

Online Marketing Strategies to PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS

By HOLLY BERKLEY

PICTURE YOURSELF at the ball game cracking through a bag of dry roasted peanuts. You're on your second handful when that familiar red and white logo pops up on the big screen advertising an ice-cold Coca-Cola. You immediately track down the next vendor with a basket of ice-cold drinks. This is called "pin point marketing." It is the process of delivering an appropriate message at the right time that produces actual results.

In contrast, let's say you are enjoying those same peanuts when an advertisement for Toyota Trucks pops up on the same screen. It's a nice ad, but not nearly as effective. This is an example of "interruptive marketing." It is not truly targeted because it is not what you are actively looking for at that moment.

What does this scenario have to do with your business? Well, rather than wasting valuable marketing dollars on billboards, 30-second television ads or radio commercials (all examples of "interruptive marketing") focus your energy on putting your product in front of potential customers while they are looking for it. Unlike when people watch TV or listen to the radio, Internet users are actively looking for solution to a problem. If you can place your product in their path at the right time, you've made a customer. The most cost-effective way to achieve this is by combining your marketing message with important content that users are already actively seeking out.

Start by submitting "how-to" or "industry news" type articles to relevant websites in your industry. Unique Web content is important for all size companies. And, buying customer information is expensive and time consuming. As a result most companies are willing to trade a small plug for your website or company for a valuable, informative, well-written article.

Every article you submit should enhance your company's position as an expert or industry leader, while providing valuable information at the same time. Content written around your company or product also helps your business gain credibility, which is extremely important for small businesses. When a potential customer reads your article, you have already established yourself as an expert in that field. By the time the customer clicks over to your website or gives you a call, you have a very hot lead.



Perhaps you own a local painting business. Your target customers are most likely looking for home improvement information online, so you could exchange stories and "how to"

advice with local carpenters or electricians. Or take it a step further and submit your "expert painting advice" to popular home improvement and real estate websites. You can swap content with anyone in your industry that is not a direct competitor. By doing so, you'll open your company up to a wider audience while building up your credibility.

Also, think about what type of person will be using the website you select to post your article. For example, studies show that a mother of two who needs a quick dinner recipe will do a quick search, and then print out the page. So animated banners ads or even a link to your website may not be the most effective way to get her attention. On the other hand, adding a clip out coupon to the article would be very effective.

In traditional media, one positive sentence in editorial is worth much more than two paid advertisements. The same is true on the Internet. Getting a free link or product mention on another website is an extremely valuable way to gain high quality leads. Combine that free link or product mention with a well-written article and you'll turn that product mention into a sale. ■

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