

Marketing your web site: more time out of your busy day

A website doesn't automatically market your business, *you* have to market the website. Like many of the other activities that I wrote about in the earlier articles, this can be surprisingly time consuming.

To recap quickly, my assertion is that a web site per se doesn't bring in a single new client unless that client was actively looking for your product. Once a visitor *reaches* your site, your content can help market your product, but the hard work is getting them there. So, how do you go about getting more people to your web site?

Just like the real world, one way is through advertising. Don't overlook the "free" options: everything you produce should have your website address (URL) printed on it. This includes your business card, your e-mail signature, any brochures you print, an instruction sheet, your invoices—anything that goes to the public. If they already have something you produced, they are a far better prospect than any hundred random members of humanity, so don't leave them wondering how to find you! Some directories will include your contact details for no cost; phone directories typically charge, and charge more to include a website address. Regular advertising (print, TV, radio, flyers, billboards) can also include your URL without a large increase in cost. To my mind, adding a URL is like getting almost free, unlimited extra space attached!

Unique to the internet is pay-per-click advertising. You'll need to do your homework before signing up, and have a respectable initial budget allocated to trying out different schemes to see how they work. I am not an expert on this subject—my point is that as well as money, you'll need to allocate someone's time to monitor this and keep tuning it to get the results you want; otherwise you're probably throwing the money away.

The web equivalent of word of mouth might well be links from other web sites. Links do two things. They bring visitors from sites which have already attracted people with associated interests, and they raise your profile in most search engines. However, getting other sites to add a link to you takes time and effort. Even if you indulge in "you add my link and I'll add yours"

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you have to spend some time changing your website, and checking from time to time that all your links are still live.

On-line directories are a mystery to me. Except for the well known few, who uses them? Although many of the small ones are free, there is a cost associated with finding all of your entries should you ever need to move or change your phone number. But it does add to your link count.

Probably the most tried and true way to drive people to a site is to have exciting, fresh, readable content. Visitors might bookmark your site and keep coming back; the really big players aim for you to make *their* site *your* homepage! With the right content, you may persuade people to add your RSS data to their reader. More usually, for small businesses, a monthly e-mail to an established audience has a teaser with a link to your web-site for more information. All of these methods require a steady stream of new content.

Lastly, there is our old friend, Search Engine Optimisation. This is not a make it and leave it deal. If SEO is to be done well, it must be done continually. One book title, "Search Engine Optimisation: an hour a day" tells the whole story. Maybe you can afford to spend less time, but this task is another resource hog. Just when you think you have it made, the competition changes something, and you're no longer in the first results page.

Just like marketing in the "real" world, marketing a web site takes time, and costs money!