COMMON INTERNET MARKETING MISTAKES
6 ways you could be LOSING business online...plus one that virtually guarantees it!

Most business owners today recognize the importance of having a website. Like the telephone, it is a necessary tool that your customers simply *expect* you to have. It is also one of the most cost-effective ways to promote your product or service locally, nationally or even internationally. What you may not realize however is that **a bad website can actually cost you business** rather than attract new customers. Yes, "bad" is a subjective term, but there are best practices for Internet marketing that have a direct impact on the success of any website.

As a business owner, you may not be familiar with these best practices. Fortunately, you do not have to become an expert, that is what we are here for. But **the first step to improving your bottom line online is knowing where you stand**.

The following are a few of the most common Internet marketing mistakes we encounter, along with suggested fixes. Even **just one or two of these mistakes can mean the difference between a *truly profitable website* and one that is costing you money *and lost sales!***

MISTAKE #1: USING A SINGLE "DOORWAY" FOR ALL CUSTOMERS
USE YOUR HOME PAGE TO "SORT" VISITORS BASED ON THEIR INTERESTS

Let's start at the beginning, which is usually the home page of your website (the first page people see when they come to www.yourcompany.com). Forget about those fancy, slow-loading Flash intro movies. They act as an entry barrier and most people just skip them anyway. Get *real value* from your home page by using it to point prospects in the right direction.

Many businesses serve multiple market segments, with an array of products that are applicable to one customer base but not necessarily the other. Your website might already have inside pages that address each of their needs, but why not make it *as easy as possible* for your customers to find those pages?

For instance, maybe you sell a line of ride-on lawnmowers to consumers and a line of heavy-duty tractors to the commercial market. Your home page can divide your website into two distinct paths, each catering to those specific market segments.

Or, if you operate a jewelry business you could set up a gateway that is divided between engagement and wedding ring sets, gold pendants and bracelets, and watches and accessories.

In any case, the idea is use your website's home page to guide visitors in the right direction rather than forcing them look for what is relevant to them. This is an easy way to improve their experience right from the start. You will be known as a business that puts its customers' interests first and will **be rewarded with higher conversion rates.**

MISTAKE #2: USING GENERIC LANDING PAGES FOR YOUR WEB ADS
LANDING PAGES SHOULD BE TARGETED TO SEARCH KEYWORDS

This one, like mistake #1 is about relevancy. Presenting your website's visitors with information that is relevant to them is always important, especially when you are doing any kind of paid advertising online.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising is a good example of where relevancy can have a big impact on the effectiveness of your search engine ads (see our page on **building targeted website traffic** to learn more about reaching more customers with PPC).

Online searches can sometimes be like wandering through the desert desperately looking for something to drink. In this way, searchers tend to have a one track mind. If your Web ad comes up during a search for *collectible shot glasses* but directs them to a general page on your website or your main catalog index, you are going to convert a lot fewer of those clicks into sales. To the searcher, a search for *collectible shot glasses* should turn up collectible shot glasses, otherwise they will quickly move on to the next search result.

To avoid losing potential sales, link your ads directly to a matching landing page. And try to include some sort of offer so that once they get there, they see a compelling reason to buy from you. The same is true if you are advertising lawnmowers, engagement rings or anything else.

MISTAKE #3: POORLY WRITTEN WEBPAGE COPY
WEBPAGE CONTENT SHOULD BE CLEAR, COMPELLING AND CONCISE
(AND ERROR FREE!)

Your website's content is important because it builds trust and credibility with your customers. They cannot see or interact with you in person, so you are relying on your website's content to be your representative, your salesperson. Poorly written copy with bad grammar and spelling mistakes equates to a sleazy-looking or uninformed sales rep. You would not keep someone like that employed in your business for very long, so why not hold your website up to the same standards?

You're a business owner, not necessarily a writer, so do not let pride get in the way of a sound business decision. An experienced sales copywriter can make a big difference by telling your product's story in a way that makes people *want to buy*.
It is not uncommon to double or even triple response rates simply by utilizing better sales copy, so hire a professional and watch the orders roll in.

MISTAKE #4: MISSING OR MIXED SALES MESSAGES
ENSURE SALES MESSAGES ARE CONSISTENT AND PRESENT THROUGHOUT

It is estimated that over 60% of online orders started are never actually followed through to completion. For Internet merchants, reducing their number of "abandoned" shopping carts is always a priority, and to do this they employ a number of proven sales techniques.

One of these techniques is to **continue your sales messaging right through the *entire* checkout process.** Many businesses do a great job of describing why their product or service is the best choice, only to present their customers with a sterile-looking checkout page.

Or worse, a multi-stage order form that asks for far more information than is really necessary to close the sale.

With nothing else to look at other than a product description, shipping fees and total price, buyers are left wondering if they have made the right choice. This is where many of them abandon their carts.

Once your content has convinced a prospect to place an order, it is important to **reinforce in their minds that they have made a good decision by giving you their business.** This can be done by reminding them about your satisfaction guarantee, highlighting any discounts or incentives that are being applied to the order, with testimonials from existing clients and so on.

Use every page of your website, including the crucial order form pages, as an attentive salesperson to move the sale on to completion.

MISTAKE #5: HIDING YOUR CUSTOMER SUPPORT OPTIONS
MAKE SHIPPING/RETURN POLICIES AND CONTACT METHODS EASY TO FIND

Here is a situation most of us can relate to: You wander into a store and have some questions about a product they carry; What is the store's return or exchange policy? Do they offer a price-match guarantee? Does it come in blue? The only problem is you can not find a sales associate to help you out. You may look up and down the aisles for a while trying to find someone, but eventually you will lose patience and leave. That is another lost sale just because the store is understaffed.

When it comes to buying online, studies show people are far less patient. But there is no reason to lose sales this way. **Think of your website as an employee who works 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.** When properly "trained", this employee can serve every customer at the same time and always knows the answers to questions about store policies.

Training your website is as easy as publishing all of your policies on an easy-to-find page. A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and their answers is another great way to provide useful information. Also include a contact page with a contact form, your phone number, physical address and hours of operation. Finally, put your phone number (or even better, a 1-800 number) at the top of every page to show customers that if they cannot find the information they are looking for online, help is only a phone call away.

MISTAKE #6: NOT TAKING ADVANTAGE OF UP-SELL OPPORTUNITIES
SUGGEST ADD-ONS AND UPGRADES BEFORE FINAL CHECKOUT

"Do you want fries with that?"

Whether you are selling online or offline, one of the best ways to increase the value of your average sale is to offer add-ons at checkout. And the concept is not limited to the retail industry; with any product or service sold there is an opportunity to sell a little more…

Offer a gift wrapping service for those collectible shot glasses. Do not forget about spare belts, blades or mulching kits for those riding mowers. Or how about a special discount when someone buys a set of matching earrings to go with a diamond pendant necklace? One offer that works particularly well online is free shipping when a customer meets a minimum order amount.

You know your business better than anyone else, so come up with a list of add-ons that you can offer to customers during the checkout process. This will make sure that once you've attracted a customer you are not leaving any money on the table.

MISTAKE #7: NOT SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISING YOUR WEBSITE
WORK WITH A RELIABLE PARTNER TO DEVELOP AN EFFECTIVE SEO STRATEGY

Of all the Internet marketing options that are available to you, **search engine optimization (SEO) can have the greatest impact at attracting new business and keeping you ahead of the competition.** The purpose of SEO is to ensure that prospects find *your* business (instead of someone else's) when searching for the kinds of products or services you offer.

SEO will help your website to rank highly (ideally on the first or second page) on related keyword searches. This is of critical importance because **people rarely look past the 2nd page of results.** Even if your website is listed in a search engine's index, being on page 4, 5 or 50 of the search results will not do you much good. **The situation gets even worse if a competitor's website is ranked ahead of yours!**

Achieving a good search engine ranking is done through a combination of specialized techniques. These include how your Web pages are programmed, the content and formatting of each page, how your website is structured and other factors.

Effective SEO is not usually something you can do yourself and it is well worth hiring a professional to do it for you. The initial cost is recovered by the considerable amount of *qualified visitor traffic* a search engine can send your way. Ongoing maintenance will ensure that your website remains well-positioned ahead of any online competitors so that you "own" premium online real estate for your industry category.

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