Yelp and Trust Pilot.

One of the barriers holding back business owners and professionals alike is that of trust. People are reluctant to trust businesses that they don't have direct knowledge of or know someone who's worked with them. Clearly, sites like can assist with that, but so can a site like .

Trust Pilot and Yelp are specifically dedicated to helping consumers find the right company to work with, and it increases transparency by providing past customers' experiences with the company. These sites are the largest in the world for online reviews and should be leveraged to help build trust with potential consumers.

10. Utilize rich snippets, AMP and FBIA.

If you're looking to gain a bit of traction with your content, you can , (AMP) or (FBIA) to aid in some early exposure. Rich snippets apply to a number of content forms including articles via the AMP specification, local businesses, music, recipes, reviews, TV, movies and videos.

There are Wordpress plugins you can use for rich snippets via Schema. org's specifications, along with plugins for both AMP and FBIA. Considering the recent focus on mobile by Google and Facebook, for example, having AMP and FBIA articles will give you a small advantage over those who don't, increasing your visibility on SERPs and in newsfeeds.

11. Collaborate with popular bloggers in your niche.

Reaching out to popular bloggers in your niche might be an effective way to market your business online, especially if you have something of value to add to one of their posts. If you find a popular blogger who often writes about a particular subject that directly correlates to your line of work, why not reach out and look for ways to collaborate?

A great way to make this happen is to offer your services as a guest blogger. Clearly, you'll have to have a good background in writing yourself, and it

might be difficult to find a popular blog willing to allow you to do this, but it would be worth a shot if you eventually secure a guest post.

12. Regularly contribute on industry-specific forums.

Many people have the whole forum-strategy posting for SEO all wrong. They get out there and drop spammy links, and they wonder why they're booted off the forums. You can't do that. If you're serious about marketing your business online, when you do find an industry-specific forum, join conversations and add value before you try to link-drop.

No one likes a person who comes in as a new guest to a forum and begins spamming links. Again, you have to think about doing the most amount of work for the least initial return. Add value. Chat with others. Make suggestions. Answer questions. Just don't spam links. Add your link to your signature after a few posts or after the rules of the forum allow you to do so, but don't try to direct people to your site at every bend and turn. It won't work out well for you if you do that.

13. Offer a free product or service to customers.

Studies have confirmed that people are more likely to accept something for free than they are to pay a nominal price for it. So, why not provide a free service or product to your customers? Maybe you offer a free 15-minute consultation or an entry-level product that you want to give away.

Whatever you offer, be sure to secure the customer's contact details so you can get in touch with them later. If you're giving away a service for free, you have an opportunity right then to upsell those customers to your paid

services. People are more likely to feel like they owe you when they accept something for free as well.

14. Use business listing sites like Yahoo Local and Google Local.

If you're running a local business and looking to attract nearby customers to a brick-and-mortar location or offering some professional service that's geographically-specific, you should list your business on local business listing sites such as and .

Google Local is an especially powerful way to list and verify your business information, providing public details such as your company's address for Google Maps appearances, store hours and other information related to your business. Ensure that you keep this information accurate and up-to-date.

15. Optimize your website for SEO.

Clearly, optimization of your site for relevant keywords is an important aspect of marketing your business online. However, the one thing to keep in mind is that if your business is new -- less than two years old -- and you've built very little authority or content, you're going to have a hard time ranking at the top of Google's SERPs for any keyword that's marginally competitive.

The goal is to build excellent content, but also ensure that you optimize your site's and Off-Page SEO. While this can become a very lengthy discussion, pay attention to things like your site's speed, mobile usability, meta descriptions, link profile, reading level, citing of sources, content quality, insightfulness and so on. This is more likened to a marathon than a sprint, so don't get discouraged in the short term if you don't see enormous results.

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16. Co-sponsor an award or giveaway in a contest.

Find something that you can give away and co-sponsor an award or contest with another company, group or professional in your field. Use tools like LinkedIn and Facebook to network with others, and locate another like-minded company or professional willing to conduct an award or giveaway with you. The whole point here is to again add value in the public eye.

17. Give a talk at a professional conference or on a webinar.

If you're an authority in your field, why not give a talk at a professional conference or webinar? Of course, would be the first suggestion for professional conferences, but you could speak at a number of other kinds of conferences or even webinars conducted online.

When it comes to online marketing, webinars are one of the most powerful tools for selling nearly anything to a highly-engaged audience. And the larger that audience, the more likely you'll be able to sell your products or services. Long term, this would most certainly give you exposure and allow you to build more authority over time, and it's an excellent portfolio piece or resume item that can be used as well, especially in the case of professional speaking engagements.

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18. Use press releases to communicate important company news or events.

Press releases aren't going to get you immediate media coverage. While some media professionals will use outlets such as , or even scour press

release sites such as , you're likely not going to get any type of instant news coverage by putting out a press release.

However, a press release that's well-written and has a healthy link profile can assist you marginally with SEO, but it can also allow you to communicate important company news or events that you can then use to actively pursue media outlets with through the proper PR channels.

19. Create a branded email signature.

One of the simplest ways that you can market your business online is by using a branded email signature. Place your links and any potential accolades your company might have received directly into your email signature. This helps to passively promote your business to people that you're in contact with on a daily basis.

You should include social media links in your email signature too, along with any relevant links to important company marketing pieces -- digital brochures or news pieces that feature your company. Drop a small tagline or one-sentence catchphrase about your business and its mission as well.

20. Implement the 80-20 rule to identify and market to high-value clients.

The 80-20 rule, or the , states that 80 percent of the results come from 20 percent of the efforts. Basically, it's only a small portion of what we do that actually produces results. However, this also applies to sales, which states that 80 percent of your revenue comes from 20 percent of your clients.

If you can identify which clients are generating the most income for your business, you can scale your sales out by sending them additional offers and discounts for other services and products. You can also gear your online marketing directly to these clients if they're using a portal system to login or if they're being tracked by cookies.

21. Post photos and videos with relevant hashtags on Pinterest, Flickr, Tumblr and Instagram.

There are a number of high-domain authority sites that you can post photos and videos on to build a following. , , and come to mind first. Use relevant hashtags and descriptions to properly categorize what you're posting about, and follow others in your industry or niche posting with those hashtags.

This isn't an online marketing technique that will get you instant sales or even instant traffic. It'll take time. But as long as you're adding value and you're passionate about what you're doing, you'll build that following up over the coming months and years. Be sure to comment, like and engage with other people's posts as much as possible in order to get yourself out there in the beginning.