

WHY ONLINE MARKETING MATTERS

How Small Business Can Get
More Customers, Sales & Profits



L.V. Kline

Why Online Marketing Matters : How Small Business Can Get More Customers, Sales & Profits

By L.V. Kline

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Table of Contents

Introduction

How to Use This Book

PART 1 – Why Does Online Marketing Matter?

Chapter 1 – Shifting Consumer Behavior
Marketing Blinders

Online Behavior

Chapter 2 – Shifts in Technology
Access

Accelerating Speed of Change

Convenience

Chapter 3 – Globalization
Offshoring

Time Compression

Chapter 4 – Cost Savings

Website

Traffic

Virtual Events

Networking

Chapter 5 – To Get Found and Grow
Your Business

Get Found in Search

Be Where Your Customers Are

Part II – What is Available to You
Online?

Chapter 6 - Social Media

Facebook

Twitter

LinkedIn

YouTube

Google+

Pinterest

Niche Sites

Chapter 7 – Audio and Video

Podcasts

Video

Chapter 8 – Blogging

Setting Up a Blog

Chapter 9 - Article Marketing and Social Bookmarking

Article Marketing

Social Bookmarking

Chapter 10- E-mail Marketing

Chapter 11 - Event Marketing

Chapter 12 - Search Engine

Optimization

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

On-page SEO

Off-page SEO

Chapter 13 - Advertising

Advertising Platforms

Ad Structure

Hosting Ads

Chapter 14 – Mobile Marketing

Mobile web marketing

Location-Based Services

Proximity marketing

Part III – How Can You Get Started and
Develop Your Plan?

Step 1 - Market Research

Your Customer Avatar

Your Competition

Your Keywords

Website Assessment

Step 2 - Develop Your Online Strategy

Determine your objective

Choose Your Platform and Strategies

Look to Your Strengths

Step 3 – Choose Your Advertising

Helpful (and free) Tools

Step 4 - Scheduling

Content Planning

Step 5 - Getting Help

Hiring Specialized Talent

Outsourcing

Consulting

What to look for when hiring
specialized talent

Next Steps and Moving Forward

About the Author



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Introduction

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), “Small businesses have added 8 million new jobs to our economy since 1990, whereas big business has eliminated 4 million jobs.” The entrepreneurial spirit is in large part what has made our country what it is today. Small business is the heart of our country and economy, accounting for 54% of all US sales and “providing 55% of jobs (66% of net new jobs since the 1970s)”([SBA](#)) yet, many small businesses are stuck in old patterns that threaten their existence.

Is your small business headed for failure? Businesses do fail for a variety

of reasons however, contrary to popular belief, the top reason is due to poor strategic management contributing to 43% of business failures, exceeding that of under-capitalization. The current economic climate has contributed to a rise of failures in 2004 of 11% to 2010 (26%). Will you be one of them?

“30% of small businesses fail within 3 years, half will fail within the first 5 years...”

Longevity provides no guarantee of success. Two of my favorite brick and mortar stores closed up shop after 30+ years in business. My heart sinks a little these days when I see another small business close up shop, especially when they've been a staple in the

neighborhood for several decades. They failed because they made poor strategic decisions.

It bothers me not just because I can no longer take my business to them but because I hate that that can happen to enterprising business owners.

Particularly those who have devoted their lives to their businesses, and especially when it's unnecessary. I wonder what they will do next, and how they are going to take care of themselves and their families. I fear it's a sign of the times today and a wake up call to which we must adapt in order to survive.

If you are a small business owner who has heard about online marketing, but don't understand what the big deal is or

if you are looking for ways to get more customers yet are frustrated by advertising and promotions that no longer work, this book is written for you. You will soon discover why many old advertising methods no longer work.

This book provides a high-level overview of the world of online marketing and answers the question of why it is critical for your business today. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive how-to but rather to reveal the criticality of getting online, getting found by your customers and to give you the tools you need to get started with your own online marketing strategy.

You will learn why your old way of marketing is no longer working, why it

isn't your fault and what you can do to fix the problem. In fact, I lay out a considerable number of options for you to consider. You will learn why the old style static websites are no longer enough for your business and what you can do to bring them up to date.

You will also learn what does work online to attract more customers, and thus increase the success of your business. The greater success you have, the more control you have over your life and destiny. My aim is to help you move away from the struggle and fear of business failure into achieving greater results so you and your business can thrive.

By reading this book, you will learn

more than many, if not most “mom and pop” shops know about marketing which will give you a significant upper hand in the marketplace. If, down the road, you decide to outsource some of the work, you will be equipped to have an intelligent conversation about the project.

Additionally, you'll learn why time itself, seems to have been compressed and why you feel as though you can no longer keep up.

I know that you already wear at least a dozen hats and are responsible for the livelihood of your employees, their (and your) family and that you have precious little time to devote to something new. Nevertheless, in order to thrive in this

economy, it is critical that you be where your customers can find you when they are looking for products and/or services online and I'd like to see you accomplish that.

You also don't have to be a “techie” to make online marketing work for you so if you have concerns about your tech skills, put those fears aside. Many small business people think they can't get involved with online marketing because they aren't “technical” enough but many more have proven that being a techie is not a requirement. You don't have to be a tech junkie to apply the principles of online marketing.

As a small business owner reading this you have more than likely already

noticed that most of what you used to do to attract new customers and increase sales is no longer working for you. As if that isn't frustrating enough, it's expensive as well! It is not, however, your fault.

The problem isn't with you or your ads, the problem is that traditional marketing no longer works. Gone are the days when you could rely upon billboards or advertising in the phone book to attract new customers.

It's not all gloom and doom, however. It also used to be true that traditional brick and mortar stores could cater only to customers in their immediate neighborhood. That no longer holds true either. The good news is that with our

changing times have come greater opportunities for you to succeed than you've ever seen before. It is up to you to reach out and grab them. You needn't be left behind.

How to Use This Book

This book is intended to serve as a response to you, the small business owner who is asking why your marketing efforts no longer work to bring in new customers and what you need to do today that will work. It provides an over-view of online marketing platforms and strategies available, and walks you through options to consider while creating an online marketing strategy of your own.

Part I explains why your traditional methods no longer work and why online marketing is critical for small business. If you've been frustrated that what you used to do to attract more customers no

longer works, there are several key factors at play and it is important to realize why these factors are causing frustration before you can create a strategy that will work.

Factors included herein are the evolution of marketing in response to consumer behavior, shifts in consumer behavior and technology. Feel free to read the sections of greatest interest to you.

Finally, perhaps the most important factor of all, is that you need to get found by more customers in order to grow your business. If you have no interest in other sections in Part I, by all means, read this section.

Part II provides an overview or survey

of some of the many strategies available to you to get online and increase visibility to new customers. It is not intended to be an all-inclusive treatise as that would take many books but merely to give you a feel for the choices open to you to help you decide what will work for you. I'm confident you will find something that fits your (and your customers') needs.

Feel free to browse, dog-ear, or pick and choose among these sections. I would encourage you to read them all as you might find an idea or two that you can use to your advantage however, if you have no interest in reading about a few of the strategies, feel free to skip ahead.

Part III is where you get down to work at developing an online strategy of your own. It provides step-by-step guidance to selecting your platform, creating your strategy, getting help if you need it and implementing your new plan. I have provided companion files for you to use with this book that can be accessed at [Web Wise Communications WOMM](#)
[Bonuses](#)

(<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>
Included are worksheets, an opportunity to join in a Q&A with me and I may be adding an audio version of the book.

Happy Exploring!

PART 1 – Why Does Online Marketing Matter?

In This Section You'll Learn:

Why traditional marketing no longer works

Why there has been a surge in online activity in the past decade

How technology has impacted consumer behavior

Why online marketing is more cost effective than traditional marketing

Why you need to get in front of your customer to be found

“Traditional marketing no longer works for small business...”

Traditional marketing no longer works for small business in part due to the evolution of marketing in response to shifts in consumer behavior and technology. Marketing as an expertise, began with the advent of competition. Looking back in history, when towns were very small, advertising wasn't necessary because everyone knew what was going on, word of mouth traveled and more than likely there was only one store of a particular specialty in town.

In the distant past, as a business owner, all you had to do was hang up your shingle and anyone needing what you had to offer was a customer. If you needed a shovel, you had one place to go to buy one. As populations grew and

competitors moved in, it became necessary to compete in order to get attention for sales or promotions. Thus was born the need to get better at advertising and promotions.

As media was introduced, so too were marketing tactics. Marketers learned that they could put advertisements in newspapers to get the word out to all subscribers and over time, those ads had to be more creative in order to capture attention. Thus the cycle begins.

Naturally, as promotional strategies and advertising evolves, so too do consumers grow more savvy and weary of tactics and strategies. It becomes more difficult to surprise them and get their attention. In time, consumers

develop blinders to ads no matter where they are and marketers have to try yet more new tactics.

In time, marketing media expanded to include direct mail, newspapers, local television and radio, billboards, trade shows, magazines, and Sunday supplements to spread marketing messages. Unfortunately, today most of that traditional media is dying a slow death due to a dramatic drop in readership and following suit, advertisers. Advertisers are waking up to the realization that a good number of traditional marketing methods are not only prohibitively expensive but that they also no longer work as well for getting new customers.

We have now seen the next step in evolution where many of “traditional” marketing strategies no longer work due to shifting consumer behavior, available technology, a global economy and, accessibility, none of which were previously available. Traditional outbound marketing is also breaking down as consumers have far more choices about the messages they will or won't receive.

When you add evolution of technology that has changed the way we communicate and shifts in customer expectations to the mix, it becomes more critical than ever to adapt with the times to meet new challenges.

In place of traditional marketing, an

expansive world has evolved online that enables greater customer engagement, and experiences that as a small business, you should not ignore lest you be left behind.

**More leads = more prospects = more
customers = more sales = higher
profits!**

Essentially, online marketing matters to small business to build business . If you want greater profits, you need more sales. To get more sales, you must get more leads and to get more leads, you need to get in front of more consumers, where ever they may be.

Chapter 1 – Shifting Consumer Behavior

Marketing Blinders

Traditional television, newspaper, and radio ads no longer work as they once did because consumers have developed marketing “blinders” and simply no longer see them as they once did.

Advertising in traditional media relies upon interrupting the consumer who is actively engaged in doing something else like reading the newspaper. This type of “interrupt” marketing becomes more challenging as consumers grow blinders to the ads over time. You need only look to your own behavior to know this is

true.

Having caller ID means you don't have to answer the phone for telemarketers thus telemarketing no longer works as well as it once did. Today instead, you get text messages delivered to your cell phone. Digital video recorders (DVRs) give you the ability to fast forward through commercials driving down the efficacy of television ads (unless of course, it's during the Super Bowl).

More consumers are getting their news primarily on their reader, tablet, or smartphone, which is detrimentally impacting the tradition newspaper advertising much the same way e-books are now outselling traditional books by a ratio of 2:1. Print media simply isn't

what it used to be.

Advertising in the local phone book is very expensive and unfortunately no longer works as it once did. Today, the majority of buyers first look to their computer to research and find products, services, directions and yes, even phone numbers and even if they are looking for local products and services.

Trade show attendance, also traditionally very expensive, has been impacted by the economy as well. Web tools now exist that enable users to connect and network without travel, and to see products, and demos online facilitating far less costly means than trade shows. Granted there remain some trade shows that continue to be viable,

but in the meantime, attendance at trade shows as a whole is down from years past.

Access to satellite radio enables users to access a much wider variety of music and talk, but it also means less time spent listening to traditional radio. When was the last time you turned on the radio in your home? For that matter, when was the last time you noticed a different advertisement on a billboard that you pass daily on the way to work? More than likely, you no longer even see them as you go about your daily business.

“Direct mail gets thrown into the recycle bin without ever being opened...”

Traditional marketing used to rely heavily on print advertising, television, radio, and the like to attract more customers. As our mailboxes filled with direct mail, we quit opening the envelopes. Now, as our inboxes overflow, we stop opening e-mails. I would note that due to the decrease in direct mail, each piece does now get more attention than in days past however, the cost remains an inhibiting factor.

The world has gone digital which has opened up even more competition. We now live in a global economy which means more competition than ever before but it also means that you can compete and market globally . You are

no longer restricted to only serving the customers in your local area.

Traditional outbound or “megaphone” marketing (advertisers broadcasting messages about how great their product is) is breaking down as consumers have greater choices in the messages that they receive.

Today, the savvy marketer is the marketer who draws customers in to their websites or blog via inbound marketing. Attracting customers to you is far less expensive both in terms of cost and time, than outbound marketing making it well worth your efforts to achieve.

As noted, consumers have become

practically immune to traditional advertising. At the same time, we've grown accustomed to instant gratification and 24x7 access. Customers want access to the companies they frequent. Consumers want to shop, connect, and get answers to questions, at maximum speed. The most successful companies like [Zappo's](#), have very successfully used those needs and desires to serve as the cornerstone for their business.

If you aren't familiar with Zappo's, they have created a business that is all about providing great customer service along with an exciting corporate culture following the philosophy of Nordstrom and Disney. Having customer service as

a cornerstone has indeed proven to be an exceedingly successful strategy. Treat your customers right, and they will reward you!

Online Behavior

Poor economic conditions, outrageous gas prices, the deep-seated need for instant gratification and the need to accomplish more in less time contribute to consumers spending more time online than ever, fueling the explosion of social media.

“Instant gratification isn't fast enough.~Carrie Fisher”

Social media and texting provide the opportunity to get instant feedback or information from friends and family. We can't wait for standard mail but rather now rely on e-mail. More people are abandoning reliance on phone books and foldout maps when in need of phone

numbers, or directions, turning to the internet instead.

Online shopping provides convenience and in some cases, cost savings for customers who prefer to shop online during a lunch break and have the goods delivered to their door. Remember when there only used to be Black Friday before the holidays? Cyber Monday is a testament to the popularity and adoption rate of online shopping for the holidays.

Shoppers have grown used to being able to access companies online whether it is simply to look up contact information, learn about products or to get help.

Savvy shoppers not only research products and services but want more transparency from the people they do

business with because people buy from those they know, from people they like and from people they trust. How can you establish this trust if you aren't connecting with customers?

Customers want to feel as though they know who you are, what makes you tick, whether you are genuine and trustworthy. That's what it takes to compete against the big stores today. If customers feel like you are a friend who cares about them, you will get their business.

As a customer, if you don't like a store or a store owner, you go to one that you do like. If you access a site online that gives you pause to think, you don't trust doing business with them. You wonder if you'll get scammed or spammed or

worse. Having a platform that enables you to build relationships with your customers is the number one best thing you can do to promote your business.

“Word of mouth is golden...”

One thing that hasn't changed about marketing is that word of mouth or referral marketing is golden and that is never more true than it is today. Word of mouth has never traveled as fast as it does on the internet and via mobile devices. We hear almost daily of topics trending on Twitter, or societal uprisings instigated by social media.

Facebook is a natural for providing word of mouth marketing or referrals and social proof. When your friend

“Likes” a dentist in your area, you are informed. You like your friend's hair style, and naturally you ask where she gets it cut.

When you need a new doctor, where do you turn? To your friends and neighbors of course. You ask them who they see, or you start researching online, reading reviews and information you find. You may feel a bit wary of trusting someone you find nothing about. On the other hand, you'll feel more trusting of a business or product that is easily found and has good reviews.

Social proof applies whether made by your friends or others. When choosing between restaurant “A” with a long waiting line versus restaurant “B” with

no one in sight, don't you believe that restaurant “A” has better food, even if you don't know anyone waiting in line? It's clearly in much greater demand which leads us to believe it is better.

The same principle of social proof applies to websites. Given website “A” that appears to be a hub of activity with lots of visitors versus website “B” that seems to be a wasteland, don't you pay closer attention to the site that has the most activity going on? Which site would you rather be yours?

Chapter 2 – Shifts in Technology

Technology has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, in part due to the explosion of the internet and in part due to the advent of more portable, convenient devices such as smartphones and tablet computers.

As of December 21, 2011, growth of the internet has exploded by 528.1% since the year 2000 according to [Internet World Stats](#) (updated December 31, 2011,). Given the population of the world (including developing countries) at 6.9 billion, 32.7% (or 2.2 billion users) are on the internet. That's over one-third or 1 in 3 people using the internet world-wide. The percentage is

much higher for North America at 78.6%. That means 8 out of 10 people in North America are now using services on the internet!

Add to that, growth of the mobile cell phone and tablet markets and you can see how technology has shaped consumer behavior on a deeply profound level. According to the [International Telecommunication Union](#), there were nearly 6 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide in 2011 or almost the same number as internet users. [Nielsen Wire](#) reports that the majority (50.4%) of American phone owners now have smartphones. [Global tablet sales](#) are expected to rise to 375 million over the next four years resulting in an installed

based of 760 million, according to Forrester.com. I share these numbers with you to impress upon you the adoption rates of technology. As technology becomes cheaper, faster and more convenient to use, the higher the adoption rate.

Access

With smartphones and tablets came applications (apps) and software platforms that further enable growth and use. You can now do just about whatever you need to do, no matter where you are, faster than ever. It all boils down to access.

Consumers are accustomed to searching for or reading reviews on products or services, chatting with their friends, checking in wherever they go, and shopping online when they have a need. Even coupons are being delivered to club reward cards or users' smartphones. If you can think of a use, there is an app for it and that impacts

you as a small business owner. You need to be accessible to the customer who is looking for you. By way of example, if your customer is searching for your products or services in Google's business listings or reviews and you aren't there, do you think they will come to you?

There is no reason to believe that this growth will slow in fact, technology enables greater connectivity daily. Whereas it used to be that use of the internet was confined to office spaces, the advent of laptop computers enabled portability giving users the option to connect anywhere. Moving forward to today with tablets and smartphones being common place, users now have

access 24 x 7. In fact, it is estimated that over 50% of searches are made on smartphones and 68% of smartphone owners sleep with them at their bedside! Now that is accessibility!

Accelerating Speed of Change

“Just as soon as you get used to something new, it changes...”

At the same time, technology enables the compression of time. In a world where we lean toward instant gratification, we no longer send traditional mail but rather rely upon e-mail. Any marketing campaign that relied upon traditional mail is an expensive undertaking. Not only must you pay for development of the piece but the postal rates as well. Standard mail takes days to arrive when e-mail is practically instantaneous and costs very little to deliver.

The accelerating speed of change transforms every area of your life whether you are ready for it or not.

To illustrate how innovation is accelerating exponentially, consider if you will, that it took 38 years for the radio to reach 50 million users. By contrast, it took 15 years for television, 4 for the internet and less than 9 months for Facebook to get to twice that many or 100 million users. Today, Facebook has met it's 1 billionth user. ([Did You Know 2012](#))

Google processes 4.7 billion requests and YouTube hosts 2 billion new videos (48 hours worth of video) on a daily basis. There are more text messages sent and received daily than the population of

the planet. ([Did You Know 2012](#))

What does this mean to you? It explains the barrage of information you try to keep up with on a daily basis, the sense of time speeding up and it explains the constant pressure you feel to catch up, while never quite achieving the goal.

Convenience

We now live in a digital, online world. Print isn't what it used to be. E-books are outselling traditional books (2:1), newspapers and magazines are in trouble and all because more people are accessing print media on their computers, tablets, or smartphones.

Buyers in small towns are no longer restricted to buying only from the shops located nearby.

Technology has enabled virtual events such as meetings, conferences, and trade shows. It's much more cost effective for companies to run virtual events than it is to pay for their people to travel for several days or weeks at a time.

Online dating is now the second most common way for couples to meet. Scientists at the University of Rochester found that in one single month there were nearly 25 million users (worldwide) who were dating online.

Online activity has increased due to access and convenience. Users are accustomed to connecting 24x7 with their friends, but as importantly, with the businesses they frequent.

“Your customers are looking for you online and if you aren't there, they won't find you, they will find your competitor...”

One of the biggest mistakes I see small business owners making is in believing

that their old static website is enough. While that may have been true in the past, it is no longer true today. Again, consumers are accustomed to buying online, to connecting with the businesses they frequent and to easily finding information they need. Minimally, adding online marketing elements to your strategy will help you build your business by giving customers what they want and need.

Yesterday, the movers and shakers in technology used to be companies like IBM, Hewlett Packard and Sun Microsystems. Today they are companies like Google, Facebook and Amazon. The truth is, shift happens.

Simply put, your customers are online

and if you aren't catering to their needs
and desires, they won't cater to yours.

Chapter 3 – Globalization

We now live in a global economy. No longer are even the smallest of businesses restricted to doing business within their own neighborhood and neither are your customers. There is good news and bad news here. The good news is that it means you can compete globally which requires a large shift in your thinking and vision. You now have every opportunity to compete for business from anyone, anywhere in the world. The bad news or challenge is that also means you have more competition than ever before possible.

In “The World is Flat,” Thomas L. Friedman discusses the impact

technology has had on this world of ours and how we've seen a flattening or globalization which in turn has dramatically changed core economic ideas. Economic changes in a foreign country are not isolated events but rather impact us all virtually overnight.

Before your eyes glaze over, what is important to understand is these changes level the playing field in terms of commerce for you and your business. Online, you can reach markets that were never open to you in the past.

The popular game Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon illustrates this flattening further by demonstrating how small our world has become. Based upon the networking theory six degrees of separation, the

game shows that Kevin Bacon can be connected to any other Hollywood celebrity in 6 steps or fewer. Online networking works the same way enabling connections between not only individuals but between networks, further shrinking your world while expanding your reach.

Offshoring

The term “offshoring” simply refers to outsourcing that is done in another country. During and after the Dot-com bubble burst, there was a great uproar over jobs going overseas. While that may mean having to make great adjustments, it also means that you have resources available to you, as well, at greatly reduced costs.

Many jobs went over seas at that time because workers can now communicate and compete globally. That means workers in lower cost-of-living areas can do the work for much less money. In turn, that drives down costs for the companies who hire them and that

increases their bottom line.

It also means that there is no reason why you can't market your product or services globally. Unless your business is based upon a hands-on service model, you can now compete with larger companies around the world and depending upon your product, at no added cost. If you ship product, shipping may cost more but in today's economy, you might also be able to “drop ship” from a company that is closer to your customer as a way to reduce the added cost of shipping.

By “hands-on service” I refer to business that requires a physical presence in order to provide it such as a hair dresser, a nurse who must

administer injections or a masseuse. If your business is a hands-on business, you should still consider online offers to attract traffic. For example, you could provide discount coupons, training for others on the web, a newsletter, or write a book about your experiences and who knows, perhaps create an additional revenue stream along the way.

Time Compression

*“The faster I go, the behinder I get. ~
Lewis Carroll”*

Along with flattening has come an element of time compression. You can get work done on the other side of the world while you sleep, making the completed work available to you when you wake. Doctors can have medical transcriptions done overnight, making them available for review the following day.

You no longer have to wait days or weeks for “snail” mail to turn around but can get almost instantaneous responses via e-mail or faster yet, text messages. Again, there are pros and cons to the

compression of time.

While you may no longer have to wait as long for work to be done, or to get answers to your questions, this speeding up of time leaves us with a feeling that we may never fully catch up.

Additionally, the pressure to respond quickly to an ever-increasing amount of data received is enough to make you feel as though your days are never long enough to get everything done.

Companies who pay attention to the possibilities that globalization provides and adopt processes and procedures accordingly will be able to survive.

Those who don't, may not. I don't mean to sound harsh, but am simply pointing out that if you choose to ignore waves of

change, you may be left behind. Your competition may be embracing that change, making them much more competitive. If you are taking advantage of global markets and/or workforces, when your competition is not, you will be in the strongest position.

Chapter 4 – Cost Savings

The really good news is that online marketing is much more cost effective and offers greater economies of scale than traditional marketing. Along with the explosion of software and apps came accessibility of the software and tools needed to setup and manage websites by yourself. Although certainly a time-saver, it is no longer necessary to rely upon web masters or expensive Information Technology (IT) departments to start a website. No longer are those technologies only available to big business. Online suppliers or vendors (business cards for example) often charge less for their services since there

is no middle man and the competition is stiffer than ever.

Website

Today, you may be able create a page on Facebook that will do what you need for no cost whatsoever, however as you'll read later, I don't advise this be your only site. If you do need a website, you can buy a domain name (your site address) for a little less than \$10/year (or less if you buy several years at a time). Likewise, you can buy hosting for that name for about \$9 or \$10 / month. Essentially, this means you can have a site for roughly \$10 per month.

From there, costs depend upon the choices you make regarding strategy however, here are a few good nuggets to consider. I recommend building a list of

followers to whom you can e-mail as long as they remain subscribed to your list. A service to do that runs around \$20/month depending upon the size of your list. If you add one of these services to your site, you are now spending about \$30/month but have everything you need to create an e-mail campaign.

If your business is solely online, cost savings you may realize include overhead costs, such as rent or lease, inventory levels, signage, phone expenses and insurance, to name a few. Depending on your business, I'm sure you can think of many more savings you would realize if your business was solely online.

Traffic

Having a website, just like having a brick and mortar business is just not enough. You still need to get customers (traffic) to become aware of your business and visit your site (or store). There are many ways to do this, but in general, the faster the strategy, the most it costs. There are a few zero cost strategies available to you as you'll see in the section on search engine optimization (SEO) but the no-cost strategies take more time to start producing revenue from your site. Having said that, if you are in a hurry, plan to spend more on your advertising budget.

There are many opportunities for advertising online however, in short if you compare what you have spent in the past for a traditional telephone book or newspaper ad, you'll see what kind of savings you may realize.

Facebook ads can cost less than a dollar for each new prospect depending upon the competition for your topic. Google and Microsoft also offer advertising and while they do cost more than Facebook ads, they still cost a good deal less than traditional advertising.

If you choose to learn to do it yourself, you can create text-only pay-per-click (PPC) ads for free and as little as \$1 for an ad that includes an image. The cost is incurred when your ad is clicked. The

more traffic you attract, the higher your cost but that may in fact, be the good kind of problem to solve since that higher cost means you are getting more traffic.

Likewise, you no longer need to rely upon advertising agencies for their help as all the tools you need are available to you. If you need graphics, online services abound to help you create or purchase graphics. If you need copywriting help, that too, is readily accessible to any size business.

Additionally, effectiveness of traditional advertisements fades over time whereas ads placed on websites can continue to spread through social media. It is advisable to rotate or refresh ads for any

media but this is clearly more costly and time consuming to do for traditional media than for online ads where you can change the ad in as little as a few minutes and clicks of your mouse. Online ad services enable rapid change and greater flexibility.

With postal rate increases, traditional direct mail costs have become costly for most small businesses, especially when taking into account the cost to develop the piece to begin with. Today, you can develop an e-mail campaign that costs you nothing to produce and around \$20/month (depending on the size of your list, of course) for an online e-mail service. You can still send out brochures if you wish but no longer have to pay

postage for delivery. (If direct mail is of particular interest to you, I recommend that you use online channels first to test your messages before spending the money to create the piece.)

It doesn't have to cost anything to create content for your site or blog, if that is a strategy you want to pursue. Of course, you can hire freelancers to help but if you do, today it won't cost nearly as much as it used to cost. The wave of corporate outsourcing and resulting competition for work has dramatically driven down the price of freelance work. That may be bad news for freelancers but good news for you.

If part or all of your business provides digital products, distribution costs are

almost non-existent. If you require digital printing, the every day business can now use print-on-demand services that used to be available only to larger companies. That means you can print what you need when you need it, ultimately keeping your costs very low. Gone are the days when you need to order hundreds or thousands of copies to sit in a warehouse until needed.

Social media strategies can also be used free of charge but for the cost of your time. They can become very time-consuming so it is worthy of comment. You may want to find a staff member who can contribute. Likewise, no longer does a small business have to rely upon advertising agencies to create or launch

campaigns. That helps level the playing field which means that for the first time, you can compete with any business, large or small, online.

Virtual Events

Trade shows are very expensive to attend for any company, easily running into tens of thousands of dollars. Typical trade show expenses include the cost for a booth, sales materials (literature, demos, videos and presentations), graphics or signage, equipment, and shipping. In addition, companies incur attendee travel, and room and board expenses to support the show. It's no wonder that in this economy, trade show attendance is down in almost every industry.

I had an opportunity to attend a virtual trade show a couple of years ago that was no less than astonishing. The hosts

created a virtual world, complete with show-floor graphics, where you can approach any “booth,” watch presentations, download materials and use a “chat” function to ask questions. Imagine the amount of money and increased attendance they were able to achieve by offering their event online. Another large conference event created an app for their event that enabled attendees to connect and chat with each other.

It should also be noted that while you can spend very little money, as you proceed, you will find items you will want to purchase to enhance your site, advertising or other marketing efforts. You may find for example, that you want

to pay for a better logo or website banner or perhaps that you want to add extra customer functionality to your site. Suffice it to say, these decisions are no different from other purchasing decisions you make as the owner of a small business.

Networking

Now if you haven't yet heard enough to convince you that you need to get up to speed with the surge of new marketing techniques, here is another brand new insight into successful marketing. One of the greatest benefits of traditional events like conferences has been that of providing opportunities to network.

While the game “Six Degrees of Kevin

Bacon” illustrates the strength and possibilities of networking, that for instance, you can connect to anyone in the world through the right connections, it describes but one network; Kevin Bacon's. Imagine if you will, one of your networks for example, your connections on LinkedIn and how many other networks those connections are tapped into. These are your network of networks about which scientists have been studying in great detail.

For that purpose, mathematicians have given us a brand new insight which appears in the literature as ”networking networks”. This shows that not only do you cascade the marketing contacts by contacting the right 6 people but that that

network of 6 people results in contacting a plethora of other networks. This has been proved for explaining the spread of pandemics and for the proliferation of many other networks. So to optimize the customer contacts, you must understand networking the networks. (Science News 9/22/2012)

Therein lies one of the beauties of the world online. Some sites such as LinkedIn make networking the cornerstone of their business however, the majority of new businesses today offer opportunities to connect with like-minded individuals in one form or another. You no longer have to go to an event to network with others (although still a good idea). Never before could

you network with so many people, in such an efficient manner, at so little cost, as you can today. There is no greater wealth of networking opportunities than exist online.

Chapter 5 – To Get Found and Grow Your Business

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, online marketing is crucial to small business in getting found by the very customers they hope to serve. As you read earlier about the customer online behavior, buyers today search for products and services online before they buy. They read online reviews, and ask their friends before buying even if what they are buying is from local business. Word of mouth is still golden and even more important in today's more competitive market.

According to the [Kelsey Group](#), 97% of consumers use the internet to research a

product or service before buying it locally. This underscores the import of having a presence online in order to be found. They also report that most users access 7.9 different sites while doing their research. Accessing research or information online is simply faster, more convenient for shoppers and a lot more Eco-friendly.

“Who will your customers find first, you or your competition?”

From buyer behavior, we know that review sites such as Yelp! and Google Reviews clearly have become extremely influential to buyers' decision making. Reviews work so well because it is similar to getting referrals from friends.

If we read more good comments about a business, it adds a bit of social proof and we tend to choose that business over another. Originally, Yelp reviews were the most influential for buyers however, Google Reviews now appear to be gaining more influence for search engine rankings.

Reviews are also important to your local listing rankings again, because Google wants to provide the best sites to searchers first. When it comes to reviews, video reviews are even better than text reviews so if you start asking your customers to give you reviews, ask for video reviews when possible.

Local listings are free business listings offered by the search engines that you

can (and should) claim to help with your rankings. If you have a brick and mortar business, you need to claim and fill out complete profiles on these pages. You can access a step-by-step how-to for [Google local listings](#) on Web Wise Communications.

Get Found in Search

When customers search for services in your area, is your business one of those that shows up in Google Maps? Of course, that is what you want however, if you haven't filled in profiles and taken advantage of that “real estate,” you severely diminish your visibility.

In order to be found by your customers, you'll also want to be found when a search is done for any of your business “keywords” or words that describe your niche or product. For example, a local dentist will want to be found when someone searches for words like “dentist” or “dental hygiene”. These can be found by doing a little free keyword

research using the Google Adwords Keyword tool. There is much more on keywords in the section on SEO however, for now, it is enough to say that you want your website or ads to show up when someone searches on a topic relevant to your business.

To illustrate, if you are away from your home or office computer, and need to find a nearby pizza parlor, you can easily search for one on your smartphone. Results returned (search engine results pages or SERPs) are those that the search engine thinks are most relevant to your search. As a small business in that marketplace, you most certainly want to show up not only on the first page of results but very high toward

the top of that page. Ideally, you want to appear in one of the top 3 spots!

Google has become the workhorse of search engines getting the majority of searches however, most of the time, if you are able to rank well in Google, your ranking in other search engines will be good as well. Therefore, I focus primarily on Google and a few of the things you need to do to help your customers find you.

Be Where Your Customers Are

Getting in front of your customers means knowing where your customers are when online. Odds are great that a good number of them will be in Facebook but if your business is one that is highly technical in nature, your customer may well be found in online forums or groups. You may be able to find niche social sites that cater specifically to your customer base.

It may be that there is a trade group or forum where your customers spend their time and it is well worth while to find out where those places are. Forums and

groups let you browse through questions that are being asked, popular topics being discussed, and provide a place where you can learn what is most important to your customer.

You can do this research by asking your existing customers, prospects that you speak with, or even by using online survey tools like [Survey Monkey](#). The more you know about your customers, the better you'll be able to not only get in front of them but market to them (more on this in Part III).

Social media sites can be a goldmine if you find one that appeals to your base. Within the sites, you can catch up to the questions they are asking, the problems they have, and the things they like and

are looking for. I can't think of a better way to win fans than to answer their questions or solve their problems. Do that, and they are more likely to “follow” or “like” you and remember you when they need your product or service.

Many marketers today are offering contests to get more fans or followers. If you like that strategy, it can be a great way to build a list of customers very quickly. I would add however, that you'll still want to get your new fans to your own site as soon as you can (more on this in “Social Media”).

Naturally, advertising is another way to get in front of your customers where they are. Facebook offers an excellent pay-

per-click program as does Google with Adwords and Microsoft with Bing Ads. If you have an advertising budget, advertising is the fastest way to get in front of your prospects.

You can also look for sites who serve your demographic with complimentary content and place banner ads on such sites. As an example, a lawyer could advertise quite effectively on a bail bonds site or a handyman could advertise on a realtor's site. It's a great way to get exposure to visitors of sites other than your own. The cost to place ads on complimentary sites varies greatly. You can imagine that a site getting hundreds of thousands of visitors a month is going to cost more than a site

that merely gets hundreds of visitors. If you want to estimate how much exposure you may be able to get on a given site, there are free tools available (such as [Alexa](#)), that will give you an idea of how much traffic a site gets.

Whether you want or need to keep up with the times, reap bountiful cost savings or just make it easier for your customer to find you, you should now have a much better understanding of why online marketing matters to your business. Now what? How do you proceed?

The next section provides a survey or overview of a wide variety of online strategies that work for many businesses. There are strategies that work for every

business type and model and at least one that will best suit your needs.

Part II – What is Available to You Online?

In This Section You'll Learn:

What you can do to get in front of more customers

What you can do to drive more customers to your website

What you can do to create greater customer loyalty

What you can do to market to your customers again and again

What online opportunities are available to you, no matter your strengths

The advent of Web 2.0 was

revolutionary in that it enabled the connection of people with and to each other for collaboration, information sharing and interaction on the World Wide Web. New web capabilities grew up around social media, enabling customer feedback, commentary and contributions. This additional functionality contrasts sharply with static websites that shoppers or consumers simply review without any interaction.

Fundamentally, Web 2.0 has changed the way people communicate when sharing their experiences, thoughts and opinions through interactions, tagging or voting, social networking, or social bookmarking.

Managed wisely, interactions are

opportunities for you to engage your customer, provide customer service, gain awareness and manage customer relationships. Make no mistake, customers do want a relationship with you. Buyers buy from people they know, they like and they trust. It's a question of transparency. Transparency may be one of the hot buzzwords today nonetheless, it applies.

Never before have we been able to connect as easily as we can now and never before has the conversation been so public. Customers have always been talking about products and services whether we were aware of it or not. They continue to do so but now many of those conversions are in the public

forum, as on review sites or on social media.

There are a several quick and clever ways you can update an older style website to include what customers want today without great expense. The best way is by adding a blog as you'll see later. However, if time doesn't permit or if writing isn't your strength, you can still update the content on your site in order to give Google some fresh new material. It would even better if you include content that you can continually freshen such as press releases or product information.

Another way you can build relationships with your customers is through e-mail campaigns. If you don't already have a

way to gather customer names and e-mail addresses, consider adding an “opt-in” box or page to your site. An opt-in box is simply a small form that a customer fills in (with their name and e-mail address) to be placed on your customer list. That information is then managed by an auto-responder or e-mail service. e-mail Service Providers (ESPs) give you the ability to send either a predetermined series of messages or special broadcast messages to your list of customers thus allowing you to build relationships with them.

To entice signups on your list, brainstorm ideas that would be valuable to your customers. Do your customers want coupons or discounts or might they

prefer an e-book or a white paper? You may need to try several different enticements before you find the one that works best for your business.

You could also consider adding “link bait” to your site. Link bait is something that others will want to link to on your page, perhaps share with others and is even better if it is something that needs to be accessed frequently. One such example might be a specialty calculator that users would need to access more than once. For instance, a mortgage company might have a calculator that enables new home buyers to estimate their monthly payment based on the price of the house they want to buy and their down payment. Realtors might find that a

handy tool to link to from their real estate sites thus creating links for the mortgage company.

Chapter 6 - Social Media

This section is not intended to be an all-inclusive look at social media as that would take more than one book to cover however, it is intended to give you a flavor of a few of the hotspots and what opportunities you may wish to explore further for your business.

Social media is not just about sharing what you had for lunch today. Social media is all about connecting, networking and conversing. Social media sites provide an opportunity to gather with like-minded people, share knowledge, network, or on the lighter side, brag about the kids or share a funny video.

Social media has exploded much like the internet. In fact, if Facebook were a country, it would be the 3rd largest in the world. Social media may have started with the youth however, the fastest growing demographic today is the over 50's crowd. Grandparents are equally interested in keeping up with their friends and grandchildren.

An abundance of social media sites (e.g. Facebook or Twitter) exist catering to different needs. LinkedIn for example, is geared toward professional networking, and focuses on careers whereas Twitter caters to more of a cocktail party style of conversation.

One of the mainstays of social media

sites is your profile page where you have an opportunity to let others know what you (or in this case, your business) is about. Profiles are important no matter what sites you choose to frequent. The more complete your profile, the more your customers will know who you are, what you are about and the more attractive you become to search engines. Include photos where possible, and ensure your website, contact information and look and feel remain consistent across all of your sites.

The biggest rule to remember with respect to social media is to participate in the conversation, to be social. While the type of conversation shifts depending upon the site, it remains a solid strategy

across all sites to share great content with others 90% of the time while promoting your products or services only 10% of the time. No one likes to get blasted with promotional messages all the time and especially not on social media. If you follow a strategy of continually making sales pitches, people won't connect with you.

Next you'll want to size up the social media site that you are visiting before jumping in to the conversation. This will give you a chance to get a feel for the culture within that group and avoid making any large, unseemly missteps.

Once familiar with the conversation, jump in and start sharing great content. The more engaged your followers, the

better. In general, you can build that engagement by asking questions, using pop quizzes, lots of images, and sharing items that your customers want to share with their connections. Try sharing a variety of content until you learn what resonates with your customers.

No matter the site, you need to familiarize yourself with the terms and conditions before use. Some sites allow for more than one account and some do not. If you violate their terms, knowingly or not, you run the risk of your account being forever banned. For this reason, I recommend keeping content (and contacts) backed up elsewhere and that you include employee standards in your social media policies for anyone in your

company that may be creating content in the name of your business.

Facebook

Facebook may very well have started out as a tool for college students but has evolved into the giant it is today, serving over 1 billion users. The conversation on Facebook is a bit like one you might have with a friend or neighbor; sharing photos or stories from vacations. The conversation is not as “professional” as LinkedIn but not quite as chatty as that of Twitter.

If you've spent any time on Facebook, you most certainly have seen that businesses have also embraced the platform by setting up business “pages” that allow customer interactions. Starbucks is a great example of a

company that has a viable presence on Facebook. Who would have thought that was doable with coffee and yet they do such a splendid job of showcasing their product on Facebook that one recent post had almost 30,000 “Likes”!

In case you aren't familiar with Facebook, “Likes” are a measure of popularity used on the site. Users “vote” for content, a page or an ad that they prefer by selecting or clicking on a “Like” or thumbs-up button to indicate their approval. Content with the most “likes” gets more exposure.

Once you have at least 25 “Likes” on your page, Facebook allows you to choose a custom page name (Facebook.com/yourbusiness) which

gives your business another valuable piece of real estate on the web and promotes your brand.

Sony, Nike and Virgin Media use Facebook not only as a place to showcase products, but to provide customer service as well. Virgin Media's page includes a “Customer Help” link expressly for that purpose.

Facebook's Terms and Conditions allow only one account per person so while you can open a Facebook account in the name of your business, if you already have a personal account on Facebook, they much prefer that you create a page for your business. You can have as many pages as you like.

You can do almost anything on a page that you can do on a site, including posting items of interest, photos, promotions and by adding “apps” you can even offer items in a store within Facebook. You could in fact, consider using a Facebook page in place of a website if you don't have a site to begin with however, I recommend encouraging your Facebook fans to connect with your website as well as your Facebook page.

As with all sites, make the best use of your profile and image opportunities and be consistent with sharing. It is possible to get your customers to do most of the work for you if you play your cards right. Ask them to share pictures of themselves with your product, ask

questions, run mini-surveys, or contests, and always answer questions asked of you on the site.

Consider joining (or starting) groups of interest for networking opportunities, finding influencers in your industry, and identify your competition. You may in fact, find that you and a competitor could collaborate on a project...you just never know.

No longer can you be assured that your message will get into the stream of those who “Like” your page for a couple of reasons. The first is because posts are fed to followers' “news feeds” which means they are continually updating with time. If your follower isn't online on the day you post your content, he/she might

not see your new post. The second reason is users can control which posts they want to see in their “news feed”. Again, it makes sense to post quality content that your users will want to see so they keep it in their news feeds.

Not only can you add functionality within Facebook through add-on “apps”, but Facebook has added a few more bells and whistles in the past few years that are worthy of note. One such feature is Facebook Events. Events allow for the creation of an event in your calendar, and then allows you to invite any or all of your friends to that event. That can be a boost for event marketers or anyone interested in giving webinars and/or teleseminars.

If you are already on Facebook, take some time to look for business pages and see what other businesses are doing with them. Some use pages purely for customer service, while others provide their pages to allow for customer interaction. Pay particular attention to pages that are done well, and offer services you would like to offer. You can use these as a model for creating your own page when ready.

Twitter

If the conversation in Facebook is like one you might have with a neighbor, the conversation in [Twitter](#) is more like one you would have at a cocktail party.

“Tweets”, as posts on Twitter are called, are limited to 140 characters including any links that you may add so it is clear that it is more chatty in nature than Facebook. You can however, also tweet photos if you wish.

Like other sites, you can set a custom look and feel, create a profile and include links to and from your site. Once your account is set up, you can then find like-minded people and influencers in your niche or industry. Soon you'll find

that people will follow you. Those are the folks who will be reading your Tweets.

While you cannot control who “follows” you on Twitter, you can try to influence whether someone follows you by following them first. Some users adopt a strategy of “following back” anyone who follows them while others are more selective.

Unlike Facebook, Twitter allows for more than one account making it possible to use different accounts for different purposes, objectives or locations. Nordstrom for example, has its standard Twitter “handle” @Nordstrom as well as one for their Rack outlet “@Nordstrom_Rack”.

The conversation on Twitter goes by in a stream, so much like Facebook, you can't be sure your messages are being seen by everyone. Many users will send out similar Tweets throughout the day to ensure greater visibility.

If this sounds like a lot more activity than you'd like, there are a few free tools available that allow management of your Tweets. Tweet Deck is one such tool that allows for monitoring multiple accounts and prescheduling of Tweets. Using a tool like Tweet Deck means you can plan, set up and schedule your Tweets in advance. I would add however, that you do still need to monitor the activity in your account so that you can respond in a timely basis to messages sent to you.

Twitter gives you the ability to either send broadcast messages to everyone who is following you or to send a direct message (a “DM”) privately to select individual(s) in your Twitter list.

Choose carefully here as there have been many broadcast tweets that were intended to be private messages!

Business applications include using Twitter to notify customers of discounts, events, new site content, articles of interest, promotions, and to communicate with customers and of course for research. You are really only limited by your creativity and 140 characters.

If advertising is appealing to you, Twitter offers that as well. As a matter of fact, if you are interested both in

Twitter and in advertising, you can actually hire a celebrity to send Tweets about your business. This isn't offered by Twitter but I couldn't resist letting you know about it.

Twitter uses a “hash tag” (#) nomenclature for topics of interest. For example, if you want to find conversations containing the word “patent law,” you can search for #patent or #patentlaw and find all the conversations containing that word. Likewise if a big event is happening about which you wish to stay informed, you can follow conversations about that #event.

This functionality makes Twitter a great research tool as well as offering

fabulous opportunities to join in the conversations you care about. Can you see how that might be very powerful for your business? Imagine if you will, being able to find and join in conversations to which you can provide great value and in turn get followers who want more of what you have to offer?

LinkedIn

As previously discussed, LinkedIn was developed around the idea of networking for business professionals. Based upon the six degrees of separation concept, it allows you to connect with friends, and ultimately friends of friends. For example, if you want to connect with a venture capitalist, you can search in your network for friends who might know such a person or be a couple of levels removed from the person you want to “meet”. LinkedIn then provides the ability to request invitations or send e-mail to those of interest to you.

Cascading contacts is another way to look at networking, and as introduced

earlier, has been proven that contacting the right 6 people results in contacting a host of other networks (Science News 9/22/2012). Having been created with this need in mind, LinkedIn is the ideal tool to use for networking purposes. What better way to build a powerful network than to connect with key influencers in your industry?

As with seeking individual connections, if you wish to work with a particular company, you can easily search for employees and possible connections to them in your network. Several years back, LinkedIn began providing opportunities for companies to create profiles which you could do to give your company even more presence.

Depending on your strategy, you may actually decide to use both of the above mentioned profiles in LinkedIn. One to serve as your professional profile and one for your business. You can use your professional profile to not only highlight your own career progression but to describe what other types of professionals with whom you would like to connect.

LinkedIn provides the ability to specify what type of connections you would like to make, for example, if you want to be contacted with employment opportunities, or to reconnect with people from your past, you can indicate that by simply checking boxes on your profile page, which are filtering

connection requests you receive.

Your company profile is an good way to showcase your business either to attract partners or employees. If you are looking for business partners, it is a good idea to describe your ideal connections within your profile.

Recognizing its value to the candidate pool, human resources personnel and recruiters began using LinkedIn very early when seeking qualified candidates for job openings. Of interest to them is the “recommendations” functionality where past co-workers, managers or employees can provide recommendations for your work. You could follow this same strategy when looking for just the right people to join

your business.

Within LinkedIn, your “network” grows exponentially as you make connections. Each connection made might be just one more person at level 1 for you but all of their friends get added to your 2nd level connections and so on.

Today LinkedIn also provides an opportunity to join in groups and participate in discussions around topics of interest. Group discussions can be fed into your inbox on a regular basis to keep you up to date. Some LinkedIn groups are based on general topics, some are alumni groups (school or corporate) and some represent specialty interests. Many groups are open to

anyone, whereas others require approval by the group leader before joining.

As with other sites, if you are the professional contributing value to the discussions, answering questions or solving problems, you will gain increasing visibility and likewise, gain fans of your work.

A mistake frequently made on LinkedIn is in not providing complete, optimized profiles. Too often, users are so eager to start making connections that they put off completing their profile and never get back to it. Think of your profile as though it is going to be found by searchers (much like search engines) and include keywords where it makes sense.

YouTube

YouTube is not only a video site but a social media site as well. In case you are not familiar with YouTube, many of the popular videos that you have seen on the news or from friends and family are being shared with you from YouTube.

What you may not realize however, is that YouTube is the 3rd largest search engine. There are so many instructional videos on the YouTube site that a great number of people start their search for information within YouTube rather than searching in another site like Google.

Video marketing can be extremely effective and as such, might provide the

perfect platform for you. Google loves videos since consumers do. It follows then that videos can improve your search engine rankings. Interestingly Google now owns YouTube which gives them a second reason to love videos.

Within YouTube, you have the ability to comment on videos, connect with others, subscribe to “channels” and of course, manage YouTube mail. While you don't have to have a channel to use YouTube, having your own channel provides greater opportunities for distributing your content.

With a Google mail (Gmail) account, you can sign up for a free “channel” within YouTube and post your own videos or link to videos of others. A

great many of the videos you see on blogs or websites are actually hosted on YouTube

Channels can be customized with your colors, logo, and / or banner to further build your brand and of course, having a YouTube channel increases your web presence. Posting content in this case means you are creating and posting videos or commenting on other channels.

Most videos are 5 minutes or less so you may find that creating short videos is less time consuming than writing.

Having one or two videos however, won't do the trick. Think in terms of creating dozens of videos on short topics that pertain to your area of expertise. If you happen to provide instructional

material, consider whether or not you could create short videos instead.

Your video's title and description are important places for keywords and links to your website as is your video itself. Don't forget to include a call to action (let your viewer know what you want them to do) when producing your video and you are ready to attract customers.

As with other sites, advertising is available in YouTube, both on your site and others. In other words if you don't have videos of your own, you can buy advertising on someone else's popular video. This is an important idea for building your business as it can be much faster than creating dozens of videos of your own.

You could in fact, consider acquiring an existing channel if that is of interest. To do that, you would find a well-visited channel that offers what you need, and inquire of the owner through YouTube whether they might be interested in selling the channel. Believe it or not, there are a good many channels loaded with videos that weren't created for business purposes. To that end, there are owners who are willing to sell their channel and simply start a new one for themselves.

Once you gain enough exposure within YouTube, you may even be invited to host ads for payment as well. YouTube loves popular, well-visited channels and that means they are more than happy to

share advertising dollars with you if you help them with promotions.

As mentioned previously, videos help tremendously with Google rankings as well, so if you can get comfortable using video as a strategy, it can pay off very handsomely for you. The biggest obstacle that most people have to overcome with video is in getting comfortable in front of the camera. As with doing many new things, there are ways to overcome that challenge as you'll see in the section on “Audio – Video”.

Google+

Google Plus is Google's answer to Facebook with several notable differences. Although not discussed previously, Facebook provides “lists” functionality to help you organize your friends, family, colleagues and the permissions you give each of your respective lists. Google Plus provides lists as well but in a visual interface called “Circles” that some think are more convenient to use. You can add connections to any of the circles you create to help you manage the distribution of your communications and posts. The conversation and posting functionality is very similar to that of

Facebook.

Google+ added “Hangouts” that is something you won't find (at least not yet) on Facebook. Hangouts enable impromptu video meetings with up to 10 others in your hangout so you can group chat face to face. You can do that on Skype but the video piece is a paid-for add on. Hangouts also enable the broadcast of live events if event marketing is one of your strategies.

Google+ provides for event planning as well. If you host events, it's easy to add guests to your list, create and send invitations, and gather party photos all in one place. You could use this functionality for example, to invite customers to an opening or anniversary

celebration at your store. You could send invitations to the opening of your Christmas season or to gather a networking group together or take a page from Nordstrom and invite your most loyal fans to a private VIP shopping event.

Nordstrom has been sending special invitations for years, much longer than Google+ has been around but the tactic still works. Everyone wants to feel as though they are special and that they are getting a private special deal.

As of this writing, Google has not implemented functionality specifically for business but many believe that is coming so stay tuned if you are interested in using Google+. In the

meantime, you can use it to begin connecting and building relationships with others in your industry.

Pinterest

Pinterest is another one of the youngsters on the block but nevertheless, has exploded with popularity. I attribute that to its ease of use and visual nature. In much the same way that video has gained such popularity, so have images. Within Facebook for example, the most widely “liked” posts are those that are visual. People love visual and Pinterest caters to that preference.

The general idea in Pinterest, is to set up design boards for topics of interest to you and “pin” pictures that exemplify that topic. In that respect, it's much like a bulletin board or scrapbook. In other words, if you create a board for

women's shoes, or the wedding you are planning, the board serves as a place for you to collect pictures for that purpose from around the web.

Pictures from around the web aren't the only things that you can pin to a board. You can pin videos, book lists, apps, screen shots or uploads from your computer which means you can show screen shots of testimonials, the home page of your site or your e-book giveaway. You are only limited by your imagination and ability to create images that convey your message(s).

When joining, you can sign up either through your email, Facebook or Twitter login. That's important to think about in advance because when you later pin an

item, your Facebook or Twitter followers will see that you've pinned an item. Additionally, when one of your connections from that site also joins, Pinterest will notify you that “your Twitter friend“ just joined Pinterest.

If you don't want your personal connections in Facebook to see your business pins, consider that in advance. If you have a larger following in Twitter than on Facebook, you may want to sign in through your Twitter account rather than Facebook. Think about not only your existing connections but your objectives and what platform you want to use to achieve those objectives (more on this in Part III).

Connections you've made on Pinterest

can quickly see your pins and re-pin to their own boards making it much faster and more likely to spread much further. It's a bit like window shopping on steroids. Imagine if you will, pinning an item, your Facebook friends see it along with your Pinterest connections. Let's say one of them re-pins your pin and guess what? Now their Facebook friends see it too. It's a powerful tool for marketing and I encourage you to consider trying it.

If your business is at all visual in nature (think pictures of your products or customers using your products) then it may be the ideal site for you. “Before and after” pictures can be very compelling and tell powerful stories

making them a natural for sharing on a site like Pinterest. You can of course, include visuals of your logo with your website adding a little advertising along the way.

Niche Sites

It is important to note that while Facebook, Twitter and the like instantly come to mind when you hear about social media, there are hundreds, if not thousands of sites that fall in the social media category. Think about your specific needs and explore sites before choosing.

Today, there are sites for book lovers such as [Goodreads](#), foodies, art lovers, sports enthusiasts, hobbies, crafters such as ([Ravelry](#)), and ([Etsy](#)) and so many more covering just about any topic of interest to you. You may find one that is ideal to reach your audience.

A good way to search is to use your

keyword (say “photography” in this case) and niche site in a google search thus: social site + photography. You'll find lots great sites to begin exploring and perhaps the one that is best for your business. You can also search for lists of social sites in Google [social sites for niches].

Hopefully I've peaked your interest enough to provoke you into doing a little exploring on your own. Do a search or two and see if there isn't a niche site that is perfect for your business and if so, go ahead and check out the conversations happening there.

The most egregious mistake to make would be to ignore the conversation. There are many examples of companies

that believe that if they open themselves to allowing comments on their site, someone might say something bad about them in a public forum. In reaction, they prefer not to allow comments to be made. The real problem is that they don't realize that the comments are being made in public forums whether they know it or not.

While you can choose not to participate, the conversation continues, with or without you. It's a better strategy to manage your reputation rather than choosing to ignore the conversation and hope it all works out. Hope is not a plan. The wiser choice is to participate in the conversation, and show the world a great response!

Chapter 7 – Audio and Video

Podcasts

Podcasts are audio broadcasts that in the beginning were frequently listened to on iPods hence the term “Podcast”. A podcast is very simply put, an mp3, or mp4 file that you can create at no cost, anytime, anywhere on any topic of your choosing.

If you haven't subscribed to or listened to a podcast, I recommend that you go to iTunes and listen to a few to get the feel for what they are like. You can find podcasts on any topic of interest to you and subscribe to them so that when you next connect to iTunes, (either directly

or by syncing your phone or iPod), you get the latest episodes to listen to wherever you may be. One of my favorites is called "A Way With Words," a weekly broadcast by PBS on the topic of words, their origins, interesting sayings etc. but you can find podcasts on any topic of interest to you.

While you can get a channel on iTunes and set it up for weekly (or other regular) distribution, you can also start by posting your podcasts on your site to see how well they are received by your customers. If you find that your podcasts are well received, then you can go through the process of setting set up a channel on iTunes or create a feed that your customers can subscribe to on your

site.

Apple's process isn't insurmountable but you will need to have a name for your channel and you'll want to get a professional graphic or logo done for your channel.

For planning purposes, consider how much and how often you want to produce content so you can set customer expectations accordingly. If you don't have the time (or enough content) to produce a weekly podcast, consider setting it up as a bi-weekly or monthly podcast.

Brainstorm what topics might be of interest to your potential listeners and see if this makes sense for you. Lacking

content? Think about using an interview format. This is perhaps the fastest way to content! You can do this simply by connecting with leaders in your industry or niche and interviewing them. The only thing you need now is a good list of questions, and a way to record the interview.

As an interviewer, you can produce audio recordings for a very long time by simply using a voice over IP (VOIP) service on your computer such as [Skype](#) and call recording software like [Call Recorder](#). Just make sure that the recording software you choose will work with the VOIP service you use.

Most computers come pre-loaded with software that you can use for creating

and editing podcasts. On a Mac, Garage Band makes it easy, by giving you a “podcast” option. Within Garage Band, you can do everything you need to do including adding artwork for your episodes. [Audacity](#) is another popular audio recording and editing solution that you can use on either a PC or a Mac.

Eventually, you'll want to upgrade to a better microphone to improve the quality of your audio and add more sophisticated editing software but that shouldn't keep you from getting started.

If you are someone who prefers to simply talk to your customer base, this may be the ideal medium for you. It's perhaps the fastest, most convenient, least expensive way to generate a lot of

content for your customers.

Video

As with many technologies today, video has become accessible to almost everyone, both shooting it and watching or sharing it, giving rise to its popularity. The popular “America's Funniest Videos” television show is a testament to the popularity of videos. Newscasts also frequently show videos that either laypeople have submitted or that have gone viral.

Examples that immediately come to mind are of hail storms in someone's backyard, lightening strikes or people caught behaving badly. Others you've seen include favorite pet or baby videos but the power of video extends well

beyond those that are funny or cute.

It may have surprised you to read earlier that YouTube is actually the 3rd largest search engine in the world, relied upon by many for learning anything they want to learn on the internet. If you are comfortable with video, it can be your most powerful medium for several reasons.

People love to watch videos because watching video takes less work and is less time consuming than reading.

Therefore, video has a tendency to rank higher than other content. It's also quite possible that Google's acquisition of YouTube in 2006 plays a role in those rankings.

For business purposes, you might consider shooting customer video reviews of your product(s) or service (helpful for rankings and your prospects), demonstrations, training, tutorials, or real-time before and after customer experiences. If in Real Estate for example, it would be a natural to shoot videos of the inside and outside of your listing.

One of the greatest obstacles to overcome with video is that of being comfortable on camera. Getting comfortable on camera does take practice but one helpful trick is to simply talk to a picture of a friend rather than the camera. Until you get there, it will be difficult for your audience to

resonate with you so it is well worth time spent getting to that point where you can be the most authentic “you” possible.

Until you achieve that level of comfort, there are a few workarounds you can use to produce videos. One possibility that is very accessible is to create a slide show on your computer, and record a voice-over for that slide show. Using this approach doesn't even require purchasing a camera. Other possibilities include using websites such as Powtoon, that enable the production of video online. The internet is rich with templates and other resources you can use to create video without having to appear on camera. Having said that

however, it will pay off handsomely for you to eventually get on camera. There is no better tool for creating a sense of personal connection for your customers.

You don't need much to get started with videos. If you want to create videos away from your computer, many if not all smartphones now have the capability to shoot short videos (which explains why so many people have a video camera with them when the action happens). If you want to shoot even better videos for your business, I recommend going one step further and getting a standalone video camera and microphone that will give you higher quality audio capability.

Today, you can purchase an HD video

camera for \$150. For those starting out, I recommend you look for one that will take an external microphone (such as the Kodak Zi-8) and add a lavalier microphone to cut down on background noise, especially if you want to shoot video outside. You can get a lavalier that will do the job for about \$20.

You will also need some software but may already have everything you need to get started. Spend a bit of time finding out what is loaded on your computer and see if you have software that allows simple editing (e.g., iMovie on a Mac). If you don't have anything you may want to invest in a small video editing package such as Sony Vegas or Adobe Premiere Elements to get you started.

If you want to produce videos on your computer by creating presentations as suggested above, you can either go without a camera or use the one on your computer. This is very easily done using Keynote on a MAC or PowerPoint on the PC, and speaking to the slides while recording your voice. If this approach appeals to you, you will need to invest in screencasting software to record what you are seeing on the monitor. I recommend either [ScreenFlow](#) by Telestream on the MAC or [Camtasia](#) by TechSmith for the PC. Both enable audio recording and editing so either will get you up and running in short order.

Once created, you'll need to host your video on a server. I don't recommend

you do this on your own site for bandwidth reasons but rather suggest you host them either on YouTube or a storage service such Amazon S3. Either way, you can still embed those videos on your website if you choose to do so.

Depending upon your chosen strategy, distribution may be your next step. Although perhaps the most well-known, YouTube isn't the only distribution or networking opportunity for videos. If you find video works well for you, I encourage you to look at distributing your videos on additional video sharing sites such as Viddler, Vimeo, Reverr and Metacafe or even on iTunes and Amazon.

Video can be produced extremely

inexpensively these days. The most time-consuming part of producing video is the editing and rendering (creating the video images) but if you create short clips, that doesn't have to be a big chore. Once edited, video data must be rendered to create the video images that you see in the resulting file. They then must be converted to a format that other computers, tablets, or smartphones can read. Your editing software will do this for you. Depending on the size of your clip, rendering the video can take hours to complete. The first time you do it, see how much time it takes so you can plan accordingly in the future. At that point, you can set up to render over night if need be.

You may also want or need to create several versions of your videos to support different delivery devices. Optimal settings for delivering a video on iPhone differ from those for web delivery. Once you have rendered a high quality “master” file, this is more easily done by using conversion software than by rendering all needed versions individually.

Video can be an incredibly efficient tool since you can use the content in several ways. Let's say you produce a video teaching your audience how to do something. Given that example, you can post the video on YouTube and other sites (linking back to your own site of course), then separate out the audio

portion and make that file available on your site or on iTunes as an mp3.

Additionally, you could then have the audio file transcribed to create an e-book, or PDF to use as a handout or giveaway. Voila! One piece of content used over and over again.

Chapter 8 – Blogging

A blog (from web log) is a website on which informal “posts” (content) containing information and/or opinions are made that can be commented on by users providing interaction. Blogs began as personal journals or diaries but have evolved into viable sites for business.

Blogging is a great way to enhance your website while solving several online needs. Blogging on a regular basis provides fresh content (which Google loves) while providing an opportunity for your customers to know you better and interact with you through comments.

Acquiring a new customer costs

businesses far greater (some say by a factor of 10) than it costs to nurture existing customers. Therefore it is wise to spend time interacting with and nurturing your most loyal customers. One way to do this is through continued contact with them via an e-mail list.

Blogging happens to be a great way to build that list by adding a simple “opt-in” box or page to your site and at the end of your posts. Opt-in boxes are the very simple forms you complete with your name and e-mail to subscribe to lists. You may have seen these when subscribing to a few of your own favorite shops or newsletters.

Offering a legitimate “bribe” works well to get subscribers. If you have something

your audience values that you can give away in exchange for their name and e-mail, you can easily build a list of followers. Once they have joined your customer list, you can continue marketing to them as long as they remain subscribed.

Many professional bloggers recommend adding 3-4 new posts a week to keep readers engaged and attract search engines. Recognizing that blogging is not your primary business purpose, you will likely not post that frequently but should expect to create new content as frequently as possible.

Generally, you'll want to target 700-1000 words in your posts however, they don't all have to be that long. Typical

posts might include commentary on news in your industry, instructional information or product news. Top tip lists or tricks of the trade are also very popular. To further expand your content, consider embedding videos or commentary on news in your industry.

Social media links are easily added to your blog to help your customers find you on all of your sites. Additionally, you can set up automatic postings between your blog and social sites.

Doing so means that as soon as you post fresh content, that content posts to your other sites automatically.

If writing isn't one of your strengths, or if you simply don't have the time to devote to it, that doesn't have to stop you from

creating a blog. There are several resources available to you to find and hire freelance writers to create content for you. As with any social media, I recommend that you establish guidelines for anyone posting in the name of your company.

If on the other hand, you find that blogging is one of your strengths and it works well for you, consider writing guest posts for other like-minded bloggers. It's a great way to spread your work and expand your reach to another site's list of readers. You can also repurpose your posts by writing articles or distributing them to social bookmarking sites. You can read more about these strategies in the next section.

Setting Up a Blog

It's quite easy to either create a website as a blog or to add a blog to an existing website. I recommend WordPress.Org (as opposed to WordPress.com) because you maintain full ownership and control of your content. The software is free and very easy to install in a directory or add-on domain on your existing site at no additional cost to you.

WordPress is a content management system (CMS) that creates a user-friendly platform for managing your site. Within WordPress, you can create content in a Word-like environment which means you don't need to know how to code web pages. WordPress

“themes” control the look and feel of your site and again, there are so many available (free and paid) that you can create any look you want for little or no cost.

Additionally, developers have been building “plugins” for close to 10 years yielding an incredibly rich library of functionality that can be added to your site. Plugins are simply add-ons for WordPress that allow even greater flexibility and customization for your site. Plugins are available that allow the creation of membership sites, for extra security, for connecting social media sites, for just about anything you want to add to your site.

Between themes and plugins, there is so

much flexibility in WordPress today that I believe it's better to have a Wordpress site than a static website.

There are other very popular and powerful content management systems available (e.g., Joomla, and Drupal) that you can use to build your site. Before choosing one, I recommend you investigate and compare the learning curve required of them and the possible cost of hiring web masters, and/or programmers should you need or want to customize your site.

Of course much of this depends on whether you are a do-it-yourself type of person or not. If you are already using web master services, their current skills would be a key deciding factor in

making your choice.

Chapter 9 - Article Marketing and Social Bookmarking

Article Marketing

If you like blogging because you enjoy or are particularly adept at writing, you may also like article marketing and social bookmarking. In fact, there is no reason why you can't repurpose your blog content for either of these.

Article marketing refers to writing articles for online magazines known as “ezines” at the end of which your signature box contains a link to your website or blog. There are many ezines available to article writers but if you want to see an example, one of the most

well-known is [Ezine Articles](#). There, you will find articles written for hundreds of markets and there isn't any reason why you couldn't become one of their expert authors.

You needn't feel as though you must distribute articles to every ezine site available but I do suggest that you distribute to at least 3 of the largest, starting with Ezine Articles. As article users find, like and want more of your content, they follow the link you provide in your signature box (at the bottom of the article) and visit your site.

When repurposing blog content as articles (or elsewhere), or submitting to more than one ezine site, take care not to duplicate the content but rather rewrite it

for each additional location. Google most assuredly will punish you for duplicate content.

Before contributing articles, read the ezine site's terms and conditions. Some, like Ezine Articles, want original content in which case, you'll need to post to those sites first, before rewriting your article for other sites.

Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking sites like [Delicious](#), [StumbleUpon](#), and [Digg](#) offer additional outlets for your content. Bookmarking sites work by virtue of being “voting” sites. In other words, if someone reads your content and bookmarks it, that serves as a vote for good content. The more votes your content gets, the wider the exposure on the site and the more people see it.

Accounts are free to sign up for, provide a profile which of course can be linked back to your site and an opportunity to find interesting content online. Searches in some of the sites are done by searching for topics of interest by “tags”

whereas others like StumbleUpon, are done based on topics (e.g., knitting) you select as an interest. Digg provides the most popular and widely read articles, videos and pictures being accessed on the web.

As a publisher of content, when readers find your material, they can add it to their own account, and organize it by adding “tags” based on topic or content. The wider your content spreads, the greater the exposure it is given by the site.

As any good social media site, you can certainly connect with other like-minded people, share and comment on each other's content. Following the general rule of “sharing-first” remains a good

idea on bookmarking sites, but if you share others' content most of the time, there is no reason why you can't share your own content 10% of the time.

As your connections “vote” for your material, it continues to gain exposure and rises in the ranks. Great content is actually featured by the site in “top” lists as a way of helping spread the word and offer great content for their readers.

Chapter 10 - E-mail Marketing

As mentioned earlier, it costs a lot more to obtain a new customer than it does to nurture those that you already have. You have no doubt experienced this yourself and know how important repeat business is to the health of your balance sheet.

Customer acquisition is more difficult, more time-consuming and requires that you either get referrals or spend money on advertising, making it more expensive than taking care of the loyal customers you already have.

To that end, it makes sense to take care of those people on your list who have already expressed interest in what you have to offer. In order to do this, you

first need an e-mail list. Before the digital age, that meant having customers sign up to a list in your store and then it meant manually entering all of their names and addresses into a database or list that you can copy into each e-mail that you want to send. A tedious task at best.

If you have a list but you are managing it manually, you'll definitely want to automate this process for your own sanity. You will want to invest in an “auto-responder” or e-mail service provider (ESP) to make your life much easier. A few of the most popular ESPs include [Aweber](#), iContact, and Constant Contact.

ESPs manage your list and e-mail

campaigns for you automatically. Within the service, you can set up and send either broadcast messages or follow up messages. The difference is fairly straight forward. Follow up messages are a series of messages that you plan and schedule in advance that build on each other as you build the relationship. You can schedule these messages to go out to your customers some number of days apart from each other. To illustrate, no matter when someone joins your list, they will get the message intended to welcome them and each ensuing message will flow to them accordingly.

Broadcast messages on the other hand are intended to be sent to your list or some segment of your list outside of the

follow up schedule. These are very handy when you want to let your customers know of a special event or sale and can be sent out at any time.

ESPs also help you comply with the legal requirements of e-mail campaigns by offering double opt-ins and including unsubscribe links to the bottom of all of your e-mails. Double opt-ins provide further legal requirement compliance assurance by requiring each person who signs up to your list, also confirm that they want to hear from you via e-mail. Without these assurances, it won't take long before finding yourself in trouble for sending spam. You must get permission from someone to hear from you before sending them messages.

As previously mentioned, you can build a list on your site through an “opt-in” box or page that the auto-responders help you create, typically through a “wizard” in your account. Once designed, it's simply a matter of copying a snippet of code to put on your site.

It's also a good idea to create an incentive for people to opt-in. Any number of ideas will work for this depending on your business. Offering a newsletter may work for your audience but does require delivery consistency which can be a significant time commitment. Other ideas include offering discounts to your list or a free give away, such as a white paper or perhaps an e-book. Try to select

something that ties in well with your business and is of value to your customer.

Finally, consistency is key. If you don't keep in touch with your list, you'll soon be forgotten. Keeping in touch doesn't necessarily have to be time consuming, only that you be consistent, which means your messages can be short and simple. Your messages can be reminders of upcoming events or short notices letting your readers know of a new post you've made on one of your sites.

Some number of contacts on your list will visit your site when they receive an e-mail from you. That gives you an opportunity to interact with them, and further build your relationship.

Depending upon the size of your list, you can get started with an auto-responder or ESP for about \$20/month. You'll pay more as your list grows but the additional expense is well worth it when you realize that means your list is getting larger. Some marketers report that on average, each customer on your list could mean \$1/month additional revenue. That of course, depends on what it is you sell, if anything, to your list of customers.

Generally, e-mail marketing winds up being a numbers game and your ESP can help guide your effort by providing data about your campaigns. Typical statistics inform you about your open, and click through rates on your e-mails. Your

“open rates” describe how many customers are actually opening your e-mail messages. Your “click-through-rate” describes how many readers are clicking on links contained within your messages. If your customers aren't opening your e-mails, you know to improve your headlines. If, on the other hand, your open rate is good yet people aren't clicking on your links, you know you should improve upon your e-mail content.

Depending on your niche (and you'll get to know this over time), you should target getting around 20-25% conversion rate (or opt-ins) to your list. This means that for every 100 visitors you drive to your site, you want to target getting 20-

25 new opt-ins.

Knowing what your number is will help you with planning, for example, imagine creating a highly targeted advertising campaign that you drive to your opt-in page. Let's now say that you get 100 clicks on your ads. If your ads are targeted well enough, you should achieve a good opt-in or conversion rate of 20-25%. If not, then you can either improve your ad targeting, your opt-in page or your offer.

Chapter 11 - Event Marketing

As mentioned earlier, the technology now not only exists to hold meetings, conferences, webinars and seminars but in many cases is free, making it much more accessible to small business. If you are comfortable with these media, event marketing may well be the perfect strategy for you, particularly if you have something to teach or news to share on a regular basis.

In case you aren't familiar with a few of the terms; a webinar is essentially a seminar held on the internet with slides or video. While teleseminars were so named originally from telephone + seminar, or holding a seminar over the

phone today they may be held via any audio source such as Skype.

While you most likely aren't interested in holding full blown conferences, you may very well be interested in hosting webinars or teleseminars for existing customers or as a way to find new ones. I know a number of entrepreneurs who rely on event marketing for the majority of their business because it works so well for them. You may be able to tell whether or not it will work for your customers by seeing what other events they attend, if any, or by seeing if your competition offers events to their customer base.

One of the biggest advantages of event marketing is the speed in which you can

deliver events, particularly if it is an audio-only teleseminar. These are very similar to producing podcasts however, the event is done live: think seminar that includes audience Q&A rather than a broadcast. Once recorded, you can post the replay for anyone who may have missed your event. If you have a product or service that lends itself to instruction, this strategy may be right for you.

A webinar is a bit more time consuming as you'll need to create your visuals (e.g., slides) and you may want or need to edit the video once recorded. Even if you don't edit the session you definitely will need to render the video into an image file that video programs can read. Video rendering can take as long as a

couple of hours if your session is a long one but if you have the time, it's worth the trade off to offer visuals to your audience. Visuals help keep your audience engaged in your session and with your information.

Different audiences prefer different media. If your topic and audience is accustomed to interacting with you or watching visuals, say for a demonstration of some sort, you'll want to consider webinars. If on the other hand, your audience prefers to listen in and you don't have a need for visuals, then consider offering teleseminars. In most markets, you'll benefit by using a combination of the two. Either choice, the idea is to record your session so you

can offer it as a replay or as a product later.

Speaking of demonstrations however, I would say that many more things can go wrong on a live webinar than you might think, for instance your computer may crash, freeze or just as you go on live, your internet connection slows to a crawl. Audiences are usually very forgiving but give that some thought and see if you can use screen captures on slides rather than doing a live demo.

If you don't have a product or service about which you can teach, why not interview experts in your industry on topics of interest to your target audience? You get the added advantage of not having to prepare as much while

gaining some of the authority from your experts.

Some social media sites such as Facebook and Google+ now include “events” as a way to invite your connections to attend which helps spread the word to not only your invitees but to their friends as well.

Both free and paid software solutions are available to host your meetings. Perhaps the most well-known and the “Cadillac” of webinar software is [Go-To-Webinar](#). Unfortunately, Go-To-Webinar has become quite expensive, now costing \$99/month. The second most well-known is [WebEx](#) but as soon as you exceed 25 attendees, you need to call for pricing. It may too, have become

prohibitively expensive. There are other solutions available to you and each has pros and cons associated with them.

A few you could consider include; [AnyMeeting](#) which offers 3 packages (1 is free) that will give you up to 200 attendees, [InstantTeleseminar](#) which offers 4 plans, none of which are free, (they do offer a 21 day free trial) and finally, [MeetingBurner](#). MeetingBurner offers a quality product and also offers 3 packages, 1 which is free, however, the free package is for up to 10 attendees only.

You will want to record your session so it's great if the package you choose offers a recording function. If your recording package doesn't offer a

recording function, you can do that separately by using [ScreenFlow](#) if you are on a Mac or [Camtasia](#) if on a PC. It's important to have a way for your guests to register and although not critical when you are starting, it's best if you can customize that registration page to better fit with your brand.

Some have slight delays in audio or video, some offer interactivity with your audience and some may not offer a large enough attendee list for your purpose. My recommendation is that you decide which technology you want to try, and try the free version first before starting a monthly charge.

Finally, although not critical at the outset, if you find webinars and

teleseminars work well for you, you will want to purchase a good quality microphone to ensure the highest audio-quality possible.

Chapter 12 - Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) falls within the practice of search engine marketing. [Search engine marketing](#) (SEM) is defined by Wikipedia as “a form of internet marketing that involves the promotion of websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages (SERPs) through optimization (both on-page and off-page) as well as through advertising (paid placements, contextual advertising, and paid inclusions)”.

You've learned about social media in a previous section and will be learning more about advertising options in the

upcoming section. This section will focus on the practice of search engine optimization (SEO).

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization refers to the process of optimizing your site for the purpose of ranking higher and getting more “organic” (free) search traffic from search engines. Search engine optimization (SEO) sounds intimidating but it needn't be. While this is a topic large enough to fill a book by itself, understanding a few key concepts will get you started.

To understand SEO, it is important to first understand a little bit about how search engines like Google, Yahoo or Bing work. It is the “job” of search

engines to give you as a searcher the most relevant pages to your search. That makes sense when you consider what would happen if they didn't return the results you want. For example, if you were to search for “digital photography” and get a page of links to “ladies shoes,” you would switch to a different search engine. In order to do that job well and keep you as a customer, the search engines must determine what sites are the best ones to present when you search.

Search engines send out “spiders” that crawl across the pages on the internet, identifying new, fresh content and content relevant to searches. The search engines then determine the quality of

sites and/or pages by using a very complex (and highly secretive) formula that takes a wide variety of factors into account. These include (but aren't limited to) factors such as relevant keywords, popularity, interactions, age of the site, title and so on.

The pages returned to you when searching for a topic are the “search engine results pages” (SERPs) that are ranked by “relevance” to that search and “authority” of the sites. Both of these play an important role in returning sites to satisfy your search.

“Relevance” simply means that the site has the information that you want to find based upon the terms you used for that search and “authority” refers to the

quality of the site in terms of power or expertise. Both play a significant role when determining whether or not that site will be displayed in your search results.

When searching for something online, the first page of results returned are the most important or relevant. People seldom look beyond results or ads on that first page. In fact, roughly 90% of clicks happen on page one and most of those (some say $> 80\%$ of these) are on the first 3 results returned. As a business, you want to be included in that list of first page results in order to be found by your customers when they search for what you offer.

Ads that you see on the page are paid-for

results through pay-per-click advertising whereas all the other results in the middle of the page are “organic” results. Organic results are not paid for but rather earned by virtue of how relevant they are to the original search.

From the business perspective, if you provide “digital photography” information, you want to be found when someone searches for those words. To that end, you want to “rank” or be found for those words in the search engines. Those words or search terms are referred to as “keywords”.

“Keywords” are simply the words typed in by a user to search for products or information on a given topic. If looking for information on “digital

photography”, you might search for that information using the words “digital photography,” .

In order to be included in the list of results returned to searchers, you need to give the search engines what they want by being relevant to the right searches and by having authority in your niche. This is done in part by optimizing your site for pertinent keywords.

To optimize a site or any of your content, you'll first need to determine which keywords are most pertinent to your business, for example: “optometrist” or “optometry”. While full explanation of keyword research is beyond the scope of this book, suffice it to say that if you want to optimize for SEO, this research

is critical. You will clearly want to select keywords that are not too competitive yet still get a good volume of traffic. If you want to dig in a little more on keywords, you can do so with the [Google Adwords free keyword tool](#).

Armed with a list of keywords, you will next need to consider both on-page SEO and off-page SEO. On-page SEO refers to the elements on your site or page that search engine spiders will care about. Off-page SEO looks at links to your site, and other sites to which you link.

On-page SEO

Elements important to on-page SEO include your domain name (and domain age), title, html header tags (H1, H2 and H3), file and image names, categories, and of course, content. If for example, you are optimizing for the keyword “optometrist”, the more that word is found in the elements on your site, the more weight the search engines will give you for that keyword.

Think of the domain name as being your address on the web in the form [<http://www.yourbusiness.com>] . Ideally the name of your business includes a keyword or two for your business. If you already do have a domain name, and it

does not include a keyword, all is not lost. Many a company has been able to rank without including a keyword. Starbucks is one example that comes to mind. You may note that the term “coffee” is nowhere to be found in their name.

As you create content or review your existing content, take note of whether or not you have included keywords in the title of your post, in headers on your page (these are the H1, H2 and H3 tags) or if you've simply used “bold” to create headers (bold is good, html header tags are even better), and whether or not you have included keywords in your image names. Speaking of images, search engines cannot read text within an image.

If your site banner or logo is an image, any text within those images will not count for SEO purposes.

Ultimately, you'll want to rank for as many relevant keywords as possible but I recommend doing so gradually as you create content. In other words optimize for one or two keywords in a particular post and move onto another post to include more.

Now would be a good time to bring up black-hat versus white-hat SEO. Black-hat refers to the guys who try to skip ahead by taking short-cuts, by using very aggressive, unnatural techniques in order to “game” or beat the system.

In years past one such technique was called “keyword stuffing” where black-

hatters would put and repeat as many keywords in as many places as possible. Please DON'T consider doing this. If the search engines suspect you are playing these games, they will bounce you to a sandbox, out of general search or worse, you can be “de-listed” and not be found by anyone. As time goes by, the search engines continue to get smarter and smarter making them next to impossible to beat.

White-hat SEO are the guys who play by the rules and I implore you to don the white hat. Going up against Google, Microsoft or Bing simply isn't worth the risk. You'll simply never win that game. As a general rule, if you are creating lots of great content for your audience, you

will be using your keywords in a very natural fashion and shouldn't be concerned about it, but it is also easy to forget that keywords do matter when creating content. For example, when including new images, it's easy to go with their given “numbered” filenames, rather than giving them a keyword-rich name.

Off-page SEO

Links that others have created pointing to your site are akin to votes of popularity. That makes perfect sense if you think of why someone would link to you in the first place...they likely found something of value and wanted to share it on their own site, hence a vote of confidence or relevance.

Links are evaluated by the amount of “link juice” they bring to your site. Link juice refers to how much authority the linking site has. That “juice” or authority is then shared with your site. Education and (.edu) government (.gov) sites are considered to be the most valuable type of link you get to your site. That makes

sense when you consider what it would take for those sites to find your content valuable enough to link to. The opposite also holds true, that if a site is a “junk” site that links to you it could demean the value of your site. It pays therefore, not to accept links from just anybody and everybody but rather evaluate the original site before accepting.

I would add a word of caution with respect to link building on your site. While there are ways to create vast quantities of links very quickly, link building should be done in a very natural way or your site may suffer for it.

At the same time, off-page SEO takes into account your directory listings, and other “real estate” you have on the web.

Your “real estate” includes photo sites, blogging, social sites, videos, bookmarking and so on. If you have set other sites up correctly, they too, point back to your site.

This is one of the reasons for claiming your business name as early as possible on any sites you want to use for marketing and one of the reasons I advise clients to claim their directory listings and complete their profiles as thoroughly as possible. At a minimum, include any trade association or chamber of commerce directories, the business (or local) pages and directories on Yahoo, Google and Bing, and search directories such as DMOz.

As you create profiles and content

across the web, ensure that you are consistent with your contact information (address, and phone number), website links and also that you include a few of your primary keywords in the information you provide. Wherever possible, include images and don't take short cuts.

Now that you are familiar with SEO, I would also add that it is not nearly as easy as it used to be to get “ranked” and get traffic this way. It also takes longer than it used to take. That is easy to understand when you consider that there were 555 million websites in December of 2011 and it is estimated that 300 million were added that year. We know that rate is accelerating however, at that

rate alone, that would account for roughly 1 million new websites every day and that a good number of those are competing for keywords.

It bears repeating that if you are posting great, relevant, content, you are more than likely getting the keywords you need in place in a very natural manner.

“In a natural manner” counts to the search engines, won't get you in trouble with them and in the long term will bring more, free traffic to your site.

Assuming you are in business for the long term, SEO helps lay a solid foundation for organic search results for years to come. Once it starts to pay off for you, you will continue to gain free traffic on a regular basis. When getting

started, you may want to results as quickly as possible in which case, getting a little more “paid” traffic (advertising) may be what you choose. That is why I recommend using a combination of both SEO and advertising.

Chapter 13 - Advertising

Advertising is absolutely the fastest way to get traffic to any website or page but you do have to have the budget to support your efforts. If on the other hand, you used to advertise in the Yellow Pages, you will find that you can get a lot better results spending that budget or less on the web.

Before proceeding, there are a few terms you'll need to know.

PPC (Pay-Per-Click) campaigns are campaigns in which you only pay when a user clicks on your ad. Typically auction based, the actual cost per click depends upon the competition for the keywords and the amount of traffic the ads are

likely to get.

CPM (Cost Per Thousand) campaigns charge by the number of impressions (or views) in thousands. Companies that are interested in developing greater brand recognition generally are more interested in getting wider exposure through ad repetition than from getting individual clicks.

When starting out with online advertising I recommend PPC until you learn the combination of text, images and keywords that works best for you. If your advertising objective is to build the brand of your business, rather than getting people to your site, CPM may be the best choice for you.

Advertising Platforms

Today, the most well-known and accessible examples for advertising platforms are Google Adwords, Bing Ads and Facebook. They each have their strengths and weaknesses but all can be tremendously effective for your campaigns.

It probably won't surprise you to learn that there are about as many ways to advertise online as there are offline. Advertising for people who are already searching for information on a specific topic is referred to as “search advertising”. Search advertising is more competitive and therefore more expensive than other forms of

advertising because the traffic is more highly qualified.

Advertising on a “network” or “interrupt” advertising is very different from search advertising. Your ads are placed on sites that are complimentary to your general topic (e.g. eye care) and rely upon capturing the attention of users who aren't looking for you. They are doing something other than searching for your topic. Examples include placing an optometrist's ad on a Wikipedia page about eye health or a weight loss ad on a women's interest blog. These are much less focused leads, are viewed less frequently and therefore, do cost a lot less for those reasons. Likewise, some systems allow for a combination of the

two types of ads enabling some targeting by demographics while specifying keywords.

Google Adwords is perhaps the most widely used but as such has also become extremely competitive and as you might expect, more expensive. Adwords offers both search and network (or “display”) advertising. Bing Ads are less expensive but the trade off is that you can't expect to see nearly the same amount of traffic as you would on Google.

Facebook Ads cost a good deal less than search ads and have the added benefit of being able to target a great deal more effectively than with keywords alone. Facebook allows for targeting specific demographics, interests, or hobbies.

That means you can aim your ad precisely at your target audience. Facebook Ads' popularity has exploded in the past couple of years making it a little more competitive and in time, I expect they will become more expensive as well, but for now, it's a great place for you to begin advertising.

While Adwords or Facebook may be the ones that you've most likely heard about there are many others to consider or list. As you browse around the web, try taking off your own advertising blinders and start looking at ads that you see. You will see them practically everywhere.

If participating in an auction for ads isn't what you want to do, there are many more advertising options to consider.

You can buy advertising on specific complimentary websites, ezines, or trade magazines that have an audience you'd like to reach. Returning to the “optometrist” example, if you don't sell glasses, you could consider running ads on sites that do sell glasses. Think about and look for sites that are complimentary to your own, inspect their site or contact them for advertising information and see if that provides an option that you can consider within your budget.

Interestingly, today you can even pay for Tweets about your business or product. In fact, if you have the budget for it, you can buy celebrity Tweets (imagine what that might do for your business). Just be aware that there are endless ways you

can advertise online. There is bound to be one that fits well within your budget for your business.

Ad Structure

Once you have decided where you want to advertise, look next to the advertising requirements for size and type of ad.

Some allow for text-only ads, others allow for added images. All have restrictions on the number of characters you can use in your ad so you'll have to get creative within a very small amount of text. You are still trying to get someone's attention when creating an ad no matter where you decide to advertise therefore, choose your words carefully.

Much like the days when you would select $\frac{1}{4}$ page or $\frac{1}{2}$ page ad in print media, there are standard online banner ad sizes such as 125x125, 250 x 250 and

so on. Some sites specify the size and some base their rates accordingly.

If your ad is a text-only ad, the most important element is the headline. Take advantage of each character allowed to capture interest. Consider asking a question or speaking to your customers' needs. Remember that you'll be competing with other ads on the page so capturing your audience's attention is of paramount importance.

“A picture is worth a thousand words...”

Images can be extremely effective in getting attention and don't have to be costly. Take a step beyond your logo which may be meaningless to the

unfamiliar, and choose an image that will capture attention. Faces with eyes looking straight at the browser work very well. Another effective technique when using images is to add a bright-colored border around the image.

It can be a challenge getting your full message into the very few words or characters allowed, making selection of those words critical. In Google Adwords for example, restricts you to 25 characters in your headline, 35 characters in the link, and 35 characters for your description. If it will benefit your ad, and save space, consider including a couple words of text within your image.

When planning your ad copy, allow

enough room to include a strong “call to action” in your ads such as “sign up now” or “join us now”. Calls to action do work and have been proven to increase the performance of ads so don't be afraid to use them.

Google now offers ad extensions. Ad extensions allow you to include your address or phone number in the ad and ultimately makes it appear somewhat larger than competing ads not using them. These can be an advantage to your campaign.

Hosting Ads

Once you have a significant amount of traffic coming to your site on a regular basis, another opportunity opens to host ad placements on your site. Not everyone wants to host ads but you need to know about the possibility. Some audiences don't appreciate seeing ads on sites so test your market to see if it makes sense for your business.

If you do want to host ads on your site, nothing is stopping you from doing that right away however, the more traffic you have, the higher the price you can charge others who want to advertise on your site.

One option is to designate a section on

your site where you will agree to serve “contextual” ads selected by ad servers (such as Google AdSense). Contextual ads are ads that fit with the content or topic of your page. You specify the type, and size of the ads you are willing to run and get paid when people visiting your site click those ads. I don't recommend jumping into these right away as they take people away from your site for very little reward.

Once you are getting traffic to your site, you may also find that other website owners approach you with inquiries or proposals about running their ads on your site. When that happens, it's a good idea to have in mind what you will charge to place their ads. Having said

that, if you do want to host ads, you may want to prepare for that by doing a little research in advance.

Research is easily done by first checking your competitors to learn whether or not they run ads and if so, see how much they charge. You can also look to sites such as [Buysellads](#) to get a feel for going rates. Many sites like this can be found by searching “buy and sell ads” in Google.

As you can see, there is a vast array of advertising opportunities for you to explore for your business. I recommend you select one or two to try, start very small while tweaking your ads and then go big when you find just the right combination that works well for you.

Chapter 14 – Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing is very new, yet coming on incredibly strong. In many respects it's so new that it's a bit like the wild west however, you should know something about it and what the possibilities are, especially since this appears to be what the future holds for us all.

For clarification purposes, in this section “mobile marketing” refers to marketing on or with a mobile device, not traditional offline mobile marketing such as traveling billboards or signs on transit vehicles.

“Short Message Service” (SMS) is more

familiarly known as “text messages”. Adoption rates, particularly among youth, have been astronomical due to its capability of delivering “instant” messages. No longer do you have to be online, and no longer do you need to send and wait to receive an e-mail in order to communicate. Text messages allow for instant communication at anytime, anywhere, using your mobile device.

Marketers can also send messages through this channel as you may have already discovered. They should be getting your permission in advance through an opt-in channel but some marketers ignore that. I advocate that you always get permission to market to

someone and not send spam.

According to Isoft.com the [CAN-SPAM Act](#) “...direct marketing e-mail messages may be sent only to subscribers who have given their prior consent ("opt-in"). Prior permission is required for business-to-consumer (B2C) communication covering all "natural persons"...”. While there are exceptions to the rule, complying with it will keep you out of trouble.

“Multi-media messages” (MMS) are very similar to SMS but allows for the inclusion of videos, slideshows or images.

With the advent of the iPhone and Android smartphone apps came an

entirely new set of marketing opportunities including “push notifications”, QR (Quick Response) codes, location-based services and proximity marketing.

Push notifications are notifications that you receive at the top of your mobile screen from an app. By way of example, Reuters offered an app during the Olympics that provided the schedule, results and photos from the events. In addition, when an event was about to start or had completed, a notification would pop up at the top of your screen giving you the update. Facebook apps similarly use push notifications to let you know when someone sends you an invitation to connect or attend an event.

Quick Response (QR) codes are the barcode-looking squares that you may have begun to notice offline. Consumers interact with QR codes by snapping a picture of the QR code with their smartphone camera and are consequently sent to a website, to download or other activity programmed within the code I've seen them on a poster at the airport, for example, where they were used to offer free downloadable books that would be ideal for someone who had a little time on their hands.

QR codes are becoming very popular in Europe, Asia and North America primarily due to their simplicity and because they give marketers the ability to track offline activity metrics. I've seen

them in magazine enclosures, bulletin boards, store mailers, airport posters (as mentioned above), business cards, and in fact, I've even seen them in ads posted in a restaurant restroom!

Many popular smartphone apps are games and it didn't take long for marketers to recognize the potential benefit to advertise within those apps. If your business can benefit by reaching gamers, or if there is a game or app that appeals to your audience, this is another avenue for you to explore. In addition, you could consider sponsoring the development of an app thereby creating your own private channel.

One very popular app strategy is to offer a free version that has ads and a paid

version that does not. It's a great strategy to get users hooked on the app while hoping that they will eventually decide to spend the money required to be rid of the ads. It's such a popular strategy that many if not most free apps serve ads within.

When considering ads in apps, don't limit your thinking to games. Keep in mind that there is an app for practically everything you can think of and in-app advertising can be profitable for you if you choose a popular app.

Mobile web marketing

Ads can be created on your website specifically targeting your customers directly on their mobile device.

Advertising networks such as Google Adwords enable the selection of channel choices when setting up a campaign.

These choices now include serving ads to mobile devices in addition to desktop computers, providing much greater exposure than previously.

If SMS marketing appeals, you can add a mobile phone number field to your opt-in box to build a list of your customers' SMS numbers for meeting reminders, coupons, and specials.

While we are on the topic, I should also

point out that you should either ensure that your website is mobile-friendly or create one that is. If you are using WordPress, there is a plugin available to do that automatically for you. Some companies build an entirely separate site specifically for mobile devices. In either case, it's worth accessing your site on a cell phone to see what users see when they search for you using their phone.

I came across one small business recently which had developed their site entirely using a technology that is not compatible with a smartphone. The end result was that when I tried to access their site on my phone, all I could see was a very blank, white page. Sadly, I'm certain they had spent a good deal of

money having that site created. Don't let that happen to you.

Location-Based Services

There are two ways that location-based services can be applied; one via GPS in the phone and the other through WiFi. The GPS system knows your location at all times and the WiFi set up knows when your WiFi connection comes within range of their “base” station. Businesses using these systems can know when you are within range and entice you to “come in and visit” by again, sending you a one-day special, coupon or discount. They can be expensive to set up therefore, more than likely won't be your first venture into online marketing.

Proximity marketing

Proximity marketing is very similar to location-based services in that it gives you the ability to send text messages to anyone within a specific geographic zone thus giving you a way to reach customers nearby. This is a great system for governments to get the word out to a specific region or for a restaurant to promote within their zip code.

If you want to consider using mobile marketing for your business, give some thought first to your objective; what you want to achieve and specifically who you want to reach. Then think about the kinds of things you could do to capture their interest such as quizzes, contests,

or discount alerts.

Can you imagine as a restaurant, the benefit of being able to instantly send notification of today's blue-plate special or as an optometrist sending this month's discount on eyewear? Mobile marketing is most assuredly where the world is headed making it a good idea for you to consider how you might take advantage of it.

Now that you have a good idea of what the possibilities are for you to consider for your business, you are probably wondering what's next. You don't have to implement all of the strategies. In fact, you can't and more importantly, you shouldn't consider implementing them all. Read on and I'll show you how you

can decide what the right strategy is for your business.

Part III – How Can You Get Started and Develop Your Plan?

In This Section You'll Learn:

*How to get started with easy-to-do
market research*

*How to develop your online
marketing strategy*

How to keep focused on your objectives

How to keep your marketing from taking over your life

How and where to look for help if you need it

You now know that you need to get online in order to get more customers. You may in fact, already think you know what you want to try but until you determine the strategy that fits best for your customer, your strengths and your business, you may be wasting your time. This section is designed to help you determine the best fit for you so that you can begin marketing online as quickly as possible.

The good news is that since you already have a business, you have a head start

and may already know a good bit more than you think about your customers.

Step 1 - Market Research

If you've never done market research, have no fear, this isn't as tedious a task as it may sound, in fact, it can be fun. This research is crucial and will help you with many aspects of your business.

Your Customer Avatar

First and foremost, you want to give a great deal of thought about your “typical” customer or your customer “avatar”. Knowing who to target will help you determine your strategy, develop content and generate your marketing messages.

If you already know your avatar, revisiting and revising your customer avatar occasionally is a good idea to make sure you are staying in tune with your audience. If you have an existing customer base, is it representative of the target market that you expected to get or did it morph somewhere along the way into a target audience you didn't expect? If your target morphed, you may need to take some time revisiting your avatar for clarification.

This needn't be difficult research and again, if you have a customer base, look to them to develop your avatar. Developing your avatar goes much deeper than simply knowing their average demographic information.

To illustrate the difference, you may have an average demographic of white males, between the ages of 45 and 60, who are college graduates and are married whereas, the avatar you develop is a single representative individual of your target. Taking a similar example, “He” is 50, a college graduate (you might even know the college), married with 2 children, lives in the suburbs and works for a Fortune 500 company. You may even know what kind of car he drives, his interests, what his favorite movies are but very importantly to your research, you know which sites he frequents online.

At this point, you can put yourself in his/her shoes and describe what it is that

they want or need, what his/her fears or frustrations are or what the problem is that he wants to solve. What is it that your avatar is searching for online? Knowing this tells you what you should include in your content and marketing messages.

I would even suggest that you give your avatar a name. I know some marketers that will find a picture of their avatar to post close by just to keep him or her sharply in mind. You can download a free [Customer Avatar Worksheet](http://webwisecommunications.com/rec) (<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>) that includes a list of questions to keep in mind while you do this work, and allows for note taking. If you have a significant list of customers already, you

can begin to learn more about them by asking them questions by use of an e-mail questionnaire or by using a free online survey tool such as [Survey Monkey](#).

I'm always surprised when I talk to a small business owner who cannot begin to tell me anything about their target audience. I should be not be surprised any longer but I am. It seems to me that if you spend significant time talking to prospects and customers, you are ideally positioned to ask questions and learn a lot about them.

The more you know, the easier it will be to connect with them and establish a relationship. It's really no different than connecting with anyone else. Trying to

connect with an average demographic is a bit like trying to connect with a room full of people at one time. That doesn't work nearly as well as connecting on an individual level with someone with whom you have something in common.

Developing your avatar helps you establish much better relationships with your customer. Also, knowing how your Avatar uses sites online will serve you by knowing where to participate and where to advertise online in order to be seen by your ideal customer.

Your Competition

For our purposes, you'll need to consider two types of businesses competing with you online. Your

competitors, in the traditional sense, are other businesses offering similar products or services in your area.

You already know that in order to compete with these competitors, it is best to know as much about them as possible including but not limited to; what they offer, how much they charge, and their strengths and weaknesses. The more you know, the better informed you are when making your own offerings, pricing and promotions. Keeping a watchful eye on what works well for them can be a valuable aid to your own planning.

In addition to traditional competition, you have other competitors to consider when marketing online. Online

competitors include businesses in the same niche regardless of location as well as those competing for position in the search results pages. These can be one and the same or distinctly different competitors.

Returning to a previous example, as a “patent lawyer”, you aren't competing solely with others in your neighborhood but with other patent lawyers online. In all likelihood, you are competing for some of the same keywords for positioning on the page or while advertising.

In addition, keywords (or even business names) can carry more than one meaning, thus be relevant to more than one niche. Think of the term “security

software”. That might be a great keyword for anti-virus companies but it also might be a great keyword for software that protects your website from hackers or software that manages your home security system. All are slightly different nuances on the same keyword.

Other competitors that most businesses overlook are those competing for page 1 results in the search engines or in advertising that you might not expect. Another example is a client in the software business who was competing with a cigar company for page one search results because their business names were similar but the two very different businesses were competing for page 1 search results.

You'll learn about these competitors while doing your research. Competitive research doesn't have to be a huge chore and there are tools available to make it much easier. To begin, do a search for your type of business + the name of your town. As with any search, the results will show your business competition in your town. Next, spend some time looking at their websites, what they offer, and see if you can determine what their online strategies are.

This initial search will provide you with a list of the top ranking 10 sites for that search in your town thus your top 10 online competitors. A quick look at their websites will tell you quite a bit about their online strategy, if they have social

media buttons, if they are building an e-mail list online, what kind of promotions they are running, and if they use video.

You can also learn quite a bit about their product strategy. If they are selling products or offering services, what kinds of products seem to be working, in what media? What do their sales pages look like? What words are they using to appeal to their customers? Answers to these questions will help inform you about what product strategy may work for you too, given the same target audience.

Performing the same search without including your location yields global competition for that keyword. Again, check the top 10 to see how what they

offer and how they market online.

There are a good number of other (free) tools that can be used to gain a significant amount of knowledge on your competition and gives you a great place to start.

Your Keywords

As you learned earlier, keywords can be a vital (yet natural) part of the work that you do online. If you are placing ads, you'll want to include them in your ads, content, website, videos and more, making it worth while to spend some time getting a good working list of keywords.

Keywords you choose will vary depending on their intended use. For

instance, keywords you use on your website will be selected based upon a combination of good traffic volume and low competition whereas keywords for your ads should be keywords that get decent volume yet don't cost too much. The more competitive the keyword, the more expensive they are to use.

Using Google Adwords keyword tool is a great way to get started and it's free to use. If you don't already have an Adwords account, go ahead and sign up to get access for a longer list of keywords. Adwords accounts are free and the keyword tool is completely free to use. You can either search for keywords by typing in a “seed” keyword that describes your business or using the

competitive information that you've found, you can point the keyword tool to one of your competitors' sites to learn what Google views as that site's keywords.

The Adwords Keyword tool will help you find more keywords. Once you've either typed in a seed word or pointed it to a website, you will be presented with a list of suggested keywords. That list is loaded with information important to your selection such as how competitive each keyword is, how much traffic it gets and how competitive it is. It can be downloaded for use within Excel if you want to sort, highlight, or edit the list.

The goal is to find a good list of keywords that have a decent amount of

traffic but that aren't too competitive (and therefore much more expensive). The very least expensive keywords don't get enough traffic to make them worthwhile, so try to find keywords that make it reasonable for your budget.

When researching keywords, don't just stop at those you think describes your business but rather try to think what your customer might be searching for. For example, rather than simply searching for “patent lawyer”, your customer might in fact search for “how to get a patent” or “cost to get a patent” or “best patent lawyer in Los Angeles”. All are keywords worthy of researching for your list. Google will help you find others within the Adwords tool.

Once you have a list of keywords to focus on, use these on your site for optimization, on social sites in profiles, in your posts, videos, articles and other online properties. Please don't overdo this. Google will know if you go overboard, so stick with creating good content and use the keywords in a very natural fashion.

Website Assessment

Next, it's time to review your current online presence. Do you already have a website and if so, how does it look? You may be able to realize big payoffs by making a few small changes to your existing site. (Keep track of your notes by downloading your free [Website Assessment Worksheet](#)

(<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec> from Web Wise Communications.)

Will your site be the hub of your business or will you add a blog to serve as a hub?

Your readers will thank you if they have one place or “hub” to go to, to find or link to everything about your business

including your contact information, and links to your other online sites. They won't however, appreciate having to search for your information or products in multiple places, making it good business sense to set up your site or blog as a central hub. As a general rule, what is best for the customer, is best for your business.

There are many website tools available to you to create a website, whether static or blog. Many hosting sites offer free website builders that use pre-existing graphics and templates. Most of them however, do limit what you can later do to customize your site. I find them to be too restrictive in the long term thus, don't recommend using them for a

professional site.

To be complete, I must include a few words about older-style static websites. The best sites today are fresh, clean and very “open” and more often than not, have a light background. You need look no further than Apple's site to serve as an example. There isn't a lot of clutter or “busy-ness” going on, just good clean design that makes it easy for customers to find what they seek.

Does your website look professional?

From a design perspective, simplicity is also the rule. Sites that are too busy or complicated make it more difficult for the reader to understand. Try to stick with 2 font typefaces and sizes if

possible and if not, go with no more than 3 fonts sizes and 3 typefaces. The same rule of thumb can be applied to colors; try to stay with 2 colors if possible, except for images.

As in photography, follow the “Rule of 3rds” for a more balanced, pleasing, and less boring look. If you aren't familiar with the “Rule of 3rds”, it suggests that you imagine a 3x3 grid when looking at an image or in this case, your page. In order to create a 3x3 grid, you would divide the space in 3rds both horizontally and vertically by drawing 2 lines in each direction. The greatest points of interest lie along the 4 lines used to create the grid and the intersections of those lines.

The rule is commonly applied on websites by having a column layout that has either 3 equal-width columns as in the grid or 2 columns wide with one being twice as wide as the other.

Another common application are sites that layout 9 blocks of product information. You can see one such example on [Web Wise Communications](#).

Be sure that you maintain consistency with the look and feel throughout your site. If you select a theme for your blog, the theme will handle this for you but if you are coding html pages, once you've decided on typeface, font size and color for major elements, stick with these throughout your site.

Finally, use left alignment and narrow

columns. Multiple alignments on a page result in your page being difficult to navigate and read. Make use of strong (bold) headlines and incorporate good contrast on your page. Doing so will make your site much more interesting and pleasing to the eye.

To illustrate dramatic differences between an ugly website and a nice, clean, professional site, compare [The Big Ugly Website](#) with [Apple](#). You should be able to see right away the sharp contrast between these sites and how the principles above apply (or not). Ignoring the images used on Apple's site for example, it is basically black text on a white background which really helps make the images stand out.

Do you have all the pages you need?

Do you have all the appropriate pages you need on your site? These include a contact page, a privacy and/or terms of use page, and a page that describes you or your business in addition to products or content posts.

If you are selling products or services online, these additional pages help not only your customer to learn about you but in the case of privacy and/or terms of use pages, they help you to comply with regulations. Always check with your lawyer to ensure your full compliance with the law. You will also find that not having these pages can make it more difficult to advertise with some networks.

If your site is a larger one, having a site map will help your customers find their way around. If you are building a customer list, you'll also need to have “thank you” and “welcome” pages for use with your auto-responder.

Is your site easy to navigate?

Search engines care about how easy a site is to navigate, whether or not there are broken links and whether or not the appropriate pages are in place. You can check for broken links by using [W3 Link Checker](#). If you find any, include fixing them as a to-do on your [Website Assessment Worksheet](#) (<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>

As a general rule of thumb, try to stick to

the 3-click rule which means a customer is always within 3 clicks of doing what they need to do. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule but the point is to keep it as simple and straightforward as possible.

Can your customers easily find links to all of your online sites?

Customers don't want to have to look in a lot of different places to find what they need. Make it easy for them to find all of your information and links to your other sites on your home page. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and most if not all, of your other sites offer icons for this purpose making it easy to implement.

Can you build a list of customers on

your site?

Consider adding an “opt-in” (sign up) box or page to your site for list building. If you have something of value to offer your audience, it can be used to provide incentive for them to opt-in to your list. Lately, having opt-in boxes on the first page of a site is regarded less favorably by Google. If you want to have users sign up on your site, one viable option is to create a button or link on your home page leading the user to your sign up form. This is preferred over placing the opt-in form on your home page.

Do you need to do more optimization to help google understand what your site is about?

Point the keyword tool at your site and see what Google thinks your keywords are. Does Google think you are in the business that you are in or does Google think you do something else? In other words, does the Adwords Keyword tool give you a list of keywords that are valid for your business or do you need to do more work on keywords?

If you need to do more work on keywords, identify the next most important keywords from the keyword list you created above and brainstorm new content you can create around those. Make a note of any new content needed on your worksheet.

Have other sites linked to you?

As you may recall in the section on Off-Page SEO, search engines do care if others are linking to your site. They consider it a “vote” of confidence or value when they see others linking to your site so you'll want to make a concerted effort to get good quality links to your site.

Using a (free) tool such as [MajesticSEO's Backlink Checker](#), check to see how many (and what) sites link to your site. Do you have quality links or “junk” links? Doing so will inform you whether or not you need to make an effort to get more quality links to your site or invalidate junk links.

Does your website provide opportunities for customer interaction?

Most old-style static websites don't provide opportunities for customer interaction with the exception of “contact forms”. As previously mentioned, search engines love to see interaction in the form of active forums or comments (in the case of blogs). Also popular today are Facebook comments that can be added to your site.

Is the quality of your content as high (and fresh) as you can make it or do you need to spend some time updating it?

You may have heard the expression “content is king”. I fully agree, especially in light of the important role that content has to not only attract your customers, along with their comments,

but to the search engines and for attracting links to your site. Thousands, if not millions of old-style static websites are marooned in buried locations that no one will ever see because their content is dated and hasn't been refreshed in months or even years.

If you haven't done so already, download your free [Website Assessment Worksheet](http://webwisecommunications.com/rec) (<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>) to keep track of your notes.

“Build it and they will come...”

“Build it and they will come” does not hold true for websites. As you learned earlier, having a site that is buried on page 54 of SERPs, buys you nothing. Simply having a website is not enough.

You must have a strategy for getting visitors or “traffic” to your site. Most of the strategies discussed in Part II not only create opportunities for interaction with your customers, but build traffic as well.

Imagine if you will, that you post content to Facebook on a regular basis and every 10th post, notify your fans of something new on your site, including a link to that content. You will get Facebook fans who follow that link and visit your site.

The same holds true for all of the strategies covered in Part II, thus making your site or blog the “hub” or central location of your business.

It bears repeating that there are two basic types of traffic; free versus paid and that they yield different results. Paid traffic yields much faster results whereas, free traffic takes more time to yield revenue. It comes down to a trade off between budget and results.

If you have \$1,000 a month to spend on advertising, you will see much greater, quicker results than if you spend \$100 a month. Even if you have a large advertising budget to spend, I don't advise blindly spending it until you have a proven combination of placement, ad and landing pages that work. That's when you have a positive return on investment (ROI) and when your marketing will be paying for itself. At

that point, the more you spend, the more you earn.

If you don't have a budget of \$1,000 a month, at least not in the beginning, I would advise using a combination of paid and free traffic strategies, and starting small with your paid advertising until you are comfortable with your marketing or have proven a positive ROI.

Step 2 - Develop Your Online Strategy

Armed with knowledge of which sites your prospects frequent online, and your web assessment from above, you are ready to develop your strategy. I'm not advocating a multi-page document that gets thrown on a shelf, never to be looked at again. I'm suggesting a brief sketch of what you want to accomplish first, and that it be a working document to help keep you focused. To keep notes as you work, download your [Strategy Building Worksheet](#) (<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>

Determine your objective

First, determine your objective for using online marketing. Of course, you ultimately want to increase your profits but how do you want to do that and how quickly?

“What do you want to you want to achieve online?”

Do you want to better build your brand, or focus on building a larger list of customers or perhaps to increase recognition of your authority in your area of expertise?

Your answer will serve by informing you of your strategy. Most small business owners I speak with go straight for the list building which I happen to think is the best place to start. Once you

have a nice large list that is growing well, you can always add additional objectives.

Choose Your Platform and Strategies

Have you selected your hub?

What site will you use to serve as your hub? Will it be your website, or blog? To reiterate, I recommend that you choose either your website or blog in order to maintain control and ownership of your content and contacts. If you were to choose a social media site for example, you don't necessarily have control over your fate. In the unhappy event that site goes away or your account gets closed, you risk losing a great deal.

Therefore, if you do choose a unique hub option, then be sure to put in place a good backup strategy.

What sites does your audience frequent?

Browse back through section II to determine which strategies you may want to try. I recommend you choose no more than two while getting started since trying to keep up with too many, too soon, can become overwhelming.

Of first consideration is the sites your audience frequents online. If during your avatar research, you have discovered that your audience spends time in Facebook, then Facebook should be on your list for consideration as a strategy.

If on the other hand, your audience spends their time on a niche site such as Etsy, then that site should on your list. Use your worksheet to keep track of your ideas.

Given your selection(s) what will you use them for?

What do you want to achieve given the channel(s) you selected? For example, do you want to be on Facebook strictly for customer service, to engage your customer or for a combination of the two?

Will you provide webinars for education purposes? Will you also use that channel for networking or to connect with other experts in your field? It's always a good

idea particularly with social media, to have a clear objective in mind so that you aren't tempted to go off-course by the abundant distractions within.

Next...

Look to Your Strengths

What gives you energy and strength, what do you most want to do?

I highly recommend that you give great consideration to your (or your designee's) strengths to help form your strategy. The last thing you want to do is pick a strategy that wears you down over time, that you don't enjoy or that you aren't proficient with. If you prefer to chat with people, have time and really enjoy being online, then perhaps social

media will work best for you, given your avatar of course.

By way of example, Facebook is a very interactive site and if you don't enjoy communicating in that type of forum it will be that much harder for you to keep it current. If you have staff that will be working on it, or if you intend to get outside help, then it may still be a viable strategy for you. Take that into account while planning.

If on the other hand, you prefer to write, then I would suggest blogging or article marketing. As a writer, you may decide that your audience would most appreciate what you have to offer via white papers, blog posts or books.

By the same token, if you are more comfortable with an audio format, by all means go for that and create podcasts or teleseminars.

The same holds true for video marketing. If video is not a medium in which you can get comfortable, you may wish instead to focus on screencasts or podcasts. I'm not referring to what you look like but rather to your level of comfort. While acknowledging that it does take practice and time to get comfortable in front of the camera, I've seen far too many a video where the speaker is obviously very ill at ease which hurts their purpose. If video is more your style then definitely include video and webinars on your list as it is

currently one of the best strategies going!

As an expert in your industry or niche, you have many online (as well as offline) opportunities available to you including speaking engagements, offering advice or answering questions in forums and/or groups.

All of these can work for you if you apply yourself to creating great content.

Which platform(s) fit best with your business?

Not all strategies fit all businesses. If your business lends itself to instruction, all strategies will work to some degree however, if your business is one that must maintain a high level of customer confidentiality, you may find it difficult

connecting with them using social media. By the same token, if your business is very typically one where word-of-mouth rules, social media may be an ideal choice.

With your list of audience preferences, your strengths, and best business fit, which strategy do you want to try first or second? Make a note of your choice(s) on your [Strategy Building Worksheet](http://webwisecommunications.com/rec) (<http://webwisecommunications.com/rec>

Step 3 – Choose Your Advertising

Having said earlier that the fastest way to gain traction is to spend some money on advertising, I highly recommend you determine how much you can set aside for your advertising budget. Given that number, determine how much you can spend on a monthly or daily basis.

Online advertising options are so abundant that I advise you start small while testing your ads. You can always expand later as you perfect your system but in the beginning, especially if your budget is small, (and when is it ever as large as we'd like?), I suggest you start

with a small Pay-Per-Click campaign.

PPC advertising is not only the fastest way to get traffic but it also happens to be one of the fastest ways of testing and tweaking your ads and landing pages. Once you have identified a winning combination of ad, and landing page (where users land when they click on your ad), you can easily ramp up your PPC campaign (because your ads are paying for themselves) or expand to banner ads on other sites. You can also use PPC campaigns to test topic ideas, product and service ideas, or book titles. If you have it within your budget, choose which PPC system you will try first. You may want to do some research to weigh the cost differences but most marketers

are finding that Facebook ads are the most cost effective at present. Again, this strategy only makes sense if your avatar is on Facebook, otherwise you may want to investigate Bing Ads, Google Adwords or placing banner ads.

Helpful (and free) Tools

Don't overlook the wealth of free tools that are available to you online. In most cases, all you need do is search for them. For example, if your business relies heavily on photos, popular photo sharing sites like [Flickr](#) and Google's [Picassa](#) might be contenders for creating and sharing photo albums, but you'll find more solutions if you look.

The tools now exist for you to meet with

vendors, sales people, and collaborators without having to travel. While working in a corporate environment, it was an every day occurrence to be in virtual meetings with staff from several states, India, Romania, Australia, Japan and elsewhere. Before the technology was available, companies spent a great deal on travel and it took a lot longer to get products to market. Think of the savings you could realize if you spend a lot of time in meetings!

Voice over internet protocol or VOIP has come a long way in recent years and now provides a way to reduce telephone expenses by placing calls over the internet. [Skype](#) is one of these tools and a great resource for meeting with

people. When you need to talk with other computer users, calls through Skype are absolutely free. Through subscription services, they do offer calls to land lines and video conferencing as well.

Google of course offers Google Docs that gives you the ability to create and share documents with your team.

Additionally, Google Drive provides online storage in a similar fashion to Dropbox. Do you need some help with project management? If so, you might check out [Trello](#).

If using social media, you may like a few of the free tools that help you manage your activity , friends and followers. Examples include [SocialOomph](#) or [TweetDeck](#) by Twitter.

Step 4 - Scheduling

The best thing you can do for yourself, is to pre-determine how much time you can or are willing to spend on your online marketing. If you've spent any time on Facebook, you already know that social media, by itself, can be a full time job not to mention that is loaded with tempting distractions.

You also need to be aware that everything you plan on doing will take longer in the beginning than later. You are not only learning new things but what works for your audience. In addition, being online comes with the tech side that will have you deviating from your daily plans from time to time unless you

have someone else doing it for you.

Most technical tasks also take longer than originally planned, especially while in the learning mode. It's a bit like the nonexistent 15 minute home improvement project that winds up taking all day, including 3 trips to the hardware store and causing far more frustration than you expect.

Having said that, it's a good idea to schedule the time you will spend.

Naturally, if you were able to spend 8 hours a day, you would accomplish much more in a shorter period of time than if you could only spend 2 hours a day. As a small business owner, you clearly don't have 8 hours a day to spend.

Decide how much time you will spend and when you will spend it.

Is it one hour a day between 8 and 9? If you need to put it in a calendar, do so. Do whatever you need to do to keep yourself on track with your schedule. Note your decision and commit to it on your Strategy Planning Worksheet. This will serve as a reminder to help keep you on target down the road.

Content Planning

While it may not sound attractive to you to pre-plan your content, this can be one of the best time savers you have. In fact, I recommend you create an editorial calendar for yourself to keep you on track. This can be done in a simple

spreadsheet or calendar on which you mark holidays, and add any specials you run on a regular basis.

Given this information, you can easily jot notes about what you want to share in advance of any special days for example, in advance of Mother's Day, you may wish to promote a special either through an e-mail campaign, Facebook or any strategy that you have chosen. Enter your plans for Mother's Day promotions on your calendar.

The calendar will keep you from getting sidetracked and will help guide you on days when you don't know what to write or post about.

Keep a small notebook with you at all

times. (I love using the Moleskin brand notebooks inspired by Hemingway and others because they come in all sizes, and formats making it easy to tuck into any space.) Any time you get a great idea, jot it down or make a quick recording on your smartphone.

Brainstorm 25 or 50 topics that you can write about and keep those in your notebook.

Once a week, schedule time to load your auto-responder with upcoming e-mails, create your posts, videos or audios or pre-load your Tweets for the week.

Loading content in advance makes the rest of your week much easier. All that is left is to respond to the occasional singular activity or others' posts.

With a little forethought, you can pre-plan most of your content so that you're never wondering what to produce, and by when.

Step 5 - Getting Help

If this just sounds like too much, first look to your existing employees to determine if you can delegate some of the work to any of them. It can be touchy having someone else speak for you online so if you decide to do that, I recommend that you set standards that your employee(s) will follow when speaking for your company.

A key factor in getting help, no matter the source, is how well you can describe your need or the project. Far too many projects are derailed by miscommunication between the buyer and seller. This can be one of the most challenging or easiest of your tasks. That

responsibility starts with the hiring manager or you.

To illustrate, what comes to mind for you if I refer to the color “red”? Do you think of “crimson” or perhaps “burgundy”? Can you see where discussions of color can be a challenge when working on graphics or can you imagine trying to describe the look and feel of a website to a webmaster? My point being that it is always helpful if you can show someone examples of what you like or what you want. Don't assume that someone can read your mind when it comes to abstract concepts and don't assume that descriptive definitions hold the same meaning for everyone with whom you work.

You should also be able to clearly define your requirements and expectations in order for them to be met. If you need 5 posts written by Friday, does that mean 5x 1000 words or 5x 300 words and does that mean by Friday at 8am pacific or Friday midnight east coast time? The more specific and clear you can be about your needs, the greater your chance of getting those needs satisfied.

Hiring Specialized Talent

“A little knowledge goes a long way..”

At the outset, I believe there is great merit in learning as much as you can about your new online activities if for no other reason, than to be able to communicate with employees and

vendors. For instance, when you are in a position to know that a given activity will only take 2 hours and someone tries to persuade you that it will take 2 days, you'll be able to challenge their recommendation.

You are likely already flooded with offers of SEO assistance in your inbox, you may get calls from consultants who imply that they work for some big-name social site or search engine or you may get promises from others to get you to the first page of Google in a week. Being aware of what it takes to succeed can help protect you from being scammed.

On the other hand, if you would really like to proceed online, don't have the time or don't have the good fortune of

having someone on staff, you should consider hiring help. It is more important to take action than to wait until you can learn enough to be successful online yourself.

As a business owner, you no doubt already know how to hire staff but if online marketing is new to you, you might feel a bit uncomfortable hiring help for those efforts. I can assure you that it is very much like hiring any other worker with a couple of possible exceptions.

Online marketers can, for the most part, work online which means you may not need to have office space for them. This additionally means that you can look beyond your local area for help. The

skills sets are most likely very different from others on your staff and that may make you uncomfortable while you are getting used to the online world, but you can overcome this discomfort by doing a little homework.

If you are ready to hire staff to implement your marketing plan, a wealth of positions have grown up around online marketing that you can consider. Positions such as Social Media Manager, Community Engagement Manager, Community Manager have arisen to support online marketing efforts. Postings for these positions can be found on any of the job boards ([Indeed](#), [SimplyHired](#)) to give you a feel for what they do. Any of these positions

can be filled the same way you fill any of your openings.

As with offline advertising, campaign manager positions can be filled the same way. If you don't yet have the ad budget to support a full-time advertising person, you may need to combine those skills with other needs, or consider outsourcing for help.

Not all web masters are created equal. Ideally, you will have someone you can count on who understands not only the management of your site, but the intricacies of SEO as well. You most certainly don't want someone who practices black-hat SEO otherwise you run the risk of having your account banned. Would you order SEO services

from someone sending e-mail without your permission (or spam)? It seems to me, if they are willing to send spam to drum up business, they are also more likely to use black hat methods as they represent you.

Outsourcing

Perhaps you need some help but don't think you need someone full-time. For short term projects, I recommend you consider outsourcing projects. In fact, the sooner you can outsource, the better. Outsourcing today is much easier than ever before.

There are several sites that cater just to this need and you don't have to make a long term commitment to use their

services. Sites such as [oDesk](#), [Elance](#), [Workaholics for Hire](#) are filled with qualified individuals from around the world looking for work at very reasonable rates.

Freelancers including writers, editors and graphic artists have been around for a long time and are a great resource for getting help with creating or editing content or graphics for your site.

It may take a few tries to find someone you want to join your team but it is well worth the time spent finding the right reliable person. I would start with a couple of small, test projects to help you make this determination rather than starting with a mission-critical project. This way you can judge whether or not

they communicate well, follow your instructions, ask questions and meet deadlines.

Most of the outsourcing sites mentioned above include ratings given from previous projects. These ratings are important to know and useful for making your selection.

Outsourcing is definitely not a bad way to go, especially not in the current economy. There are many great, highly skilled, qualified people in every country who would love to have the work making outsourcing a viable win-win situation for both of you.

Consulting

Finally, another option for you to

consider is to find a consultant to help you with your marketing. A consultant can help guide the way for you as you venture forth online and can potentially help with any number of tasks including the selection of outsourced resources, research, project management, content creation or advertising campaign management.

Having a consultant on board helps you benefit from others' experiences. Not only is it their job to stay on top of what is current, what works and what doesn't, they bring to the party experiences from other clients which can greatly reduce your own learning curve.

It may be helpful to know what to consider or not consider when looking

for a consultant. Naturally, you'll want to work with someone that is in sync with your business objectives, and ethos. Consider starting with a short term project to see how well you work together before adding more extensive projects to the list.

If anyone guarantees you that they can get you on page one on google in a week, search for someone else. No one can offer that kind of guarantee. As with outsourcing, project specificity and clarity go a long ways toward ensuring success.

If someone gives you the impression that they are an employee of Google or Facebook, press them for details. There are many folks looking for your business

who imply that they are employees of a major site but who in reality are not.

What to look for when hiring specialized talent

You probably have a few of your own requirements for hiring help and I would add that I've always found that if you can find someone who cares almost as much about what you are doing as you do yourself, they are more likely to be a winning resource. Often, you can see this drive and desire as a spark in their eyes (or their voice) when talking about your business.

If working off-site, you'll want to find someone who is proficient in the tools and technologies that you use of course,

but you'll also want to make sure they have time management skills, are dependable and reliable.

Some marketers advocate getting a list of every employer that someone has ever had and getting references from each however, I don't believe that is feasible unless you are hiring the very young. I believe the system that most corporations use of getting 3 references is a much better way to go. Naturally, people will give you their best 3 but if you stay with references from the most recent employment, you should be fine.

You will probably need to blend skills and job descriptions. For example, when hiring a social media or content manager, depending upon your needs,

they may need to be a special blend of “nerd” or “geek” and social engagement so they can tackle occasional technical issues and stay on top of the ever-changing platforms. They may need to be resourceful and good at research if you also want them to create posts. They also need to have a good handle on the platforms you wish to use, the tools available and the analytics that impact their work.

For example, when hiring a social media, community or engagement manager, review content they've produced to see if their tone fits with your business or consider having them write a sample for you.

Steer clear of over-the-top promises that

might indicate a propensity toward black-hat tactics. Ask to see other sites they either own or have worked on and what they did on those sites. When in doubt, consider hiring a consultant to help with your selections.

Next Steps and Moving Forward

“Set realistic expectations...”

The overnight success is rare. We hear about those stories because they are so rare however, more often than not, there was just as much work behind those “overnight” successes as most businesses. They just “seem” to have come out of nowhere. It is important to realize that it takes trial and error to find the right combination that fits with you, your audience and your business model. Everything you do online as a marketer needs to be considered a test. Anytime that you hear of someone having great results doing XYZ, and assuring you that

it will work for you, realize that while that strategy may work for them and their audience, it might not work for you, your personality, and your audience.

I usually advise clients to never get too tied to a new idea and would advise that you consider online activities to be experimental. Consider that there is no “good” or “bad” result but that getting results is what matters. Any results obtained inform you of your next steps and from that perspective are always positive or useful. That is why experimenting and “tweaking” is so crucial to your efforts. Each step takes you closer to your goals.

One example as applied to advertising; if you run an ad until you get a couple

hundred clicks and it isn't doing well, change the ad or better, run more than one at a time until you get enough clicks and keep only the one that performs best. Then start another ad to try knocking that one out of the #1 position. This is called “split testing” or A/B testing; trying ad A against ad B and so forth until you can no longer find an ad that outperforms your best one.

Once your ads are working, look at your landing page. Is it converting well? If not, start tweaking and testing your landing page. Google offers the ability to split test not only ads, but landing pages. Sometimes simply changing one word, button or color can make a lot of difference in conversions.

If you try Facebook for some time and can't seem to connect, perhaps that isn't the right medium for you or for your audience.

The idea is to make continuous improvement to your site, ads, content, and connections. There is always room for improvement but the more improvements you make, the more successful your efforts will be.

“If you aren't moving forward, you're falling behind...”

Now that you know why online marketing matters to your business, you know what is available for you and you have a strategy, nothing is left to do but ACT! Implementation is essential.

Imagine that you've read this book, toss it aside and do nothing. Your results in 6 months or a year from now will be the very same or worse while the rest of the world including your competition will have moved ahead by another 6 months.

On the other hand, what if you do take action, get online, and begin tapping into a new customer base. Can you imagine how great it will feel to see your customer list grow, make more sales and see your profits rise? That can't happen if you don't take those first steps. It can only happen for your business if you start. Can you really afford not to get online?

About the Author

Linnea Kline, is a high-tech marketing and educational professional who helps small businesses and entrepreneurs succeed online. Much of her career has been spent developing marketing and training programs within the high-tech environment. As a consultant, and educator her clients have ranged from hobbyists, to high-tech software companies.

Linnea writes, teaches and mentors small business owners and entrepreneurs who have a great vision for their work and life, are inspired, and driven to grow their business. She particularly enjoys working with entrepreneurs who

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Linnea brings a unique combination of education development, project management and a passion for online marketing to her work. Combining these skills with her expertise in online marketing creates a unique synergy for her work.



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