Online Marketing Tactics

Companies selling goods and services over the Internet need to employ web based marketing tactics that serve to draw traffic to their website, improve visitors-to-buyers ratios and increase the amount each buyer spends. The use of the web as a marketing tool is a challenge because Internet users are now much more mission oriented in their web behavior and are less inclined to surf or allow themselves to be enticed into entering a web path that deviates from their intended destination.

The effectiveness of an online marketing program is dependent on the extent to which it succeeds in reaching the intended target audience at a time when the marketing message is relevant to the target. Initially it was believed that the web, with its data mining capabilities, would open up dramatic new opportunities to marketers, but the initial enthusiasm has proven exaggerated, largely because marketers were unclear in how they defined relevant and bombarded consumers with automated marketing messages that proved to have little genuine relevance to the site visitor.

The lesson to be learned from the initial shortcomings of online marketing is that people cannot be fooled into believing something is relevant just because a banner advertisement or window pops up on their computer screen. Nor can we, as professional online marketers, assume that relevancy is determined by the immediate activity of the web user. Not everyone searching a site on telecommunications want to buy a book on the topic. True, they might have a greater interest than someone who never visits a telecommunications website, but that is not the same as relevancy.

The real way to guarantee relevancy is to allow the user to determine what is relevant to him or her at any given moment. It's true that this is being done to some extent by having a presence where relevancy might occur. Still, the challenge to online marketers is to create new tactics or new twists on existing tactics that will serve the interests of online marketers by serving the needs of online buyers.

Search engines allow online users to declare relevancy by electing the topics to which they wish to be directed. Registering your site with the search engines will help drive traffic to your site. Effective registration is a three-phase process. You need to (1) be identified by the search engines, (2) be placed relatively close to the top of the search list, and (3) get selected by the searcher. Hints for effective use of search engines include:

- Don't wait for the search engine crawlers to find you. Submit the URLs you want listed to the search engines. You'll need to be patient though. The birthrate of new websites is such that it could take a few weeks before your site actually gets listed.

- Keep resubmitting your URL. Even the best search engines only feature about 10% of the web pages out there. With more than a billion pages on the web the task is overwhelming and getting more so every day. Still, the huge number of new of web pages means that the search engines often have to remove existing pages in order to accommodate new ones. By resubmitting on a regular basis you will insure that even if you were bumped, you're back on.

- Choose your search engines. Insofar as you do not want to make site submission a full time occupation, it is wise to select which search engines are most important for your company. In most cases you will elect to submit to the larger, more active engines, but if, for example you are in a specialized category, you may want to register with an engine dedicated to your sector as well.

- Use titles and meta tags. Search engines will rank titles and meta descriptions highly, so this will help you get placed more prominently in search results. Also, your title and description will most likely be used by the search engine in the search results, so make certain what you write is what you want the search results to show.

There are a number of online marketing tactics you can employ on your website:

- Personalize It - you can create a personal and ongoing relationship with your customers through the use of personalization. By providing your customers with a registration option, that comes with a variety of convenience-oriented benefits, you will be able to identify users as they login. You can then use the knowledge of their presence to welcome them and offer a level of personalized assistance. This will allow the consumer the chance to indicate their relevancy as they enter your website, giving you the chance to work in suggested products and impulse buys.

- Merchandise - traditional retailers use a variety of physical elements to promote the sale of goods in their stores. Some of these include scent machines, music, lighting and shelf placement. Your online entity needs to merchandise its goods without the benefit of these subliminal influences. It is therefore essential that you present your products in an orderly and logical manner. Make sure to incorporate sophisticated search engines that provide the consumer with the ability to search regardless of their perspective of the product. Also, when presenting merchandise it is best to offer a photo, as well as in-depth product specifications. Some sites also offer consumer reviews and products of the day. Both of these are effective and useful merchandising strategies.

- Have Good Web Architecture - when designing the architecture of your site keep in mind the consumer experience and strive to construct a site that provides the greatest possible levels of convenience, information and comfort. The way products are presented is only part of the puzzle. You must also pay attention to the user path, the check out and payment process, and the placement of special offers. You are aiming to create a gratifying and enjoyable consumer experience. Design your website to deliver.

- Use E-mail - mail can serve as a valuable marketing tool provided you structure your messages well and avoid engaging in spam. Use your e-mail campaign to develop a relationship with your shoppers, allowing them access to special offers and updates about new product offerings.

- Practice Loyalty Marketing - loyalty marketing is valuable because it creates a bond between you and your customers and gives them an incentive to come back and buy from your website again. Some loyalty programs allow buyers to earn points that can be redeemed at a variety of network-affiliated websites.

Other programs allow points to be converted to cash. You also have the option of developing your own incentive loyalty program, although Tudog does not recommend this unless you are prepared to provide extremely attractive rewards. There is a consumer perception of added value in programs that allow for redemption through multiple sites or as cash. The important thing to keep in mind is that loyalty programs show customers that you appreciate their business and they in turn reward you with repeat purchases.

- Develop an Affiliate Network - affiliates serve your site by creating points-of-awareness at various websites of similar or related interests, and can serve to create credibility through association. There are affiliate management services, such as Commission Junction (www.commissionjunction.com) and Be Free (www.befree.com) that can lend exposure to your affiliate effort.

Consumer e-commerce has taken a beating in the last 18 months or so, but just as many pundits exaggerated its potential, so too are they now exaggerating reports of its demise. If you have an e-commerce site, or think adding one to your brick and mortar operation will enhance sales, there is an audience of millions of web users who are still open to responding to your marketing gesture - provided it is compelling, appealing and relevant.