

Website Marketing 101

Marketing a Commercial Website

To "Market" something means: "To offer it for sale".

"Marketing", for our purpose here, means to offer one's product (or service) for sale in the particular marketplace called the World Wide Web. Marketing on the web has its own rules, procedures and methods.

Make the distinction that you aren't actually marketing your WEBSITE, you are marketing your PRODUCTS or SERVICES, using your website and other online avenues to do so.

For a more in-depth introduction to this subject, click [here](#).

In the course of marketing products and services since 1996 for our clients, through their websites and other online methods, we have learned [what works and what doesn't work in "marketing a website"](#). This is what we do for (and teach) our clients; these are our recommendations for marketing products or services through any commercial website:

Wring Every Sale from Your Existing Traffic

In our analysis of websites that come to us to help them get more traffic, the first thing we look at is how the website actually handles the people that do make it to the site. Does the website drive away the traffic it is currently getting?

After all, what good will it do to drive more traffic to the site if those people don't buy anything either?

- Look at your website as if it were a continual advertisement for your service or product. Because that is what it IS! [How effective is your website as an advertisement?](#)
- [How easy is it to buy](#) what you're selling on your website?
- Take a look at the [five points customers want to see](#) before they'll buy. Does your site cover these five points well?
- Take a look at the other points involved in [how to design a commercial website](#) so that it actually sells.

All this analysis is essential to establish a foundation for further marketing of your products or services online. What you discover from doing these analyses will almost certainly suggest some re-design of the site so that it maximizes sales from the traffic it currently gets. In our experience, you can usually improve almost ANY website so it sells to a higher percentage of the visitors resulting in some immediate income from those extra sales.

For a fee, we will provide that analysis and perform the re-design of your website, or you are welcome to do it yourself using the information provided on our website. Here's how to [contact us](#).

Here is an [article listing many articles about how to increase conversions \(sales\) from your website](#).

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Search Engine Optimizing

The most basic step to take in actually bringing your website to the market that is the World Wide Web is to capitalize on the extra traffic you will get by being able to be found in the search engines. Statistically speaking, that's where people go to do their searching when they are trying to find what you sell. Surveys have determined with certainty that people arrive at websites primarily after finding them in the search engines. Which means that you can get an astounding increase in traffic just from being easily found in the search engines and directories. That's how things are found on the web. There isn't any other magic way to find things on the web.

Optimizing your site for the search engines is the online equivalent to the basic steps of taking out an advertisement in the Yellow Pages and putting a big sign outside your shop, letting people know what you do or what you are selling. If you fail to do this step, you won't be able to be found because you won't show up properly in the search engines.

Although Search Engine Optimizing can be considered a passive activity--because customers have to be looking for whatever you provide before they will find you--it can still be very effective because there are so many people looking for things on the web. Monthly searches from unique visitors at Yahoo! alone are about 65,000,000. Some of those people are looking for exactly what you sell.

Simply put, the people who are looking for your product or service are EXACTLY the people you want to find your website! So help them find you by optimizing your site.

We have created a [Search Engine Optimizing](#) page that lists the many things that need to be done to a website to optimize it for the search engines. We give you plenty of instruction so you can do these things yourself, or you can [contact us](#) and we can do the Search Engine Optimizing for you--it's our specialty in website re-design and has been our niche for several years.

Search Engine Registration

Search engine registration is not terribly difficult but is often done very poorly or simply skipped. In our experience with clients, we have seen many professionally designed websites whose owners thought that their website had been registered with the search engines because someone told them that it was registered, or because someone bought a software program for \$49.95 that says it registers your website with 5,000 search engines. (Reality check: There aren't that many. There are only about 50 that need your submission.)

The acid test is to take ten minutes and go do a search, yourself, at some of the top major search engines and directories, and look for the product or service you are selling. Try:

[Google](#)

[Bing - was Windows Live \(previously MSN\)](#)

and [Yahoo!](#)

These search engines provide the results pages behind the vast majority of the search queries currently done on the internet, even at search sites that are not theirs, such as AOL, About.com, Altavista, Hotbot, iWon and Dogpile.

If your website sells Western Saddles and Tack, do a search for "western saddles". Do another one for "tack". Does your site come up on the first page or two of the search results on all of them? If it does, good for you! You've been doing things right.

If your site doesn't come up near the top of the search results you get when looking for your products at the major search engines, **you'll know that people can't find your website**, even though they are looking for what you are selling. In which case it should be obvious that your website needs to be optimized for the search engines and it may need to be re-submitted to the search engines and directories. Even if they have come through your site and indexed it, they don't "like" what they've found and don't consider it relevant to your main key words.

For more practical advice on what you can do to register your site yourself, and how we might help you, click [here](#).

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E-zines and Newsgroups

E-zines and Newsgroups are both areas where it can be worthwhile to market your website.

< p>For practical advice in how to market in both areas, click [here](#).

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Advertisements in E-Zines

One of the most cost-effective means of advertising on the internet is sponsoring an E-zine. Ads in E-zines usually cost less than \$100, sometimes as little as \$10. They are often unbelievably cheap when you consider the highly targeted nature of the E-zine subscribers. [EzineAd.net](#) is a resource for finding ezines to advertise in. We are not affiliated with them in any way.

Wherever possible, we recommend that the website owner do this research because the knowledge gained this way can be incredibly valuable in marketing the average commercial website. Be certain you don't try to advertise in anything that is actually [unsolicited email](#), as it can backfire on you in the long term.

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Opt-In Email Mailings

There are basically two valid sources for opt-in email addresses:

[1. Your own list.](#) These are the email addresses you gather on your own website by letting people opt-in to your own mailing list. For practical advice on how to gather these names and what to do with them, click [here](#).

[2. The opt-in email lists you can rent](#) from the companies that provide opt-in email lists (like YesMail). For more information and advice on how to go about finding and renting these lists, click [here](#).

Click this link for a listing of about 50 companies from which you can rent [opt-in email lists](#). Please make sure you do not rent anything except **opt-in email lists** - anything else would be SPAM.

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Article Marketing

We've been using for the last year the services of an [article marketing service](#) to get articles written and sent out to various places online that will publish them. This has proven very successful for our clients. Note: that's an affiliate link above -- I used them for a year before becoming an affiliate and would recommend them even if they didn't offer an affiliate program.

You can also write articles about your area of expertise (mentioning, of course, your website or your company) for publication in targeted E-zines and elsewhere is one of the most effective ways to market a site online. A mention of your website in an article in a popular newsletter can cause a huge jump in visitors to the site. Just getting a mention of your site in Randy Casingham's ["This is True"](#) newsletter or the [Windows Secrets](#) newsletter can cause a huge jump in traffic - in fact it has been known to crash the servers due to the huge increase in traffic.

Being mentioned in an article in a printed magazine is very helpful, too, and there are Public Relations (PR) companies, such as one of our clients, [PowerPR](#) who specialize in getting articles about your company written and published.

For example: a site selling [skin care](#) products retains a dermatologist who endorses their products. Ask the doctor to write an article about a particular skin ailment, **mentioning the website and the product**. Don't make this a blatant sales pitch, just note that the product helps

prevent or handle a particular skin ailment. People who are interested will find the article, come to the site and buy the product.

If you own a Western Saddle and Tack shop -- write an article about the care and maintenance of old saddles, or about the benefits and liabilities of different kinds of girth straps for saddles, and **mention your website**.

If you can't write, find someone who can, and talk to them about what you want. Get articles ghost-written by someone who CAN write. There are a million writers out there struggling to make ends meet. Pay one of them to help you. You can even hire Words in a Row's premiere [writing services](#).

Where you get these articles published is a matter of research, communication, persistence and luck.

Frequently repeated advice about such articles is to soften your article so it doesn't come across as a blatant sales pitch; others will advise you to mention your website only at the end of the article, the idea being that those who are interested will visit your site. My advice will always be to be more direct and to let people know who you are and why you are an expert in the field you are writing about, either in the article or in an accompanying blurb about you and your service or product. Don't hide your connections and don't be afraid to ask people to do something in your article.

Be sure to [submit your article](#) through EzineArticles.com

This article about [PR Articles](#) sums up the possibilities open to those who can write and get articles distributed online. It can be an excellent method for promoting your website.

You can find and post articles on these websites to name a few:

- [Article Announcer](#)
- [Idea Marketers.com](#)
- [Zongoo](#)

Subscribe to these email lists to submit or request articles:

- [Publish In Yours](#)
- [Article Announce](#)
- [Free-Content](#)

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Press Releases

Press releases can be very effective. They can also be a complete waste of time. If a newsworthy event occurs, by all means send out a press release. If you are trying to make something quite ordinary sound like news in a press release, re-think it and come up with something that IS news, or you're probably just wasting your time and the time of those who will receive it.

There are software packages like [Media Magnet Pro](#) which can automate the whole process for you. Media Magnet has a list of 24,000 people who have signed up to get press releases, broken down into categories. If you need to send out press releases, use this program or one like it to cut way down on your investment of time.

Just be aware that what seems like news to you may not be of any interest to the people who get these press releases -- and the vast majority of press releases they receive will be trashed. Be very selective in the categories to which you send the press release.

News can be created. Did your company just sign a contract with the US Government to put diagnostic software into every one of their PCs? What newsworthy problem did this solve? What problems does it create? What controversy is involved? (Newsmen are taught to like controversy.) It does not hurt to point out that a press release is a great opportunity for your highly creative marketing person to BE highly creative.

Do a search at a search engine that specializes in sentence-structured queries [Ask.com](#) for "How do I write a press release?" and you will get plenty more instruction on how to write press releases.

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Get Good Links to Your Site

We had so much information about links that we moved it to it's own page. So, here is a our advice about link resources and [how to get links](#).

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Affiliate Programs

Affiliate programs are basically an arrangement with other websites that refer people to your site, in exchange for a commission on any sales those people make at your site.

For practical advice on setting up an affiliate program to increase sales on your site, [click here](#).

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Banner Ads

You see banner ads everywhere you go on the web. Nowadays most of them are displayed as part of an [Affiliate Program](#).

As with any advertisement--if it is displayed in the right place and says the right things, you can make a bunch of sales from it. (Yet another reason to read [David Ogilvy's books](#)!) But if it costs too much money to display your banner ad where it will do the most good, even if does make you a bunch of sales--you can still lose money.

The effectiveness of Banner Ads has been dropping steadily over the last decade. When they first came on the scene they were incredibly effective, but the newness has worn off long ago and the average click-through rate on banner ads is way, way down. Way less than one percent of the people who view them actually click on them. One clickthrough per thousand impressions would be a very good clickthrough rate. We have all taught ourselves not to look at them--to ignore them. So they are, for the most part, ignored.

Will banner ads work to drive people to your website? It depends on what your offer is, what you say about it, and where you place the banner ads. Banner ads were once one of the best of the tried-and-true internet marketing techniques to get traffic to visit your site, but they aren't what they used to be.

You have to decide if you can cram a message that will actually drive people to your website into a tiny box that they will probably ignore, which they will see someplace they don't expect it. And then you need to locate that place to put that ad and pay only enough to make it worth your while. You can buy advertising space at Yahoo!--but the last time I checked their minimum advertising purchase was \$5000 for so many impressions, with no guarantee that it will put any paying customers onto your website.

Banner ads are best used as part of an affiliate program but if you want to pay for instant exposure somewhere that makes sense, then contact the owner of the website where you want to display the banner ad and find out what it will cost, for how long, and how many impressions it will receive. (Following our own example, we rent ad space on one of our pages about [optin email lists](#). We can do that because the page gets a lot of traffic and usually ranks at #1 for the term "optin email lists" at Google.)

Don't bet the family farm on banner ads. But if you can get a great deal on advertising space somewhere, on a busy website whose visitors might be interested in your product or service, go ahead and try out a banner ad.

We have designed, created and placed banner ads for clients. If you need help on this, [contact us](#).

To have an expert at making the actual banner ads themselves create one for you, contact [Sailcat Graphics](#).

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Blogs

Blogging is practically a lifestyle for many. There are lots of other places where you can get polished up marketing babble about blogs. We dig into them a bit more for technical data, how you can tweak your code, and data that we couldn't easily find elsewhere about "Why?" and "How?". We have a lot to say about this recent addition to your marketing arsenal. So much that we moved the blog information to its own pages.

We answer the questions:

- [What is a blog?](#)

- How do I (SEO) [optimize a blog?](#)
- How do I [register my blog with the search engines?](#)

We have our own blogs, too: [Jere Matlock blog](#); [Desi Matlock blog](#).

Commercial blogs are commonly used to display pay-per-click ads or affiliate links. They can then generate extra money for their owners in addition to their own marketing value - but only if your blog is updated often enough and remains fresh and interesting enough to continue to draw visitors.

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Viral Marketing

"Viral marketing" is a term coined for spreading news about a website by word of mouth, through the web. If you have something really "cool" or "outrageous", and a few people tell a few friends about it, and those friends tell more friends, then you've hooked into the phenomenon known as viral marketing. It works the same way as a cold virus; you catch it (hear about it) from your friends and relatives.

More practically for your purposes, you can ASK people to tell a friend about your website. You can provide incentives for doing so. What you should not do is ask them to give you email addresses so you can send out an email (which would be spam if it came from you, unsolicited, to their friends). Instead ask them to tell their friends about your site. Put up a form allowing them to do that. Or ask them to put up a link to your website from theirs. Make it easy to do that by putting the code and any image necessary on a page so they can just cut and paste it. Or give something away to those who send you a certain quantity of visitors.

<We interrupt this page to bring you a special message!>

Following our own advice here: Feel free to tell a friend about our website with all these tips you are reading. Here's our URL:

<http://www.wordsinarow.com/marketing.html>

Cut and paste it into your email. There must be someone you know who ought to be told about the valuable information you have found here!

<End of commercial message.>

You can set up a program on your site so someone can win something of value for referring a friend to your site. We've seen websites where you can earn a version of "online bucks" for referring a friend to the site, or for doing something else that they would like you to do (fill out a survey or whatever). That "online cash", of course, is only redeemable at that one website, which requires the people who get the "online cash" to come back there in order to buy anything with it.

The original success of hotmail as a way to get a free email address is entirely due to the viral marketing effect created by a link at the bottom of every email sent through HotMail, saying

"click here to set up your own free HotMail account." That's another form of viral marketing. According to them, it was an unintended effect. They were swamped with requests and had a major problem keeping up with demand.

Google used a completely closed viral marketing plan to start up gmail, Google's free email service. It would not let you in unless you were invited by another gmail user; that's viral marketing. This was very successful for gmail. Viral marketing works well if used correctly.

A good viral marketing campaign requires some cleverness--some real thought. Look at the service or product you are selling and come up with a way to get people to tell their friends about it, and you will be on your way to starting a viral marketing campaign for your website.

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Offline Marketing

Having a website does NOT mean you can drop out of real world marketing. A good yellow pages ad is still going to be an important marketing tool for most small companies. Have you been sending out letters? Placing ads in the right magazines? Would a [cheap radio commercial](#) work for you? Those can be had fairly inexpensively, and can flood the phones with incoming calls.

While offline marketing is beyond the scope of this website, I can tell you that I routinely advise my marketing clients to send out postcards, and refer them to this site for info on how to do it right: Bob Leduc's [Build your Business with Postcard Marketing](#) is terrific and worth studying and applying; if you want to use old-school techniques in real world marketing then study and learn from this master of postcard marketing. I've been doing postcard marketing since about 1970, and I thought I knew it all, but Bob's info was really eye-opening. The first barrier to learning is thinking you know it all already; don't fall into that trap. Even old dogs (like me!) can learn new tricks.

Postcards can get website sales going, or pop them into a new range. Don't turn up your nose at postcards just because they are old fashioned.

The best places we know of to get post cards printed are [Post Card Mania](#), [Uprinting](#) and [EMS Marketing](#).

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Things Not to Do

Don't send out [spam](#).

Don't do "nothing". "Nothing" is almost always the wrong thing to do.

Every little bit you do to market your website helps. It can be a struggle to make a website sell and it can seem impossible, especially at first, to get people to visit your website and buy what you're selling.

Be smart, realize it will take some time, relax and have fun at this. Don't bet the farm on making money from your website from the day it goes online. Keep at it, doing a little bit every day. Like life, marketing your website is a game you can win. And aren't games supposed to be fun?

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This page provides many practical ideas for specific things you can do to market your products and services through your website and other methods on the web.

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