

Marketing Your Business On The Internet

By Noel Ferguson

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Marketing Your Business on the Internet

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Author Notes



Noel Ferguson graduated with a Bachelor of Management Studies from the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, in 1977.

During the 1980s, he created and then managed a Dunedin-based, 25-person, software development / consumables distribution company. 30 years later, one of the products he and his team developed, The Film Management System, is still being used by film and TV production companies.

For most of the 1990's, Noel managed his own software development team in Auckland. His team developed systems for industries like Flat Glass, Aluminium Joinery, Kitchen Design, Cabinet Manufacturing, Wood Panel Processing, Luxury Boatbuilding, Roving Maintenance, Courier Management (via WAP-enabled cell phones), and CRM.

During that time he was a founding Member of both the NZ Software Exporters Association Executive Committee (now NZ Software Association), and the NZ Software Manufacturers Association, a group promoting NZ-owned and developed software solutions to Government.

Noel has acted as a consultant on many types of projects, including several in the Government sector. He has over a dozen feature film/TV production accounting credits, both in NZ and overseas.

From 2002 to 2005 Noel was involved in Regional Economic Development. This type of work involved Strategy Development and Implementation, Small Business Development, Public/Private Sector Based Projects, Regional Image and Branding, Technology in Communities and Education/Lifelong Learning.

Noel has been involved in web development and marketing since 1994. He has a deep and demonstrable understanding of how to increase web site Return On Investment (ROI) using Search Engine Optimisation and other Web Traffic Maximisation techniques.

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Why you should invest in Internet Marketing?

Over the last 15 years or so, the internet has become part of daily life. People use the internet to search for almost everything, including local businesses and other local information. And now it's becoming mobile.

The huge growth of smartphones like Androids and the iPhone will continue.

The majority of people in countries with advanced economies are now connected to the Internet in more than one way.

If you're not reaching your customers and potential customers when they are searching for information, you're going to lose those customers to your competitors. It's a lost opportunity to increase your customer base and sales.

It also means your business is at a competitive disadvantage.

This book outlines the basics that you need to know when marketing on the web, as well as ways to reach new customers and get your existing customers to spend more money with you. And do it more often.

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The stampede away from Directories to Online Search

According to Google, about 20 per cent of all searches are related to location.

In the last 5 years, local searches have doubled.

Simply put, more and more people are using the internet to search for local information, including information about businesses like yours.

Yellow pages directories have been hit hard by these changes. In the past, if your business wasn't listed in the yellow pages you would be missing out on a lot of potential customers.

But with huge increase in internet-based local search, people are less likely to use the yellow pages. It's not only about convenience and speed. People are also looking for reviews and other information about the companies they're considering doing business with. That isn't possible with print advertising – especially if you only get to change your information once a year.

So, the Internet is quickly becoming what phone directories used to be - the most essential place to promote your business.

Why Directories Are in Trouble

Directory providers realise that they need to do something fast to stay in business. One of the solutions attempted is internet-based directories.

These directories work much like their printed counterparts. Your ad gets placed in whatever business category is applicable on the assumption that people will use those directories to find local businesses.

But the reality is that those sites have relatively little traffic compared with search engines like Google and Bing/Yahoo. These are the first places most people turn to when they're looking for local businesses.

This is good for you, the small business owner, for several reasons:

1. You have much more flexibility in how you present your business through the search engines than you do with online versions of printed directories.

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2. Your costs can be much less than what you would pay for an ad in the print version of printed directories, especially when it comes to larger ads.
3. With local search marketing, you can update or make changes to your ads as often as you want. Compare that to a print ad that can only be changed annually.

In addition to those things, the internet gives you a much larger reach. Directories generally get distributed once a year.

Connecting With Your Customers Online

There are a number of ways you can connect with your customers online. For the best results you need to take advantage of as many as possible.

A sure way to success in business is to put yourself in front of a crowd that is hungry for your products and services.

The crowd is on the Internet.

And you need to be where they are looking and meet them before your competitors do.

The most important place to be is in the Internet search engines, specifically Google, Yahoo and Bing. Of the big three, Google gets by far the largest percentage of searches Google is the first place you should focus your efforts.

There are several ways to develop a presence in Google:

- Search results
- Google Places
- Sponsored ads
- Google Images
- Google News
- YouTube video site (owned by Google)

While these avenues are all part of Google, in many ways they are independent of each other. We're going to cover them all in detail in this book, but it's important to remember that each of them is independent from the others and that you want to show up in as many places as possible.

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What many people don't understand, and many website designers for that matter, is that the broader and deeper your web presence is, the better your chances of success.

Keep in mind that the other search engines have many of these same features. While this talks a lot about Google because they are the largest, virtually everything we cover translates over to Bing and Yahoo as well.

Google Places

Google has a service for local businesses called Google Places. This service lets you set up a profile for your business where you can showcase various things, such as:

- Special offers and promotions
- Post live updates and company news
- Add photos and videos
- Respond to reviews

Reviews are important because Google Places lets your customers post reviews about your business that you can respond to and create conversation with those people. More about this shortly.

Your Google Places listing will appear when someone searches for the products or services you offer in your area, along with other companies offering the same things.

When someone goes online to search for a company that provides the solutions or products you offer, they're going to see several results in Google Places.

What is going to make them choose one business over another?

One factor will be your business' ranking in Google Places. All else being equal, the top three results get the majority of their attention, with the first one getting more than the rest. So you want to be sure your listing is at or near the top of those results. We'll look at some ways to make this happen later in this book.

Another factor is how much information is shared. If your company has a full

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profile with pictures, reviews, special offers and other information, it's a lot more likely to impress the searchers than another listing that just has the bare minimum information showing. A "me too" presence isn't much of a presence in the mind of the average consumer.

You have to remember, this could be a potential customer's first impression of your business, so you need to put your best foot forward. You know you run a solid business and have a good reputation with your regular customers, but potential new customers don't know that.

Way too many business owners still view the Internet as a gimmick and treat their online marketing as an afterthought. Their expectations are low and their online marketing efforts and the results they experience reflect that.

Success in online marketing works the same as your offline advertising in this respect—you have to understand your target market.

That means a business owner needs at least a basic understanding of how people search for, and react to, information online - or the owner needs to hire someone who understands their target market's online psychology and behaviour.

Internet marketing is like most things, you pretty much get out of it what you put in.

The truth is you CAN get more out of internet marketing than it you're putting into it, but you have to know how to leverage the efforts and platforms of others. It's not magic business, it's a smart business.

There are other important ways to connect with your customers beyond Google Places, which we will cover in more detail later. But first, let's look at a relatively new way to reach your customers.

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Social Media Websites

One of the fastest growing segments of the internet over the last few years is what's known as Social Media.

Facebook and Twitter are the two most well-known examples of social media sites.

Having a Facebook page is becoming more and more important because people have come to expect it. **There are over 800 million users on Facebook.** If you're not on Facebook, you're missing out on a lot of potential business.

Facebook IS the Internet for many people and they spend a lot of time there. Many people spend most of their time online using Facebook, so if you aren't reaching them there, you may not have a chance to reach them at all.

You may have already started to notice a lot of big companies adding "Find us on Facebook" to their websites, advertising and other places.

It can work just as well for local businesses - in fact probably even better. Facebook is by nature a place to be social, so a nimble local business fits in much better than a bigger, slower moving, corporate entity.

A business Facebook page gives you a way to connect with your customers and help create a real sense of community. And the idea of "community" is a fast-growing factor online.

Twitter is another social media site where your business should have a presence. It's a bit different to Facebook - the whole point is to post short updates (up to 140 characters at a time), so you can only share so much information.

Twitter is great for sending out messages about special offers and other news, but importantly it's another way for your customers and potential customers to contact you.

Your customers can send you messages via Twitter, called "Tweets". Because the messages are so short, tweets are an easy and effective way for them to ask quick questions or give you quick feedback.

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Remember, people will talk about their experiences with your company on the Internet whether you are part of the conversation or not. So besides reaching potential customers, there's another reason you should have a presence in places like Facebook and Twitter — to manage your brand.

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Managing Your Reputation Online

A lot of business owners find it difficult to get their heads around the idea that people will be using the Internet to talk about your company - whether you like it or not.

That includes good AND bad.

Mistakes happen in any business. When they do it's more than possible that news of your mistake will wind up on the Internet where anyone searching for your business can find it.

The fact is that the public have a much greater voice and influence over your business success than ever before.

Previously and upset customer might tell a few friends, but after letting off a bit of steam the urge to complain about your business passes.

But, if they post the same complaints online those complaints are likely to float around forever, reaching a far greater audience than their personal circle.

If you're not maintaining an effective presence on the web, the following scenario is quite possible:

1. A negative review could end ranking high in the search results, so whenever somebody searches for your business, this could be one of the first, and quite possibly the last, things they see. Your potential customer has no way of knowing whether the complaint is accurate or not (it might be a competitor), so without your side of the story they are more likely to accept it as fact.
2. Without a web presence, you won't have a chance to explain your side of the story, or to try to repair the situation or damage done.

The solution is to be a part of the conversation.

In other words, engage your customers where these negative comments. You can then try to correct any mistakes, or explain your side of things if you are not at fault.

It's important that you have a presence on both Facebook and Twitter, if only as a point of contact for your customers who are already in those

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places.

If someone moans about your business, and you don't have a presence on Twitter or Facebook, you might never know about it. But people who are looking for information about your company online could quite likely find that information whenever they search for you. Naturally that negative information would influence their decision on whether or not to do business with you.

This happens every day.

To make matters worse, some angry customers exaggerate the problem. They want to make you suffer. And when they can post anonymously or use a pseudonym in most cases, the sky is the limit!

Of course, if you have an active presence on Facebook and Twitter you can try to correct the situation. You have the chance to turn an unhappy customer into a happy one, who might then become one of your biggest supporters at that point.

It's also a big plus to add your voice to the online "record". When someone finds that complaint they're also going to see your response. You might win a new customer by your reasonable responses, and turn a negative into a positive.

As an aside, the growing level of online criticism has led to a new type of service in the Internet – "online reputation management".

Customer Review Sites

Other important places where it's important to maintain an active presence are review sites, including:

- [Yahoo Local](#)
- [Google Local](#)

These sites are probably best described as business directories that let people post rating on local businesses.

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Again, you need to maintain a presence here if you want to be able to manage your brand.

In addition to reputation management, these sites are important because many of them have apps for smartphones. And this is important because people use these mobile apps to look up local businesses.

If people using mobiles find a listing with low ratings or bad reviews, they can just choose another listing—you **will never know you lost a potential customer** because of a negative online influence.

Just like Facebook and Twitter, you need to be able to either correct any problems your customers have, or explain your side of the situation.

Note that review sites aren't only about reviews. Many of them let you make special offers to your customers. Special offers can be another great way to draw in both new and existing customers through your doors via smartphones and other mobile devices.

If people are searching for a local business using one of these services, and they see a special offer from your company, it is much more likely they will visit your business in person.

If your offer is combined with good reviews and obvious interaction on your part, this is likely to improve your chances of winning their business.

Bottom line: do you have all the business you want?

If the answer is no, then you have to go to these new centres of influence and put your business in front of a new kind of customer—ones who are influenced more by the Internet than by traditional means.

Getting Involved With Your Customers

Another way of managing your brand online is to engage your customers.

This comes back to having a Facebook Page, setting up a Twitter account for your business, and using promotions that let you connect with your customers at a far lower cost than traditional advertising.

For example, if you have a Facebook Page where your customers can follow

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your business, you can use it to make offers.

Imagine you run a restaurant. You're having a slow week. So you post a special offer on Facebook for your followers offering a 10% discount and a free dessert with any meal. You limit the offer to the next two days.

You can be pretty sure that you will bring in a few customers who wouldn't have otherwise showed up over the next couple of days. (A similar offer could help a supermarket sell food items before the expiration date passes.)

This kind of marketing is *short-notice promotion*. Benefits include:

- Cost effective—it's essentially free advertising
- Flexible—you can promote anything at the drop of a hat
- Immediate—no waiting for a publication to be distributed
- Fast—results can be nearly instantaneous

Facebook and Twitter can both be used for short-notice promotions, but there are even more powerful tools as well—mobile marketing and email marketing.

Mobile Marketing Offers You Some Huge Opportunities

Mobile marketing is a huge opportunity for local businesses.

More and more people are carrying smartphones that have always-on Internet connections and they are using their phones to find local businesses when they're on the go.

Very few businesses approach mobile marketing correctly, however.

Most businesses have no "mobile" version of their website; or if they do it's really just a smaller version of the main site.

To see what your current website looks like on a smartphone, follow the link below. You can see 3 variations without logging in.

<http://www.mobilemoxie.com/handset-emulators/phone-emulator/>

Of course, any mobile version is better than no mobile version, but it's still

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not likely to be very useful for the customer or effective for the business.

It is 80% likely that a smartphone user will simply leave a non-mobile friendly page and look for another site.

Here's something else to consider. Many smartphones have GPS functions. You could include your GPS coordinates on your website. All your potential customer would need to do is click on the link to get exact directions to your business.

How many of your competitors are doing that right now? If they are, then they have an advantage and you need to catch up. If they don't then you can create an advantage for yourself.

Another possibility— set up your contact information on your website so that a site visitor can click a link and automatically save it on their phone's address book.

With your address details loaded they'll be more likely to see you when they need your products or services.

One incredibly powerful mobile marketing tool that is totally under-used by local businesses, is text messaging.

Text Messaging – Marketing on Steroids

Text messaging, or SMS, is huge. And it's used by people of all ages.

Local businesses can use text messaging to engage their customers on a much more personal basis than even email marketing can provide.

There are two huge advantages to text messaging that really can't be matched by any other method of communication.

1. Most people have their phones with them virtually all the time, so those messages will reach them no matter where they are.
2. The vast majority of text messages get read almost instantly when they're received.

How can this work in your favour?

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Going back to our restaurant example, text messaging could work much the same as Facebook promotions, except it would be more immediate.

If the restaurant was slow on a particular day they could send a promotional text message at 5:00 PM and reasonably expect a response within an hour. There's just no other advertising medium that can reach your customers as immediately that is virtually guaranteed to be seen.

You don't have to tap out text messages to all your customers every time you want to send something.

There are services that will broadcast a text message to everyone who has requested to receive them from you. These services let you choose a number, called a *short code*, to use as your point of contact. Your customers just have to send a text to that number to sign up to receive text messages from you.

You can set up an automatic response from these short codes. This gives you the ability to offer an incentive to get people to opt in to receive your messages.

For example, a restaurant might offer a customer a coupon for a free appetiser on their next visit by texting the word "yum" to their short code number. When the customer sends the text they could get a near instant response with the details of how to get the free appetizer.

After that whenever you broadcast a text message they will receive it unless they opt out.

And if they like receiving discounts they will more than likely stay subscribed to your messages as long as you don't abuse the privilege with too many messages.

Email Marketing Scenarios

Email marketing lets you send messages, known as broadcast emails, to those on your list. This is a very effective form of marketing because your list contains people who want to hear from you.

Not everyone checks their email daily, so this is best used for events that

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last for more than one day; or for a promotion where the customer can take advantage of your event at their leisure. Sending discount coupons, sales that last a few days, list-only sales and similar events are great for email marketing.

A list-only sale is where you give a special deal only to those on your mailing list. It's a way to reward them for being on your list.

There's more about email marketing in an upcoming chapter.

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Making Your Website Effective

Having a good mobile version is one aspect of an effective website, but there are several other things that your main website should offer. Your website should be doing the following things:

- Educating your audience
- Branding your company
- Establishing your expertise in your industry
- Generating leads and sales
- Building relationships with your audience

But there are some things a website can't do:

- Miraculously drawing in people searching for what you offer
- Replacing personal connection and interaction

One mistake people make is to try and cram as much information as possible into the home page of their site. This overwhelms new visitors, and in many cases they will just click away and keep looking elsewhere.

Instead, use the home page to grab the visitor's attention and help them find the right page on the site for whatever information they're looking for. Think of it as a sort of "directory" for the rest of the site. You want people to be able to find what they want within 5 seconds and 3 clicks or less.

The trick is to look at your website from the view of a complete stranger.

A useful approach is to think about what a typical customer would want.

Create a "model" customer with most of the traits of your typical client. Give them a name, consider their age, their sex, what kind of knowledge they have about your product, their income, how many kids they have, etc. The more complete this imaginary customer is the better.

Then, whenever you are writing something for your customers, whether it's website content, an email, an article or any number of other types of content, write it as though you're addressing that fictional customer directly

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and personally. This can really help to filter out the stuff that's either unnecessary or confusing and get right to the point.

This really wins customers over to your side because you are treating them as real people. They will learn to like and trust you. And once they reach that stage, chances are you have a customer for life.

We'll discuss how to get the people who are searching for what you offer to actually visit your website shortly (in fact, that's really the ultimate goal of everything in this book), but as far as personal connection and interaction goes, the Internet has one very useful tool for this – email.

Send an email, make money. Send an email, make money. Get the idea?

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Email Marketing – The Internet Workhorse

One of the most critical things you should be doing on your website is some kind of lead capture. That means getting your customers' names and email addresses so you can contact them via email.

"66% of those surveyed said they had made a purchase because of a marketing message received through email."

- ExactTarget, "2008 Channel Preference Survey"

You can also encourage people to sign up for your mailing list in your place of business.

The ideal situation is to have a computer set up at (say) your reception or counter where you can quickly enter their email address while there are in your premises.

When they get home they'll find an automated confirmation email from you.

They click the link to confirm their subscription to your mailing list and they'll receive a second email welcoming them.

They might join your list just to receive future discounts and special offers, but you'll get more subscribers if you offer them an immediate incentive. It can be delivered automatically by email as well. (One of the nice things about email is that so much of it can be automated so it takes very little time once it's set up.)

Every page on your website should have an opt-in form where people can sign up to receive your emails. While text messages, Facebook and various other methods of contacting customers are important, email is still one of the most widely used technologies on the Internet.

Virtually everybody has an email address, and by building a list of your customers' names and email addresses you can keep in touch with them on a regular basis and keep your company at the top of their mind.

Suggestions for email promotion include:

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- Upcoming promotions
- Coupons
- Newsletter
- How-to information
- Reminders
- Anything else that would be relevant to your customers

Email advertising is much more cost efficient than flyers and other types of advertising.

Think of how much a simple newspaper ad costs. Once it's published, you have no idea how many people will see it.

Furthermore, the newspaper ad isn't nearly as well targeted as your mailing list. A newspaper ad goes out to local subscribers, but most of them aren't subscribing to see your ads. Most probably won't be interested. With your mailing list, everyone is expecting to hear from you, that's why they gave you their email address.

For you that means you can send an email as often as you like, to people who expect and want to hear from you, and you can do it without any lead time.

You can use in conjunction with other types of advertising.

For example, if you have a special event or some other special promotion coming up you could send an email reminder your mailing list about it. That way those who saw your other advertising will be reminded of it so they can take advantage of it and those who didn't see your other advertising will learn about your event for the first time.

But email is not just about sending special promotions.

You can also use what's called an "autoresponder" to automate your email contact.

When a customer signs up to receive your emails, an autoresponder service will automatically send specific messages to them at any interval you want.

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This lets you queue up a number of emails that will go out to your customers with absolutely no effort on your part.

Here's an example...

A restaurant starts a mailing list. Instead of just sending promotional emails, their autoresponder is set up to automatically send out an email once every week or two with a cooking tip, or a kitchen tip, or a recipe, or some other useful information.

Most kinds of businesses could put that strategy into effect in some fashion. A car dealer could send out car care tips, a greenhouse could send out plant care tips, a book store could send out book reviews, a pet store could send out pet care tips, and so on.

But wait, there's more...

Suppose a greenhouse business is sending out plant care tips. One week could be a lesson on how to start a bonsai. They could include some pictures of bonsai specimens. At the end of the email the greenhouse offers them a coupon for 15% off bonsai planters and the specific plants that make a good bonsai tree.

You can be pretty confident that this would result in sales to the greenhouse that they otherwise wouldn't have made.

It's pretty obvious that if you're not marketing like this you're leaving money on the table.

You can use email to educate your customers about the products or services you offer, or how to use those same products or services, or even just send monthly reminders that you are there to help if they need it.

Another good use of email is to send reminders of appointments or other due dates.

A dentist's office could send a reminder via email a day or two before a scheduled appointment, a car dealer could send a reminder that it's time for the next oil change, a gift store could send a birthday reminder and offer a discount so the email recipient will come to their store to shop for their loved ones birthday, and so on.

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Any business that sells shippable products can expand their sales reach via the Internet.

You don't have to put your entire inventory online. As long as you can offer a valid reason for someone to buy from you, you have a chance to win a sale. Valid reasons could include exclusivity, scarcity, limited quantity, price, a free bonus product, brand, even perception.

And perhaps best of all, email is a two-way communication tool so you can use it to ask your customers for feedback.

Here are a few ideas:

- Ask them what their biggest questions are about the products you sell so you can tailor your advertising and other promotions to answer those questions.
- Ask them what products or services they want or need that you don't currently offer.
- Get feedback and testimonials from them that you can use in future promotions.
- Find out how they feel about your customer service and support, prices, inventory, the friendliness and helpfulness of your staff and other factors. The information you receive can help you improve your business by identifying problems etc., and gives you a chance to demonstrate you're responsive to your customer's concerns and ideas.

When you do this, you're not going to get responses from every customer who receives your email. Only 1-2% will respond. But here's the rub - the responses you do get could help you make a lot more profit simply by identifying your customer's concerns, needs, and desires.

So how do you get people to sign up to receive your emails?

There are various strategies that will work.

If you deal with people in person in your business, such as a retail shop or restaurant for example, you can have a laptop computer or a portable device such as an iPad where people can enter their name and email address right at the point of sale.

This is more effective than the low-tech method still used by a lot of businesses—a notebook and pen. Why get your customers write their name and email address in a notebook when you can have them enter it directly

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into a computer? This puts them directly into your email database so you don't have to enter the information manually.

Another low-tech method is to provide "web cards" to your customers at the point of sale and in other strategic locations in your store.

A web card is like a business card; only it lists the web address for signing up to your mailing list. You can offer an incentive to them for following through. This can be done right on the web card, you don't have to have your staff or you pitch it to each customer in person. Just put something like this on the web card:

"Join our VIP mailing list for great tips, discounts, and exclusive offers—plus get 25% off of your next purchase just for trying it. You'll be emailed the details when you sign up!"

The bigger the discount you offer the more tempting it will be for people to sign up. (You make up for the discount later by having them on your list.)

Another effective way to get people to sign up to receive your emails is on your website itself.

Add a lead capture form (opt-in form) to every page on your website so people can enter their name and email address no matter what page they might be looking at.

To increase the number of people who sign up to receive your emails, you can offer them some sort of incentive for doing so.

This could be a free report or white paper in digital format (think eBook) that will help educate them about something related to your business that they would want to know. It could also be some sort of special offer or coupon that gets sent to them automatically after they sign up to receive your emails.

Or you could do both to improve your conversions even further.

Offering a report or white paper has another advantage as well ... you can use it to promote products and services related to the subject matter. For example, a hardware store might offer a report that shows people how to

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change locks on a door, and then then offer a discount on locks.

You can also use what is known as an *exit pop-up* on your website. This is a pop-up window that gets displayed when someone leaves your website. This pop-up can make the same offer as your opt-in forms, but it has been proven that these popup windows are more effective at converting visitors into subscribers.

The worst that can happen is they will leave without signing up, but they were leaving your website anyway so why not make one last attempt at capturing their contact information?

Another way to get people to sign up to receive your emails is to use other advertising media.

If you send out flyers, include a brief call to action on each one letting people know they can sign up to receive special offers and other information by email by visiting your website.

If you want to continue running Directory ads even after reading this book, include that same call to action in your ad the next time you renew.

You could even add a message to the end of every customer receipt or invoice, asking them to sign up for your emails at your website.

In fact, you should be including your website address in most places where you use your business name, and specifically use the call to action wherever it makes sense. Some places where you should include your website address:

- On your after-hours Answering Machine
- On your Business Checks
- On Letterheads
- On Business Cards
- In your Yellow Page Ads
- On newspaper Display Ads, Flyers or Inserts
- In your Classified Ads
- On your Invoices

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- On your Sales Receipts
- On your Product Bagging/Packaging Materials
- In Direct Mailings
- On your Company Brochures and other Literature
- Include it with your Radio and Television if you do any
- On Billboards if you advertise that way

Any promotional material you produce - include your web site address.

The wider the use of your Internet address the more impact it will have for you.

Think "Integration" here.

Too many companies separate offline and online activities. They view their physical business as one entity, and their web site as a separate entity. In fact, an integrated marketing approach is the most effective strategy.

Treat this email list as a valuable part of your business – because it is – and promote it anywhere and everywhere you can.

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Make It Easy To Stay In Contact

Your website should make it easy for your customers to contact you, no matter how they want to get in touch. For most businesses this means including:

- Your phone number
- Your physical address
- Links to other web properties where you have a presence like Facebook and Twitter
- A "contact us" form where they can send you an email message directly from your website

The more ways you give your customers to contact you, the better.

For example, if it is practical, you could offer a live chat function on your website that lets your visitors chat with someone directly over the internet. Skype – with or without video - is another chat option.

Chat doesn't work for everyone, but if you have people sitting in front of a computer for much of the day, it's worth considering

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Some Selected Promotion Strategies

The Internet lets you reach new customers with low cost of advertising at speed. And you quickly make changes to test the effectiveness of various components of your campaigns.

Here are just a few promotional strategies you can use to both improve your rankings in the search engines and get your business listed in various other locations.

News Updates Using Press Releases

Press releases can be very effective. News websites pick news releases fairly quickly. By including a link back to your site in the press release you can drive potential customers directly to your site. The link back from a news site will also help improve your site's search engine rankings, which in turn increase the number of visitors to your website.

A side benefit is that your press release might also get noticed by a local newspaper and your business could end up getting some free publicity. Many local newspapers are desperate for stories about local people or businesses – especially if you have something newsworthy in your press release.

Press release services can distribute your press release to newspapers, websites and other media outlets. Some of the leaders include:

- PRWeb.com
- Webwire.com
- Marketwire.com
- PR.com
- WirePRNews.com

Here's how it works. You submit your press release to a service, and they then broadcast them out to the many different news outlets, both online and offline on their database. The cost varies, depending on the number of outlets they broadcast to and what other additional services they provide. Some are free.

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If you use press releases often your website will benefit from a growing number of links pointing to it. (Link building – or backlinking – is one of the most important search engine optimization factors. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of grooming your website to rank highly in the search engines for keyword phrases important to your business.)

Media distribution is another promotional option. This involves submitting articles, videos, images and other types of content to various high traffic sites. When your content gets posted on those sites, people see it and click through to your pages. This gives you a chance to convert them into customers and/or subscribers.

Make Your Own Videos

Video is a powerful option. While you can add images and video to your Google Places account page, you can also add videos to dozens of video sharing sites – including *YouTube.com*.

Other popular video sites include:

- Vimeo.com
- Dailymotion.com
- Veoh.com
- Justin.tv
- Buzznet.com
- Collegehumor.com
- Ustream.tv
- Revver.com

Some sites prefer certain types of videos. Other sites, like YouTube.com, let you post pretty much any type of video.

The content you include in your videos depends on your objectives. You could include promotional/commercial content, something more educational like “How To” videos.

For example, if you operate a computer shop you could create “How To”

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clips for your YouTube channel showing people how to do various things with their computers.

This approach would give you two opportunities to reach your customers.

People searching for a local computer store could find your videos on Google or another search engine. If you had a collection of videos showing various things they need to know about computers, you'll have set yourself up as the local expert – even before they set foot in your store.

You could also use your clips to help existing customers. They could view your tutorials about computers on YouTube, and you could take questions from them via email, Facebook etc., and then create new videos answering their questions.

From your customer's perspective you can see how these kinds of activities will turn them into raving fans and help to build your brand.

Used in this way video can keep your business fresh in your customers' minds, so when they need a product or service you offer, you are the "Go To Guy".

When you submit your video to numerous sites, you improve your chances of getting new customers. They can find your video on those sharing sites directly, as well as finding them via search engines like Google Video. One of the joys of the Internet is that you never know where people will find your content, so the more places you can share it, the better.

Of course the more sites containing your video, the more sites that link to your site, the better your rank in the search engines.

Write and Distribute Articles

Article helps promote your website and improve your website's search engine rankings. There are hundreds of article directories on the Internet. Some of the most effective sites to get your articles distributed include:

- Ezinearticles.com
- GoArticles.com
- Articlesbase.com

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- WebProNews.com
- ArticleDashboard.com
- Article-buzz.com

Like video, you'll find that some article distribution sites focus on certain topics, while others cover pretty much everything.

The mechanics of Article Publishing are straightforward. You submit your article to get published on their website. You can include a short "resource box" at the end of the article. Most use the resource box to talk about themselves or their business and include a link to their website.

The link in your bio has two benefits:

1. People who read the article will click on the link to visit your website and you get a chance to turn them into customers/subscribers
2. Each link from an Article Directory helps your website rank higher on the search engine result – i.e. as a rule the more articles you distribute, the better you will rank when people are searching for local businesses.

Your article resource is a great place to entice people to your website. Say you're in the real estate business, and you write an article to help homeowners choose the right real estate agent to sell their home. Many people would include something like this in the resource box:

Joe Somebody has been a real estate professional for over 15 years, helping make buyers and sellers home ownership dreams come true. Visit Joe's website at: www.somesite.co.nz

Problem is that there is no invitation to visit Joe Somebody's website. What's in it for the reader? Why would the reader click through to the website?

Compare the approach with this:

Get a free report titled, *How to Stage Your Home for a Quick Sale at the Maximum Price*. Don't leave money on the table that could be in your pocket, get your free report at www.somesite.co.nz today.

Obviously the second resource box will do a much better job of bringing in new business. There's something very powerful in it that would make it hard for any homeowner selling their house not to click through.

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The same aorta of approach can be used to attract home buyers too. Articles for home buyers offer a free report on how to save money on closing costs, or how to choose an agent, or how to negotiate for the best price.

Article sites also offer syndication features. Most article sites let other websites use your article on their site, as long as they leave your resource box intact at the end.

When this happens you will get even more opportunities to reach your customers. More and more backlinks will be helping to push your website up in the search engine rankings.

In parallel, assuming your articles contain useful content and are reasonably well written, you will be helping to establish a reputation as an expert. People searching the Internet about you, your company, or your products, will find your articles on many different websites. This will help make you the local expert on what you offer – especially if your competitors are not appearing in the results.

Imagine if you saw the same author's articles in every magazine you read about a topic. You would be inclined to think they knew something about the subject. Being mentioned all over the internet has the same effect.

Marketing Using Images

Images are another type of content that can help you get your company in front of potential customers. Photo sharing sites let you share your photos. Examples include:

- Flickr.com
- Photobucket.com
- Imageshack.com
- Imgur.com
- Picasa.com
- Smugmug.com

There a several benefits when you use images.

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First, if it suits your business, you can share pictures of (say) the products you sell or the work you do. For example, an interior designer might share images of past jobs or before and after shots.

Having pictures can be very rewarding - a picture is worth a thousand words. Plus, Google and most other search engines have image searches so you could attract a potential customer via your images.

Even if your business doesn't deal with visually exciting products and services, it can still make sense to distribute images of some kind.

One reason is for brand recognition. When people see your company name or logo in the search results, it helps to brand you in their mind. The next time they see your website listed in the search results, or find your Google Places listing on their smartphone, they may recognise your business name ahead of other companies that they haven't heard of. A case of "familiarity leading to opportunity".

Like videos and articles, images give you opportunities to create links to your website. And the more links you have, the more likely you are to improve your website's search engine rankings.

One less obvious benefit - if you have pictures of your office or business online it will make it easier for people to recognize you and your business in "real life".

By themselves, each of these promotion ideas can provide you with some great benefits. Using all of them can make a huge difference to your bottom line.

Paying For Advertising

There are also a number of ways that you can buy advertising on the Internet, including:

- Pay per click (PPC) ads
- Banner ads
- Direct ad buys with other websites
- Facebook ads

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Pay per click ads are the "sponsored ads" that are displayed at the top and/or on the right side of the page in the search results on Google, Yahoo and Bing.

As an advertiser you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad, not when it gets displayed. The cost per click can range anywhere from a few cents to several dollars, depending on what industry you are in and which keywords you are bidding on.

You create ad campaigns based on keywords that people would use to search for your business.

For example, if you were in the tool rental business you might bid on some of the following keywords:

- [city name] tool rentals
- [city name] paint sprayer rental
- [city name] sump pump rental

...and so on. There are usually dozens, and sometimes hundreds of keyword phrases people use as search terms for any given subject.

You can set it up so your ads will only get displayed to people who are actually in your geographical area so you aren't paying for clicks by people who aren't likely to do business with you because of their location.

Because you can control exactly where your ads get displayed, you can specifically target people who would be most likely to become customers.

And while a broad keyword might have a high cost-per-click, when you are bidding on the *local* version of it (with the city name included) the cost is generally much lower. Of course, this will depend on the number of competitors who are also bidding on those exact keywords.

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Advertising Using Banners

Banners are the graphic ads that you see on many commercial websites.

There are a number of ways to obtain advertising space. You can work with an ad network that will handle your ad buys for you; or you can work directly with other website owners and buy ad space on their pages.

Another option is to partner with other businesses in your local market that don't compete with you directly and trade ad space on each other's websites.

For example, let's say you own a plumbing business. You could partner up with a local electrician, real estate agent, lawyer and builder and share ad space on each other's websites.

If you set up these complementary partnerships it can work out well for everyone involved – it's essentially free and everyone can win.

Obviously you want to be careful when selecting your ad trade partners. Having a trade partner with a bad reputation could do you more harm than good.

Facebook Advertising

Facebook ads are another form of pay per click advertising - you only pay for those who actually click on your ad, and you can target a very specific audience.

There is a difference - instead of your ads being shown based on the keywords people are searching for, Facebook ads are displayed based on various demographics that you choose.

For example, if you own a gym or fitness club you could create an ad that targets women between the ages of 35 and 50 who live in your area, who have a university education and are interested in health-related topics.

You could also create a different ad that targets men with the same demographics. Another ad might target the 50 to 60 year old age group, or any other available demographics. Facebook's aim is to make it easy to put

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your ad in front of the people who are most likely to be interested in what you have to offer them.

Facebook also makes it easy to create multiple ads that bring potential customers to the same offer, but each ad can target a different group of people.

Facebook is growing at a much faster rate than other websites, including Google, so it is becoming more and more important that your business has a presence there - your own Facebook Page and Facebook advertising.

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Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Many of the topics we have covered so far are various parts of search engine optimization, or SEO for short. SEO is the process of optimizing your website to improve its rankings in the search engines.

There are two main components of SEO, on-site optimization and off-site optimization. Each main component has many sub-components.

Off-site optimization is comprised of various strategies for building links to your website. In general, the more links to your website there are, the higher it will rank.

On-site optimization involves the strategic use of the right keywords and semantic terms in the right places, the internal and external linking structure and strategies, populating your site with the kind of content the search engines expect, and using an optimized site structure.

Keyword Research

There are many ways to help you find the right keywords for your website. One is the free Google Keyword Tool.

The Google Keyword Tool was designed for Google Adwords advertisers, but it also works well for discovering the search words people are using while looking for a site like yours.

You may think you know the best search terms for your website, and you probably do know some, but you will be amazed at how many different ways people search for the same thing.

Here's an example...

While researching web hosting, (at the time) there were about 5,000 searches a month for *low cost hosting* and about 132,000 searches a month for *cheap hosting*.

Quite a difference, but it's unlikely you would know the difference without doing keyword research.

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Suppose you have a craft store and sell craft supplies. You know a lot of keywords that could be used, but you don't know which ones are the best to target. You use a keyword tool and enter "craft supplies" as the seed keyword phrase. The keyword tool returns a couple hundred phrases and the number of times they are search for each month.

Some of the keywords you thought would be good don't look good at all. Like the hosting example, they were terms an insider would use, not the real terms customers are using. You browse through the list and a few phrases jump out at you:

- wood craft supplies gets 2,900 search per month
- craft boxes, 6,600 searches
- craft paint, 8,100 searches

Those are good keywords to shoot for, and you find some others, but then you discover some interesting things. While *wood craft supplies* gets 2,900 searches per month, *wood craft supply* (singular rather than plural) gets 5,400 searches per month. It's a subtle difference in wording but a big difference in the number of searches.

Then you notice *cheap crafts* gets 5,400 searches per month, and the competition is low. It gives you the idea to create a special section in your store for low cost craft activities. You figure you can put together some affordable kits, and you'll add a new section to your website to rank specifically for this term. It's a great idea, you've discovered an underserved niche market and should be able create a good income from it.

What you see next astounds you! You see there are 49,000 searches per month for *scrapbooking supplies*. The competition is a little stiff, but you realize you need to devote more website space to scrapbooking. Even if it takes a long time to rank well for that keyword phrase, you know with that many searches per month, people finding your website for other search terms might be scrapbooking enthusiasts as well.

So now you can see how keyword research can lead you to the actual search terms people are using, but it can also lead to new and profitable business ideas that can add significantly to your bottom line.

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Keywords

Knowing which keywords to use is one thing, knowing how to use them is another, and knowing how often to use them is still another.

Without getting too technical, you should use the keywords you want to rank for in strategic locations on your web pages.

You have to be careful not to overdo it - artificial attempts to rank web pages via excessive keyword usage and manipulation is frowned on. Too much keyword usage can result in the search engine algorithm flagging your page as a possible spam attempt, which will lower its ranking.

Building Links

Another component of search engine optimization is link building, or backlinking. It involves getting links pointing to your website from other websites. Generally speaking, the more incoming links your website has the better, and the better the quality of those links the more they will help your site.

For example, if you have a computer related website and get a link pointing to it from an authority site like PCWorld.com, it would be considerably more valuable to your ranking than a link from Joe's Pizzeria.

Of course, there's a lot more to it than that, but this isn't a detailed book about link building or search engine optimization. Simply put, you need links to your website to succeed.

There are various ways you can generate these links to your website. We have already discussed some of them when we looked at media distribution. Articles, videos and various other types of media can include links to your website, so as you distribute them to more and more places you will generate more and more links back to your site.

You can also buy links on other websites. This is essentially a form of advertising, but instead of paying for another site to display your banner or paying for clicks on Google or Facebook, you're paying another site to link back to yours with the goal being better rankings.

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Be careful though - the search engines don't place as much value on paid links as they do organic links, so you don't want text close to your paid links that signal your link has been purchased.

Words like *Sponsor*, *Advertisement*, or *Paid Message* tell the search engines that the link is a paid one. Which means it is not going to help you as much as you'd hope for.

You also want to avoid sites that use the "nofollow" attribute because that tells the search engines not to follow the link—in other words, the link doesn't count.

By all means buy nofollow links, but use them to generate sales traffic or for list building.

Links from sites like Facebook and Twitter can be useful, and so can links from sites review sites like Yelp.com.

Another backlinking related strategy is to set up multiple websites of your own, each with a very narrow focus.

All of them can link back to your main site, helping to push its rankings up.

For example, you might set up "minisites" for different product lines that you sell, or different services that you offer, each with a very specific focus.

A word a caution about this strategy - search engines count links as "votes" for your site from your peers, but if it is obvious one company owns all of the sites, the links won't carry as much weight as votes from neutral sites. And, unless you are careful, it is pretty easy for the search engines to figure out you are the owner of multiple interlinked sites.

Obviously many of the strategies outlined in this book work in tandem with each another.

Media distribution doesn't just get your name out there, it helps with SEO. Being active on Facebook and Twitter doesn't just give your customers another way to contact you, it also helps your website rank better. The more you market your business online, the more everything will compound to give you better and better results.

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It is important to remember that SEO is not a one-time thing. It is an on-going process.

Sure, you can ease back on the amount of content that you are distributing to various places once you've made an initial push to get your site ranked, but to maintain those rankings you'll need to do a certain amount of this on an on-going basis.

Otherwise, if your competitors are also improving their SEO, they could beat your search engine rankings.

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Increase Your Profits by Tracking Your Results

There are numerous website tools that let you track where your customers are coming from and which traffic sources are the most (and least) profitable for you.

You can tell how many potential customers are arriving from Google, Facebook, videos on YouTube and any other place you post your content.

And you can analyse traffic sources down to specific messages or media. For example, if you post a video on YouTube, you can embed a special tracking link into it so you know exactly how many people end up visiting your website as a result of that specific video.

Having this kind of capability helps you to know where to focus your time and efforts, and while you can get traffic from a range of sources, it's also about getting higher search engine rankings.

Note: Even though a particular site isn't sending a lot of direct traffic to your website, it may be valuable in a different way. If a site is about a topic related to yours it's a search engine asset for you. If the same site has a high Google PageRank or authority status, it's a big backlinking asset, even though it may not send many visitors.

There are many tracking services available – from free ones to services that cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month.

One of the most effective is free to use - Google Analytics.

Google Analytics will track visitors coming to your website, where they're coming from and many other things. It will even tell you what keywords people searched for when they found your website in their search results.

This data can be REALLY useful to you because over time you can analyse it and work it back into your website to get even better results.

For example, when you analyse your data you might find you're getting some traffic from Google for a phrase you didn't do any optimization for. Seeing that, you could click over to Google and see just where your site ranks for that term. Let's say you find it towards the bottom of the first

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page, say in the 8th place out of the ten. If you got that good of a ranking without trying, you could create some optimized content for that phrase, which would likely lead to an even better ranking, which would then lead to a lot more traffic.

You might write a new article to add to your website that uses that phrase.

You might submit content to other sites that use that phrase and link back to your own content about it.

With a little bit of SEO work your site would move higher in the search engine rankings and are likely to start getting more visitors who are searching for that term.

Google Analytics doesn't just track your visitors, however—it can also track the actions those visitors take once they arrive at your website.

For example, say you have a lead capture form on your site for people to sign up for your mailing list, and you have Google Analytics on the page.

You would be able to determine how many people come to that page, where they come from, and by checking how many people actually sign up during the same time period, you'll know what your conversion rate is.

That can tell you several useful things. The most important of these are:

- Knowing how people found your sign up page tells you where your best time investments are, as well as your best monetary investments if you run ads.
- If you do buy advertising, you'll know your exact acquisition cost per customer so you can run more profitable media buys.
- You'd also be able to make "tweaks" to your lead capture page so you can improve the conversion rate. The more you can improve the conversion rate the lower your acquisition cost per customer.
- You'll know which keywords are working the best for you and which are least effective. You can then drop the ones that aren't working, use the ones that are working more, and try new keywords and be able to know if they are effective.

This kind of detail is pretty much impossible to track through traditional advertising mediums like the phone directories and newspaper ads.

If you don't have a website for your business, or if you do but aren't taking advantage of it properly, I hope some of areas we have covered in this book

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have opened your eyes to some exciting possibilities for your business.

Unfortunately, many SEO service providers aren't able to take a business beyond the point where they are helping the business make more money than they are costing them in fees. Most mean well, but they either spread themselves out too thin or they lack knowledge in one or more areas.

Still others view it as a job. They put in their time and feel they've done what they were hired for—they don't quite get the whole "results" thing.

It's all part of the new landscape. This book should help you, the forward looking business owner, to a better understanding of using the Internet to increase your business.

Should you decide to do it yourself you have a better idea of what you need to research now. Should you decide to hire a pro, you have a better idea of what the possibilities are and what questions to ask.

My advice:

- a) think in terms of the lifetime value of your customers
- b) Think about the cost of acquiring each new customer.

Let these numbers drive your decision making.

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The Bottom Line

With the right pieces in place, the Internet can give you far better results than most traditional advertising methods. And it's just going to become more and more important to local businesses as time goes on.

More than half of your business competitors have a website right now. And that percentage will increase.

If you're not keeping up with the times you're falling behind the times *and* your competitors.

And, if you aren't making the best of all of the opportunities the Internet offers, you have two choices—do nothing and continue to lose ground, or start taking advantage of them.

You can bet your competitors are hearing all the same things.

Where to Start?

We've covered quite a few topics in this book. Hopefully your head is swimming with new ideas. And it's likely you're wondering where to start.

Sure, you could probably figure the technical stuff out for yourself, but is that really the best use of your time? It's unlikely that you will be able to run two businesses at once.

Let's face it—is this the kind of stuff you want to be doing personally? Probably not.

MegaCam helps small businesses get more customers and make more money.

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