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the Internet

2010: The New Ways to be Found Online

Using Word of Mouth to Generate Business Leads

WSI White Paper

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Introduction

WSI Internet Consultants often come across clients that ask the following questions:

- How can I use the Internet to generate leads for my business?
- My business relies on “word of mouth” how can Internet Marketing help?
- How can social media be used for my business?

Companies want to know how best they can spend their marketing dollars to achieve the growth they require.

The reason they ask these questions is because they don't have a good understanding of how people are using the Internet to search for information or for the type of information they look for. In addition many business professionals are unaware of the variety of online channels that their prospective customers use when looking for information.

In this white paper, we'll look at how to get found on the Internet in the new decade:

- The challenge of getting found on search engines
- Market drivers that we should be aware of with regards to what people do on the Internet
- Push vs. Pull marketing
- Key steps to developing a “Content Marketing” plan to get found online
- Publishing content that increases customer conversion

We will discuss combining content and social media marketing as a way to build trust and credibility which in turn will increase your online leads and profitability.

The Challenge

Pressure to Reduce Marketing Costs

Companies that have large marketing budgets are looking for ways to cut costs and still have the same visibility to their prospective clients. TV, radio and newspaper advertising can be expensive as it requires repeated messages to be pushed out to the masses in the hope of attracting attention and convincing you to engage with the company.

Companies know that using the Internet can help them reduce their marketing spend and measure the results. But in many cases, most of these companies resort to using the same advertising techniques online as they use offline.

They embark on “banner” advertising and “email blasts” and soon realize that these mediums can be just as costly if not managed carefully as their online marketing spend.

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Effective Online Marketing

Companies have heard of many ways that others are using social media but still struggle with how to leverage this medium and optimize it for the best possible results.

With the advancement of the Internet, many new marketing channels have become available to both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) sectors and the challenge is to understand the best ways to take advantage of the World Wide Web for online marketing.

Online marketing and social media marketing provide a cost-effective and practical way for small and medium sized companies to compete effectively against their larger adversaries especially since they operate on smaller marketing budgets.

Would it not be an ideal solution to present your marketing message to your targeted prospect at the very moment they are looking for information on your products or services? This is a major shift from push marketing to pull marketing. It is using content to attract your audience and then market to them when they are ready.

So what are the new ways to be found on the Internet?

Market Drivers

Social Media Use

People are changing the way they shop for products and services. They go to the Internet to find and gather information so that they can make an informed decision. It is much easier to get the information that you need by searching on Google than to look up a phone number in the Yellow Pages and then call. We just don't want to be sold to.

Besides searching on Google, people are also looking for information on a number of social media sites such as:

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Stumbleupon and other bookmarking sites

These social media sites enable us to get the "word of mouth" recommendations and advice that we all seek when considering making a purchase of a product or service.

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Generation Y

Many of us in the “Baby Boomer” community think that social media is a trend for the younger generations “X” and “Y” as they are the most active in this medium.

The Generation “Y” population is over 70 million in America and by 2010 they will outnumber Baby Boomers. They will become our future leaders and the majority of them have been raised with technology and belong to one or more social networks.

Companies must start incorporating social media strategies into their marketing initiatives to engage with the Generation Y’s now to avoid being left behind in targeting this growing segment.

Word of Mouth (WOM) Marketing

Social media provides us with the ability to find and comment about almost any product and service niche very quickly.

If we’re looking for a recommendation, review or comment on a company or its services, all we have to do is type our query in Google and look for social media sites that provide the answer.

People type in their search words into Google, find a few social media sites that are interesting and start a conversation. People are talking about your company, its products and even your service, and all this information is easily accessible via search engines like Google.

Everyday each one of us is subjected to intrusive marketing messages in the forms of advertisements from the following media:

- Television
- Radio
- Billboards
- Junk mail
- Newspapers

And only *14% of us trust these ads. This is alarming as many companies still continue to pour money into these advertising mediums even when statistics show a low return on investment.

“Word of Mouth” is one of the most effective forms of marketing as *74% of people place a lot of trust in their friends’ and experts’ opinions. Also, relevancy of your marketing message drives the conversions you get out of it, as there is a lot of noise created by each marketer trying to get attention from the similar segment of customers.

The Internet allows conversations to spread at light speed around the globe, be heard by millions within minutes and has become one of the largest mass-communication mediums of our time.

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- 75% of American Internet users engage in social networks to communicate with friends (Source: Internet World Stats).
- 13 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.
- There are more than 100 new members on Facebook every hour.

Word of Mouth Marketing is generated by people having conversations about you and your products because:

- they like you
- they are unhappy with you
- they were asked their opinion about you
- their community is talking about you

* (Source: Neilsen Global Trust In Advertising Survey, 2007)

Push Marketing vs Pull Marketing

People and businesses resist others pushing their marketing efforts onto them. This push marketing is interruptive and the message is not always trusted as it comes from just one point of view.

People prefer to find out more about the claims of a company's' products and services before they want to engage with a sales person.



A study by Microsoft shows the activities that 90% of people conduct prior to making a purchase.

Most of the information gathered is to help make an informed decision.

Push Marketing

Push marketing is when you interrupt your target market hoping to get their attention long enough to create interest in your product or service. We are subjected to this interruptive marketing hundreds of times a day, and many of us subconsciously just ignore these messages.

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Pull Marketing

Pull Marketing is when your target market finds your company through valuable content that they were searching for. Normally this content is found via search engines.

Once your content is found, your visitor will evaluate the quality and value of your message and may comment either positively or negatively directly on your site or on a social media platform, such as a forum. By publishing extraordinary and valuable content you will attract links from other websites that point and refer to you.

Increasing the number of links to your content helps you get found in more ways than one:

1. Google will reward you by improving your search engine position as you obtain more “valuable” links from other web sources
2. Your website will receive increased visitors from other sources that refer to your content

The Solution

Content Marketing

The new way to be found online in 2010 is to create, publish and syndicate content that is valuable, interesting and entertaining on many of the social media sites that are available today.

Focus on creating optimized content that is specific to what your target audience is searching for:

- Identify the information needs of your targeted audience
- Analyse your ideal persona’s needs by asking them what they look for
- Provide information that fulfills the need of each individual persona
- Include a clear “call to action”. What do you want your readers to do?

This Content Marketing strategy is best described by leading author and strategist Joe Pulizzi (co-author of Get Content Get Customers) as;

“Content Marketing is the art of understanding exactly what your customers need to know and delivering it to them in a relevant and compelling way.”

- Joe Pulizzi & Newt Barrett

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Content Syndication

The next step is to optimize your content and distribute it to many social media sites where your content will create conversation. People will find your content on search engines, click through to a social media site and participate in viral/push marketing as they comment and link to your valuable content.



Content that Creates Conversation

Your online marketing strategy should include creating and publishing remarkable content that builds credibility and improves conversation by being found on social media sites that are indexed in Google's top 30 search engine results.



Without content, conversation is mere networking.

Without conversation, content is dead. It goes nowhere

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When your ideal persona searches for the information they are looking for with regards to your company, its products or services, you will have the opportunity to present your content via various

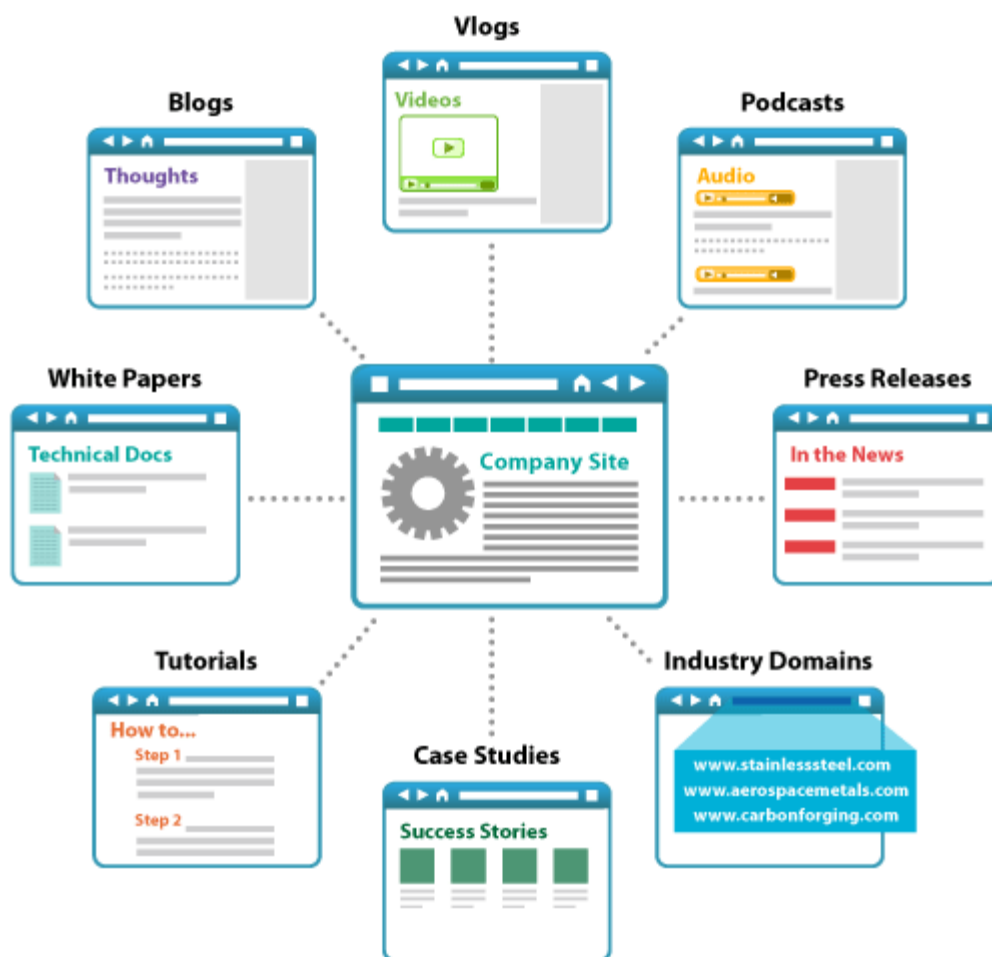
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social media channels. This provides them to choose the communication channel they wish to engage with your content.

Using popular social media channels to market your content is the new way of being found online. These channels can include blogs, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Slideshare, Squidoo, Hub Pages and many more. Use your website as the hub of your business and attract visitors from the channels they prefer to use online.

This diagram illustrates the type of links that would refer to your website by publishing content in various forms such as video, audio and the written word.

Business-to-Business Credibility Through Optimization of Content



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Syndication of Content

Syndicate your content and take advantage of social media sites as they enable you to get to your target market on a “many to many” basis as opposed to a static website which offers a “one to many” interaction.

- Blogging – use blogs as a marketing tool by publishing educational and relevant information about your products and services. Don’t sell; become a “thought leader” and develop your online credibility. Blogs will consistently attract new visitors and increase the online visibility of your company. Blogs enable easy interaction with your readers and provide a quick way to syndicate your content across the web.
- YouTube – create short videos showing how your products can solve problems that your ideal persona is interested in. Upload videos that provide the answers to your most frequently asked questions. Many people add the word “video” to their search term as they prefer to get a visual and audio view of your content.
- LinkedIn – develop your online network of contacts with professionals in your particular industry. Review questions that are posted and provide answers that address these questions without selling directly. LinkedIn provides you with the ability to network with thousands of subscribers that can interact with you or your company.
- Facebook – create a business profile and encourage your clients to become a fan. That way you can attract and communicate to thousands of fans.
- Twitter – allows thousands of followers to be updated on the Internet or mobile phones with the messages that you wish to publish.
- Social Media Bookmarking sites such as StumbleUpon, Digg and Reddit make it easy for your valuable content to be quickly spread throughout the web.

Create and publish good content and you will stimulate good conversation.

Creating a Content Blueprint

It is easy to fall into the trap and just start adding content to your website and syndicate it to social media sites. People can confuse “article marketing” with content marketing. Article marketing is mainly used to create links to your website and to attract search engine traffic. In many instances, these articles are of low value to the reader and although they bring attention to your brand, they don’t always contribute to your conversion goals.

The first step in implementing a content marketing strategy is to create a content blueprint.

Step 1: Define your business goals

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What do you want to achieve in the following 12 months in your business? Goals to consider are:

- Revenue targets
- Increase customer base by 15%
- Upsell to existing customers

Step 2: Identify your ideal website personas

Who are the ideal personas that you would like to visit your website? These are normally the decision makers or evangelists of your products or services:

- Chief Executive Officer
- VP of Marketing
- Chief Financial Officer
- Housewives, etc.

Step 3: List the types of information they require?

For each of these personas, create a list of:

- Questions they typically ask
- Information they seek about your company, products or service

Step 4: Determine the action you want your persona to take

- Download white paper
- Download case study
- Listen to podcast
- View company video
- Subscribe to your newsletter

This information should help your visitor solve their problem, build your credibility and ultimately persuade them to engage with your company.

Step 5: Research search keywords

Use keyword research tools such as Wordtracker, SEO Book, Market Samurai or similar tools to:

- Identify the list of questions used in search
- Identify niche topics that you can create content for
- Look for Top 10 lists, Best of, etc. ideas

Step 6: Create your blueprint

Sort your content by persona and create a sitemap and navigation plan to channel your content effectively to your visitor. For each content piece, decide which Internet channels you will syndicate to:

- Website
- Blog
- YouTube video
- Podcast
- LinkedIn
- Facebook
- Squiddoo
- And others that your persona would frequent

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Create your online marketing plan

Schedule regular dates on which to create and publish your content. Publishing regular content will increase your online visibility and create an online asset for your business.

Measure your business objectives

- Install Google Analytics to monitor your website and blog performance
- Set the business goals that you need to measure
- Review goal achievement and keywords used to get to your site
- Brainstorm creative ways of providing content related to your industry

Benefits of Content Marketing

Many organizations still rely mainly on traditional marketing tactics that consists mainly of sending interruption messages to your target market. These messages are being ignored or filtered by people who wish to find your marketing messages when they are ready. By incorporating “Content Marketing” into your marketing mix you can increase sales and profitability and realise many benefits:

- Syndicating your content on various social media sites will encourage conversation about your content and will support any “word of mouth” strategy that your business has.
- Good information encourages people to link to your content thus creating increased referral visitors to your website.
- An additional benefit is that good content can generate many referral links which improves your Google rankings and in-turn increases the number of visitors and online brand visibility.
- Good content reduces your need to use paid advertising as you will continue to attract more qualified visitor traffic, instead of continually having to pay to keep getting more visitors.
- By including social media into your company’s communication strategy you will be able to target and get to the “Generation Y” population that is increasingly becoming more important in the business world.

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Below is a screenshot of the number of keyword phrases that visitors entered into Google when arriving at a Flower Shop website that is a client of the author.

32,415 visitors using 10,377 different keyword combinations arriving at the website

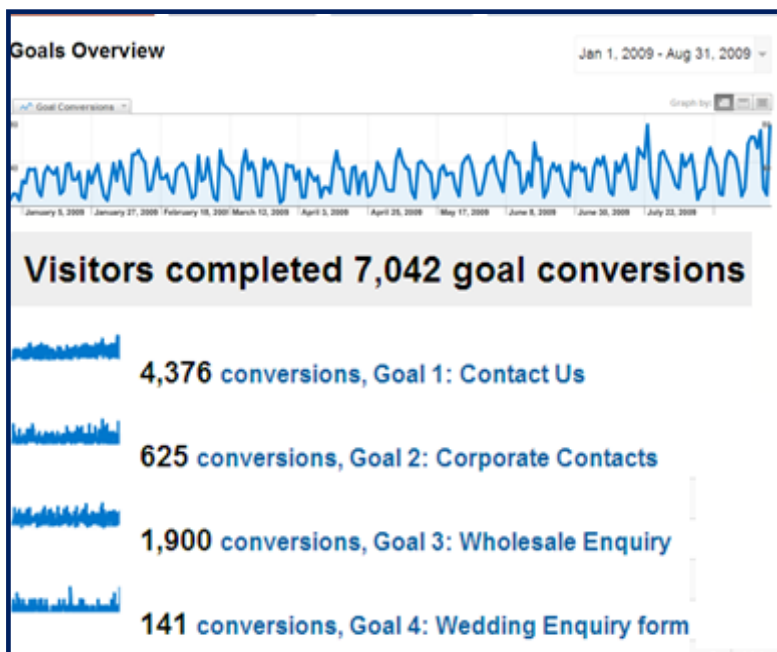


Search sent 32,415 total visits via 10,377 keywords

Conclusion

The Internet provides the ideal platform for any business to generate leads. The way to increase your online presence is through “Content Marketing”. By continuously publishing valuable and relevant information you will be creating an online asset for your business.

The key to generating business leads online is to provide relevant content that persuades your visitor to engage with your company.



Set up your goal metrics in Google Analytics to support your company’s business objectives and measure your results regularly.

The goal measurements show the lead generation goals that were achieved online

The new ways to be found is to syndicate your optimized content onto social media platforms and be found on search engines for more than just your website content.

Good content will lead to conversation about your company and its products creating “word of mouth” referrals.

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About the Author



Francois Muscat is a recognized WSI Internet and Online Marketing Expert. He is a sought after speaker at Internet marketing conferences and has presented at numerous international seminars for WSI. He teaches WSI Internet Consultants worldwide on ways to: generate leads, build online credibility and create customer communication strategies for their clients.

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