

Web Marketing Nine

Nine Necessities of Web Marketing
for Service Businesses and Professional Practices

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Author’s Note

This book essentially describes my process for building professional Web marketing programs for service businesses functioning in a local marketplace. This book is not a step-by-step guide as much as it is a comprehensive education of process. Your particular steps will be unique to your situation.

My process in serving the local service business by helping them leverage the Web has been years in the making through much thought, much experimentation, but mostly through action/reaction, tracking and adjusting. I have come to where I am by providing real services to real people to solve real

problems and create real results, and being held accountable through the nature of the marketplace for those results... in a word, experience. I hope this book educates and opens minds.

Introduction

Service businesses and professional practices are the anchors of any local business market. Banks, attorneys, insurance agencies, CPAs, REALTORS, developers, etc. – these professionals are the big dogs of local business. If you are one of these big dogs, then you have a situation on your hands, a question that is becoming increasingly necessary to answer: What are you going to do about the Web?

Search presence and an engaging website are increasingly necessary for the service business and professional practice. Gone are the days when a service professional ignores the Web because, “I mostly get my clients through referrals, so it’s not really relevant to me.” It’s no secret that yours is a referral business. All service business is, but what is a referral? A referral is a mention or recommendation or testimonial by one person to another person. But look at this more thoughtfully and you see many relationships at play:

- The need of the prospect versus how the referrer defined your service
- The personal relationship between these two people
- The prospect and what he already knows about you and your company (market presence)
- The prospect’s interest to follow up matched with the tools available to him or her (the Web)

Yes, you get most of your leads through referrals, and you still will, but now if you don’t have the complementary due diligence tool for the prospect to use before

contacting you, then he or she may never contact you or may get sidetracked in trying to contact you and drawn in by a competitor. Also, if you are not a result I see in my search experience as I research an industry, then you must not be a major player in the marketplace. The Web now plays a huge role in establishing market presence in a local market. It's undeniable.

For the service business, the Web is not only, nor even primarily, a lead generator. The Web is often primarily used as a professional positioning tool, a market presence tool, a due diligence tool, and a client communications tool.

A few years ago, a local bank may have argued, "We can't be big on the Web. Why do it? We don't want people across the country contacting us. We're not Bank of America." But now, that statement is wildly off base. And here's why: People use the Web as a local resource the same as they use it as a global resource. It's all about search and specificity.

In other words, I'll type in "Insurance Rock Hill, SC" one minute and "Globalization" the next. Each time, I will be rewarded with exactly what I am looking for (theoretically). And here's the kicker... Those options that are in my search results, those ARE my options. Think about that... in my mind, those ARE my options.

Think about the days before the Web. Think about the drastic difference there would have been between the processes involved for searching for a local insurance provider versus the process of searching for information on globalization. The first search may have necessitated calling friends and using the yellow pages. The latter would surely have necessitated going to a library. The two searches were completely removed from one another.

But now, everything is different. There is one magic place to get whatever you need... Google (and other search engines). Large or small is not important, simply be specific, and you will find what you want. SO... if people are searching locally and globally in the same context, then here's the deal:

A person will use the Web to experience Community Bank X the same way that they will use the Web to experience Bank of America. Does Community Bank X appear to the searching consumer to be a promising option? Or is it positioned as an inferior option? In competing with the majors, a community bank must eliminate the "better or worse" choice and replace it with an option based on preferences and needs.

The same scenario is true about attorneys and REALTORS and developers and CPAs and general entrepreneurs in their respective industries. If you are experiencing success, then there are a relatively large group of people out there in your industry who know who you are and respect you. It is also true that much of your ability to win business is immeasurably connected to this reputation. This is positioning. But how do you hold up online? Remember... when I go to your website (and I definitely will, if I'm going to do business with you), whatever I see, YOU ARE THAT.

So what are your options?

The complex, rapidly evolving world of Internet Marketing grew up separately from those established brick-and-mortar small business environments in every city and town across the nation. But the role of the Web in our everyday lives is undeniably powerful, more so all the time.

Some options for the service business in investing in marketing through the Web have thus far been:

- Sign-up for a template system with do-it-yourself capability
- General contract web designers, techs, and writers
- Hire a Web design firm
- Allow your IT company to handle your marketing
- Hire a small Advertising or Integrated Marketing Agency
- Hire an Internet marketing “coach” or “guru”

These have been the clearest options put forth by the industry thus far, but many question marks cover even these more familiar options. The questions have to do with:

- Barrier to Entry
- Process
- Cost
- Return on Investment
- Timeline
- Function within business model
- Function within marketing strategy
- Maintenance
- Future need to upgrade

Mostly, I believe you need someone you can talk to about all of this, someone who will provide you with the ability to make a good decision, someone who can implement and manage appropriate actions. You need a “go-to guy” for all things Web.

Overview

OK, no more stalling... What are the nine necessities of successful Web marketing for the service business or professional practice?

1. A Real Commitment
2. A Singular Brand
3. Specific Goals and Objectives
4. Strategic Design and Architecture
5. Open Source Web Development
6. A Content Strategy
7. A Search Engine Strategy
8. Analytics and Strategic Revision
9. Offline Integration

This book attempts to give you an overview of each of these core areas of understanding.

Necessity #1: A Real Commitment

It's gonna take time. It's gonna take money. (Just like the George Harrison song from the 80's.) If you are not willing to give both, then you don't need to bother with investing in the Web.

I see more Web services projects fall into permanent stall mode than I can count. And why? They stall because the client has not dedicated the time to the project. No matter how good the Web consultant, the designer, the developer, if you as the owner (or some assigned responsible individual decision maker) do not commit your full attention to your Web investment, then your whole program will stall and become ineffective. Many Web programs stall during the site build, which means you have run out of gas before you even have a website up online. Many more stall after the site is launched. Many clients don't make the time or the commitment to keep the pedal to the floor and really generate some positive results.

In terms of money, you get what you pay for to a large degree. You must invest in a quality website, and then you must invest in ongoing efforts to generate and track healthy return on your investment.

Though you get what you pay for, be sure you understand what you are paying for. I've heard stories and had interaction with companies who have all different kinds of models for providing Web services. You need to understand questions like:

- Who owns the creatives of the website?
- Who owns the code?
- What specifically is being paid for or purchased?

If you are not willing to learn about your options, if you are not willing to commit time and money, then just don't even get started. That's not an indictment. It's just the frank truth. Just wait until you are ready.

Necessity #2: A Singular Brand

A website is an experience for the user. Inevitably, the site is defined in the mind of the user – a personality of sorts, a cumulative effect with the “sum is greater” principle at work. Your company as a whole has a presence for “the user” – clients and prospects in a particular community. Working to understand your presence, attempting to articulate it, is a powerful experience in self-definition, which directly affects decisions, which determine actions, which create effect. Branding, to me, is all about developing that presence. First it is developed in your mind, developed around a table, then several, then out into the community perception.

A well-defined brand communicates:

- Industry
- Marketplace
- Demographic Served
- Category
- Positioning
- Uniqueness

Please don't misunderstand. When I say a "brand" I don't mean a logo or tagline. I mean the entire perception of your company in the mind of the marketplace. When someone says the name of your company, your prospect should know who you are and how you add value. When I see a Wachovia sign, I think the following:

- Banking
- National (and beyond)
- Personal banking, business banking, loans, etc.
- Claim better customer service than the other big banks

I think these thoughts so naturally that I don't even realize that I do it. I may realize the customer service focus they have had and wonder to myself if it has changed my opinion of the bank. But the other information listed above is subconscious thought – like Wal-Mart having low prices... it's in my DNA.

Most businesses aren't attempting to reach the level of societal infiltration of Wal-Mart, McDonalds, etc. But every business functions with an audience. Most businesses function in a geographical community. You need for prospects to know who you are, but you also need for them to understand if and how you can benefit them.

When I have a sinus infection, I go to my doctor. I take Tylenol when I have a bad headache. I go to Wal-Mart if I need a scattered collection of items, or something random. I go to Wendy's or Backyard Burger or Chick Filet when I eat fast food. I choose Coke when I buy a soda. When I buy whiskey, I may buy George Dickel, Knob Creek, or Glen Livett. When I run out of Crest, I go buy more. When I want to discover a book about management or marketing, I go to the Books a Millions that is a few miles from my office.

Each of these brands is a specific option in my mind. I know when I need them and why. I don't hesitate to buy because I clearly understand the benefit I will receive. These are powerful effective brands.

So, What is your one thing loud and clear?

You can only be something by being one thing. This thought came to me years ago, and it frightened me. I was a creative writer (author of a historical novel and a collection of creative works). I was a musician (written dozens of songs, played dozens of shows, completed nearly 10 professional recordings, released 5 or 6 records). I was a teacher (taught ninth grade English for 4 years). I was an entrepreneur (had started my own business). I was a Web marketing consultant (had studied hard and learned the trade quickly). I was a husband, a son, a brother, etc. And here I was supposed to be one thing in order to be successful at any of them. What was I going to do?

Well, I learned that being one thing is about focus, not about being less. For a service business or professional practice to be an option at all it must exist as something specific in the mind of the prospect. For a prospect to engage your services, the person must, to some degree, know what you do and why it is worth (through benefit or necessity) more than specific amounts of money.

Necessity #3: Specific Goals and Objectives

To create specific goals and objectives for the Web, you need a clear understanding of:

- The role your web presence can play in your business model
- Who you want to come to your website
- What you want them to do while there

Before you invest in the Web, you should have a clear understanding of what you are trying to do. I don't mean in terms of understanding the Web and its possibilities (that comes next). I mean in terms of your own business or practice. What are your overall goals and objectives?

How do you want to grow?

- By more and more clients and customers
- By shifting the demographic of clients and customers
- By focusing on preferred services
- By achieving more free time

The overall goal or strategy informs your micro-strategies. And investing in the Web takes a micro-strategy.

I suggest you start here: How can the Web be used to have the most positive and significant affect on me as possible? I suggest that you consider this question very seriously—seek consulting on it. Once you feel that you have an understanding of the answer, then I suggest moving into creating the strategy, then action plan (then implementation and so on).

How do you bring your strategy to bear on your website?

Remember that the only reason you need a website is because it is going to improve your situation in some way. It's important to understand how the site is supposed to benefit you. This sounds elementary, but you may be surprised at how many Web projects become so focused on the deliverable itself, that the purpose of investing in its creation, or the reason behind the whole project, is lost.

For example, a major goal of your website may be to improve your professional positioning over time. If so, how? Understanding this "how" will guide decisions down to which tools to choose and the tone of your copy.

Let's say you are trying to change your professional positioning to appeal to a younger generation, then video taping yourself at your next professional seminar and putting the video on YouTube may be a great use of your money. If you are, instead, focused on being a textual resource for those who want to read serious materials about your industry, then your money could be better spent on a downloadable whitepaper (with large font).

So, it's not only about you and the website. It's really mostly about the visitor. Who's going to come? What are they hunting? Are they the right people to come? Who is the right person? And finally, what do you want them to do while they are there?

What is a conversion?

A conversion is when a visitor on your site does some action that has been pre-defined as success. For example, in E-commerce the conversion, of course, is the sale (among others). But in service businesses, a conversion is not as easy to define and not as easy to track. Yet, doing both is crucial.

A common conversion is for the visitor to contact the provider. But lead generation is not always, not even most commonly, the goal of a service business's or professional practice's website. Market presence or professional positioning may be the more specific objectives. These may contribute more meaningfully to your preferred manner of growth.

Also, it's difficult to really track a site's contribution to contact leads for a service provider anyway. You can track how many people use some online tool... how many fill out a form, how many email with a certain address. But are you considering how many call? Or how many approached you? Often your website is not the actual tool they use to contact you, but it still plays a role in the fact that they did contact you. This is more difficult to measure than how many times was a form submit button clicked over the past month?

Tracking and Analytics are topics I discuss later in this book, but for now I focus on the idea that you need something specific to attempt to track. You need to know what you are trying to encourage people to do... specifically.

Necessity #4: Strategic Design and Architecture

Design is about achievements in the visual. Strategic Design is about creating marketing goals that define what these achievements should be and why. You will need strategic design and architecture for your website (the next step after your strategy). Probably, the following goals will be the focus of your strategic design and architecture:

- Communicate to the visitor immediately that he or she is in the right place
- Communicate what he or she can do next

You're in the right place

To communicate to a visitor that he or she is in the right place, it must be true. This means we need the right person to come to the site in the first place. Then we need to speak directly to that person. Well, one great thing about the Web is that by building a site around a specific message you naturally recruit traffic that is seeking out that message (it's the nature of Search).

Your site must also make the prospect feel immediately comfortable so that your level of professionalism is a non-issue. As a consumer, I am not in the right place if I feel uncomfortable. I'm not in the right store to buy food if I feel the environment would be a gross place to eat.

So, assuming that the visitor is the right person to be there, then to “Communicate to the visitor immediately that he or she is in the right place” means to communicate your:

- Industry
- Category
- Positioning
- Services
- Marketplace

In a nutshell... your brand.

Strategic Web Design is, to a large degree, about communicating these things all on the home page. Now, that doesn't mean that a home page needs to be “texty” – every element of the presentation (including images, layout, text, and multimedia) must work together to present a whole message that is interpretable

within 5 seconds, and it must communicate to the right person that he or she is, in fact, in the right place.

What to do next...

Communicating “what they can do next” is about allowing the visitor to your website to take an action that he will be rewarded for. This makes the experience of your site an effective one. For example, if someone is there simply to find your contact information, then he should understand immediately how to do that, how to use your site as a tool to accomplish his objective. Then, when he clicks on the “contact” button or link, he should be rewarded with the information he seeks. This may seem elementary, but consider other ways that your website could present an option for action and then reward the actor; it can get pretty elaborate.

To stay basic, you want to present:

- A clear organization of content
- An intuitive user interface

In other words, the visitor needs to know immediately what options of action are available and understand what will result from that action.

Your homepage is key

Your Homepage is your prime piece of marketing real estate. It communicates to the visitor if he or she is in the right place, and it provides the visitor with clear options of action based on what content is there on the site.

Thus to create an effective home page, you will need to go through a process of strategic exploration in your overall business, as well as generate ideas about what all will be on your website and why.

Necessity #5: Web Development

To achieve successful Web Development, you need:

- An understanding of the nature and significance of different major directions that lie before you
- A strategy for development (tool selection, customization plan, team orientation, etc.)
- A skilled developer or, more likely, team of developers

When I refer to “Web Development”, I am referring to the process of transforming a strategic design into a functioning system or tool to be hosted online as your “website”. A designer will show you what your website will look like, a strategy consultant can explain why it looks like it does, but the developers make it a functioning system to be hosted on the Internet.

Often in the world of Web service providers, those who position themselves as “Web Designers” tend to focus their energy and talents into the creation of a design, then often use semi-professional software to “slice images” and “generate the code”.

Inversely, those who position themselves as “Web Developers” may focus passion and innovation on code creation and systems/tools integration. Yet, they may be restricted to the most basic conventions in terms of the aesthetic impression and the organization of visual information (in other words... the strategic design and architecture).

Success in the Web for a business or professional hoping to capitalize on its power comes in the coordinated strategic effort of a group of skills – design and development are two of these.

A New Day in Development

Web development technologies are changing all of the time. But if you look back over the short history of the endeavor, you will likely notice major shifts that stand out from the slower evolution of constancy. This seems to be the case with any evolution – steady change with intermittent bursts of movement.

A recent shift that for those in the industry has been a radical and comprehensive one has been driven by two movements or ideas:

- Web 2.0
- Open Source

Web 2.0

The term “Web 2.0” is often used to describe the shift in perspective of the usability of a website. You may have heard or read YouTube.com described as “Web 2.0”. The core of this concept is usability. As the YouTube visitor, you control the content on the screen. You can search through it, arrange it by category - it is an interactive, user controlled experience, to a degree. Often, you can even add content to the site and see it displayed there on the screen.

The term Web 2.0 is also used to describe a certain visual aesthetic or design style. This seems inevitable because form often follows function, and styles evolve as forms change.

It is the work of talented designers to bridge the visual gap of the hyper-aesthetic and the conventions of the world of the client community. For example, you can imagine how the same design elements may not be appropriate for a lawyer site and a Hip-Hop artist site and a Web developer community site and a book club

site, etc. The conventions of each community will weigh in on appropriateness and effectiveness in terms of design.

But keep in mind the usability aspect of Web 2.0. The members of your prospect community are increasingly experiencing the world of Web 2.0 in their current Web experience. Do they use Search? Do they use the search tools on the websites they visit? Do they download? Do they upload? Do they rearrange data on their screens by category?

The nature of what the Web is, of what a “website” is, is changing in the general perception of your community. If you are part of that community, then how does the experience you provide, the experience that is you in the perspective of the visitor, how does it jibe with what is subconsciously and consciously felt by that visitor to be the standards of professionalism? That a website works a certain way is defined by the websites they experience. Is yours different from the websites they use frequently? Is yours lesser somehow?

Service businesses and professionals are tapping into the world of Web 2.0 because the Web 2.0 experience is becoming the standard.

Open Source

Open Source is a movement (predominantly online) towards the free access to knowledge and tools – a community of contributors adding to the development of a tool or system, free for any interested party to access, alter, and contribute to. The most prevalent community of open source practitioners is in the world of software and web application development.

Think about Microsoft Office for a minute. Think of what a wonderful and powerful software application it is and how many businesses have it integrated into their models. Think of QuickBooks and the amount of good it has done the small

business. These are wonderful applications. But imagine if the general community of developers and entrepreneurs around the world was given access to the core code of these applications, and each encouraged to innovate, to download them for free and change them in whatever creative way they can, to introduce plug-ins and add-ons to solve real problems. This is open source. Obviously one cannot do these things with MS Office and QuickBooks. But one can do them with Wordpress and Drupal and myriad others.

There is much argument and speculation on the world of open source and it's role in the marketplace. But for the service professional and small business, there is a world of opportunity to gain access to incredibly powerful and customizable tools for little to no cost. Your costs of course come with customization and implementation. And though I am a big proponent of open source, one must measure costs and benefit in each situation.

Necessity #6: Web IT (Hosting, Email, etc.)

For businesses, professionals, and organizations existing in a local marketplace, Web IT is quite a challenge. The first question you may have is, What is Web IT? So, allow me to describe a services landscape.

Many of my clients will say, "I don't know the first thing about computers and the Web and such." These clients tend to see their physical computer and associate everything they experience on that machine as being one area of service, products, etc.

But consider that your machine is a piece of hardware, a computer, that you probably bought at a big box retailer or in a business package from Dell or the like. Then consider that your software is programming that is loaded on your machine by a software company like Microsoft or Apple. The software is

proprietary, and the core source code is inaccessible by anyone other than the creator. So, already, when you turn your machine on and you try to do something, you are dealing with at least two different providers - two whole different industries - Microsoft is not competing with Best Buy.

Then comes the Internet. The Internet is a series of connected servers all around the world. This means that if you can get access to that connection, then you can communicate with people and experience information stored all over the world. So, who provides this connection? Who provides you Internet access? Most likely, your ISP (Internet Service Provider) is either a phone company or a cable company. Where I live, you're probably using BellSouth or Comporium for your Internet access. When you email, for example, you are using software(1) on your computer(2), and that software is connecting to the Internet(3).

So, in terms of providers, if your computer will not turn on, Microsoft cannot help you. Take it back to Best Buy. If your Outlook won't open or is locking up, call Microsoft. If you can't connect to the Internet call your local ISP. Right?

Well, as service industries evolve, the big players innovate with service options and local providers emerge to serve businesses and organizations. So, if your Outlook won't open, it is probably not the best action to take to call Microsoft. You either take it back to Best Buy, and they have an IT person on hand who has specified support at Microsoft. Or, as most businesses and organizations now do, you have "IT". Give it to IT, right? Who is IT? Well, IT is usually staff or a local service provider.

IT service providers make up the service industry that's developed around computers. An IT service professional in a local marketplace essentially plays the role of helping a company deal with all of the computer related issues. They

network your computers, recommend and install software and hardware... and so forth.

In terms of a mid-sized to large business, you have IT staff. They “fix your computers”. They undoubtedly are good at their jobs. But consider this: Are they your marketing team also? Probably not. And this brings us to the Web.

Your website is a communications medium and one of your most dominant methods of market presence, branding, and positioning - OK, so put the marketing team on it, right?

Well, your website is a creation of interactive code (or a piece of software, essentially) - OK, then let's purchase it from a retailer and have IT deal with it, right?

Well, your website is supported (in display and in function) by hardware and software and ISPs - OK, then upgrade our local cable or phone service and, again, have IT deal with it, right?

Well, your website is also, if you are using your Web domain for your email addresses (for example, you@yourbusiness.com), your email communications hub - again, put IT on it.

You can see how big of a role that IT plays in your website. But what is the MAIN purpose of having a website? Answer: marketing and communications. Thus, IT plays little part in the main function of your website. As a matter of fact, marketing and IT are at the far ends of the professional spectrum, and the Web has forced them together. You can see the confusions here.

You may say, “I want one company that can handle all of this for me, to simplify this whole computer related thing for me.” That’s a valid motivation, and there are providers in every marketplace who offer this solution. They are IT companies who added the Web element as the Web became accessible. They have incorporated marketing and design and programming into their IT models and come out the other end a new breed of provider. Such companies are good options for many people.

Increasingly, though, the specialist appears in the marketplace. Like all industries before it, “Technology” is defined increasingly sharply into different areas of expertise and service. Web Design and Web Marketing have become increasingly cousins to Marketing as much as to Technology. Web Development, though all the rage in the online world, is seen by most business folk as a subset of Web Design. Computer and software purchasing, networking, maintaining, and ISP connections and such are clearly defined as the job of your “IT guys”.

Web Hosting is the step-child of this awkward marriage. Hosting is the IT need of your Web Marketing efforts. Hosting is where your IT and your Marketing must be seamlessly coordinated. Some companies and organizations choose to host their own Website on their own internal servers. That’s possible because remember that from a technical point of view a website is nothing but code, images, and databases. It displays itself into what you see when you use it. If not on your own servers, then it has to be somewhere. Thus, you will have a relationship with a Hosting Provider.

What is a Hosting Provider?

Hosting is quite a challenge for businesses. Many businesses expect the person who built their website to host it. But, unless you used an all-in-one IT company that offers web services, then this is NOT a good idea. You do not want your “web designer” a design/creative individual hosting your website. Think about it.

They don't have any servers. So, where is your site. It's on some other company's servers that you don't know about. The web designer is just reselling their services.

Your best options are:

- Partner with a local service provider (one that actually has control of the servers, not a reseller of someone else's hosting)
- Use one of the "big boys" (yahoo, godaddy, 1and1, etc.)

The point is that hosting is like phone service or Internet service. In fact, these services are not even really seen as services at all. They are commodities of access, so to speak.

Imagine that young sales person came into your office trying to sell you phone service from some other company that you have never heard of. Then you find out that the sales person is a non-licensed reseller of someone else's services. Does this even seem worth your time?

This strange example is akin to small shop web designers and web developers and web consultants offering to host your website. They are just reselling another provider's services, and all they had to do was fill out an online form to be able to do so. They have no control over your hosting, and if there was a problem, they'd have to call a 1800 number or use online help, just like you would. They cannot guarantee you anything about the service. They only know what they've read, or been told, or experienced as a customer of that provider.

In terms of using a local service provider (actual provider) versus using one of the big boys, consider these advantages and disadvantages.

Potential advantages of using a local service provider:

- Service

Not always, but many times a locally owned company can offer you better service. In terms of hosting, you really only need service when there is a problem.

- Networking

It is always a good idea for local service providers to do business with other local service providers.

The potential disadvantages of using a local service provider:

- Cost

Usually you pay more to use a local company. If the service is better, though, then may be well worth the difference.

- Access

Local web hosting service providers will often also offer other Web related or IT services. This is fine of course, and for many this is great. In almost every industry there are those who benefit greatly from the one-stop shop model, that concept will never go out of style. The only concern with such a model is the nature of propriety and access. Some models perpetuate a relationship where access is controlled by the service provider. These are not malicious practices as much as just the way of doing things.

This last point, access, is worthy of more explanation. Access is becoming the key concept of the world. Allow me to articulate a specific example in the context of Web hosting. Many web services companies that also provide hosting do not provide FTP access. You may say who cares. I don't even know what that means. But what it means is that you have eliminated your ability to do business with many providers out there offering innovative services. FTP is access to upload to your site (enabling new pages and changes to be made and to go live).

You may not want anyone else in your website besides your one-stop-shop. And that's fine for many people. But consider this: managing your website is like managing your personal wealth. Some people feel comfortable with one provider solely charged with the management of their financial portfolio. Other people use one provider for this, another for this, do some of it themselves, etc.

Let's compare the hosting industry to the banking industry. Using a community bank is good business for a local service provider but not the best idea for a relocating person. Some people still bank at one bank. Most people, though, bank at many banks.

Personally, if I wanted to take out a loan at one bank, I wouldn't want them to have to go to my other bank and ask permission to do business with me. And if my other bank said, "Sorry, you have to take your loan from us." I would laugh at them and move my money somewhere else.

Necessity #7: Search Strategy

Consider search and site experience. When I say search, I mean your site's relationship with search engines. When I say site experience, I mean your site's relationship with its users. The two are interlocked and synergistic.

Your site's relationship with search includes your site's natural ranking, presence, placement, etc. and that of a paid nature (usually pay-per-click). Regardless of what it's called, it's about relevant access. When your site shows up in search results, that's when your site is present and accessible.

Consider how powerful that reality is in affecting your business. As we've all learned long ago, perception is reality. If I type "insurance providers in Rock Hill, SC" into a search engine, then what comes back are my options. If you are an insurance provider in Rock Hill, SC, then you better be there or you are not an option. If you are a known brand to the searcher off-line, yet still absent in these results, then you are noticeably absent. That absence has negative consequence in the perception of consumers as they come to understand your marketplace.

Where we are now: the local provider must be present in search results for relevant searches. But how? Well, I could write a book about search, and many people have written better books than I could write on the subject. These books range from how search affects our culture and may be the birth of Artificial Intelligence, to how to move your site up the natural rankings, to how to create and manage

Google AdSense accounts, and more. So, I'll approach the subject here in the context of the local service business or professional and hope I add something of interest to the greater body of work

Search engines work like this:

- The search bot finds your site
- The search bot indexes your pages - each individual page*
- Someone types in a query
- The search engine references it's database and returns relevant results

*(There are many factors that determine whether a particular page is indexed or not.)

The short of it is that you must be indexed appropriately so that appropriate queries will yield you as a result.

So, how do you get indexed appropriately? Search bots index your website based on the textual content of your site and the connectivity of that site to other sites. In other words, each page is read and interpreted for its textual meaning, and every link to and away from it is analyzed. From the data the bot collects in this process, it interprets what the page is about and how it should be indexed.

Furthermore, search bots return in a frequency directly related to the frequency of your site's publishing activities. In other words, add content frequently, and your site will be indexed more frequently. The reason for this is that the bot wants to read any page it can and individually index it based on its content. The bot is insatiable - an alien librarian of sorts.

So, you need to:

- Frequently publish quality content
- Frequently link to and encourage links from other relevant websites

These are the basics of your search marketing activities. Of course, these assume that you have a well made website. Not only well developed with clean, operational code, but also effective organization and presentation of the growing content.

In addition to your relationship with the bots and engines, you can pay for

immediate presence in search engines for particular search terms with pay-per-

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click programs. For example, you can decide that you want to be present for anyone who searches for insurance in Rock Hill, SC. You do this by agreeing to pay so much per click on your listing. It's a bidding war so if you bid high enough you will be there. These listings are referred to as sponsored listings and designated as so in the results.

Often I will help service providers run an aggressive pay-per-click campaign during the time between when the site is first launched to when they begin to show strong presence in natural rankings. Some continue with pay-per-click, some don't.

Your goal should be to be present and accessible when your presence is relevant to the direct motivations of the seeker. Or as one would say, being in the right place at the right time.

Necessity #8: Analytics

You can act, and there will be reaction. That's never in question. Thus, doing something always affects change, but how much change and in what way altered and to what effect? These are the questions.

The only way to know the degree to which your actions are effective is to define or articulate "effective" and interpret results in light of this articulation.

In other words, you must have a goal to know whether you are making progress. Moreover, you need defined objectives to track and manage actions and investments.

In terms of Web Marketing, your basic goal and objectives determine how you use the Web, what you will build and manage, and more. Your website, for

example, will be built around these objectives. The site will be built to facilitate actions that work toward the attaining of your objectives.

When looking at your web analytics, you basically looking at two things: traffic and behavior. In terms of traffic, you want to increase the amount of good traffic (the right people in the right place). In terms of the behavior, you want to function as a tool that enables the visitor to pursue you further.

More specifically with conversion tracking, there are two major considerations, the number of opportunities for conversion (traffic) and the number of successful conversions (behavior).

Necessity #9: Offline Integration

A website does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a community of minds and media, a colloquial culture. It reflects your core values and presents your ideal brand, communicates your value and details your services, provides a due diligence resource for referrals and others, professionally positions you in the perception of the community, and more.

So, keep in mind what business is: Business is managing a system of activity that perpetually provides win/win situations. And keep in mind with whom these situations exist: each with an individual, each individual part of a community of people. And these people aren't sitting around and looking at your website all day. These people are concerned about their own businesses and families and habits and desires. And on top of that they are inundated with information. And on top of that, much of that information is blast marketing media. The volume of our environment is cranking loud with sometimes predatory marketing and with constant attention-getting-efforts being made by repetitive messages. It's like

being surrounded by 5 year olds who want to tell an adult about the clown that just left the room.

So, these surrounded, taxed adults are your audience, they are us, everybody. So, how do you form a relationship with them? Well, surely not by being another voice in the crazy clown room. Imagine a man enters that room of children and walks to you and says: "We provide quality service for people in need of widgets and widget services." Wow, what a great television commercial that would be. (Hey, anybody interested in producing it, give me a call.)

So, don't approach the adult while standing in the room of noise. Just sit outside, down the street, way down the street, in an office, upstairs, in some building, downtown. But... How will the adult know where you are? How will the adult know of what I do? How will I get new customers? Well, leave the office frequently. Be available. Be visible. Know a lot of people. Be yourself. Be friendly. Be dedicated to serving people well. Be very good at what you do. And (often neglected), be singular and clear in communicating how you provide value.

So, does this all mean that networking is the only other marketing aside from the Web. No. It doesn't. What I am trying to communicate is this idea: The best marketing is for everyone to just know you. To know who you are and what you do. To know simply how you add value, so they just come to you when they need what you have.

All of your media should be united in communicating you clearly. Your marketing presence should reflect your market presence, for it will become it. Your marketing message should match your value proposition. Achieve fluidity.

About the Author

Jason Broadwater is founder and president of RevenFlo. He is the author of six books, three of which are on Web marketing (the other two are creative works). Jason speaks to audiences regularly on and currently teaches courses on Web marketing. Jason holds an MFA in Writing from Goddard College, a BA in Literature and Writing from the University of North Carolina Asheville, and a graduate teaching certificate from Western Carolina. Jason is member to both business and community advisory boards. Jason's passion is to create, whether in his more personal endeavors of music and literature or in his more public ones in business, teaching, and Web marketing.

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Thanks,

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