

Top 10 Marketing Strategies for Small Business Owners

How To Succeed on the Internet in 2010

By Randy Kirk

1. GIVE IT AWAY!

In the decade just concluded, a major shift has occurred in the way people sell things. We have entered an era when giving things away results in sales. In the olden days, circa 1999, we held our specialized information close to the vest. We feared that disclosure of propriety methods would undermine our sales opportunity. Surely if the entire world knew how to change an oil filter, the auto repair business would be bankrupt.

While no one is suggesting that Coca-Cola divulge its formula, we have had a sea change in the way information is treated. At some point we realized that having an instruction sheet on how to change an oil filter did not change the habits of many automobile owners. Even a YouTube tutorial in HD will not result in a 1% shift in behavior towards folks changing their own filters. The other barriers to change are too high. Buying the tools, getting your hands dirty, fear of failure, and a real-enough risk of disaster are pretty good reasons to give Jiffy Lube some work.

Today the internet is attempting what the folks in the city of Babel could only dream of. Information, both useful and not so, is abundant on the how and why of pretty much anything you could possibly want to know. And the increase in such "knowledge" continues unabated. In marketing your products and services both your potential client and Google want to know how much you know as a part of the evidence of how much you care.

The practical application of this first tenet includes providing tons of content on your website, blog, and other places where you appear on the net. It means the proactive dissemination of information through email blasts, snail mail, and in your location. Did you ever imagine you'd be learning about teeth whitening and straightening while waiting for your dentist?

2. INTERNET VISIBILITY

The first advertisement created by Page1Listings.com cried out "Your Website is Dead." This bit of hyperbole was designed to call attention to the very real trend in Google's downgrading of proprietary websites in search. It isn't that Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc., no longer think websites are valuable. It is that they have concluded that the average user of search wants to get a multimedia result on page 1. Therefore, the space that used to be mostly websites is shared with Local Search Engine Results, YouTube Videos, Images, News, and coming soon Twitter and Facebook.

What this means for you is that if you wish to be seen at least once in the top ten of the keywords critical to your company, you need to be creating content in Local Search Engines, YouTube Videos, Images, News, and now the Social Media mediums like Twitter and Facebook. Your goal should no longer be a single placement in the top ten on page 1. Rather you should be working overtime to be seen multiple times via various channels.

3. THE KILLER LOCAL SEARCH ENGINE

Google's Local Business Center, now aped by Yahoo and Bing, is the category killer for Local Search Engines. While it is still important for small businesses to be listed on Yelp, MerchantCircle, CitySearch, and YellowPages.com, none of these can make and break your month like Google. With around 80% of search starting with Google, the map that pops up when you search for Chicago barber shop or bakery Los Angeles is just too dominant to be ignored. Small businesses across the country are reporting that their phone stops ringing if they "drop off the map."

"Claiming" your business on Google Local is pretty simple, and doing a rudimentary job of creating your listing is not that hard. There are dozens of tutorials, including this one for getting that done. However, the hard part is that Google is changing the game weekly. Between November 2009 and January 2010, Google made major changes to their local business center that dropped off millions of businesses, and helped out others. More changes are promised in February 2010, including the institution of advertising on Google Local.

4. MOBILITY HAS ARRIVED

If your potential client is in the car or in your neighborhood, and they need some of what you have, will they find you on their Blackberry, iPhone, or soon on their IPAD? Because I can, I often leave the house without jotting down the details of my planned stops for the day. It is easily accessible in so many ways, why do the smart thing and write it down. I'm not alone.

Moreover, when I am out and around, I commonly come up with a new thing I need (In & Out Hamburgers comes to mind). It is nothing short of amazing that the closest In & Out is a couple of keystrokes from revealing its location. In fact, I may just need to speak it, and my homing device may speak back to me which way to turn to get a #3. There is an app for that.

What apps should contain your info? Should you have your own apps? Are you listed on the Mobile Search Engines?

5. THE SECOND LARGEST SEARCH ENGINE

You want to do a search for how to fix a bicycle flat. Sure you could use Google. But you really want to see a demo. Then you do the search on YouTube. YouTube is now the second largest search engine after Google. Folks are looking up stupid stunts and cute cats by the millions. But they are also looking up Italian Restaurant Culver City, because they may want to learn more about how the interior looks, hear what the owner has to say about his passion, or they may be just plain curious.

In order for your business or your products and services to be found on YouTube, you need to produce one or more YouTube Videos. Once having done this, a little bit of skill may result in your video being seen on a standard Google Search, too. Turns out that you have a 27X chance of being seen on the first page of a Google Search due to your video than due to your website. This is because Google wants mixed media on page one of the search. For most searches, there are way more websites than videos, therefore the videos get preferential treatment.

You may feel like doing a YouTube video is a huge undertaking, but you probably have a camera in your possession right now that will do the trick. YouTube is a casual environment. It is better if the video looks a bit home made. Give it a try.

6. SOCIAL MEDIA TAKES A BACK SEAT TO THIS MARKETING APPROACH

National organizations like Target and Apple have known this for years, but now the cat is out of the bag. Email Newsletters have the highest return on investment of any marketing tool in the toolbox. This marketer prefers to depth and execution of [Constant Contact](#) there are other systems available for creating and managing email campaigns.

Why email newsletters? Would you like to be able to pick up the phone and have a 10 minute conversation with your key

customers each month? Do you think that having such a short conversation each month would increase their loyalty to your business? Mailing a nice note or newsletter is great, too. But the cost is now at least \$1 per article mailed. An email blast can convey much more about your company than either a mailer or a phone call, it is less intrusive, and much more interactive. The cost, depending on whether you have it professionally prepared, could be as low as 2 hours of employee time plus \$15 - \$40 a month.

7. BLOG – FACEBOOK - TWITTER - THE BIG THREE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Blogs used to be an important, but secondary element in the marketing scheme. Enter Twitter and Facebook. Now the blog becomes the hub of your social media wheel. In much the same way as the consumer now expects free information before they will buy from you, they also may want to "feel you" before they buy. Are you engaging the community that you sell to?

The blog is the long form. Even at two or three paragraphs per post, this is where you get to tell the whole story. What is going on behind the scenes - with pictures? Who on the staff is winning trophies or getting married? What client took an African Safari? What new products did you see at the show? What article did you read on another respected blog that you can add your commentary to? What are your thoughts with regard to trends in your business? It all goes in the blog. That plus embeds of your videos, copies of your promotions, and more.

Every time you put up a new post you tell your Twitter followers that you have done so, and use a tiny URL to send them to your blog. Your Facebook Fan page also reports on the new post in a bit more detail. And Fan notices on the Facebook Fanpage also get a Tweet. Sounds like a lot of work? Have you ever stood in a booth at a trade show for three days to see 200 people. Spend 3 hours a week on your Social Media and you will touch many more. We highly recommend a great book on this topic by Erik Qualman – [Socialnomics](#).

8. WEBSITES ARE NOT DEAD - THEY ARE MORE CRITICAL THAN EVER

Everything else you do online should lead folks to your website. All of your literature, advertisements, business cards should prominently display your web URL address. And when folks get to your website, the secret of success in your entire Internet marketing effort, is converting the visitors to clients. Check out your current website to see if it has the following:

- A Strong Emotional Appeal in the major headline and first paragraph that draws the customer into your unique selling proposition and lets them know you care about their needs.
- A clear enunciation of your unique selling proposition and proof that you can deliver results.
- A closing statement that asks for the order and then points to at least three ways to take ACTION
- Two or three methods of Navigation so that different personality types can easily find what they're looking for
- Pictures and graphics that tie into the emotional and practical appeals
- Your phone number in a prominent location
- A way to drop their email address if nothing else
- Keywords in the URL, Title Tags, first 150 words of text, and in the footer
- Methods for existing clients to get work done to save them time and create efficiencies for your office staff
- Can you find your website on page 1 of Google Searches that matter to you?

9. CUSTOMER SERVICE ISN'T ONE THING - IT'S THE ONLY THING

You've done all eight of the above. New potential clients are jamming the phone lines, sending emails, filling out online forms, placing orders, and walking in the front door. Great job!! Is your staff friendly, trained, professional, courteous, efficient, and

knowledgeable? Are you sure? Have you researched it?

As reported in the [Harvard Business Review](#), the answer to the following question was a clear pointer to the profitability of a company: "How likely would you be to recommend our company to a friend or colleague?" A net score of 60% or less was correlated with no growth, low profits, and/or no longer in business. A score of 80 or above was highly correlated with excellent growth and profitability.

You can find out how you and your employees rate on this Customer Service scale through the use of online or in store questionnaires and other methods. Don't just guess at your CS score. Test it.

10. TRACK EVERYTHING

Smaller businesses have been at a huge disadvantage due to the high cost of tracking results compared to their larger rivals. Creating and maintaining statistical analysis of what works and what doesn't so as to be able to modify marketing and administrative functions is a cost which scales based on size. What might cost 1% of sales for a \$500,000 business drops to .01% of sales for a \$50m business.

That has changed dramatically. Almost every online component is now trackable with analytic tools that require no cost other than checking on the data. This allows even the smallest company to see that the blog isn't working very well, but that YouTube videos are getting high viewership. Tools available from Google and others can even tell you how long visitors are staying on your website, what they are viewing, and what part of the world they are viewing from.

Therefore, the task of counting everything becomes within reach of every budget. How many shoppers entered the store today? What was the average sale? What was the number of employees needed to get those dollar sales? How did those customers that did come in find out about you? What was the shoppers experience like? Would they recommend your company to a friend?

Bonus Strategy

11. REVIEWS ARE IMPORTANT – GOOD OR BAD

The review trend is accelerating. Getting good reviews is going to be the keystone to local search marketing in 2010.

Google Maps Local Business Center has already been including reviews from CitySearch, MerchantCircle, Yelp and other local search engines on maps. It is expected that this kind of trading of reviews will only increase.

Now Google Maps is drawing reviews from what they consider to be other local sources. They are pulling reviews from blogs, newspapers, and the like. It is expected that they will be drawing reviews from Facebook and Twitter, too.

As I may have mentioned to you in the past, some industries who are already dependent on Google Maps for a big % of their business have 20 or more reviews. Hotels commonly have 100's. And your status (rank) on Google Maps is at least in part determined by the number of reviews.

What does this mean for you.

1. Outstanding customer Service results in good reviews. This means even kissing the ring of your worst nightmare of a customer or client. Bad reviews can hurt. Good reviews are essential.

2. You need to have a specific strategic game plan for getting your clients to review you. This can include incentives, but will require at least asking your best clients to do you the favor of putting up reviews.

Again. This will be a big deal in 2010. Do not back burner this issue.