LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS' GUIDE TO
ONLINE MARKETING

LEARN HOW TO USE THE INTERNET TO GET MORE CUSTOMERS

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Learn How to use the Internet to get more customers

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Introduction

Introduction

You may have a local business that's doing really well, or you're just starting out. Regardless of your situation, you cannot ignore the Internet. You might think that you have a purely local business that caters to a purely local clientele. However, considering how powerful and far-reaching the Internet is, it's simply not enough for your local business to rely on your local area's goodwill. Local businesses have to build an online brand so they don't get left behind by the **Mobile Local Business Revolution**.

According to recent hardware device sales statistics, an increasing percentage of American consumers are now constantly connected to the Internet and they're connected primarily through mobile devices like smartphones and tablets. Gone are the days where somebody has to whip out their laptop just so they can connect to the Internet. Going to your office or home so you can turn on your desktop computer so you can get on the Web is a distant memory. In fact, given the way most mobile apps are set up, most consumers are constantly connected to the Internet and get feedback or notifications through their apps.

It's crucial for local businesses to develop a solid online brand. Simply having a website is not going to cut it. You need to position your website's brand online so you can get more traffic to your website. This is not just a question of web traffic hits going to a page. This traffic can actually be converted into warm bodies showing up at your business' premises.

This book gives you an overview of how online marketing can help deliver real live customers through your business' physical doors.

Chapter 1

The Mobile Revolution threatens your business' local goodwill

You may have a business that's been passed on from one generation to the next. Maybe your business is so well-recognized and respected in your local area that many of your customers view your business as some sort of local institution. That is all well and good, but the problem is that is not good enough. Thanks to the Mobile Revolution, completely new businesses can get a leg up on well-entrenched local brand names. You may have a lot of local goodwill going for your business but you probably cannot rely on that local goodwill. Eventually, that goodwill will run out. You need to ensure that your business' local goodwill or projected future goodwill is not only maintained but also expanded through a solid presence on the Internet.

What drives this urgent local marketing reality? Over 50% of consumers use mobile devices to connect to the Internet to make local purchasing decisions. It's easy to see why no amount of existing local goodwill can guard against online based competition. You brand needs to be a big presence in the places where your potential customers are looking for information in sizing up your business. Simply relying on your local credibility and brand power is not enough.

Understand the significance of mobile devices' 24/7 connection to the Internet

Since mobile devices enable consumers to stay connected to the Internet on a 24/7 basis, there's a constant interplay between your online brand and your offline presence. You might not be aware of this but it exists. Unfortunately, if you choose to ignore this or overlook it, whether consciously or unconsciously, you are at a tremendous competitive disadvantage. Keep in mind that this is a tremendous opportunity if you want to play it as such. Get this wrong and your local customers will head elsewhere. It doesn't matter how long your local business has been around for, it doesn't matter if your local business is viewed as a local institution. If you continue to neglect the power of mobile branding and your overall online brand, it's only a matter of time until your local goodwill is completely eroded by your more digital-savvy competitors.

Stop viewing your website as an online business card

You might have reached this stage of the book thinking, "Well, I already have a website. What more do I need"? Let me be clear: simply having a website doesn't necessarily mean you have an online brand. In fact, a lot of offline businesses continue to function, in practical terms, completely offline because they view their online presence a certain way. Most local businesses who feel that they're not getting the kind of results that they deserve from the Internet are getting such dismal results precisely because they treat their websites as online business cards.

Make no mistake about it, the "online business card" approach is too little too late. You're simply just putting up a static page on the Internet telling people where your business is. You have to go through certain steps to ensure that whatever online presence you put up will generate the kind of results that will push your business forward. Otherwise, you're just simply wasting your time.

Month after month, you're paying your hosting fees; year after year, you're renewing your domain registration; all these costs translate to little to no tangible effect as far as your bottom line is concerned. The first step to fixing this problem is to simply stop viewing your website as an online business card. There is a better way.

Your online presence must be the home of your online brand

The secret to successfully leveraging your online presence is to turn the discussion from just merely being on the Internet and being found online, to creating an online brand. You're already part of the way there by having a website. You're definitely in a better shape than your competitors who have completely ignored the Internet. Still, this offers cold comfort since your website is essentially an online business card. It would still be very easy for a very tech savvy competitor working with the right online marketing agency to completely leave you behind and suck up all the traffic that your website could have been getting. It all boils down to focusing on creating an online brand.

Once you've changed your mindset towards this paradigm, the next step is to create a tight fit between your online and offline brands. If people can't tell that you actually have a website because your online and offline brand personas are clashing, or are diametrically opposed, then you're

making things unnecessarily difficult for yourself.

Whatever online presence you have must seamlessly integrate with your existing offline brand. Remember, the name of the game is to let your online presence enhance your offline existence so you can recruit more local customers.

Chapter 3

Take your online presence to the next level

Once you have put up a website and you have decided to make sure that whatever branding signals you're sending out from your website is consistent with your offline brand, you are definitely operating from a position of strength. Still, **this is not enough**. You need to **take proactive steps** to take your online presence to the next level. How do you do this?

Well, it all depends on the kind of business you have. If your business involves appointments, menus, inventory pick up, or some sort of product order process, then your online presence should have functionality that would fit these operational factors. For example, if you own a dentistry practice, or have a legal practice, you might want to build functionality into your website that would allow you to set appointments online. This information is not just stored online but is actually sent to your office's appointment setting and phone call reminder system.

Similarly, if you run a local store that has a wide inventory, you can put your catalog online and allow your local customers to order online but pick up locally. In this particular scenario, the actual sales transaction happened online. All your local customers need to do is to go to your location, and pick up whatever it is that they bought on your website.

In a third scenario, you can set up an online catalog not for ordering and payment processing. Instead, you can use this system to enable your customers to make reservations for a particular set of products. They would then go to your physical location to pick up the products that they reserved.

Turbo-charge your sales through "online only" incentives

I'm sorry to report this but by simply offering an online window to your business, you might not have enough of a competitive advantage to actually spur your local customers to take action. There has to be something unique and special with the online experience that you offer.

You have to take an extra step.

One way to do this is to **incentivize customers who interact with your brand** on the Internet to order online through special offers that can only be found through your website. This can take the form of a discount coupon that they can print out. This can also take the form of a special digital code that they just need to write down on a piece of paper and say to a cashier when they're checking out at your store's physical location.

However way you may want to engineer this interaction, it's really important to make sure that you **give people a reason to go online to order from you or interact with your brand**, and they have to walk away with some sort of tangible reward.

The good news is that this reward can be *purely digital*. You'd be surprised as to how many people would gladly promote your business to their Facebook friends just because you gave them some sort of digital book, graphics badge, or award. In fact, for some customers, simply mentioning their name on your website and/or your social media accounts is enough for them to share your materials.

Whatever incentives you choose, make sure you base it in your actual interactions with your customer base. Make educated guesses regarding the incentives they want. You can even ask them directly. Whatever you do, some advance research based on actual information you get from your local customers increases the likelihood that people would respond more favorably to your online brand.

Chapter 4

Social media: Your online marketing secret weapon

If you're reading this book, and you're concerned about building an effective online presence, you probably have heard of Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Google Plus, and other social media platform. You probably have even heard of how powerful these platforms could be in marketing offline businesses. Well, the good news is these reports are completely true. There's a reason why businesses ranging in size from your typical local mom and pop operation to corporate behemoths like General Motors are spending, in total, **billions of dollars** every single year on social media marketing. The reason is: it works!

Why social media is so powerful?

Imagine if you had a tool that enables you to talk to the friends of your friends of your friends. In fact, this tool is so powerful that you would be able to reach friends of those friends of those friends to a potentially unlimited degree. Do you see how this works out? Do you see the potentially exponential reach of this tool?

People have different webs of influence, and these webs branch out as you go down many different levels. It's very easy to see that this can easily involve a huge amount of people in a short amount of time. It is no surprise that very funny cat videos can easily "go viral" overnight simply because people just can't help but share these videos and pictures with their co-workers, relatives, and friends. Those people in turn share this material with people they know who then share the information. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that even if you have a relatively small amount of followers or friends on Facebook, you can still reach millions of people just by virtue of the fact that you shared highly contagious content with the right people.

This fact is not lost on local businesses. They see the potential in turning their existing base of local customers into a potential online marketer army. The good news is that, regardless of how big your existing local customer base may be, your existing local customer base could be enough to give you a toe hold on Facebook that you can then leverage to expand your local user base. In short, you would be using Facebook's social media mechanisms to expand your local user base by working with your existing customers.

Promote your online brand through special "online only" deals

The most effective way to leverage the existing social network connections of your existing customers is to give them a clear and convincing reason to champion your brand to their friends, family, co-workers, and acquaintances. Championing your brand of course can involve simply sharing your content. Whatever the case may be, you have to give them some sort of incentive.

One of the most common, yet effective, ways local businesses do this is by offering special "online only" deals. These are custom discount codes or custom announcements of special sales that people will only hear about if they interact with your brand through social networks like Facebook. Best of all, this doesn't have to cost you much money. **The discount may even be negligible.**

As long as people feel that they are getting some sort of value, this may be enough for them to poach your content and brand on to members of their social network, who may be in the same local area as you.

The best thing about social media is you can start small!

The best thing about social media is that you don't have to have an existing marketing budget of millions upon millions of dollars. With only a free Facebook fan page, you may be able to leverage your existing local customers' existing friend network to explode your brand's local reach. It's all about your credibility. If you cultivate an eager and enthusiastic enough local crowd of promoters, you'd be surprised as to how quickly your brand can spread in your local area.

It's important to note that however powerful Facebook and other social media networks may be, you cannot look at them as simple free floating devices that you need to go to only if you need to. Instead, *you have to make sure that your social media presence is seamlessly incorporated in all your other online marketing campaigns*. At the very least, this means that you should have the proper social media buttons on your website, and your content from your website must be seamlessly integrated and broadcasted to your other social media accounts. Best of all, the most promising integrations is when you include your social media account information in all your offline marketing materials and paraphernalia. I am of course, talking about flyers, catalogues, brochures, business cards, so on and so forth. This way, you never miss an opportunity to grab

eyeballs as far as your social media accounts go.

The more your customers are aware that you have a strong social media presence, the higher the likelihood that they would engage with your brand on those platforms. This increases the probability that they would be sharing your content in their local network of friends, coworkers and associates.

Chapter 5

Seven ways to market your local business online

Keep in mind that this is going to be just an overview of 7 online marketing techniques for local businesses. This chapter just lightly touches on 7 of the most common yet powerful techniques used by local businesses to get the online world to pay more attention to their brand. In the succeeding chapters, I will drill deeper into these marketing options.

It's important to note at this stage of the book that different local businesses would do well with different types of online marketing methods. In some cases, local SEO would be the best fit for your business. In some cases, perhaps email marketing would produce better results. It all depends on what kind of business you have, your existing user base, and the overall offline sales conversion trajectory you have in mind. I just need you to look at this as an opening menu so that you can have some sort of framework from which to work off.

Throughout this whole marketing selection process, you must have a clear idea of the particular set of circumstances surrounding your business, as well as your available marketing resources and other key considerations. There is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all strategy. If you come across a digital marketing agency that tries to sign you up to some sort of cookie cutter marketing solution, you need to be skeptical. Some of these online marketing methods that I will describe have a more general application you can pretty much apply and be relevant to any kind of offline business. But you still need to focus on the specific set of factors surrounding your particular business.

Local SEO

SEO stands for search engine optimization. Search engine traffic is a very attractive and powerful traffic because this kind of traffic only occurs when people have an actual need for the product and services your business is offering.

For example, if I'm looking for a new Chihuahua puppy, I would enter into my Google browser "Chihuahua puppies for sale." Usually, when people enter such a search term, they do so because chances are quite high that they are on the market for whatever it is that they're searching for. This is a very powerful source of traffic because there is a high likelihood that if you target the right

keywords and phrases, you would convert that search into an actual sale .

According to many marketing surveys and studies, as much as 60% of search engine queries are for local buying decisions. This is a big deal. This is why I've listed local SEO as the top marketing option on this list for local businesses. For the most part, almost all local businesses can benefit from local SEO. Local SEO simply involves building or changing your existing website's content to fit optimization parameters as well building the right link relationships between external websites and your website. Also, local SEO involves listing your business information to as many relevant third party websites so your ranking goes up on Google, and other search engines.

Pay per click search marketing

Local SEO involves generating free traffic from search engines. This is called organic search traffic. If you can't wait, or you have a decent marketing budget for your local business, you might want to turbo charge the speed at which you get results. By simply going to Google Adwords, and paying for your ad to show up when certain search terms are typed into Google , you turbo charge the speed at which traffic would appear to your website.

Of course, a lot is riding on how well your website can convert that traffic into actual buyers or user of your services. Usually, local businesses who have established a decent level of success with local SEO would then take their marketing efforts to the next level by initiating a pay per click search marketing campaign. For most local businesses, a pay per click search marketing initiative is usually not the first item on the agenda. In most cases, it's a much better use of your time and resources to try local SEO First.

Free social media marketing

As I mentioned earlier, social media is huge. In fact it's so big that the way we converse with content online has been truly revolutionized by how Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and other big social media platforms present that content. Put simply, social media cannot be ignored.

Not surprisingly, you can generate quite a tremendous amount of traffic from social media, as long as you know what you are doing. This involves creating social media accounts, and managing them in such a way that you ride the social networks of your brand's followers in these platforms to

spread your content far and wide. The more people interact with your content and your brand, the higher the likelihood that they would end up at your website and do what you need them to do. Whether you're trying to sell merchandise, get people to contract for your services, or join your mailing list, social media marketing has a lot to offer.

Paid social media marketing

A paid social media marketing operates the same way as free social media marketing, generally speaking. The name of the game is still to ride people's social networks. However, the big difference with paid social media marketing is that you pay for the visibility of your brand on different social media platforms. In other words, the dollars that you pay to push into brand interaction leads to a higher volume of fast appearing traffic. Just like with pay per click marketing. You don't have to wait until your content catches on, or your online presence gets ranked highly. Instead, you get traffic immediately.

Email marketing

Email marketing involves building a mailing list and then sending updates to the members of your list. Seems pretty simple right? It definitely seems straightforward-and that is exactly its appeal.

In marketing study after marketing study, researchers have shown that email marketing continues to be the most powerful way to sell anything online. That's how powerful email marketing is. This really should not be a surprise because the moment somebody signs up for your mailing list, they are essentially giving you permission to start a relationship with them. They're giving you permission to talk to them and that leads to a relationship-if you want it to.

As powerful as email marketing can be, a lot of local businesses completely drop the ball. They think that they just need to create a newsletter to start drumming up a lot of sales. There are certain activities you need to engage in to boost your level of success with email marketing. This applies to recruiting people to your list, maintaining the relationship with people on your list, and paying attention to the content that you're sending out so you can maximize your conversion probability.

Blogging

Blogging has been around for a long time. A blog is essentially an online web log or an online journal. Blogging is so powerful and so ubiquitous, people consistently misunderstand it. They think that effective blogging is simply just paying somebody to post a big advertisement blog post, or advertorial, about your brand. Talk about completely missing the point. Other people are under the misguided thinking that you only have to keep blogging about certain keywords on your local business' blog, and all these yummy search traffic would appear. There are lots of misconceptions regarding blogging.

In the chapter dedicated to blog marketing below, I will step you through the process of maximizing your sales and conversion ability through properly crafted blog posts. Don't fall for the very popular yet misguided information out there regarding blogging's marketing potential. It's very easy to get your wires crossed with this type of marketing and end up with very little to no results after you've invested your time, energy and resources.

Local directory marketing

Regardless of which particular industry you're in, or the particular geographic region of the United States your business is based in, there are local directories that you can reach out to and get listed on. This is quite a sleeper marketing option because a lot of people often overlook it. They think that because Google has gone through many different changes, that somehow local directories no longer have as much weight as they used to. It really is too bad because in the right hands, local directory marketing can actually give you a tremendous competitive advantage that can yield not only better search engine rankings, but a better overall online brand presence. Best of all, it's highly targeted.

In the following chapters, I will go into some depth regarding the issues and opportunities surrounding these seven different local business online marketing options. I just want to be clear that these marketing options are by no means perfect. There is no such thing as a magic bullet that would make all your local business online marketing headaches go away. By getting a clear picture as to the potential as well as limitation of these different marketing options, you can at least start making truly informed decisions as far as your online brand building initiatives are concerned.

Local SEO: Get noticed when your customers need you most

Local SEO is all about arranging the content on your pages, as well as posting information on third party websites to increase the likelihood that people searching for the types of the products or services your business offers will see your business' website ranked first. That's local SEO in a nutshell. It's arranging your content so that search engines can find you more easily and rank you much higher.

The bottom line: SEO traffic is very powerful traffic

As I mentioned earlier, this traffic is very powerful because it's highly targeted. If you know what you're doing, you would be able to appeal to people who are looking for the precise products and services your local business is offering at the time they need it.

Search engine marketing turns the traditional advertising model on its head. Keep in mind that traditional advertising is all about disruption. People are watching a TV show, and enjoying the content of that show. All of a sudden, there's a commercial break, and then they see an ad. This interrupts their viewing experience, and then the show resumes again. The problem with this model is that there is no assurance that whatever ads would show up actually fits the needs of the audience consuming the content of the TV show. It's like taking a stab in the dark. You're really rolling the dice and hoping that somehow, someway, the ads that you show based on the demographic study of the audience for that particular show would more likely than not be interested in the content of the ad. Talk about a gamble.

You don't have that uncertainty with search engine traffic. As long as you're targeting the right keywords, your site gets listed in results only when people type in these keywords that they are interested in the particular type of service or merchandise you offer.

Best of all, they would only do this when they have an almost immediate need for whatever it is that they're looking for. This is why local SEO is so powerful for your brick and mortar business. It gives you a powerful way to reach people who are ready, willing and probably able to buy whatever it is you're offering. Local SEO involves practices that tailor fit search engine optimization for local

businesses. The big difference between optimizing for a national or global audience and local SEO is that local SEO involves targeting localized keywords which have a monthly search volume that's a fraction of national or global keywords.

How can your local business benefit from local SEO?

There are two primary benefits from local SEO, as far as local businesses are concerned. First, you get direct traffic from people who are within the geographic regions you are optimized for. For example if your ophthalmology practice is based in Glendale, California, chances are you would probably be interested in potential customers who live in the Glendale, Pasadena, Burbank and, possibly, the Greater Los Angeles Basin area. Chances are very high that people from San Francisco, or Bakersfield would not be interested in your ophthalmology practice. After all, there are probably ophthalmologists in the San Francisco Bay Area as well as the Bakersfield greater metropolitan area. You see how this works? Local SEO can help local businesses tremendously due to the fact they put geographic limits on the potential visitors from search engines to your website.

The pros and cons of local SEO

I wish I could tell you that local SEO is a slam dunk. I wish I could tell you that just by engaging in a local SEO advertising campaign that you automatically build a solid online brand. Unfortunately, this is not the case. There are drawbacks, as well as advantages to local SEO. All the online marketing options for local businesses that I will describe in this book have their own share of advantages and disadvantages. Here are the pros and cons of local SEO.

The big advantage of local SEO is that you get targeted traffic. This is traffic that is actually looking to buy. They have a pressing need for whatever it is that you are offering. Also, this type of marketing enables you to put geographic limitations on your traffic. This way, you appeal only to people who live and work in areas that can be reasonably served by your local business. In short, it's practical for them to visit your local premises because they don't have to drive that far. The third major benefit to local SEO is you get to target the specific demographic you're shooting for, depending on keyword intent. This is a big deal because a lot of competing traffic platforms in the Internet are not as good in targeting people based on their intent. In many cases, we're back to the old interruptive marketing model that would show people content, and, in the middle of their content viewing experience, your ad shows up. You don't have this issue with search engine traffic.

The big disadvantage of local SEO is that it takes time. You have to make some changes on your website, or set your website up a certain way, and you have to post materials or make submissions to third party websites continuously. If you do the right things, eventually, after a few months, you will get targeted traffic from search engines. You won't get a lot at first but if you keep up your local SEO efforts, the traffic can pick up considerably as you rankings for your target keywords improve over time.

The worst part of this process is its lack of guarantess. While some service providers are such experts that there is a high likelihood that they would get you number 1 rankings, nobody in their right mind can give you a 100% guarantee. There are just so many other factors that these search engine optimization agencies cannot control. Still, if you're working with the right service provider, you can rest assured that you can rank pretty well, especially if your competitors have a very weak online presence.

The other disadvantage to local SEO is usually it's not the type of marketing that you can easily do yourself. While you're more than welcome to try your hand at local SEO you have to remember that you have two great factors working against you. First, there's a lot of stuff to learn. The state of knowledge regarding search engine ranking technology, as well as indexing mechanisms, change on an almost quarterly basis. You really have to keep on top of all these evolutionary changes as far as Google's algorithm is concerned. Otherwise, you will be playing a losing game.

If you are more like the typical local business owner, I'm sure you'd rather focus all your firepower on maintaining, if not growing, your local customer base. Most local business owners simply don't have the bandwidth in terms of personal productivity and inclination, to want to master something as potentially complicated as local search engine optimization. I'm not saying that it's impossible, but you definitely have to commit to investing the proper amount of time, resources, and energy into local SEO for you to get it right.

The final big disadvantage to local SEO as far as local businesses are concerned is that it takes quite a bit of experimentation. Don't think that just because you read an SEO guide somewhere that you can put together a page that would work like magic. Similarly, just because you come across some sort of blog post that teaches you how to submit to the right places, that you would automatically get a massive boost as far as your rankings are concerned. I wish that was the case. Unfortunately,

this is far from reality. In most cases, local business people who try their hand at doing their own search engine optimization have to try repeatedly, miss the mark, and make variations until they get it right. This can take a long time. Why? It's all about trial and error. You simply don't have the many years of experience a proper local SEO service provider brings to the table.

Remember, if you go with a local SEO specialist, you can rest assured that that company has the experience and technical know-how needed to get you rank where you need to rank. Compare this with you relying on your own ability to absorb information, learn from your mistakes, and try and try again. In fact, most local business people who try local SEO on their own simply give up. This really is too bad because a local SEO could have benefited them if they had only gone with the right service provider, or learned under the right coach or mentor.

Key considerations for local SEO

If you're thinking of putting together a local SEO campaign, either with the assistance of a professional agency or you're thinking of doing it on your own, I need you to wrap your mind around the following key considerations. A lot of people who fail at this type of online marketing are completely blind to these considerations. They simply let these issues get the best of them. I don't want that to happen to you; I don't want you to get blindsided. Accordingly, it's really important to make sure you understand what these factors are.

Keyword selection is crucial

I don't know what you've read regarding SEO, but there are all sorts of misconceptions regarding magic bullets or "special ingredients" needed for success. I'd like you to set that all aside. The truth is your keyword selection will make or break your search engine optimization campaign. That's the bottom line. If you pick the wrong keywords you're going to spend a lot of your time barking up the wrong tree.

Why is your choice of keywords so crucial? Very simple. Different keywords have different intent. If you pick a keyword that doesn't match the intent of your target customers, chances are very high that you are going to attract the wrong people. Sure, your website's getting a lot of traffic precious little of that traffic is converting into what truly matters. What truly matters, of course, are dollars and cents in your bank account. That's your bottom line. And unfortunately, picking keywords with the wrong or ambiguous intent is not going to do your business any favors.

Be aware that there are different ways to describe your business

Local SEO also turns a lot on how you describe your business in terms of categorization, as well as description. This is a big deal because a lot of local SEO involves citation building. You submit information to many different third party sites, and if this information involves the right keywords and is formatted properly, you increase the likelihood that you would attract the right people and the right traffic.

The dilemma here is there are many different ways to describe a particular business.

You might think that you know your business like the back of your hand. You might think that your categorization is extremely accurate. Well, the problem is you might think that but in actuality, your local online customers might be categorizing your business in a completely different way. Since this is not how you describe your business, they end up pulling up your competitors in their searches. Simply put, you're leaving a lot of money on the table by being completely blind to the search terms these individuals use.

You could have been recruiting this local customer base, but for the fact that you chose to describe your business in the same way that you've always described it. In many cases, offline descriptions or industry descriptions might be different enough from the preferred description used by online visitors. This difference might be pronounced enough as to have a negative effect on your overall traffic level.

Understand the power of picking the right location

Since a key part of local SEO involves NAP or name, address and phone number, you have to make sure that you are getting listed for the right locations. You might think that you live in the same general metropolitan area and people from that area would all be equally excited about your business. This is a very risky assumption to make.

Keep in mind that in large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, people are very concerned about convenience. If you pick the wrong district to optimize for in the greater Los Angeles basin, you might end up with very few customers. In reality, there are a lot of people looking for your type of business, and they would have gladly visited your business if you had only picked a different district.

Pay attention to your location options and look at the demographic profiles of those particular areas to ensure that you are advertising for lucrative enough population bases. Keep in mind that people are more than happy to drive a certain distance as long as it's convenient for them to do so. Don't worry about turning people off because the particular district that you picked may seem to be a bit far from where they are. Focus instead on local demand patterns.

Apart from the factors that I've outline above that can blindside your local SEO success rate, keep in mind other following factors. You need to make sure that your business is properly categorized. The reason for this is simple. You may be categorizing your business as a certain type all these years, but it turns out that people who use the Internet tend to categorize your business a certain way. Since this is the vast majority of people you're trying to reach, you end up completely missing them because you chose a different category. The solution to this is to simply pay attention to the online habits of people interested in the particular type of service or merchandise you're offering. You would be surprised as to their categorization choices. It may be wrong in your mind because you know the industry like the back of your hand. Unfortunately, that doesn't really matter. What matters is what your target audience members think your proper categorization is. If you want more search engine traffic, go with their categorization.

Another problem area people looking for local SEO need to be aware of is NAP consistency. The way your business name, address, and phone number is published on third party websites, as well as your own website, can lead to serious issues if there are inconsistencies there. In some cases, these inconsistencies are necessary, but you have to be aware of when you're needed and when you're not.

Other factors that you should pay attention to involve listing in the right local directories. Some local directories are more valuable as far as getting listed is concerned. Others are very spammy. There are certain directories that you need to avoid like the plague.

You also might want to get your website mentioned at review sites. You have to remember that a vast majority of mobile device users use review sites. Use this to your advantage. It's okay to have a few negative reviews as long as the bulk of the reviews is positive for your business.

Finally, you also might want to consider reaching out to local bloggers. The more local bloggers mention your brand without necessarily brand linking to you, the higher your local brand cache and prestige becomes.

You need to be aware of all these varying factors because these small differences may make the difference between consistently getting the most traffic from your local area of specialization, or completely missing out; or more likely having to settle for mediocre results.

Pay Per Click (PPC) Search Marketing

The big difference between pay per click marketing and regular SEO traffic is that with pay per click, you're paying for this traffic. This is search engine traffic that you get when people enter keywords and queries related to your website on search engines like Google. The big difference here is that your ads will appear immediately to the side or top of the page, depending on how Google AdWords ranks your ad.

Another key difference is the speed at which traffic appears. As I've mentioned in the discussion above regarding local SEO, it can take quite a while for your website to rank and get free traffic on search engines using organic and local SEO. With pay per click, however, your traffic will appear immediately after you pay for the traffic. After all, you are paying per click.

As awesome as pay per click marketing is, I'll discuss more fully the broad range of advantages and disadvantages this marketing option brings to the table as far as your local business' online brand is concerned. You need to read that section very carefully. It's too easy to get all caught up in the hype and claimed advantages of pay per click. If you play your cards wrong, your PPC efforts can blow up in your face. Worst of all, you might have very little to show for all the money you invested in this particular type of traffic.

How can your local business benefit from PPC search marketing?

The ultimate benefit that you get from PPC marketing is that you get highly targeted local traffic extremely quickly. If you're looking for speed, a high level of targeting and a tightly defined geographic reach, pay per click marketing is it. With that said, it does come with a tremendous amount of considerations that you need to seriously think about.

The pros and cons of PPC search marketing

The biggest advantage of pay per click marketing is that you can get a tremendous branding opportunity when people enter search terms related to your local brand and not click the ad. The more they see the ad, the more familiar they become with your local brand. You basically get free

advertising this way. However, when they click your ad, they go directly to your website and engage directly with your brand.

This is a very powerful way of getting traffic quickly and getting your brand in front of the right eyeballs. You only need to pay for that opportunity. Sadly, this is where its set of disadvantages come in.

The first big disadvantage is that you obviously have to pay for this traffic. Not only do you have to pay for every click, but unless you're going to do your pay per click marketing campaign yourself, you probably would have to hire a PPC marketing specialist. Such digital agencies or individual consultants can cost quite a bit of money. You're essentially paying twice for PPC: for the actual traffic and for the specialist setting up your PPC campaign.

The second drawback to this type of marketing is that you have to allow trial and error for a certain period. I don't care how specialized or experienced the PPC expert you're going with. They still have to run test campaigns to fine-tune the initial crop of keywords you're targeting.

Those keywords may lead to substandard conversions. They may get a lot of traffic, but only very little sales. Whatever your metric of success may be, get ready to spend quite a bit of time and money going through the initial testing stage. This can get costly very quickly.

There are hardly any PPC campaigns that come out of the box completely perfect. Allow yourself a block of time to fine-tune your campaign so you eventually reach the stage where your campaign is targeting the right keywords and producing conversions at a satisfactory rate.

The third disadvantage to PPC involves a situation where you decide to handle your own PPC campaigns. As I've mentioned in the discussion above, even if you were to go with a tried and proven PPC expert, there's still an initial learning curve as they play around with different keyword clusters to try to identify the group of keywords that would convert most consistently.

With that said, if you were to conduct your own marketing campaign, expect things to get really costly. Since you're learning how to do PPC, the initial stage where you're testing out different keywords is going to be extended. If that isn't bad enough, you also have to factor in the extra time you will take to get a hang of the many different targeting options you get with Google AdWords.

If put these all consideration together, you can expect to pay through the nose in terms of the following costs:

First, you would have to pay for keyword testing. Second, you would have to pay for your learning curve. Third, you would have to pay for the opportunity cost.

You have to remember that for every minute you spend trying to run your own PPC campaigns, you could've easily spent that minute engaging in other activities that could possibly put more dollars in your pocket. Never underestimate the opportunity cost factor. This is one factor that most local entrepreneurs completely overlook. Little do they know that they could be making much more money by simply outsourcing their PPC campaigns to competent and experienced experts.

As daunting as these disadvantages may be, assuming that you're in the right niche and you have built a website that can convert paid search traffic, PPC can still be lucrative for you. You just need to get a clear understanding of all the risks you are going to be taking on if you choose to use this particular online marketing method.

Key PPC Search Marketing Considerations You Need to be CLEAR on

It's very easy to get excited about PPC marketing. After all, who wouldn't want overnight traffic and a steady stream of traffic that you can work on converting? It's fast and definitely convenient. I've already outlined that it can be quite a risky proposition if you don't completely know what you're doing.

Here are some key considerations that can dramatically explode your PPC marketing costs if you're not careful.

Keyword intent is crucial

It's really important to remember that you must target the right keywords. Since you're paying for this traffic, you need to attract the right kind of traffic. Unfortunately, if you're clueless regarding the intent powering of certain keywords, you might end targeting the wrong keywords, and the wrong people will go to your website and won't buy anything.

Sure, you might get a few stragglers who end up buying here and there, but for the most part, end up with the wrong audience. This happened because you chose the wrong keywords. They have the wrong intent and have no interest in whatever it is you're offering. You have to select your keyword option based on whether the intent behind these keywords fits whatever it is you're promoting.

Many local businesses are completely blind to this, devoting a few hundred dollars to PPC marketing month after month. If you look at their overall rate of success, they have very little to show for all that PPC marketing dollars.

Traffic volume doesn't matter as much as conversion

Another seductive misconception regarding PPC that you might find yourself falling victim to is that you only need to rack up a huge amount of traffic. If this was the case, then you shouldn't have any problems with PPC. You only need to target certain high volume keywords that are very cheap for you to get a lot of traffic and you'd be on your way to great profits. Right? Absolutely wrong!

The problem is you're promoting a local business. This fact alone means that you have to focus on a smaller stream of traffic. You're not shooting for global traffic or traffic from all parts of the United States. You're focused on one particular geographic area. It follows logically then that you shouldn't fixate so much on volume as you would on conversion. At the end of the day, it's conversion that puts dollars in your bank account, not traffic volume.

People can click on your link like crazy, but that's not going to do you any favors. That's actually only going to drag you to the poor house if you don't know what you're doing. This is why it's crucial to always focus on whether the keywords you select for your PPC campaign have a high likelihood of leading to conversions.

Unfortunately, this is not easy to figure out. You have to run test campaigns, look at your stats, focus on overall conversions and make all sorts of tweaks and modifications over an extended per of time until you get the right blend of keywords. In fact, truly effective PPC campaigns that are able to turn cheap clicks into conversions are only possible after an extended period of testing and tweaking.

Be prepared to pay for your learning curve

As I mentioned earlier, if you were to try to run your own PPC campaign, expect to pay a lot of money because there are several learning curves at play. You have to learn the right keywords and how to do PPC in general. Finally, you also have to learn how to convert whatever traffic you managed to get with your PPC campaign into actual buyers. That's a lot of learning, and it can get very costly very quickly.

To make matters worse, you also have to engage in constant experimentation and tweaking. If you're not very systematic or methodical about this process, it's very easy to end up barking up the wrong tree. You might end up optimizing the wrong things. There might be situations where you try to fix something that's not broken while letting something that burns a hole through your pocket continue unchallenged.

If you want to be free of these highly foreseeable struggles, focus on one piece of good news. The

good news is that PPC is only hard until you get the formula right. Once you figure out your business' PPC search marketing "secret sauce," you can get a fairly predictable return on investment on your PPC campaigns. Up until that time, expect to spend a pretty penny for your learning curve.

This is why I strongly encourage local business owners who simply don't have the time, inclination or technical savvy to learn PPC to go with tried and proven PPC consultants. Many PPC consultants are actually certified by Google AdWords. They know how Google AdWords' ads service system works and how to pick keywords with the right intent. With the right guidance and budget, you can make PPC work for you.

Still, you need to protect yourself from sticker shock. I can't repeat this enough. This kind of online marketing for your local business can get quite expensive very quickly. Consider yourself warned.

Chapter 10

Free Social Media Marketing

I've already outlined why social media marketing is so powerful and explained why you can't continue to ignore social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. With that said, social media marketing can bring a tremendous array of benefits to your business. The primary benefit is that you get to leverage the social connections of your existing customer base in your local area.

The more they get excited about your online promotions, the wider your reach in your local area becomes. This may seem truly awesome and exciting, but you really need to guard against getting caught up in the hype. As powerful as social media marketing is, it's too easy to assume that it has more power than it really has and blindly overestimate the ease of social media marketing that you end up getting in way over your head.

What follows are the pros and cons of free social media marketing. You have to look at this particular advertising option with wide open eyes. You can't allow wishful thinking or overly rosey traffic projections steer you into the wrong direction. Even if you are going to be doing this yourself, understand that it might turn out to be more costly than what you thought.

The pros and cons of free social media marketing

The big advantage of free social media marketing is that you get to work with a known quantity. You're going to be dealing with people who already bought or are interested in whatever you have to offer. I'm talking about your existing customer base. A healthy percentage of your customers have active social media accounts. Don't let this opportunity go to waste. By converting your existing customer base into your social media cheerleaders, your brand can get thoroughly marketed within your fixed geographic area.

The second big advantage of free social media marketing is that you get to use content that can put your brand in the best light possible. This is not the case with other forms of marketing. You get direct access to your fan base, ask them questions, gather market intelligence and get data that you need to sculpt a truly effective online brand. In other contexts, this can be quite expensive, but not

so with Facebook.

You only need to put up a Facebook fan page and use the right polling apps, and you can mine your existing fan base for all sorts of information that may be able to take your local business' brand to the next level.

The third big advantage of free social media marketing is that you get to put out fires before they get really bad. Let's face it, regardless of how big or small your brand is, there will always be people out there who have a chip on their shoulders. You can never truly avoid or get rid of these people. There will be people who post all sorts of nasty stuff about your business.

If you do that on social media, you're given a platform on which you can present your side of the story. This way, your brand doesn't become a sitting duck. People can't just dump on your brand and destroy it without you getting a chance to share your side of the story. While you cannot prevent negative reviews and comments on social media, by being proactive and instantly responding to whatever complaints they have in a very public way, you arrest whatever corrosive effect those negative social media mentions may have on your online brand.

I wish I can say that social media marketing is all good and can only benefit you. Unfortunately, it also has its own share of disadvantages. The big disadvantage to free social media marketing is that your reach is not a guarantee. Just because you have a solid looking branded account on all the major social media platforms, it doesn't logically follow that you would automatically reach the people that you would like to reach.

Simply showing up doesn't guarantee that the audience you're trying to reach will seek you out. It doesn't work that way. It's not like PPC marketing where you set a budget with Google, and all this traffic starts to appear once you've picked the right keywords. With social media marketing, you need to start with a starter base. The best starter base is your existing customers, which brings up the second disadvantage.

You have to be proactive in using your offline marketing materials to highlight the fact that you have all these social media accounts. The whole idea here is to make these account addresses so ubiquitous as far as your customers are concerned that they would naturally seek you out on Facebook and like your page. This is too much to assume. You have to give them some sort of

incentive for them to do that. After all, there are millions of fan pages. Why would your existing customers take the time and bother to join your page instead of the countless other pages out there?

This brings up the third disadvantage of incentive engineering. You have to put together the right kind of incentive to get people to like your particular fan page. This is a disadvantage not because it's totally a bad thing, but because it takes time to come up with the right incentives. In many cases, this can take several months or several quarters.

It's not something that you can take lightly. If you give out the wrong incentives, you might attract the wrong people and encourage the wrong kind of social media behavior that leads to the wrong results. It's imperative to be systematic and methodical regarding putting together the right social media incentivized offers for your existing base of local users to truly champion your brand on social media platforms. Simply put, getting eyeballs is not enough. You also have to motivate those eyeballs.

As you can tell from the disadvantages of free social media, there's a lot to think about. When it comes to business, thinking involves costs. For every second you spend trying to piece together a successful social media marketing campaign, you're not spending that time maintaining or growing your business. This is the biggest cost of free social media marketing.

It's too easy to get all caught up in the hype surrounding this particular online marketing method and completely lose sight of the different costs involved. It might turn out that there are more lucrative options available as far as far your return on investment is concerned.

Read Chapter 11 to get a full understanding of what I'm talking about.

Chapter 11

It turns out Free Social Media Marketing Isn't So "Free" After All

As I mentioned in Chapter 10, it's very easy to get excited about social media marketing. After all, who can help salivating at the thought of having only a few followers on Facebook but being able to use these followers to potentially reach millions upon millions of people? I don't care how jaded you are or how many bad experiences you have with online marketing. You can't help but get excited by the reach of social media.

With that said, there is a very big danger here. Offline business owners might get so excited that they lose sight of the tremendous costs they're undertaking if they engage in free social media marketing. The bottom line is that free social media marketing is not so free at all. You're constantly paying for marketing.

You may not be paying in the form of dollars and cents, but you're definitely going to be paying in the form of your most precious asset, which is your time. Your time is actually your most valuable asset because it can be turned into anything - money, knowledge, better relationships, even a very fit and athletic body. That's how powerful time is.

It's easily convertible into a wide range of objectives. Unfortunately, this is exactly the kind of resource that you're going to be wasting if you go about free social media marketing the wrong way. I've devoted a whole chapter to this element of free social media marketing because too many local business owners are completely blind to this marketing method's dimension.

Time is money

I've said this repeatedly, but this bears repeating one more time: Time is money. For every second you spend doing one thing, you could've spent that time doing something else. What if the alternative activity you could've engaged in produced more money? It's very easy to see that whatever you did choose to do was a money loser.

This is extremely important to know, and you have to constantly keep this in mind. Otherwise, in your search for free traffic through free social media marketing, you might actually end up losing a

lot of money. By using paid social media marketing, you may have been able to achieve better results at a much faster pace. Always remember that your opportunity costs are real.

Why spend one day making $10 when you could've spent that day making $100? It's a no-brainer. Unfortunately, local business owners who are so caught up in the hype and promises of free social media marketing allow themselves to be blinded from this very important consideration.

It takes time to build a responsive social media presence

The reason why I'm emphasizing the time element of free social media marketing is because it simply takes quite a bit of time for your social media marketing initiatives to gain traction. Here are the things that you need to do.

First, make sure that your brand presence on your social media accounts are consistent across the board. This means that if your website has a particular look and feel and features a particular logo, those elements should be present on your social media accounts. This requires time and attention to detail.

Second, once you have these accounts going, you have to stock them with content. It's not a simple matter of going to Fiverr or some other source of cheap labor. You're playing with fire if you do that. The content that you'll be using to stock your social media presence must move your brand forward. That can only happen if the content meets a certain minimum quality threshold.

Another cause for concern is the fact that you have to reach out to other local noncompeting brands that have a solid presence on the social media platforms you've marketed to. The whole idea here is to cross-pollinate each other's audience base. You post your content on theirs, and they post their content on yours. You don't have to worry about them competing with you because you've deliberately selected them based on the fact that they are not direct competitors.

The reason for this is that they already have local customers in your local area. By having your brand in front of those eyeballs, you can draw those local people to your website. They can also do the same with your existing user base. This is a very powerful marketing strategy because it produces a win-win situation. Instead of settling for the level of traffic you have, by working with a tried and proven non-competitor, you get to tap into their traffic base and expand your existing fan

base.

Content is king

A key consideration you need to focus on is that in social media, content is king. Success with social media marketing really turns on whether people will consider you credible and authoritative. This can only happen if you feature the right content. Content is king, and you have to post content that would build up the credibility of your brand.

There's a lot more to this than you think. First of all, the content must be so specific to your niche and your location that people can see the initial value your brand brings to the table. The good news to all this is that you can share third party content mixed in with your original updates. If you're forced to produce only your original content, then that social media marketing can get very pricey very quickly.

The fact that you can curate or syndicate third party high quality content can go a long way in reducing your overall content production costs. You can then take rifle shots on the specific topics that you would need to produce original content around. This can save you quite a bit of money.

The key to social media success: Leverage your current offline customers

The number one tip I can give you regarding your social media marketing campaign's chances of success is that it turns on how well you leverage your current offline customers. Make no mistake about it, starting from scratch can be quite an expensive proposition. You will run into the empty restaurant syndrome.

When was the last time you ate at an empty restaurant where you haven't eaten at before? Chances are high that you tend to steer clear of such restaurants. The fact that it's empty speaks loudly regarding the potential quality of the food it serves. As a result, it's more likely for you to eat at a restaurant where there are a lot of diners already.

This is exactly the same dynamic that plays out when you start out your social media presence with absolutely zero followers and fans. It takes a long time to organically recruit people from within Facebook, Twitter or other social media platforms you're marketing on. It's much better to "pre-

stock" your social media accounts with your current offline customers.

Even before you launch your website, send out flyers to your existing customer base telling them that you're going to be launching on Facebook. You incentivize them with all sorts of special "online only" promotions to get them to become your fans. This is the right way to launch a social media presence. The more you run online only promotions, the higher the likelihood that you would get followers and fans.

Once you get a decent number of social media fans, the next step is to publish content that they can then push to their local social network. Pair this content with special promotions so you can then repeat the process. If you do this right, you would be able to continuously and consistently expand your local base of customers and get a means of constantly communicating with them. This can be very powerful if you give yourself the time to do this right.

Unfortunately, considering what's at stake and how sensitive people are in social media, it's also very easy to drop the ball. It only takes one bad update on your Twitter feed or Facebook fan page's timeline for your brand to take a hit. It's a much better use of your time as a local business owner to contract with a digital marketing agency to handle your social media marketing campaign. They have the experience and competence needed to ensure that your social media accounts are sending off the right signals to the right eyeballs.

Chapter 12

Paid Social Media Marketing

You might think that paid social media marketing isn't all that much different from free social media marketing. You might think that the big difference between this marketing method and free social media marketing is the fact that you're paying. Actually, there is a huge difference. The big difference is that you get to appear in more places on social media platforms. The biggest difference is that you're able to tap into the tremendous targeting power of social media platforms.

Never underestimate how well they can slice and dice user information as far as ad targeting is concerned. Take Facebook, for example. There's a reason why Facebook got into all sorts of legal troubles due to privacy concerns. It has been engineered from the ground up to listen to you the moment you log on. It's paying attention to the kind of content you consume, the categories or groups and other areas on Facebook that you engage with. It's not just sitting on this data, but it's using it directly for its ad targeting system.

When you use Facebook's paid advertising system, you leverage all of this tremendous advertising targeting technology to your advantage. That is the biggest difference between paid social media marketing and free social media marketing. Think of it this way: With free social media marketing, you're basically using platforms to leverage your existing user base. With paid social media marketing, you're turbocharging your chances of recruiting fresh eyeballs from within the traffic ecosystem provided by the social media platform.

It's easy to see the tremendous benefits your business can get from this. First of all, you benefit from targeted branding. Since you're tapping into these targeting mechanisms, chances are your brand will only show up in front of the right eyeballs and at the right time.

The second benefit that you get is that it's very easy for you to track conversions. You can see which campaigns are doing well and which campaigns are not living up to their fullest potential.

Both these benefits can work towards a higher benefit of making your local online brand a very powerful entity. If you do paid social media marketing right, your local business' social media brand can become credible and authoritative in a very short period of time.

Why is this important?

If you're credible and authoritative, people would trust you more, and this can lead to higher sales. After all, people would only buy from brands they trust.

The pros and cons of paid social media marketing

Whenever you're paying for any kind of online advertising, you really have to pay attention to the pros and cons involved in that particular marketing method. While social media marketing's list of advantages is quite heavy and substantial, so is its list of disadvantages.

I've already outlined the big advantages of social media marketing. You also get another key benefit of social media marketing above. You also get another key benefit with paid social media buys. You become credible to local non-competitors. The more they see your ad on Facebook, the more likely they would be to go into cross-promotion arrangements with you.

In this particular respect, you turn your past social media ad marketing campaign into some sort of a business card. The more they see your ad in the local area, the more comfortable they become to the prospect of potentially doing cross-promotions marketing with your business. This is no small advantage. It can take years to strike up the right business alliances in your local area. With the proper paid campaign on Facebook or Twitter, you can cut down this timeline quite a bit.

With all that said, advertising on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest also brings quite a bit of negatives to the table. First of all, it costs money. While you can get lucky and get penny clicks here and there, if you're truly serious about getting high converting traffic, you have to be prepared to pay top dollar. This is especially true if you are advertising in a fairly competitive local niche. The more competitive your niche, the more you should expect to pay for every click you get from Facebook.

The other cause for concern you need to keep your eyes on is the fact that if you're going to be running your social media marketing campaigns, expect to pay for your learning curve. Nobody hits a home run the moment they step up to the plate. It doesn't work that way. You don't hit a 3 point shot the moment you step up on the line. You have to miss your shots several times until you get it

right. Since you're paying for social media traffic, this can easily become a very costly proposition if you don't have systems in place that would tend to mitigate your advertising costs.

Finally, even if you hired a consultant and are not running your own campaign, there are still many costs involved. Not only would you have to pay for an experienced digital marketing agency or consultant to run your campaign, you also have to pay for that initial testing phase where they're trying to optimize your campaign to pick the right interests and keywords that would lead to more optimal results.

All throughout this process, you're paying for the learning curve. Worst of all, consumer trends on different social media platforms tend to change and evolve over time. Again, you have to pay for these changes. It's not a surprise that many large corporations simply go with digital media agencies and devote millions of dollars in Facebook and Twitter campaigns and leave it at that.

It requires a tight system and a high degree of attention to detail. I'm not saying that you can't do this on your own. However, you need to be prepared to put in the right amount of time, effort and enthusiasm for learning to make it work out. Otherwise, you might end up spending all this time, effort and money and have very little to show for your investment.

Chapter 13

Paid Social Media Marketing Considerations You Need to Focus On

I hope you didn't get me wrong and that Chapter 12 didn't scare you from going ahead with your paid social media marketing plans. I didn't mean to discourage you. Instead, I wanted to present you with a clear picture of what you're working with. Otherwise, it will be too easy to fall for all the hype regarding the effectiveness of social media marketing and end up with results that are at best nothing to write home about, and at worst burned a hole through your pockets.

If you're the typical American small business, you really are not in a position to blow money on ultimately ineffective marketing initiatives. Sadly, a paid social media marketing campaign can easily turn into those failed initiatives if you don't pay attention to the issues I raised in the previous chapter and the ones I raise below.

Expect a costly learning curve

I can't repeat this enough. Whenever you're dealing with pay per click, whether it's for search engine traffic or social media traffic, you need to set aside some money for the learning curve. Even if you retained the very best social media campaign planner out there or you're dealing with an agency that has a literal brain trust of social media marketing experts, there's still an initial stage where they're throwing spaghetti at the wall and hoping that something sticks.

They need to go through that initial testing so they can fine-tune their campaign to craft together the right kind of parameters that would produce the results that you're looking for. This can cost quite a bit of money. Expect this. If you're a local small business, this might be a deal killer. It's much better to understand this now than get all your hopes up and end up quitting midstream.

You will be forced to focus on ROI quickly

This can be good news or bad news depending on your attitude. Since there's money involved, things can get painful financially very quickly. When many small local businesses feel the financial pinch of advertising campaigns that may not be working out all that well, they are forced to focus on return on investment very quickly.

This can actually be a good thing because if you tend to jump into different marketing initiatives only to settle for mediocre results, this might be the wakeup call that you've been looking for. Make no mistake about it, paid social media marketing campaigns can get costly very quickly. By establishing a laser focus on ROI, you would be able to focus primarily on what works, save money on what doesn't and apply what you've learned to other marketing initiatives you've undertaken. This can lead to better overall marketing results for your business. Think of it as opening a door instead of necessarily a window shutting in front of you.

Use the "elemental analysis" method for gauging the effectiveness of your campaigns

I wish I could tell you that advertising on Facebook is a simple matter of just getting together ad materials, paying your money and seeing all that amazing traffic appear. It doesn't work that way. For you to get optimal traffic from platforms like Facebook, you have to look at your ads, make certain changes and be systematic and methodical on how you make those changes.

If you do this right, you would be able to use the right ads on the right set of eyeballs to produce the right kind of results. One of the best ways to do this is through a system called "elemental analysis." This is just a fancy term for breaking up your ads into different parts. These are called elements. Your title, the picture on your Facebook ad and the body of your ad text are all elements.

Elemental analysis involves playing around with variations of each element and watching your conversion results. If you see a dramatic improvement on one variation, you make variations of that variation to see if you can increase the quality and volume of your results. If you're able to achieve an improvement, you repeat the process until your results plateau.

Once you reach this point, you go to the next element and optimize that. You go through all the elements until you arrive at an ad which produces a fairly predictable rate of conversions. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done because there is the other side of the equation: traffic. You have to do quite a bit of testing with that side of the equation to make everything work out.

Conversions are great, but NET CUSTOMER VALUE is more important

It's important to pay attention to conversions. After all, conversions pay your rent and put food on

the table. However, with all that aside, you also need to focus on net customer value. It doesn't make any sense for you to spend $25 converting somebody who bought $26 of products when you could've targeted somebody who would've spent $100 on your website. You see how this all works out?

Initially, you would probably be shooting for buyers. However, you should reach that stage fairly quickly where you're filtering your buyers based on their overall value. You need to tweak your campaign so you tend to attract higher value customers. It's all about return on investment. For every dollar you spend on your marketing campaign, try to get as much money as possible. Unfortunately, this is very hard to do unless you keep a close eye on net customer value.

Chapter 14

E-mail Marketing: The Money is in The List

As I've mentioned previously, in marketing survey after marketing survey, e-mail marketing always manages to make it to the top of the list in terms of conversion effectiveness. What gives? The next time you sign up for a mailing list, make sure you pay attention to the dynamics involved. For you to even think about signing up for a company's mailing list, at the very least, you're thinking that the company is credible.

You're thinking at some level or another that you are going to be getting some sort of benefit from signing up for that list. Moreover, the act of entering your email address, clicking that submit button and waiting for the confirmation link to come to your e-mail, and then clicking on that link indicates some level of commitment on your part. Put all these together, and you can see why email marketing is so powerful.

When people sign up for a mailing list, they're essentially giving the company behind the mailing list permission to talk to them. In short, they are looking to establish a relationship. Unfortunately, a lot of people who try e-mail marketing flat out fail because they don't get this. They think that when people join this list, it's just a permission for them to send them unrelated and irrelevant garbage. It doesn't take a genius to figure out what's wrong with that picture.

Make no mistake about it, when people sign up for your list, this is a heavy responsibility. This means that you have to take care of the interest of the people on your list. Otherwise, they're not going to open your e-mail and click on the links included in your updates. It really is that simple.

These people might not bother to unsubscribe from your list, but they might as well have for all practical purposes since they're not opening your e-mails. As powerful as e-mail marketing is, it's really important in this stage when looking at many different online marketing solutions for your local business owners to understand its relationship boosting power. Your e-mail marketing strategy and implementation must focus on this element. This is the only way you can build a solid and credible online brand. Any other approach will not only ensure that you fail to meet your goals, it will actually cut against your brand. You might actually conduct yourself in such a way that your brand ends up getting eroded due to misguided and abusive e-mail marketing practices on your part.

How can your local business benefit from e-mail marketing?

Your business is able to get your brand in front of the eyeballs of your brand's followers when you need it and wherever your list members are. In short, your newsletter or e-mail list enables you to establish a lifeline to your brand's fans. This is a tremendous benefit because you can publicize special promotions that your business is having and let your newsletter members know regarding very important news about your company.

If you were to boil all this down, it all leads to one singular benefit: relevance. That's what you achieve with a well-put-together and well-executed e-mail marketing campaign. You become relevant to the people who are interested in what you have to offer. If you maintain this level of professionalism and relevance, your mailing list members will eventually identify your brand with certain values regarding ideal products and services in your industry. This gives you a tremendous competitive advantage.

The pros and cons of e-mail marketing

You can probably already tell from this book's discussion regarding online marketing options that there is no such thing as a magic bullet option or an online marketing option that has no downsides. E-mail marketing is not immune to this reality. I've already stepped you through the big advantages of e-mail marketing.

To recap, e-mail marketing enables you to communicate directly with your user base. You can expect to get a nice surge of traffic if you send out relevant updates. Best of all, e-mail marketing enables you to turn what would otherwise be temporary traffic to your website into a semipermanent pool of return visitors.

You need to be very careful with this responsibility. If you sent too many junk updates or you are abusive regarding your list members, eventually they will view your updates as nothing more than spam. They would ignore you, and your open and click-through rates will come crashing down. They might not come around to unsubscribing from your list, but that wouldn't matter. The effect is still the same. You're not going to get much traffic from your e-mail if you do not watch what you do.

As you can probably already tell, this is the biggest disadvantage with e-mail marketing. It's very tricky because there's a fine line that you can't cross. Unfortunately, depending on your business, industry and specific set of circumstances surrounding your e-mail relationship, it can be very difficult to determine where that line is. There is no one bright line that says "Do not cross."

In many cases, you set the context of your relationship with your list members based on the e-mails that you sent previously. You have to be very deliberate and methodical with the e-mails you're sending out and pay attention to how well your list members respond to your updates for you to get a clear idea as to which updates work, which ones do not work and most importantly, which ones serve to alienate your user base.

This is extremely important and very risky. Unfortunately, a lot of local businesses think that they simply need to put up a mailing list, and all of a sudden, they have this access to all this amazing traffic. It's not that simple even though I wish it was. You have to do a lot of listening and also use your mailing list as a consumer intelligence tool to ensure that your relationship with your user base is the right kind of relationship.

Chapter 15

How to Fine-tune Your E-mail Marketing System

As I mentioned earlier, there's nothing magical about a mailing list. Anybody can put up an e-mail system and an autoresponder. What separates local businesses who use e-mail marketing successfully from those that achieve mediocre results is that successful local businesses consistently fine-tune their e-mail marketing system. They don't look at it as some kind of "set it and forget it" system. You can't just set it up and leave it. It doesn't work that way.

E-mail marketing, just like most other forms of marketing, is a work in progress. You constantly have to pay attention to details and pick up on certain trends regarding your newsletter members so you can identify opportunities and avoid taking unnecessary risks. With that said, there are key practices that you need to adopt to maximize your e-mail marketing success.

Here are the most common practices that should give you quite a bit of a leg up.

Make sure you're always collecting e-mails

The first thing you need to understand after you have put together your mailing list and completed an effective squeeze page is to make sure that you are always collecting e-mails. How do you go about doing this? Make sure that there are enough areas on your website that call people to action and join your mailing list. When they click on that link, they go to your squeeze page and leave their e-mail address there.

Another way you can consistently and continuously collect e-mails is to publish your direct subscription e-mail address on your printed materials. Your local customers only need to send an empty e-mail to that e-mail address for them to get a confirmation e-mail asking them to sign up for your mailing list. You have to make sure this e-mail address is available on all your printed materials because you're already printing those marketing items, so you might as well just put your e-mail subscription address there.

Of course, all your social media accounts should also feature the direct link to your squeeze page. If you are engaged in content marketing where you publish your original content on third party

websites, you might want to consider using a second link that goes to your squeeze page instead of your main website.

Use an elemental approach to whip up your squeeze page into shape

One common reason why would-be e-mail marketers fail is because they just buy a squeeze page template and think that that's all they need to collect e-mails. That's absolutely wrong. Many of the templates are simply bad guesses as to what would encourage people to sign up for a mailing list. In many cases, they're not based on any kind of statistical analysis or some sort of hard science as to what works and what fails straight out. You're simply relying on the hype and bold claims made by the person or company selling you that template package.

As you can probably already tell, this is not exactly a recipe for success. It's okay to use a template at first, but you cannot leave it at that. It's really important for you to reduce your squeeze page into certain elements and play around these elements by using variations and testing them with your traffic to see which variations lead to a higher e-mail sign-up rate. Any typical squeeze page can be reduced to a header, picture, text and overall layout. Make variations of these different elements sequentially, and once you've maximized your optimization of one particular element, you then move on to the next element.

You keep doing this until your whole squeeze page is converting at its most optimal rate. I wish I can just direct you to a squeeze page that is guaranteed to work for all businesses regardless of the industry they're in and their geographical location. Unfortunately, no such squeeze page exists regardless of how many snake oil salesmen try to make you believe otherwise. The reality is that the best squeeze page for your local business is something that you have to fine-tune over a long period of time based on your specific blend of traffic and based on your particular experiences.

All your online presence must lead to your squeeze page

You're probably thinking that I already covered this in the first item that I outlined above. In reality, your business actually has a lot more online presence than the channels I itemized above. You can be corresponding with customers via personal e-mail. People might be trying to reach out to you through a support ticket system. You might even be conversing with potential customers on forums and message boards.

Whatever platform you use to get in touch with your potential customers, make sure that you don't let this presence go to waste. Come up with a way to make this presence and interaction lead to your squeeze page. If you're able to do this, then you'll be able to pull in as many list members and potential traffic and, down the road, potential buyers wherever your brand is found on the Internet.

This takes a little bit of discipline and quite a bit of experimentation because you probably would want to get rid of interactions that don't really produce much results and focus on the ones that do. What makes this process very frustrating is that you don't know ahead of time which online presence would lead to the most optimal results as far as e-mail list recruitment goes. This is just one of those things that you need to continuously work on to detect certain patterns so you can optimize as you go.

Remember: Your e-mail updates' quality level can destroy your online brand

You might be excited by the fact that you have a lot of people signed up to your mailing list. It's too tempting to fall into the thinking that just because you have a huge list, by simple percentage conversion, you are on your way to a lot of sales. This is a very tempting and seductive idea. Unfortunately, it's absolutely wrong. It's very easy to destroy your online brand with bad updates.

For example, if you have a local business selling baby shoes and you create a mailing list of people looking for baby shoes, but you send updates trying to get those people to patronize a local taco stand, chances are people will begin to tune out your updates. Your brand will become tarnished. At best, it would become confused. You don't want that to happen, so you need to really make sure that the quality of your updates remains on the up and up. Take measures to ensure that your updates will remain on topic.

Reward your customers for joining your list

There has to be some compelling reason why people join your list in the first place. You have to show this fact to your list members immediately after they join. Maybe there are some sort of promotions that you give only to list members. Maybe there are special discounts or giveaways or swag that only list members get to enjoy. Whatever it is, give them some sort of reward and make it clear to them that they didn't waste their time joining your list. Otherwise, it would just be too easy

for them to disregard your updates, and at the end of the day, you've ended up wasting your time putting up a mailing list.

<div align="center">Chapter 16</div>

Blog Marketing

Blogging is not exactly new. It has been around for a long time. Blog, of course, stands for web log. It really is just an online diary. What is awesome about blogging is that it allows almost anybody to have a platform on the Internet with which they can reach a potentially huge audience. You get a personal soap box where you can talk about pretty much anything you want.

How can such a platform lead to your local business getting more customers? It's very simple. If you put up a blog, you essentially get your own editorial space on the Internet where you can focus on your branding initiative. You would be able to interact with your customers and also get valuable feedback from them.

Most importantly, you would be able to network through your blog with other local businesses. Maybe they don't have a blog, but they do have a website. Regardless, your blog can create relationships through the links you put in your post and the links pointing back to your blog.

Moreover, your blog content can be syndicated to social media accounts. When people like the content that you share on those social media platforms, they only need to click a link to end up at your blog. When they get on your blog, you can then employ all sorts of tricks to get them to drill deeper and deeper into your content. The deeper they delve into your content, the more chances you get in converting them into either direct purchasers, visitors or list members.

It's like a fly hitting a spider's web. Depending on how you spin that web, you either have yourself lunch or you have a big fly that got away. It really all boils down to how you work that web. Your web, of course, is your blog.

The pros and cons of blogging

I've already outlined the key advantages of blogging, but I would be remiss to not mention these other benefits. Your blog enables you to create a space where you can build credibility with your

industry. One way to do this is to create a directory of all related blogs and businesses. If these types of posts are so useful on your blog, other blogs can't help but link to you because you have the original copy of that information. More importantly, by going through the time, hassle and bother of publishing such information, you become credible in your local area. People can't help but talk about your blog.

Another benefit that blogging brings to the table is that most blog themes nowadays are mobile friendly. When your local customer base looks up your blog through their mobile devices, they can see a version of your blog that is very easy to process and read regardless of the size of the screen of their mobile device.

The big disadvantage of blogging is that it's very easy to dismiss, precisely because it's too easy to misuse. A lot of people who try to get into blog marketing think that they only need to blog about certain keywords or their company obsessively and somehow, some way, all the Internet traffic will show up. I'm sorry to be the one to break this to you, but there's nothing talismanic or magical about blogging. You have to have a solid plan when you blog. Otherwise, you're not going to attract much traffic.

It all really boils down to the saying, "If you fail to plan, you're planning to fail." If you blog with no clear strategy ahead of time, chances are your blog is going to gather digital dust. This is why a lot of local business owners think that blogging is a waste of time. The reason why they think this way is because they don't have a clear strategy going in. It is no surprise then that they get the lousy results that they are getting. If you want to ensure that your blog truly serves its purpose, you have to be strategic in how you use your blog.

In Chapter 17, I lay out the 5 power rules for effective local business blogging. You have to blog a certain way. Otherwise, you're going to fail. It really is that simple.

5 Power Rules for Effective Local Business Blogging

As I mentioned in Chapter 16, it's very easy to drop the ball with blogging. It really is. It's easy to write posts day after day and have very little to show for it. Sure, you might be able to save a lot of dollars by outsourcing your blogging to places like the Philippines or India, but that still doesn't solve your problem. You might have been able to reduce your costs, but if the material that you post on your blog doesn't generate traffic, then you're just wasting your time.

To avoid this disappointment, here are 5 power rules you need to follow to ensure that your local business blogging effort bears fruit.

Rule #1: Use your blog to build credibility

One of the biggest misconceptions about local business blogging is that you just need to create this master list of keywords related to your company or the products and service that you offer and blog about those. I don't know if you've seen those types of blog posts, but they're nothing to write home about. If you read them, they look like some sort of robot wrote them. They are dull, lifeless and hardly excite the readers.

Think of it this way: if people cannot detect automatically the value your blog post brings to the table, then they really have no business reading your blog post. There's no incentive for them to invest their time reading your materials. If this is the case, then you're not building credibility. The whole point of local business blogging is for your brand to become credible in the eyes of local consumers. This is not going to happen if you use dull, flat, lifeless and oftentimes irrelevant materials.

You have to use your blog to build credibility. If you can wrap your mind about this concept, it naturally flows that you have to be very selective regarding your blog posts. It also naturally flows that your blog shouldn't be just a place on the Internet where you announce promotions that you're running at your brick and mortar business. It has to be bigger than that for you to unlock its almost unlimited branding potential.

Rule # 2: Think about actual customer feedback

Believe it or not, when people interact with your content online or interact with your brand on social media, people are giving you feedback. It's really important for any local business that is serious about using blogging for local business marketing to actively listen to this consumer intelligence. It really is a heartbreak to see all these customer feedback go to waste.

People are not going to take a break from their busy schedules to leave comments just because they want to. Somehow, some way, they want you to act on these comments. It doesn't get any better than this in terms of consumer intelligence. Unfortunately, a lot of local businesses let this information go to waste. You have to be proactive in using your blog to collect information from your offline and online customers. Don't just sit on this information. You need to sort this data, plug it into your overall marketing strategy and brainstorm regarding content that would reflect the needs and interests inherent in these feedback.

If you do this right, you would be able to blog about content that truly matters to your customer base. This is a great way of building relevance, which leads to credibility. You need to start the process at the right stage, and this requires paying attention to actual customer feedback.

Rule #3: Get your readers emotionally invested in your blog content

Now that you've listened to your customers, the next step is to get them to get a sense of ownership to the content you're producing. What are the benefits of doing this, and what are the different ways to do this?

When people feel that you are actually listening to them and you credit them with certain ideas or simply announce to the world that you've noticed certain individuals, they can't help but feel that they are emotional "owners" of your blog content. Think of it this way: if nobody else is mentioning these people, they would naturally become more loyal to online resources that do give them that kind of recognition. Don't underestimate the power of this emotional connection because the more your readers feel that you're actually listening to them because you mentioned them and actually take action on their feedback in the form of content, they can't help but feel loyal to your content.

One key benefit is that they are more likely to come back. Another key benefit is that when they do come back, they're more likely to share your content on social media or wherever else on the Internet that they interact with other users. This can enable you to ride their social connections or their online influence. You'd be surprised as to the reach that you can achieve by simply getting your readers emotionally invested in your content.

Rule # 4: Blog to actively control your brand

The interesting thing about the Internet is that it's always working to shape your brand. Whether you like it or not and whether you're conscious about it or not, this is happening. Unfortunately, a lot of local businesses assume a totally passive stance regarding this and just completely ignore it. I'm telling you right now that you cannot ignore this process. A brand is like a shark: either it's moving forward or it's slowly dying. That's how it works. If you just let other people talk about your brand without any feedback from you, chances are your brand's online critics and haters will get the upper hand.

Eventually, these third parties will define your brand in such a way that works against your interests. You can't just lean on the fact that your local business as a local institution has built up all this goodwill throughout the generations. All that can easily be flushed down the toilet if your online brand becomes so toxic, and you can't really do much to reverse the process. Don't let it get to that stage. Use your blog to actively control your brand. If you've done research on your brand mentions and there are certain negative comments on the Internet regarding your brand, actively rebut such negative comments. Always step up to actively share your side of the story.

Unfortunately, this, in and of itself, is not going to make negative people change their minds. People who already hate your brand are not going to be convinced. However, this is going to stop the bleeding. By seeing your side of the story, whatever toxic comments made about your brand will not spread as widely and convince other people. You see how this works?

By being consistent about this and being clear as to your side of the story, you might be able to lead observers of your brand to the brand perception you desire. This doesn't happen overnight. It requires consistent attention, but it is definitely worth it.

Rule # 5: Blog to be shared

It's easy to look at blogging as a chore. It's easy to think that you have 300 words to write today, so you either outsource it or write it on your own and assume an out of sight, out of mind philosophy. This attitude is really too bad because if you want your blog to be successful, you need your blog to be shared. In short, you need to blog about local topics you can easily share with other local business sites.

They have to be interested in what you're blogging about. The more you do this and the more they willingly link to your blog post, the more traffic your website gets. As mentioned in the chapter on SEO, SEO really is all about how you configure content on your website and how other third party websites either link to you or cite your information. When you blog to be shared, you're giving the websites of other local businesses a clear incentive to want to link to you.

Blogging to be shared means posting interesting information about your area. It means posting funny or emotionally engaging information that gives value to people's lives. This skill set is not something you achieve overnight. It's one of those things that you really have to consistently work on. The good news is that you can easily outsource to an army of skilled writers located all over the world who would be ready, willing and able to give you the kind of quality blog post that you need so your brand can be shared online.

Local Directory Marketing

Local directory marketing involves specialized websites that list local businesses within a particular geographic region. These directories employ a category sorting system so visitors can easily find local businesses within a particular category and location.

Think of local directory marketing as an online form of your local yellow pages. In many cases, it's very easy for local businesses to fall between the cracks when people do general keyword searches online. They enjoy a much faster search experience when they go to location specific directories and enter a few keywords and look through a category listing to find the websites of local businesses that they're looking for.

Local directory marketing is simply the process of getting your local business listed on such directories. That's all there is to it. It's all about finding these directories and filling out forms and getting listed.

How can your local business benefit from local directory marketing?

It's very easy to see the direct benefit here. You get direct traffic from people who are looking for certain businesses within a specific geographic area. It doesn't get any more targeted than this. The less direct yet equally important benefit you get from local directory marketing is the fact that search engines like Google pay attention to local directory listings. If your local business is listed on enough relevant local directory marketing sites that are not spam sites, chances are pretty good that people who are looking for your type of business in your area of coverage might find your business more readily than competitors.

The pros and cons of local directory marketing

In addition to the advantages listed above, one key advantage of local directory marketing is that for the most part, it's absolutely free. While there are some exceptions that require upfront payment, for the most part, local directories take free listings. You only need to invest your time in filling out an online form so your local business' website is properly listed.

Another key advantage of local directory marketing is that it enables you to craft a purely local brand presence. If you focus on directories that are focused primarily in your area and disregard all other local directories, you get a very tightly focused presence on the Internet. This can help you with potential local customers if the local directory you got listed on has achieved a high level of traction with your local audience.

Unfortunately, local directory marketing also has its share of disadvantages. The biggest disadvantage is that a lot of them are spammy. These are websites that are put up primarily just to get citations for certain businesses that are actually being promoted by the people behind the local directory. This is a very tough challenge because you don't know which local directory is legitimate and which one is simply a spamming vehicle by just going by the looks of the website.

Sadly, if you get listed on too many spammy local directories, this can't help but erode your brand and negatively impact your search engine rankings. Another disadvantage to local directory marketing is that you cannot really be sure that the local directories you're trying to get listed on will cover your type of business or would have an accurate enough category that would be logically and directly related to your business.

In many cases, you might be stuck in a situation where you try to fit a square peg into a round hole. This can be a serious problem as far as your local SEO chances are concerned because if you try to force the matter too often, your listings might suffer because there might be all sorts of inconsistent or even conflicting categorizations in the citations that you have generated through local directory marketing.

Chapter 19

Basic Local Directory Marketing Tips You Need to Follow

If you've decided to try your hand on local directory marketing, don't get too excited by the fact that, for the most part, it's absolutely free. Don't get in over your head. You need to read the following tips to ensure that you're doing it right. It's too easy to drop the ball when doing local directory marketing. It's too easy to think that you're doing it right and all of a sudden, your rankings tank or you don't get much traffic at all.

Make sure you pick directories that provide proper localization

It's really important to go with directories that are as local as possible. For example, if you have a business located in Fresno, California, your best bet would be to list first with a directory that is specific only to Fresno, California. Once you've gotten listed on those sites, your next step would be to find directories that list only California businesses. After that, you might want to go national.

You see how this works? The main point here is that the closer you get to a purely localized directory, the better off you are. However, there is a downside to this. There are many purely localized directories out there, but they are spam directories. They were put up by an SEO company so they can get an SEO advantage for their local clients. These are not real websites because they don't really get much real traffic. They didn't build a solid local brand. They're just put up for marketing purposes. Those are a waste of time.

Unfortunately, as I've mentioned in Chapter 18, it is not apparent which local directory is legitimate and which one is a spam directory. Another disadvantage with proper localization is that you might have found truly localized directories, but you may discover later on that its coverage is still too wide. It's important to look for directories that are properly localized.

What I mean by this is that their area of coverage is wide enough to cover your region, but it's not so broad that whatever legitimacy they have within that geographic area is watered down by the fact that they're trying to cover too wide of an area.

Proper categorization is key

As you can probably already tell, basic local directory marketing is all about filling out forms. Unfortunately, many of these forms are very different from each other. In fact, many local directories might not even have the exact category for your type of business.

This is going to be a problem because different categories and subcategories can lead to big differences in traffic. If you pick the wrong category, you might end up not getting much traffic from search engines because it may turn out that your users don't categorize your business a particular way. If you pick the wrong categorization, you might be missing out on all that traffic because your would-be visitors are actually using a different set of keywords to describe your category.

To fix this problem, you need to either work with a professional and experienced local SEO firm or listen actively to how your current online fans and offline customer base describe your business. What makes the latter option difficult and challenging is the fact that you have to give people incentives to want to share that consumer intelligence with you. This is not as easy as it may seem. It's not like you're just going to whip out a $5 bill and people will give you the answers that you're looking for.

Always go the extra mile

There are many local directories that allow apps, videos and other rich multimedia elements. Others offer a large amount of text space for you to truly flesh out what your business is about or to describe in some detail your products and services. Don't let these opportunities go to waste. If a website allows links to YouTube videos or gives you space for putting up your Google map coordinates, do so. Fill out your directory listings and profiles as thoroughly as possible.

Why is this a big deal? If the local directory you're using attracts people from your target area, you get a competitive advantage when a would-be customer compares your listing, complete with videos and a long, thorough description of your business, and your competitor's listing that has just bare bones information, which listing do you think would build more trust? This is a no-brainer. Take advantage of as many different local directory marketing opportunities as you can.

Chapter 20

Doing it Yourself Versus Outsourcing

Now that I've stepped you through the 7 major ways you can promote your local business online, I'm going to talk to you about how you go about doing that.

Most local business people think that since they are tight on resources that they automatically have the time and capacity to do their online marketing themselves. Unfortunately, this option might actually produce more problems than it solves. I'm not saying that you can't do it yourself. What I'm saying is that you have to make sure that you have the time, effort and motivational energy needed to learn whatever it takes and go for however long it takes to achieve the results that you're looking for.

You have to remember that online marketing is a marathon and never a sprint. You have to wrap your mind around that because if you don't, your chances of failure increase exponentially. There are so many things that could go wrong. When you're doing online marketing, you're essentially looking at what you're doing, figuring out the results and making small incremental changes to optimize your results.

This takes time and a lot of patience. In many cases, it takes quite a bit of money as well because there are going to be inputs required. Depending on the online marketing method you choose, your input costs can get quite expensive. With that said, there are tremendous advantages to doing online marketing yourself. The biggest advantage is that you have full control over the process. You get to pick and choose the specific direction you wish to go. You also get a clear view of what's going on and what you have to work with.

Unfortunately, this also brings its own set of disadvantages. If you don't know what you're looking at or get confused as to the actual state of your marketing success, it's too easy to make strategic errors that can torpedo your overall chances of online marketing success. You have to give yourself the time to learn the ins and outs of the particular online marketing model that you've chosen for your local business.

This takes quite a bit of time and can take you away from the daily operations of your business.

After all, you still have a business to run, which also requires quite a bit of your time. Unless you're willing to invest the proper amount of time to thoroughly master certain online marketing models, it's a much better idea to outsource whatever marketing option you've chosen to either an individual or a company that has experience, competence and attention to detail needed to get you the results you're looking for.

Setting proper expectations with do-it-yourself online marketing

Assuming that you have decided to do things yourself, it's always a good idea to go into the project with the right set of expectations. Just like everything else in life, it's very hard to feel disappointed if you have the right expectations. Similarly, it's very easy to feel like a loser and a failure of you have the wrong expectations.

You have to set your expectations properly for you to succeed with do-it-yourself online marketing. This is one of those activities where your energy and motivation level are going to be constantly tested. After all, you shouldn't expect to score a goal the first time you kick the ball. It takes several attempts over several months for you to get everything just right or to even get mediocre results.

After that, you can then start conducting experiments to optimize your results so you can get better and better results over time. This requires patience, attention to detail and most importantly, it requires that you never take your eyes off the prize. You have to know what to look for and what trends constitute a real opportunity and which trend you can discount.

Because of all these factors, you have to set the right expectations. When I first started, the expectations that I set for myself was that I'm just in it to learn. This way, I set the bar really low, so when I ran into snags and challenges, my motivation level didn't evaporate quickly. Instead, I expected that there would be bumps down the road, and this enabled me to keep moving forward. Had I set my expectations unrealistically high, I probably would've given up the first few weeks. You see how this works out?

Some key reasons why you should outsource

As I mentioned earlier, unless you're willing to go all the way and invest whatever it takes and go for however long it is, it's a good idea to just outsource. The whole idea of outsourcing scares many

local business owners because they fear that they are losing control. Some of them are afraid of the costs. The reality behind outsourcing should set your mind at ease.

First of all, when you outsource, you leverage somebody else's experience. They simply just made the mistakes that you could've made. The good news is that you don't have to pay for those mistakes. They already made those mistakes and learned from them, and what you're going to be getting is somebody who knows what he or she is doing.

The second advantage to outsourcing is that you are hiring somebody who has put together an efficient way of going about the marketing activities that you are contracting. If you're learning online marketing on your own, chances are you're probably going to be doing things the hard way. You're probably going to go through many different hoops when you only need to go through one. If you hire a seasoned professional, they know that they are racing against the clock. They're essentially selling their time, so they have all the incentive in the world to behave and provide services in the most efficient way possible.

You get this tremendous advantage and are not going to be dealing with somebody who's just going to burn up a lot of time trying to figure out how everything works. That's exactly what you get when you try to do this yourself. Again, I'm not completely discouraging that option. If you have a lot more time than money, then you should definitely go for it. However, if you would rather manage your local business so it can make more money, and you're comfortable with simply setting aside a fixed amount of capital every month to take care of your online marketing needs, then outsourcing would be a better option for you.

Finally, when you outsource, you're assured that you're dealing with a digital media agency or professional who is working with the latest technology. Depending on the particular online marketing method you've chosen, the state of technology might be mutating on an almost monthly basis. This is definitely true when it comes to SEO. If you go with a professional, they make it their job to always be current with the latest state of technology in their particular marketing discipline. You're paying for cutting edge technology proficiency.

A quick word about Virtual Assistants

If you have decided to do your online marketing on your own, I highly suggest you hire a virtual

assistant. You have to remember that regardless of which online marketing method you end up pursuing, there will be parts of that method that would require grunt work. Take blogging, for example. If you love to write, blogging is not going to be a problem. However, if you had a tough time turning in a term paper in high school, chances are you're going to look at blogging as a chore. If that's going to be your attitude coming in, then it's very likely that you will end up failing.

Why? The moment you quit blogging, you have failed. It really is that simple. In this particular situation, you might want to consider hiring a virtual assistant from places like India or the Philippines, where there are lots of people who speak English as a second language. As long as you filter your virtual assistants properly, not only do you save money on costs, but you can devote the time that you saved to growing your local business.

Virtual assistants can help you with any of the 7 online marketing methods I've outlined in this book. Whether you're doing e-mail marketing, social media marketing or local SEO among other marketing methods, virtual assistants can help you do the grunt work involved. By "grunt work" I mean any tasks that are repetitive and don't require much analysis.

Online Promotions Outsourcing 101

If you have decided to outsource your online marketing activities, you need to outsource the right way. If you visit any online marketing forum, there will always be people complaining about the "fact" that you can't find any good help online. These people are just frustrated and are absolutely wrong. The reason why they are griping is because they outsource the wrong way. Just with anything else in life, you can choose to do things the right way or the wrong way. Similarly, you can choose to do things the easy way or opt for the hard way. It really is your choice. Success, after all, is a decision.

Unfortunately, it's too easy to get caught up in all the money and time you'll be saving with outsourcing that you end up outsourcing in a very haphazard and sloppy way. If this is the way you go about your outsourcing activities, chances are the work product that you will get will be substandard. To ensure that your experience is as positive and as productive as possible, pay attention to the following tips. These can make or break your outsourcing success.

Know what to outsource and what to keep in-house

You wouldn't believe how many local businesses are so sold on outsourcing that they essentially give their outsourced freelancer or digital marketing agency the keys to their kingdom. In other words, they give them all the information regarding their business. They just set goals and give whoever they outsource to free reign as to how to go about the campaign. This is a serious problem because not all parts of your online brand formation process should be outsourced.

Anything that involves the heart and soul of your brand should stay in-house. Anything that involves analysis regarding your audience profile should involve your feedback at the very least. The problem occurs when you give your outsourced service provider full discretion regarding your branding options. They might end up promoting your brand in such a way that undermines your brand or produces mediocre results. To add insult to injury, you only have yourself to blame if this happens because you outsourced everything on a wholesale basis.

You have to always keep in-house the elements of your marketing campaign that involve brand

strategy decisions, branding directions and audience segmentation. The reason why I don't recommend that you outsource these elements is because you are the only person who is in the best position to know this information. You have to remember that regardless of how professional the outsourced service provider you're dealing with is, they are never mind readers. Most importantly, chances are they don't have deep and intimate experiences with your particular niche or sub-niche. There are all sorts of things that can go wrong if you expect them to simply read your mind or understand how your local industry or business works.

Pick the right outsourcing model

Now that you have clearly segregated what you're going to outsource and what you're going to keep in-house, the next step is to pick the right model. There are many different ways to outsource over the Internet, and there are distinct pros and cons to these different models. I've listed below the 4 common outsourcing models. I've also laid out how they work and their set of specific pros and cons.

Micro-outsourced tasks

Platforms that offer micro-outsourced tasks involve very small tasks that can be performed in a very short period of time. In many cases, this involves just one task. You then pay a small amount of money for the performance of that task.

For example, if you just need accounts generated, you can go to a micro-outsourcing platform and ask people to create accounts for you. You pay a small amount of money for each account created, like US$0.25. The big advantage of this outsourcing model is that it enables you to recruit a vast army of people who would work for cheap. These people would go through often complicated or confusing forms and fill out these forms based on the parameters you set. Best of all, you pay very little for each item filled out. You can also set quality parameters so you have the right to reject if a particular form was filled out the wrong way and has lead to an account created with the wrong information. Many micro-outsourcing platforms enable you to reject such bad work.

The big disadvantage with micro outsourcing platforms is that you can only outsource very simple and very basic tasks. If there's any sort of judgment call that needs to be made, these platforms simply fall apart. You may end up wasting a lot of time rejecting accounts that were created the

wrong way simply because the people involved didn't follow your instructions or your instructions were fuzzy or, most likely, they didn't have the right analytical skills to make the right decisions for you. It's too easy to waste a lot of time on micro-outsourced tasks simply because you picked the wrong tasks using this type of outsourcing model.

Project-based freelancers

In this particular outsourcing model, you create a project description and set a budget range for your project. Different freelancers who registered with that freelance exchange platform would then apply by bidding on your project. The big advantage to this outsourcing model is the fact that you are getting a complete package at a predictable price. After all, these people did bid on how much your project is worth.

The big downside to this is that you are at the mercy of the review system for such a platform. If they somehow, some way manipulated the review system, it may turn out that you're doing business with an incompetent freelancer. This freelancer might end up wasting your time, and you end up wasting your money. Unfortunately, this happens quite a bit because a lot of shady freelancers often give each other favorable reviews.

Also, one other common trick shady freelancers use is taking on a lot of low skill and low quality required projects to pad their ratings. When you look at the ratings, you would think that this freelancer has worked on many complicated and high value projects. It turns out that the vast majority of the projects that this person has worked on require very little thinking. In such a situation, your chances of being burned and ripped off increase tremendously.

Time-based freelancers

Time-based freelance platforms list out different freelancers based on their core competencies and their offered skills. You also get a list of all sorts of projects that they have done. Most importantly, these freelancers are sorted out by the amount of money they charge on an hourly basis.

The big advantage of going with a time-based outsourcing model is that you pay only for the time the freelancer takes to work on your project. In fact, one of the biggest time-based freelance platforms out there actually enables clients to peek at the screen of their freelancer to ensure that the

freelancer is actually spending the time working on that client's project.

The big downside to time-based freelancing is quite obvious. When you're paying somebody $20 an hour on your project, they have all the incentive in the world to drag out the amount of time they take working on your project. This is especially true if they don't have any other competing projects that they would switch to after completing yours. Even if you are using that real-time work monitoring system offered by one of the largest time-based freelancing platforms on the Internet, this person can simply just drag their feet and run out the clock, so to speak.

Instead of a project taking only one hour to compete, this person would find a way to let it drag for 5 hours or even more. The obvious workaround to this is to pay per completion. This way, whether it takes the person 10 minutes or 10 hours to complete your project, you still pay the same amount of money. If this is your preferred solution, then you should use the project-based freelance model.

Outsourcing firms

This model involves hiring a digital media agency or a company to do your marketing for you. The big advantage with hiring an outsourcing firm is that you get a complete organization with complete teams. As you can probably already tell, when reading the chapters where I described the different alternative online marketing models available, these models have different moving parts and tasks associated with them.

When you're dealing with only one freelancer or one consultant, this person might be very good at certain parts of the process but might completely drop the ball with other parts. You don't get this problem when you're dealing with an outsourcing firm because you're dealing with a team-based production system where the project managers would assign specialists to different parts of your account.

Let's take a local SEO, for example. Local SEO requires keyword research, citation creation, content writing and other elements. If you're dealing with an outsourcing firm or a digital marketing agency worth its salt, they would break down your project into different parts and assign tried and proven in-house specialists to these different parts.

The advantages are quite obvious. First, you get a more polished product. Second, you get more

consistent results. Third, everybody in the team leverages each other's productivity and quality to produce a more superior final product.

The big disadvantage with going with an outsourcing firm is the cost. Running a team can be more costly because your overhead is much more substantial than if you were just running a one-person operation. There are workarounds to this. If you hire a digital marketing agency based in the United States or Western Europe, you can expect to pay through the nose. However, if you hire an equally competent firm based outside of Western Europe, North America or Australia, you can save quite a bit on costs. Best of all, you can get the same level of quality without it costing and arm and a leg.

Chapter 22

How to Make Sure You Get What You Pay For

If you've decided to outsource and you've selected an outsourcing model and picked out a platform you're going to use, it's very easy to think that you've got everything set up for success. It is easy to believe at this point in time that you are going to get the results that you're looking for. Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the case. You can set up your project in such a way that at best, you get mediocre results and at worst, you get no results at all.

To make sure that you get what you pay for, you need to wrap your mind around the following tips. These are non-negotiable. It's really important for you to outsource a certain way so you can increase the likelihood that you will get the quality of work product that you are looking for. You have to remember that for every dollar you spend on online marketing, that dollar won't be spent on growing your business locally. So, you are assuming quite a bit of risk here and it's really important for you to get maximum value for every red cent you're going to be investing into outsourcing your online marketing initiatives.

Proper training is the key

You might think that since you have selected a digital media agency or are working with a tried and proven online marketing consultant, that training is a non-issue. Well, that is a very tempting assumption. Unfortunately, it can also be very costly.

Regardless of the skill and experience level of the company or the person you're working with, there is still some training involved. It can be as basic as getting on the same page regarding the reports that you will be getting, or it can be as involved as telling that person or firm what kind of objectives and consumer data you want them to work with. Put simply, proper training is really all about lining up your expectations with the core competencies of the service provider you're working with. This way, there will be no unpleasant surprises down the road.

Keep in mind that this training process is a two-way street. They will be training you as to the reports that they will be sending to you and what you should expect. Also, you'll be training them regarding your particular expectations. You have to go through this process, otherwise, it's too easy

to misunderstand each other and end up providing information to your service provider in such a way that they can easily misunderstand it and this can all lead to unsatisfactory results. To avoid all that unnecessary drama, you have to allow yourself the proper amount of time to properly go through the mutual training process. At the very least, this clears the air of any unrealistic expectations.

Use video walkthroughs

If you're going to be working with an individual freelancer or you're sending out some grunt work to be done, it's really important to make sure that you use video to walk the outsourced worker through the particular process you need performed. Since you know the kind of results that you're looking for and what's possible with a particular sequence of steps, it's a good idea for you to take a video of your scheme as you're going through each step that you are outsourcing to somebody across state lines or maybe even somebody located at the other side of the world. By using video, you decrease the likelihood that this person will make a mistake. Also, if you go through the process of creating instructional videos, you clear up any misconceptions on your part regarding the production process. This can also be very beneficial as far as your knowledge is concerned.

There are many video screen capture software packages out there. My personal favorite is Camtasia. It is a little bit costly, but if you use it enough times it is definitely more than well worth the cost. I've tried other video and screen capture packages out there and they are quite substandard compared to Camtasia.

Provide samples

After you have walked your contractor through the process that you are outsourcing, the next step is to give them samples of the final work product. You can go through all the time and bother of walking somebody through a process but unless they have a clear example of the concrete final product, they can still screw things up. Do yourself a big favor and actually provide samples of the final product that you are looking for.

Send feedback immediately

If for some reason, the individual freelancer or firm that you're outsourcing to produced work that

doesn't meet your expectations, speak up immediately. The sooner you send feedback, the higher the likelihood that the problem will be addressed. If you wait a long time or you send feedback in drips and drabs, the chances of you misunderstanding each other increase exponentially.

Do yourself a big favor and always be in the loop. Send feedback before they proceed further with your project. This way, you can put out small fires before they get larger. Also, you can shift the direction of your contractor to the right direction while there's still time.

The main rule you have to remember

The main rule you have to remember is that regardless of how experienced, professional, or expensive the contractor you're dealing with is, you're not dealing with mind readers. You have to spell everything out. You can't assume that they know what you're talking about. You can't assume that they get the big picture.

You have to remember that you're dealing with specialists. They focus on the details, but you are the person who can tell the forest from the trees. You're the person with the big picture. Don't flip your roles by assuming that they get exactly what you're looking for. You have to spell it out for them. You have to give yourself the space and the time for proper training.

Define Your Online Brand or Someone Else Will Do It for You

Now that you have chosen an online marketing method and you have either started doing it yourself or you have hired a contractor, the next step is to focus on defining your online brand. As I've mentioned earlier, the whole point of online marketing for local businesses is to define, manage and control their brands in such a way that warm bodies show up to these local businesses' physical premises. This is not going to happen if you are very sloppy or negligent with your online brand. I can't say this enough. If you don't take active steps in defining your online brand, somebody else will do it for you.

You have to remember that people are already talking about your brand online. It may not be readily apparent to you or they may be talking in small, out-of-the-way places, but they're already doing it and the problem here is that big wildfires can easily go from small fires that you can control to raging infernos that you can't control. It all boils down to how proactive you are. Pay attention to the following tips because they will enable you to take active measures in defining your brand before it's too late.

Be proactive regarding your brand mentions

By simply entering your brand into Google, you would see whether people are talking about your brand in a negative, neutral, or positive way. It's really important to have a clear picture of as many different brand mentions as possible because you want to step in to ensure that these brand mentions work for you instead of against you. You have to take proactive steps. Maybe you need to use Google Alerts so that when any sort of blog post or website mentions your brand, you get notified. Maybe you need to make it part of your routine to just get on Google every few days to actively search for your brand directly or misspellings of your brand. Whatever you need to do, you need to be proactive regarding policing your brand mentions.

Turn brand mentions into linking opportunities

If you've noticed that some blogs have started mentioning your brand in a positive or neutral way, you should work to proactively turn this into a local SEO opportunity. How do you do this? Well,

you need to search for your brand and if you notice that blogs have been mentioning your brand, find these blogs' contact info and email them. Let them know that they've mentioned your brand and you'd appreciate it if they would turn that brand mention into an active link to your site.

This achieves two things. First, you get direct traffic from that particular blog post or webpage. This may result in a large volume of local traffic or it may not. What matters more is actually the second benefit that you get.

The second advantage you get from turning brand mentions into linking opportunities is that you increase the likelihood that search engines will rank you higher because you have more links pointed to you. This doesn't take much effort. However, keep in mind that for every 10 websites or blogs you contact regarding your brand mention, maybe only a tiny fraction would probably get around to linking your brand text to your website.

Respond to negative reviews forcefully, directly and quickly

If you're proactive about your brand mentions, you would quickly discover that certain review sites may have been posting negative reviews about your local business. This is unavoidable. No business is perfect. Maybe your employees just weren't feeling good on a certain day or maybe the customer just woke up at the wrong side of the bed. Whatever the case may be, one of your customers had a negative experience with your local business. In fact, they had such a negative experience that they got online to post a negative review of your business.

At this stage, you need to make sure that you gather information regarding that customer interaction and you present your side of the story. You need to do this forcefully and directly. You can't beat around the bush. By clearing up the context of the negative customer interaction and quickly apologizing or making amends for the negative experience if appropriate, you go a long way in preserving your online brand.

If you just let these negative reviews sit there, then people who look up your local business' name will eventually see that negative review more often and this can on a subconscious level, negatively affect your standing with potential customers. You have to remember that these people are in a hurry. They don't have the time to go through tons of sources to see whether these negative reviews are actually accurate. In many cases, they only need to see a handful of negative reviews for them to

completely shut you out as an option. Accordingly, it's very important for you to respond to negative reviews very quickly and present your side of the story in a very clear and concise manner. If need be, offer discounts or some sort of peace offering to make sure that the interaction can at least turn into a neutral branding experience.

Tire out haters by quickly sharing your side of the story

As I've mentioned earlier, there will always be negative people out there. There will always be people who will have an axe to grind with your brand. This really is unavoidable. The good news is by simply resolving to quickly share your side of the story, you will eventually tire out these haters. They will quickly find out that you actively monitor your brand mentions and the moment they post anything negative about your brand, you will be there at the scene posting your side of the story. If you do this enough times, they will get exhausted and they will pick somebody else to hate on. This happens all the time, so make sure you respond to negative brand mentions quickly, forcefully and directly.

Always Focus on ROI and ROE

A lot of local businesses fail in their online marketing efforts simply because they lost track of ROI and ROE. In most cases, they are completely clueless regarding these concepts. I'm telling you right now, if you don't want to waste your hard-earned dollars on an ineffective or even negative online marketing campaign, you need to make sure you keep a laser focus on these two concepts. These concepts are actually twin concepts. They flow into each other. The more you focus on one, the better your results would be with the other.

What is ROE and why should you care?

ROE stands for Return on Effort. Everything you do with online marketing involves your effort. Simply coming up with an initiative and picking out agencies to carry out your initiative involves effort. Your effort is really a measure of your time. Always remember that opportunity costs are always at play. For every minute you spend on a failed or ineffective online marketing campaign, you could have spent that minute on something that would have put money in your pocket. Do you see how this works?

You have to make sure that all your initiatives produce maximum return on effort. This means that of all the possible marketing options available to you, pick the ones that produce the highest amount of reward consistently. You should care tremendously about ROE because all the time that you spend managing your online marketing campaigns could have been spent growing your local business, building up your local brand, or any other initiatives that can translate to more dollars in your bank account.

What is ROI and why should you care?

ROI, of course, stands for Return on Investment. ROI is different from ROE because ROE focuses primarily on your time and effort. ROI, on the other hand, focuses primarily on the amount of money you spend on your online marketing campaigns.

Whether you are doing things yourself or you're outsourcing, you need to pay attention to ROI.

How much money have you invested in your campaigns and are you getting the most bang out of every buck you invest? You have to remember that you're not in Las Vegas. You're not putting coin after coin into a slot machine and pulling the slot machine's lever in the hopes that you will get a payout. You can't gamble with precious capital. You need to put a tight focus on ROI, otherwise you might be losing money.

Again, the primarily loss that you're going to experience takes the form of opportunity costs. For every dollar you invested in a failed online marketing campaign, you could have invested that dollar on a marketing method that would have produced substantial results. I hope you see how this all works out. Sadly, a lot of local business owners reveal that they're completely blind about ROI when they get excited about the fact that their local business' website gets a lot of traffic. I'm sorry to burst your bubble, but there's more to ROI than just getting a lot of traffic.

Raw traffic volume doesn't put food on the table…CONVERSIONS do!

One common example that reveals many local business owners' blindness to the concept of ROI is when they get all excited about traffic volume. I can't tell you how many times I've run across local business owners that are just beside themselves regarding how much traffic they're getting from social media, blogs, forums, you name it. The problem is after I dig through their numbers and read between the lines, I notice that they're actually losing money. Why? They're not converting this traffic.

I can't emphasize this enough. High traffic volume is well and good, but it doesn't put food on the table. You have to take things to the next level. You have to add an additional step to your analysis. You also need to focus on conversions. In many cases, less traffic produces more. It really all boils down to traffic quality because the higher the quality of your traffic and the more qualified it is, the higher the likelihood you would be able to convert that traffic.

It really all boils down to your bottom line. You need to proactively filter your online marketing initiatives and focus on what works as far as conversions are concerned. Try to improve substandard performers and get rid of hopeless traffic sources. The sooner you do this, the sooner you would get to turning your local business website into a lean, mean conversion machine.

Chapter 25

Recruit Your Existing Customer Base to Turbo Charge Your Online Marketing Efforts

In a previous chapter, I've already talked about how to leverage your existing customer base to jumpstart your social media marketing campaign. This strategy actually applies across the board regardless of which online marketing method you choose. By simply applying the following tips, you can take your campaign's performance to the next level.

Incentivize your existing customers to engage with your marketing method

If you're using blogging, for example, to build up your online brand, you might want to recruit your existing customers by telling them to comment on your blog and sharing your blog post on social media. Of course, people wouldn't normally do this for free. There has to be some sort of incentive available for them to want to do this. I'll leave it up to you to craft an appropriate incentive to get your existing customers to leave blog comments. Whatever the case may be, you need to give out incentives so your existing customers would want to take action on the marketing methods that you have chosen.

Build a loyal community around your brand

By working with your existing customer base, you already have a small mass of ready users. The next step is to offer them such high-level value that they become loyal to your online presence. Again, the most obvious example of this is with social media. However, this also applies with other marketing methods. This can apply with email.

For example, if you develop a very loyal mailing list membership, you can easily convince them to share the updates that they receive on their Facebook walls or other areas of the Internet that they frequent. Maybe they would even share it on a forum that they post to. Whatever the case may be, once you have established a loyal community around the marketing method that you've chosen, the marketing cross-platform pollination opportunities can be quite huge. It's all about getting your existing local users to equate your online presence with a high degree of value.

It's all about extending your brand's reach within your local area

Now, I don't want you to get ahead of yourself. I don't want you to think that since you're using all these online marketing methods, that you can explode your brand's reach all over the world. Well, this is going to be a problem. If you have a local business, you're obviously serving that local area. You don't want to serve the whole world. The shipping costs may be prohibitive. Also, handling returns might be a problem. If you're providing local services, targeting the whole world wouldn't make any sense.

You need to focus on your local area and keep it at that. I need you to focus on this because it's very easy to get so carried away with the tremendous marketing reach of some of the marketing methods I outlined above that you end up marketing to the wrong crowd and the wrong geographic regions. If you are a purely local business, you need to make sure that you fine tune all the marketing methods I've outlined to keep the results strictly within local bounds.

Chapter 26

Don't Expect to Get It Perfect the First Time Around

In this chapter, I just want you to always remember that your success is determined by how motivated you are. Unfortunately, if you set the wrong expectations you might end up robbing yourself of the motivation you need to keep pushing through until you achieve a high level of success. In fact, you might set things up for yourself that you quickly lose motivation and you end up with mediocre results. I don't want that to happen to you so, it's really important for you to have the right expectations. Here are some ways you can go about doing that.

Be clear about your marketing initiatives

First, you need to be clear as to the outcomes that you want to see happen. Of course, we can all agree that you want to make more money. Nobody's going to dispute that, but you need to map out the steps that need to happen before you get more dollars in your bank account. This is where you need to clearly identify your marketing initiatives and break them down into different component parts and put them into a timeline with the end of the timeline, of course, involving more money in your bank account. You need to be clear about the big picture here.

Compare your initiatives to each other based on results

Now that you have run your different marketing initiatives, lay them out next to each other based on the results that you're getting. A clear picture should emerge. If you're running your marketing campaigns like most other local businesses, it will be very easy to see that some initiatives produce more money than others. Other initiatives also require more money than others. Identify initiatives that are succeeding and fine tune them so they can achieve a higher level of success.

By the same token, invest some time into initiatives that are not working and see if you can tweak individual elements and steps within those initiatives until you hit your traffic and conversion targets. What complicates this fine tuning process is that if you're outsourcing your online marketing campaigns, you need to work clearly and consistently with your service provider. Otherwise, you might not be getting the optimized results you're hoping for.

Conclusion

Building a solid online brand for your local business is a marathon, not a sprint. Always remember this, don't assume that you will achieve success overnight. Things don't work out that way. In fact, online marketing really is a giant and long and drawn out educational process. Many local business owners who try to do their online marketing themselves don't get this. As a result, they get discouraged and they end up settling for a tiny fraction of the success that they could have achieved.

If you want to maximize the results of your online marketing initiatives, always remember that building a solid online brand is something that you need to commit to for the long haul. It's not something that will automatically happen just because you are willing to spend money or time. You have to understand that a large part of why branding takes so long is because there's a lot of fine tuning and tweaking involved.

Since no two local businesses are the same, they all have to deal with different sets of circumstances. These require their own particular fine tuning and tweaks. You have to commit to this whole process, otherwise, it's not going to work out. The best way to go about this is, of course, to focus on learning as you go through the marketing process. Don't expect to get it right the first time. Very few people ever hit a homerun the first time they step up to the plate. Expect to strike out the first time you try, but as long as you are focused on learning and you view the whole learning process as an adventure, you will eventually succeed.

I wish you nothing but the best!

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