

e-Marketing

Small Businesses Not Connecting with Online Audience



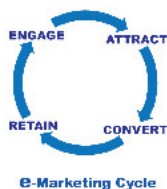
What do you do as a consumer or a business owner when you are ready to research a product, service or company? My guess is you are like 82 percent of consumers and small-business owners who turn to the Internet first for information, including using search engines to research local companies, according to a recent study from Webvisible and Nielsen.

The study uncovers a significant disconnect between the way small-business owners act as consumers vs. the way they market their businesses online. This behavior is not sustainable in today's digitally savvy world.

The reality is that less than 10 percent of small businesses keep up with their online presence because they do not have an understanding of how the channel works. For the small-business owner, the challenge of dealing with the rapid pace of technology advancements is the fear of cost, complexity and the commitment of time. These challenges are balanced by hope for the powerful benefits that new media enabled by technology promise — new customers, new markets and new opportunities.

The Marketing Cycle

Marketing in the digital age is about promoting brands using the Internet, mobile phones and other interactive channels, like digital outdoor advertising, to achieve the goals through the marketing cycle, which are to attract, convert, retain and engage customers.



1. **Web Site to Convert** – strategies for developing targeted messaging, offers, images and calls to action that are designed to compel the visitor to take some type of action to interact, download or buy
2. **Search Engine Marketing to Attract** – includes:
 - Search Engine Advertising – popular form of search engine advertising placement using keyword ad themes and categories to bring actively interested visitors to your Web site

- Search Engine Optimization – focuses on enhancing a Web site with a mix of content, keywords, links and images to improve search engine visibility to gain natural search results listings

3. **E-mail to Nurture and Retain** – effective for relationship building by warming up leads, and efficient way to interact and communicate with customers, donors and partners
4. **Social Networks to Engage and Retain** – offsite media networks like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn provide outlets for a small business to connect, engage, listen, monitor and receive feedback from targeted groups of customers and prospects
5. **Social Media to Attract and Convert** – the use of images, video, blogs and other rich content for the purpose of customer engagement, search engine marketing and online awareness management
6. **Mobile Marketing to Attract and Engage** – primarily using short text messages for advertising and emerging as a way to establish loyalty programs with consumers

The number of emerging digital media channels makes it even more challenging for the resource starved small business owner and entrepreneur. When you only have so many dollars in your budget for advertising and marketing, it is easy to go with what you are more familiar. Yet traditional advertising channels are declining because the audience is moving online. According to the Nielsen/NetRatings 2007 study, *Why Search Matters to Local Business*:

- 78 percent of consumers use the Web to find local business more today than two years ago
- 25 percent of consumers use the Internet to find local business once or more per week

Search Engines are the most popular e-marketing channels. They are the preferred source for finding local information and local professional services:

- 36 percent of those using search engines to find a local business

searched for a medical specialist, like a chiropractor

- 32 percent searched for automotive services or repair
- 11 percent searched for legal services

However, the study also revealed that most local searches performed only delivered “fair” to “poor” results due to the fact that small-business owners are not allocating advertising dollars for local search engine marketing. Local search engine marketing can deliver highly targeted leads due to “geolocation” technology, which allows businesses to target ads by city, zip code or even distance from a given address.

In addition to search engines, local search media can include local TV and radio online offerings, directories and yellow pages.

With more and more Internet users logging on to find local business and ready to transact online, small-business owners must start considering their own actions, shift from broad reach traditional advertising, and learn how to integrate more efficient and effective e-marketing and advertising services. But one has to have the knowledge to do so. One also has to be willing to experiment. If you are doing the same things you did just a few years ago, you are missing some real new opportunities and your digitally savvy competitors are gaining the advantage.

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