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Small Business & the Web

Reading List

<http://www.allbusiness.com/technology/software-services-applications-internet/6433786-1.html> Kathy Murdock

Stop me when this sounds familiar. You've created a new blog for your business, as a way to attract customers online. Now you're ready to start your blog marketing program to kick things into high gear.

The only problem is, you're not sure where or how to begin. This guy says one thing, that guy says something else, and nobody seems to agree which business blog marketing techniques work the best.

If you can relate to this, let me offer some helpful advice. Starting your blog marketing program is more important anything else, so feel free to jump in anywhere. Seriously. There is no perfect plan for business blog marketing, nor is there a "one-size-fits-all" technique that works best across the board. Every business is different, and every blogger has different goals. So a marketing technique that works great for one company might be a flop for another company.

In other words, don't succumb to analysis paralysis! And don't let somebody tell you what will or won't work for you, based solely on *their own* business blog marketing experience. Experiment for yourself. Be bold. Put an idea down on paper, give it some thought, and then go for it. You'll make some mistakes along the way, I guarantee that much. But you'll also learn a lot as you go. And anything is better than just sitting there, scratching your head and analyzing your options to death.

Some Blog Marketing Ideas to Start With

There are more business blog marketing techniques than you can possibly use. So instead of bogging yourself down with the minutia of every possible scenario, choose a handful of the techniques that interest you, and then go for it. Here are a few blog marketing ideas to get you started.

1. Create Valuable Content

It all starts by having great content that your target audience finds useful and interesting. If you fail in this regard, all of the business blog marketing techniques in the world can't save you. Start by creating a [blogging content plan](#) to hone in on your key message, topics, etc.

2. Network With Others

Once you've got plenty of great content on your blog (see item #1), you should share it with others in your industry. Direct competitors probably won't link to your blog — unless it's *really* interesting. But many others will. These links you acquire from your networking efforts will help you [boost your blog rankings](#) and traffic levels at the same time.

3. Send a News Blast

While you're telling the world about your blog, why not send a press release about it as well? You can use a website like PRWeb.com to publish a press release online, and it will probably get picked up by Google News, Yahoo News, and other channels. After the initial blast, you can seek out industry websites that cover your field or industry, and you can send the release to the editors of those websites as well. Public relations is a highly effective but often-overlooked aspect of business blog marketing, so experiment with it for yourself.

4. Focus On Usability

There are thousands of widgets, gadgets, plugins, and other bells and whistles available for blogs these days. But just because a certain tool exists doesn't mean you need it on your business blog. Exercise restraint. Keep your blog clean and inviting. If you put so many "toys" on your blog that it hurts your readers' eyeballs, then there's no point worrying about your business blog marketing efforts ... nobody will spend much time on your site anyway.

5. Keep it Fresh and Current

If somebody visits your blog and sees that the most "recent" post is a month old. They won't be inclined to (A) stick around, (B) tell others about the blog, or (C) participate in any way. So keep your blog relatively current. Post something new and useful at least once a week, or more often if you can manage it. The same goes for the quality of your content too. So write about interesting topics, and write in a clear and engaging manner. I'm not saying you have to write like Faulkner — in fact, it's better if you don't. I'm just saying your blog should be interesting and easy to read.

So there you have it, an initial plan-of-attack for your business blog marketing program. Like I said, it doesn't really matter *how* you get started as long as you start *somewhere*. Don't be a victim of analysis paralysis, and don't be afraid to blaze a new path with your blog. The best business blogs are often created by people with the courage to try something new. So go get 'em, tiger!

Get more ideas for [promoting your blog](#).

Post Info: Friday, January 23rd, 2009 | [Blog Promotion](#) | Brandon
<http://www.ceoblogwatch.com/2009/01/23/business-blog-marketing-step-1-do-something/>

What Is Quality Content?

Now we know how to increase blog traffic with quality content. Specifically, we have outlined three ways that great content increases traffic levels. It turns visitors into fans, it helps you improve your search engine ranking, and it generates referral traffic from other websites.

But what is quality content and how do you create it?

In my opinion, [quality website content](#) has the following traits:

- It explores the subject matter in great detail, regardless of the subject being addressed.
- It is well-written with proper spelling and grammar. Thus it is easy for people to read.
- It is interesting and insightful. It doesn't just rehash what everyone else is saying — it speaks for itself.
- It is updated often to address current events / changes within the subject matter.
- It is written with a clear purpose in mind. To entertain, to educate, to persuade, etc.

So now you know how to increase blog traffic with quality content. The only thing left for you to do is start generating that great content! Good luck.

Post Info: Sunday, March 16th, 2008 | [Blog Promotion](#) | Brandon

Essential Website Pages

<http://www.sitepronews.com/2009/01/27/24-essential-pages-to-include-on-your-website/>

By Ivana Katz in Web Design

Wondering what pages to include on your website and why? Here is a list of important information that should be included on your site.

Before you start thinking about what to write, it is important that you create a plan, which outlines what each page will contain. That way you won't repeat yourself or forget vital information. The most common pages on successful websites include:

1. Home Page (First Page)

This is your "sales" page and should provide information about what you can do for your customers. It should also give your visitors a brief overview of what they can find on your site.

2. Products / Services

It is useful to have a separate page for each product/service and write as much detail about each as possible. Start each page with a brief summary of the product/service, then provide whatever information you can. When people are searching for information on the internet, they want to know it NOW. They don't want to wait until tomorrow when they can speak to you on the phone.

3. Contact Us

Place contact details in as many places as possible. Make it easy for your customers to contact you. Create a special "Contact Us" page, include your details in "About Us" page and also at the bottom of each page. Information to include: business name, physical address, mailing address, telephone, fax, email, emergency number, website address.

4. Pricing

Whenever possible include the price of your products/services. Even if you can't be specific. It is helpful to put at least a range of prices, eg. Carpet cleaning ranges between \$40 - \$60 per room.

5. Testimonials / Product Reviews / Before & After

Include testimonials from your current customer to show your potential clients that you are trustworthy, reliable and that you offer great service and/or products. Make sure the testimonials are real and if possible provide contact details of the person who supplied you with the testimonial. If you don't have any right now, get them! Simply email your customers and ask for their feedback on your business and service.

You could also include before and after photos. Show the problem picture and beside it show the picture of resolution, with an explanation of your product's benefits.

6. Frequently Asked Questions

This has proven to be a great time saver for many companies. Instead of having to answer the same questions over and over again, place them on your website and keep adding to them. The more information you have on your website, the less time you will need to spend answering questions by email or phone.

Frequently Asked Questions should address your customer's concerns that may otherwise be an obstacle to making a sale.

7. Response form such as "Subscribe" or "Enquiry" form

An absolute must if you want to build a mailing list. Most people don't like giving out too much information, so ask only the basics, such as Name and Email Address. Then keep in touch with your customers on a regular basis by sending out information that may be of interest to them. You may even wish to develop your own on-line magazine (ezine). There are many fantastic free or inexpensive programs that can handle this for you.

8. On-line Magazine or Newsletter

This is a great marketing tool. Not only does it help you keep in touch with your customers, but provides your website with fresh content. You can set up your Ezine in 2 different ways:

(a) Email subscribers on a regular basis or (b) Publish it on your website.

Or both. Include information about your business, industry or anything that may be of interest to your customers.

9. Resources/Articles

Add value to your business. Provide information that is complementary to what you do. For example, if you sell wedding dresses include information about reception venues, wedding planners, wedding cakes, flowers. By adding extra information you encourage more hits.

10. About Us

This is a very important page as it tells your customer about who you are and why they should buy your products, services and/or trust your organization. It can also feature your business hours (if you have a bricks and mortar store) or when they can speak to someone on the phone. Many companies also include their mission, details of their staff (photos, biographies, qualifications), recently completed projects, ACN or ABN, logo, directions to your store/office. It is also useful to include details of trade associations you belong to, trade and insurance certificates and any awards you may have won.

11. Guarantee

Offer a money back guarantee. The longer the guarantee, the more effective it will be. It could be 30 days, 60 days, 1 year or lifetime.

12. Survey

Find out what customers think about your website, business or product.

13. Events Calendar

This can relate to your business or industry. If you are an artist, you can feature dates where and when your art will be displayed or if you are a singer, where you will be performing.

14. Search My Website Feature

Some visitors to your site may not know exactly what they want but if you include a search function on your site, they can look for it very easily. Like search engines, this feature will allow your visitors to type in a word or phrase and then search for it on your site. It's like having your own mini search engines, only instead of it searching the world wide web, it just searches your website.

15. Return/Refund Policy

To make your customers feel more comfortable when making a transaction at your website, you should provide them with your return/refund policy. Ensure it is easy to understand and spelt out step by step.

16. Privacy Policy

Privacy continues to be a major issue for customers shopping online. Concerns about how their information is going to be used is a major barrier when making a sale. Internet shopping experience is built on trust and privacy is the number one ingredient in trust.

17. Site Map

A site map is similar to a contents. It shows visitors how the site is laid out and which sections are where.

18. Copyright Information

Your website should carry a copyright notice to protect its intellectual property. It is generally in the form of "Copyright © 2004, Your Company Name".

19. Links

Here you can place links to the manufacturers of your products, trade associations or complementary services. When you place links to other businesses, you can request

they do the same for you. This will not only bring you more visitors, but may improve your search engine ranking.

20. Media Information

Include any information, articles, photos of your products, staff etc that have appeared in the media - print, TV, radio or internet.

21. News

This can include news about your products/services or about your industry.

22. On-line store

An on-line store allows you sell products directly on the internet 24 hours a day/7 days a week. When building an online store it is important to take in a number of key concepts.

- Make sure that when visitors arrive at your store the navigational mechanisms are simple and effective
- The actual process of placing the order must be simple
- Make sure you accept common and convenient methods of payment
- Continually test your store so you understand your customer's shopping experience

23. Blog

A blog is a journal that is available on the web. The activity of updating a blog is "blogging" and someone who keeps a blog is a "blogger." Blogs are typically updated daily or weekly using software that allows people with little or no technical background to update and maintain the blog. Blogs are a great tool as they help with:

1. Communicating with your customers. Blogs provide a way for you to communicate with your customers directly. And it is a two-way communication. You can post a message on your blog and your visitors can easily respond.
2. Search Engine Marketing Blogs give you an increased presence on search engines, like Yahoo! and Google. If you use Blogger (Google's Blogging Tool), every message you post creates a new page on Google so in a very short time you could have lots of pages pointing to your website
3. Stay Ahead of Your Competition Blogs are relatively new and chances are your competition does not yet use them. So you will be seen as an expert in your industry when you post your knowledge and expertise.
4. Media & Public Relations Blogs are excellent PR tools. You can post your Media Releases and articles and have them picked up by the media.

5. Free or Low Cost

24. Photo Gallery

Even if you do not wish to sell your products on-line, you may wish to showcase your goods or services in a special photo gallery - show how your products or services are being used by your customers. They say "pictures speak a thousand words" and on your website it is particularly important.

Don't give your customers a reason to visit your competitor's website and provide them with all the information they may possibly need or want.

<http://www.pawprint.net/internet-marketing/small-business-web-site.php>

Top Ten Small Business Web Site Marketing Tips

Many small business owners struggle with the seemingly overwhelming task of managing their web site. There always seems to be so much to do, yet no time to do it all (something we know all too well). This brief primer should help to highlight the key aspects of web site management that will help them gain the most from their web site with the time that they have available.

The following ten tips are key to maintaining a successful web site. Follow these and your site will do better. Nothing will guarantee that a web site will be successful as there are simple too many different factors that impact web success - but as a general rule these ten tips will always lead to better performance.

For more detail consult [Building Web Site Success](#) a detailed primer about these and other aspects of Internet marketing.

#1 Content

Content is key

Almost all the search engines scan a sites content now - almost ignoring things like meta tags. The more content you have on your site the more the search engines can scan - but there is more to it then that: people like content too. Many people measure a web site's success by the number of visitors it gets - so ask yourself - why would people come to your web site? do you offer them interesting and informative information that relates to your product or service? if not, why would they come?

Relevant content and lots of it is a key for a successful web site. There is always room for more content on a web site, and you can never have too much.

Take this article for example, while it's fairly useful information for many of our visitors, it's also additional content for our web site - and will serve to help our site do better. Writing articles about aspects of your industry is a great way to generate content.

Set aside an hour a day (or at least an hour a week) to devote to adding new content to your web site.

#2 Freshness

Keep it current

Having lots of content is great - but if it is all three years old it's not going to look like your site is much of a priority. The search engines actually track this. They monitor how frequently your site changes as they visit it for indexing. The more often it changes the better your rank in the freshness category.

What constitutes change? pretty much anything - which is why keeping a BLOG or adding frequent news articles to your web site usually produces such good results. It is also the reason why having something as simple as rotating content and the current date on every page has been shown to make a difference (although the search engines have been getting wise to this kind of tactic)

#3 No Tricks

Don't try to outsmart the Search Engines - Eventually you'll loose

Many design firms promise success through the use of tricks, backdoors, and special tactics designed to sneak a web site into a top position rapidly. Something, of course, that the search engines are constantly battling to defeat. Why play the game? as the search engines find the cheaters they will plug the holes and a rank (that usually costs a pretty penny to achieve) will immediately be lost.

Rather, follow the recommendations of the search engines - most set out rules for web masters that outline what they would like to see in a web site (incidentally these rules are the main source of research for this document) By following the rules the engines are actually battling all the cheating web sites and working to promote the sites that follow the rules - they are fighting FOR you!

#4 Links

Links both in and out must be relevant

There has been a lot of talk about link exchanges - people linking to others merely to gain a higher rank (hmmm this smacks of breaking tip #3) if you are going to link to someone and/or ask them to link to you - ask yourself: is it relevant?

Any old link is not going to help you much - search engines will look at who is linking to you - they are also starting to pay very close attention to how many links you have off your web site on a page. This is being done to try and drop sites with pages of links (do you have a links page on your web site?)

It is far better to have relevant links places throughout your web site - on only those pages that specifically the topic that relates to the page being linked to.

Unfortunately you can't exert too much control over the way that other sites link to yours but it is worth looking at how a site usually links to others before to specifically go requesting a link from them.

#5 Structure

Organize your web site and everyone will thank you.

Both the search engines and your web visitors prefer a web site that is well structured. The search engines due to their very nature (being computer programs)

must break down all web sites into elements based on the structure of the pages. People, so frequently rushing to find the specific information they are looking for, rarely read through web pages but rather scan headings and bulleted lists to find the detailed sections of interest. In both cases a well structured site will be far better received than one that is a mish-mosh of information haphazardly thrown together. This is simple to do - but all too often missed. Make headings, use the correct coding tags for them, organize sections of content into groups, and use bold and bulleted lists to present key points.

Keep in mind when writing paragraphs of text that most humans will not read them unless they are specifically titled with a headline that matches what they are looking for.

#6 Accessibility

A web site that speaks to all is better than a site that only speaks to some.

Tips #6 and #7 are closely related: The Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) provides a list of guidelines for how to create web sites that are accessible to as many people (and systems) as possible. Think about your web site - can someone with a visual disability (perhaps even something as simple as colour-blindness) still get information about your product or service? If not, how do you feel knowing that you have just excluded a vast segment of the population from accessing your web site?

There are many simple ways that you can ensure your web site is accessible to people with special needs. A group of simple tests for the sites content and design that ensure your product or service is presented to the widest possible audience. The specifics are beyond the scope of this document - but be sure that you check with your designer to ensure that your site design and code is following accessibility guidelines.

#7 Quality Code

Well coded web sites perform better.

Many small business owners don't have too much control over the code used to create their web site - but it is still important to know how important it may be. Standard compliant code that has been checked for errors is easier for the search engines to assimilate. It is more widely visible across varied platforms (computer types) and in different browsers.

Ensure your web designer is writing standard compliant code that is validated for errors. You can also check your own web site using [free on-line tools](#) from the W3C (The World Wide Web Consortium - the standards body that administers Internet technologies)

#8 URLs

Prudent choice of URLs will impact your web site's performance

Professional web designers should already know this - but if you are using a content management system to build your web site, or portions of it, it is important to understand the significance of the URL used to access pages on your web site. Search engines look at the address of every page on your web site and try to extract key-words from the content of the url. For example, you may have a page about "Widgets" on your web site called "somewhere.com" creating the page with a filename of `wigits.html` will give a better keyword rank than `page6.html` this is also true of sub-directories on the site `somewhere.com/widgets/...` being better than

[somewhere.com/files/...](#)

This is a fairly subtle point but makes a significant difference for most search engines. It can also make it much easier for people that are typing in a URL to access a specific page of your web site. Notice the URL for this web page - it's called <http://www.pawprint.net/internet-marketing/small-business-web-site.php> for a reason!

#9 Style

Looks do matter - but perhaps not the way you think...

In the grand scheme of things the "looks" of a web site in the classic sense are not really that important - honestly! once people have looked at a web site for a few minutes they will quickly discard their first impression (based on looks) and move immediately to asking - is this site giving me the information I need - and can I find it quickly (going back to tips #1 - content and #5 - structure)

So what are we on about with style? simple - ensure the style of your site makes it easy to read. Avoid things like black backgrounds with white text (inverse text is harder to read) ALL CAPS (humans read by identifying word shapes - writing in all caps forces people to read every letter and quickly becomes annoying - plus on the net it is used as a typographic method of indicating you are screaming) You should also check your web site using a [colour blind test](#) to ensure that visitors with the various types of colour-blindness can still actually read your navigation.

#10 Images

Selling a product - better make sure it looks good

If you are selling something that has a visual representation - then professional looking photography is key. Even a multi-million dollar resort will not look good if the photographs are amateurish. If you care about what you have to sell, then it's worth investing in some professional photographs to show people what you have.

Remember, on-line people can't get a hold of your product - so you need to give them some really good photographs so that they can feel confident that it meets their needs.

[The Death of The Elevator Pitch](#)

Posted by Renee Oricchio at 11:00 PM

What happened? Believe it or not; it's too long.

I'm old school converting to new school. Once upon a time (a couple of years ago), the rule of thumb in business was to have your so-called "elevator pitch". In other words, whatever you are selling, advocating, messaging about yourself or your business; be able to say it in the time it takes on the average elevator ride. If you aren't on an elevator, it was called the two minute pitch.

The elevator pitch today is a lifetime. The two minute pitch is eternity.

Here's a softball question; what killed it?

- Texting
- Twitter

Even if you really are on an elevator with a potential client/new employer/venture capitalist, guess what? They are used to information shortened into short illiterate phrases - and they like it that way!

I will resist the temptation to moan about the downfall of civilization, the art of language, the courtesy of patiently offering time to others; when the reality is that it is what it is. Sigh!

So how do you say what you need to say about your business or yourself in literally one line?

Start with the basics; noun, verb, object.

(i.e. We sell cloth.)

Now add a modifier to clarify what is special about you or your business.

(i.e. We sell cloth made from bamboo.)

Now add a short modifying phrase to clarify what is not only unique; but niche about your business.

(i.e. We sell cloth made from bamboo that is cheap, ample and green-friendly.)

Now edit the whole thing down by a third to one half and start with the most ear-catching words.

(i.e. We're totally green. Bamboo cloth. cheap & ample.)

Then exchange e-mail addresses.

Hook 'em.

Other links:

<http://ezinearticles.com/?10-Things-You-Must-Know-Before-Designing-Your-Website&id=2100373>

http://www.psandl.com/img/pdf/10_Things.pdf

BLOGGING DO'S

Like any other websites, a [free blog](#) also demands a great deal of marketing effort to really see targeted traffic building. Here are sought-after tricks you can use that will quickly get you started in the right direction:

1. Everyday posting will mark up your blog's ranking in search engines and is essential to the survival of any blog. A number of bloggers who have adjusted their posting frequency and analyzed the resulting traffic numbers claim three posts a week is a minimum, and three times a day is where you begin to see some serious targeted traffic.
2. Make your voice heard among the thousands of pages competing for search engine placement and ad revenue by submitting your blog RSS feed to My Yahoo!, Google's Reader and other RSS directories and search engines.
3. Trading links or trackbacks with other bloggers in your niche is perhaps the best way to drive traffic to your site. Bloggers are well known as free and generous linkers. Most blog owners will readily provide abundant natural links to content that interests them and their readership or even freely create permanent links to their regularly read blogs from their own home blog pages.
4. Blog pinging is important if you want to make the most of all the time and effort you put into creating new content and posts. By pinging blog search engines, your blog's content will be indexed in a much more timely manner, which could lead to additional search traffic, which could, in turn, lead to new inbound links if other bloggers who found you blog's content interesting and link-worthy.
5. Comment on other blogs oftentimes. Drop by some blogs everyday and leave useful comments on all of them. If your comments help other or if they find your comment useful they will surely come to your site.
6. Register with forums and discussion boards related to your website's niche. Contributing valuable info on the forum will generate website traffic from your signature link from forum users in your post. You can setup a forum signature that has your website address.
7. Tagging your blog posts is a trick of getting people to find what you're writing, not just organizing for yourself. Sites such as Technorati and Del.icio.us allows users to tag their blog postings, making searching and sorting of blogs easier.

Lastly, good content is what will make or break a blog. On the Internet content is king and always will be. Creative content will allow you to grab your readers' attention and hold it. Readers are the life blood of your business blog if you want to grow your business. With consistency and quality you'll develop a loyal base of readers that will drive [targeted traffic](#) to your blog and be the cornerstone of your blog's success.

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/03/26/nelson-dell-marketing-cmo-network-nelson.html>

Online: An Essential Path to Igniting Brand Passion

Erin Nelson, Dell CMO, 03.26.09, 07:10 PM EDT

Marketers should engage customers through social media.

Do you remember your first online purchase? I do. It was not that long ago when it was a big deal to shop online. Today, shopping online is as familiar to many people as going to the local mall. In fact, in another five years, the majority of the workforce won't have experienced a time when you couldn't shop online ... or e-mail, or text, or consciously manage and create an online personal brand.

The Web is continuously changing the way people connect and communicate and how marketing professionals are reaching customers. We must increasingly consider and use new tools and media that thrive on connectivity, interactivity and engagement. When we close our laptops or set aside our smart phones at night, customers around the globe go right on transacting and connecting. They are sharing and searching for information. They're expressing perceptions about our brands or asking others for advice--all of it recorded for online searches and easy to find.

On average, Dell (nasdaq: [DELL](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) is mentioned in 5,000 online conversations every day. Four years ago, we were not participating in those conversations, some of which were not flattering, none of which we were influencing. We came to understand the force of these global online connections, recognizing the tremendous growth in the blogosphere and social media--perhaps not surprisingly given the power of the Web not only to our IT business, but also its significance in our

direct model and direct relationships with customers. Now these online customer conversations have become a part of how we do business--from [product development](#) to customer support, impacting our business processes, as well as how we connect.

Amid these changes, we're witnessing near-daily launches of the latest "haven't you used it yet?" social-media tools, even as a challenging economy is forcing marketers to reduce their budgets. Like never before, companies rely on us to help raise sales, understand issues around customer satisfaction and retain customers. In this environment, social media can seem like just "another thing to do." But when used smartly, with great purpose, social media can be critical to sales, satisfaction and retention--now and forever.

Surprisingly, only about 15% of the largest public companies have a blog or are taking advantage of the power of the Web to engage with customers online. For most organizations, engaging customers through social media has to become a fundamental part of marketing. Good marketing has never been just about staying on message. Now, in this connected era, it's increasingly possible and important to participate in conversations and foster communities of loyal customers.

How? It's easy to begin connecting and transacting with customers in the digital world, and igniting passion for your product, your services, and your brand:

1. Listen: Take Their Input. Listening to customers, prospects and influencers has always been primary to good business. However, businesses have not always been able to access those conversations. Today, that's no longer the case. Log on and search the blogs or social networks. Those online voices and conversations might help shape your marketing, identify and lead to resolution of an issue before it becomes even more public, and determine the effectiveness of underlying business strategies.

There's more customer insight available to you than ever before, and it's virtually free!

2. Join the "In" Crowd. Know where your customers are talking. It's not hard to find them. Use Google (nasdaq: [GOOG](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) Blog search, Yahoo (nasdaq: [YHOO](#) - [news](#) - [people](#)) Pipes and Technorati, and gather your findings in a Google Reader. That information will allow you to monitor and adjust campaigns, correct misinformation, and solve problems.

3. Chat and Cultivate. Get involved in the conversation. Online dialogue is direct and personal, requiring the highest levels of transparency and candor. If people care enough about your company, product or service to talk about it online, then shouldn't you care enough about your customers to talk with them? Your fans know your products and brand. Now you can identify and connect with them, unleashing new ambassadors for your company.

4. The More, the Merrier. Crowdsourcing is the process of enabling your customers to create new products and services, or solve a business challenge. Focus groups and research are great. However, no one knows your products and brands better than the people who are talking about them online. They will respect you for asking their opinion. By using the Web and technology, you can get global insights and the benefits of, say, 100,000 people debating and sharing ideas with you. Dell participates in (Product) Red because customers shared their ideas with us on Ideastorm.com.

It's best to start with the most accessible and powerful online tools:

Blogging. Blogs are great for updating customers, establishing thought leadership and sharing expert views and information. Blogs function as sounding boards, engaging key audiences in fast, honest, two-way conversations. Remember: They're very informal,

so leave the corporate speak behind. It's not only OK to express personality and opinion online, it's a must. Share your passion for your company and brand, but also be prepared to hear out others.

Harnessing Facebook. The fastest growing social network in the world now has more than 175 million active members. Dell recently launched a community guide series called "Social Media for Small Business," which provides entrepreneurs with insight to using social media to grow their business. The community connects Dell with more than 33,000 fans, sharing our digital best practices, sparking conversations on IT and business ideas and serving as a means to deliver Dell deals and news.

Using Twitter. This online community is experiencing tremendous growth. Twitter can help marketers publicize product deals and share other information with the customers who "follow" their brands. Delloutlet Twitter deals have generated more than \$1 million in sales, with no additional marcom spending. Our fans make product recommendations, connect us to friends to discuss technology purchases and point us to customers who could use some assistance.

Sharing Multimedia Content. Photos and videos engage customers and convey more about a company and its people, products and services than text alone. Today, technologies and Web sites such as Flickr and YouTube make it easy to produce and provide multimedia content. You'll be surprised, as we were, to see how your customers show their pride in your products.

Measuring Success. Like other marketing initiatives, social media needs a purpose. It should enhance the customer's experience and your company's performance. Tools like Google Analytics help make social-media programs highly measurable, and new measurement tools are being developed all the time.

Remember, customers will have online conversations about your brand, products or services with or without you. Candidly listening, learning and engaging in these exchanges can spark and fan brand passion and product lust, which turns into real customer loyalty.

Erin Nelson serves as chief marketing officer for Dell. In this role, she is responsible for customer relationship management, communications, dell.com, brand strategy, core research and analytics, and overall marketing agency management.

http://www.inc.com/guides/biz_online/20664.html

Building a Better Web Site

If you don't keep improving your site on a regular basis, you may as well be serving sales prospects day-old doughnuts or sending out holiday cards in January. Want to hold the attention of your Web audience? Pay attention to your site. Here's a roundup of our favorite articles to help you make improvements.

Make Sure Everything Clicks

[The Perfect Host](#)

All Web hosts are not created equal. Inc.com's technology columnist Anne Stuart describes how to evaluate Web hosts and to choose the one that's best for your business.

[Checklist: Monitor Your Web Site's Performance](#)

Discover what aspects of Web site performance are critical to your e-commerce success.

[Make Sure Your Web Site's Working for You](#)

Internet logjams losing you sales? Speed up your site with these smart strategies.

[Weed Out Your Weak Links](#)

Everyone likes to link to other sites because, well, that's what you do on the Web. But having too many links – or outdated links that don't work – will distract and dismay your visitors.

[Site Maintenance Utilities](#)

Here's an overview of various HTML checkers, which can help ensure that your Web-site visitors have an error-free experience on your site.

Content Is King

[Writing Well on the Web](#)

Hardly anybody really likes reading online. No surprise there, since so many websites are so poorly written. Here are easy ways to make your Web words more reader-friendly.

[Traffic Magnets](#)

With imagination and a clear sense of their customers, Earth Treks and Merriman Capital Management keep their Web visitors coming back for more.

[Blogging for Business](#)

Blogging has been popular with teens, geeks, and flamboyant extroverts for years, but today, it's garnering more attention from businesses as a way to connect with customers and prospects.

[When Blogs Go Bad](#)

Blogs can be a great marketing tool. But when they bite back, it's all about damage control.

[Blog Rules](#)

The blogosphere is a world unto itself, with its own set of rules and regulations. Newcomers break them at their own peril. Here's what you need to know before jumping into the fray.

[The Top 10 Things You Should Know Before You Blog](#)

Three business blogging experts share their best tips for getting started in the blogosphere.

[Don't Focus on the Razzle-Dazzle](#)

Flashy graphics and shock-wave downloads do not a successful site make. Content is what really brings back customers.

[Create Your Own Web Content](#)

To take the last article a bit further, good content brings back customers. Second-rate editorial and graphics will send them away faster than an e-mail chain letter. Here's how can make your site full of the former.

[Proofread Your Content](#)

There are a distressing number of typo-ridden, grammatically incorrect Web sites out there. Stand out by showing your potential customers that you pay attention to detail.

Know What Your Users Want, and Give It to Them

[The Survey Says...](#)

Want to know what consumers think? Put down the comment cards and poll them online instead.

[The Skinny on Survey Software](#)

With more than 100 online polling software packages to choose from, picking the right one can be tricky. Here, three options to suit various needs.

[May I Help You](#)

New live-chat software helps Web merchants convert browsers into buyers.

[Live Aid](#)

There are scores of live-chat vendors, and finding the right one can be tricky. Here are three options to suit your various needs.

[Capture, Capture, Capture](#)

How to make every visit to your website a marketing goldmine.

[Pumping Your Visitors for Information](#)

Improving your site means getting inside the heads of your users. Here's how you can do it without seeming like a telemarketer calling at dinnertime.

[Come In. I've Been Expecting You](#)

If you don't treat visitors like they are the only person in cyberspace, don't expect them to stick around. And personalization doesn't need to be expensive.

Building Your Brand in Cyberspace

[Building Brands on the Web: An Old Game with New Rules](#)

E-commerce may be changing the rules of business, but most of the traditional laws of marketing still apply. Here's how to plan for the long-term success of your site.

<http://www.inc.com/guides/it/20685.html>

Creating a Great Web Site on the Cheap

In a perfect virtual world, building your Web site would be cheap and easy. Updating and maintaining it wouldn't take much effort. And, of course, you would make money.

Ah, were it that easy.

Practical and profitable Web sites are hard to come by. If you're not careful, your Web site can become a financial drain. But crafty entrepreneurs sidestep the potential money pit and bootstrap well-oiled sites whose start-up and maintenance costs don't dwarf potential returns. These entrepreneurs devise clever ways to build their sites on the cheap. They take advantage of low-cost marketing strategies to get the word out. And they use free and almost free tools to keep their sites running smoothly.

Here are more tips on how to improve your site without spending a fortune.

Penny-Pinching Your Way through Web Development

[Penny-Wise, Site-Foolish](#)

Don't scrimp when you pick a Web host -- unless you like greeting customers with "Site not found."

[Working with Student Contractors](#)

Save money using student contractors to help meet your Web design needs.

[Build It Yourself or Hire Someone?](#)

Inc.com Internet in Business mentor Bradley Feld responds to a reader's question on the best way to build a Web site.

[Master Your Domains](#)

The right domain extension can make a difference for your business. Learn what .tv, .biz and others can do for (or against) you.

[Taking Business Online](#)

When Jackie Monticup discovered that foot traffic to her store, the Magic Trick Shop, was beginning to disappear, she decided to take the business online. Here's her 12-step program to building an e-commerce website.

[Turnkey Web Sites: The Key to Success?](#)

Do you have little time and money to spend on the latest and greatest in technology? A turnkey solution, which is a ready-built Web site with nominal flexibility, is one option to consider.

[Hire Overseas, Come in under Budget](#)

Did you know you can save cash by hiring a Web designer in a foreign country?

Improve Your Site Inexpensively

[Less Is More -- and Less Money](#)

Simplicity, focus, and practicality are the keys to a successful Web site. And they don't have to cost too much.

[Can Visitors Navigate Your Site?](#)

Usability testing -- analysis of your site's navigation, speed, and effectiveness -- isn't as expensive as you think.

Build Your Online Store without Breaking the Bank

[David vs. Goliath: Four Lessons](#)

So you think you're too small to sell on the Web? One Internet entrepreneur offers strategies for effectively – and inexpensively – competing with the big guys.

[Come In. I've Been Expecting You](#)

Here's how inexpensive tools can make every site visitor feel like an audience of one.

[Almost Free E-Commerce](#)

The Net has recently been flooded with low-cost e-commerce services. Here's what you should know about them.

Web Marketing on the Cheap

[In Praise of E-Mail](#)

You may take e-mail for granted, but it just might be the simplest, most effective weapon in the marketer's arsenal.

[E-Mail: Your E-Commerce Ally](#)

E-mail remains one of the cheapest and most effective ways to promote your site – if you know how to target your message.

[Stretch Your Marketing Dollars](#)

Here's how one entrepreneur grew an e-commerce business with ingenious, inexpensive marketing techniques.

[Climb onto the Web, Painlessly](#)

A well-written e-mail newsletter can be one of the most economical ways to generate buzz for your brand on the Net.

<http://www.btoonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090312/FREE/903129995/1084/FREE#seenit>

What are the top 10 e-mail marketing mistakes?

Curtis Jackson, senior VP-brand strategy, Quell Group

Story posted: March 12, 2009 - 12:19 pm EDT

E-mail marketing has almost become too easy to execute, given the proliferation of bulk-e-mail providers. It's critical for organizations to be strategic in this tactic and avoid these common mistakes:

- 1. Not having a strategy.** You must have a strategy detailing reasons for the e-mail, content, audience, key messages and metrics.
- 2. Using an outdated list.** You need a permission-based list of opt-in subscribers to increase open rates and reduce undeliverable e-mails. If contacts haven't opted in, you may be flagged as spam and prohibited from sending future e-mails.
- 3. Focusing on nonrelevant content.** Your message must be important to the audience. E-mails with the highest opt-in and open rates are most often thought-leadership topics or personal insights into industry trends.
- 4. Missing an opportunity in your top-line message.** Your message may be viewed in a preview pane with images turned off or on an e-mail system or PDA that doesn't support HTML content. Your top-line message must include a link to a Web-based version—just in case.
- 5. Being too text- or graphic-heavy.** Adding visuals improves appeal, but you need a balance of images versus HTML text. Too much text can be overwhelming if not supported by interesting graphics to move the reader along.
- 6. Being “salesy.”** If your readers sense a sales pitch, it will not only get deleted but they may even unsubscribe from your mailings. Worse yet, they could report your e-mail as spam.
- 7. Forgetting to drive your Web traffic.** Editorial-driven newsletters are best developed with content directing Web site traffic. Include a portion of the story with a link to “read more” and have contextual links relevant to specific Web site pages.
- 8. Testing only on one browser or operating system.** All e-mail systems will not display your message the same, so test it on a PC versus Mac and Internet Explorer versus Firefox. Format consistency is critical for HTML-based e-mails.
- 9. Sending at the wrong time.** Whether your contacts are domestic or international, think about recipients' time zones and business hours. Recent data suggest higher open rates occur on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- 10. Ignoring metrics.** Metrics reveal whether your message was successful. An initial report will show bounce rates so you can scrub your list. An evaluation the day after will begin to show open rates, opt-outs or spam reports.

More LINKS

BLOGS

American Bar Association - Feature Comparison - Major Blog Providers (also has links to other information) <http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/fyidocs/blogchart.html>

Annenberg Center for Communication - Online Journalism Review: Blog software comparison chart: http://www.ojr.org/ojr/images/blog_software_comparison.cfm

Maxed Out Blogging: <http://beth.typepad.com>

Monitor Yourself...and your competitors:

<http://www.google.com/alerts?hl=en&gl=>

Key Words <http://www.seocentro.com/tools/search-engines/keyword-suggestion.html>

Site Stats

Blog Statistics for Free: <http://tracker.icerocket.com>

<http://www.popuri.us> - A tool to check at-a-glance the link popularity of any site based on its ranking (Google PageRank, Alexa Rank, Technorati etc.), social bookmarks (del.icio.us, etc), subscribers (Bloglines, etc) and more!

What is Social Media?

Integrating Social Media into a Web Content Strategy: http://www.digital-web.com/articles/social_media_to_web_content_strategy

What does your site look like on someone elses browser?

<http://www.anybrowser.com/siteviewer.html>

List of Online Marketing Sites

<http://websites tips.com/marketing/resources/#sites>

Add-Ons

List Serves

<http://www.mailchimp.com/pricing>

<http://www.verticalresponse.com/email-marketing>

Invitations, Surveys

<http://www.jotform.com/premium>

<http://www.wufoo.com>