



Marketing casebook: Start spreading the news

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The internet can turn any small business with a laptop into a media network, syndicating your content to the world. Jonathan Crossfield looks at new ways of getting your marketing message across.

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Introduction

The internet has revolutionised the way we do business today – no question. But the cornerstone of internet marketing is website design; creating a front for your business that cements the impression of an effective and professional outfit.

With the internet operating even while you sleep, it is crucial to consider how your website automates your business and reaches the widest market possible. The presentation, architecture and content of this website are just as important as the fixtures, fittings and signage of a traditional high street store.

With the right design, you may not even need to field enquiries to generate a sale – your website can solicit and close the entire sale before processing the funds straight into the bank. And none of this costs as much as you may think!

Whatever the goals for your website - whether you're looking for an online brochure to drive enquiries or a sales powerhouse to make you money while you lie on the beach - understanding how to achieve the best web design solution is vital.

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Setting your goals

I have a reputation for being an opinionated bloke – it is one of the reasons I love to write. So when I started a personal blog, it became an outlet to discuss my ideas, views, observations and professional opinions on all aspects of my writing career.

Because I blog, my opinions now appear on websites across the world. While I sleep, websites I've never heard of and people I've never met are taking the RSS feed from my blog and placing my questionable wit and wisdom on a whole range of websites, online forums, blogs and emails. Each of these sources feeds traffic and links back to me, further increasing the success of my own site as well as my appearance in Google. This in turn allows even more people to discover my content and syndicate it to their websites, social groups and newsletters, snowballing until eventually my website will require little effort from me to produce hundreds, if not thousands, of hits on a daily basis.

Bloggging is one of the most powerful methods of taking your content and freeing it from the confines of your website, sending out lines to hook readers and lead them back to you. But if a blog seems too daunting or complicated, you can still get your message off your website and out to a receptive readership with email marketing.

Permission email marketing – where customers have allowed or requested subscription – now makes up 27% of a users inbox. This illustrates a spectacular difference between online behaviour and our real world experiences. Many people complain viciously about the junk mail in the letter box, but the same people are happy to receive marketing in electronic form.

How easy is it for small businesses to use these methods and what should you consider when planning your online marketing strategy?

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Do you need...

- to increase repeat business and maintain long term client relationships? **Beginner**
- to spread brand awareness and your business message beyond your website to attract more people? **Expert**

Jargon translator

Blog - originally a 'web log' or online journal, blogs are simple website applications that allow the contributor to easily add regular posts and invite reader comments.

RSS feed - Really Simple Syndication uses xml code to allow readers to subscribe to your content. With this feed, they can receive your fresh content directly in a 'feed reader' without returning to your website every day to check for updates. Alternatively, RSS feeds can be used to automatically add content to another website, updating whenever you do. An RSS feed is traditionally signposted with an internationally recognised orange icon.



Content management system - Sometimes called a CMS, a content management system is an internet application that allows you to edit and manipulate your website online

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Basic - Email marketing

Is it for you?

- You have an established customer base
- You want to increase repeat customers
- You want to promote new products or services easily
- You want to present your brand as informative and trustworthy

Benefits

- Additional traffic to your website
- Tailored email templates to match branding, look and feel
- Ability to track responses and analyse the success of each email
- Mailroom email marketing packages start from \$19 per month

The challenge

Research shows that for most businesses, 80% of their sales come from 20% of their customer base - the business from a small number of established customers usually far outweighs that from new customers. Yet most businesses spend 80% of their effort and marketing budget chasing new customers who will most likely only produce 20% of their business income.

Why are companies only spending 20% of their time talking to their best customers and 80% talking to their worst?

Netregistry faced this question of customer retention and building repeat business. Giles

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Donovan, Sales and Marketing Director for Netregistry, explained. "Although we started out as simply dealing in domain names and web hosting, we soon expanded to offer a lot of other services as well. But many of our customers would come to our website to buy one thing and never be aware of the other ways we could help them."

Although many businesses have used email marketing for years, recent surveys reveal newsletters are often produced quickly without a clear focus to engage the customer or the means to track the success.

The solution

To evaluate the success or failure of Netregistry's newsletter campaign, Giles knew the software would need to provide detailed information on how many people opened the email and whether they clicked on the links it contained.

Netregistry chose an email marketing system with an easy interface and the ability to produce detailed statistics, allowing Giles to run a monthly email newsletter and track the response. With an email template designed to replicate the look and feel of the main website, the newsletters would always appear consistent with the brand.

"Over the years, we've experimented with different formats and styles and I think we've settled on the newsletter strategy that achieves the best results." This includes identifying the specific time and date when a newsletter is most likely to be received and opened.

Many businesses use their email marketing merely to publicise special offers or promote a new product. Netregistry decided to adopt a softer marketing method. "People are less likely to open an email that is clearly just a sales pitch or marketing brochure. But more people will open it if they feel the email contains information and advice they can use." By sending articles and tutorials instead of monthly promotions, the Netregistry newsletter has dramatically increased

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responses. The informative articles create more interest in the readers who may then follow the discreet links to investigate the related products. The feedback from customers has been very positive with many reporting that they are now opening and reading the newsletters instead of ignoring them.

“They love it. They see it as Netregistry providing an extra service. Not only that, but they see Netregistry as a reliable source of information. If they trust our knowledge, they are more likely to come back to us when they need advice or help in the future.”

Conclusion

“Email marketing is about more than just a quick sale. It’s about keeping that relationship with the customer, providing them with information and advice they can use.” Giles sees email marketing as a major component of his marketing strategy. Instead of waiting for customers to return to the website, the newsletter reminds them that Netregistry is ready and waiting to serve their needs.

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Expert - Blogging

Is it for you?

- You want to attract more traffic
- You want to build a large number of links
- You want to develop your brand image
- You want to provide additional information resources

Benefits

- Easy interface allows for regular fresh content
- Syndication features can spread your message to other websites
- Customisable templates to match your brand
- Comments allow you to receive valuable feedback and interact with readers

The challenge

The United States has already seen incredible growth in small business blogging. With 5% of small businesses now running active blogs according to The New York Times, that's approximately 1.25 million business blogs engaging an online readership that shows no sign of slowing down.

Yet in Australia, business blogging is still very much in its infancy. Locally, blogging is primarily the reserve of marketing and online media companies, the natural early adopters in any innovative techniques for spreading the message.

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“I think the Australian market is quite cynical about new technology. New stuff is really hard to sell here,” explains Tereza Alexandratos. Tereza is the Digital Director for Bellamy Hayden, a communications strategies business based in Sydney that has hosted a blog for over a year at www.bellamyhayden.com.au/blog. The reluctance by Australian business to embrace blogging means those jumping into the blogosphere now are gaining a significant advantage over their competition.

But why are blogs advantageous? Tereza knows why it works for Bellamy Hayden. “We wanted a forum where our clever people could air their thinking and show the industry our level of knowledge and opinions about media strategies. What better way to do that but via our website, which is usually the first thing you look at when you’re researching a company.”

The solution

With over seventy million blogs in the world, only fifteen million are considered ‘active’, many of these personal or non-commercial sites. This is because the vast majority of blogs are abandoned within the first two months, often after only a couple of posts. Most blogs need at least six months of regular content and activity to build the necessary traction. To avoid your business blog joining the online graveyard, careful planning is required.

“I wouldn’t say it’s got to be updated once a week or every fortnight, because I don’t think there’s any point in putting stuff online just for the sake of it. But once every six months is not enough,” Tereza explains. “The blog needs to be regular enough to let people know there’s a point in coming back for new content. Once a week or once a fortnight would be ideal but only if you have something to say.”

Poor content can kill a blog just as fast as no content, so a clear topic or niche capable of generating plenty of ideas is vital. “Obviously the blog has to be related to what we do – communications strategy. Sometimes it’s pointing out another good website and giving an

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opinion on that. Sometimes it's talking about a project we may have worked on here at Bellamy Hayden. It could be an interesting piece of research we think is appropriate and relevant to comment on." The important factor was ensuring the blog would have a steady flow of ideas to keep adding fresh content.

It can also be very difficult to find the time. Opinions don't research themselves and a successful blogger needs to devote time to crafting an insightful and informative post. "I know I've got something in my mind that I need to blog. I've been meaning to write it for about two weeks now. It's on my to-do list but it gets pushed down my priorities because I've got to stop and think about it and take the time to pull it together."

This is why Tereza recommends booking in time into your weekly schedule to devote to the blog. This can be time for writing, or it can involve research and catching up with the other newsletters, industry magazines and related blogs in search of inspiration. "I subscribe to a million industry papers and I get them in my inbox all the time. Dedicating time to read them usually leads to inspiration to blog about something."

The key to a readable blog is a conversational style that avoids corporate language or copy that has had to go through three levels of management for approval. It should read like a friendly chat between friends, creating an easier understanding as well as a human face for your business. The downside to this can be the company reputation if this tone is abused.

Tereza agrees. "If you're giving the power of authorship to people in your company, remember that they are representing your name. Whatever they say does reflect on your company's reputation." So choosing the right person to run your blog can be incredibly important in avoiding possible indiscretions.

But what of the benefits? "We've had a few clients who have called us directly because of the blog. A client in Thailand was looking for a communications agency and came across our

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website, read our blog, thought these guys actually know what they're doing and gave us a call. So it does help us with new business. It also gives our current clients something to read and showcase our work that may be broader than what we're doing for them."

Conclusion

Tereza sees business blogging as a very low-risk, high return marketing strategy. "It's such a low cost strategy. Once set up, the only cost is time."

It is inevitable that business blogging will become as much a part of the online commercial landscape here as elsewhere in the world, but those who adopt blogging strategies early will be best placed to reap the rewards.

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Read all about it!

Online users and search engines are hungry for fresh content, so why not give them plenty to chew on? If you are looking for ways to step away from your competition while displaying the experience and knowledge your business can offer, newsletters and blogs can allow you to create and control your own online presence.

Netregistry is helping small businesses leap into the world of blogging quickly and easily. Within the Netregistry customer admin panel – the console - there is a simple and free one-click installation of Wordpress – the most popular blogging application available. Within minutes, you can have a fully functioning blog installed on your hosting account (Business Hosting or above is required).

Whatever your goals – increased traffic, customer retention, brand image or editorialising – blogging and email marketing allow you to spread your business message. Becoming a trusted source of information and advice, coupled with a friendly and relaxed style, can give even the smallest business a powerful readership that spreads your brand virally throughout the internet.

Call **1300 638 734** or visit **netregistry.com.au**

