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## Direct Marketing with Permission

By Jack Guerin

An effective Internet marketing strategy requires more than a website. With 125 million websites, you can't depend on random search engine visits to deliver significant traffic.

Email is the number one use of the Internet with more than 80% of Web users listing it as the primary reason they go online. The Internet is a potent direct marketing tool. One of the best ways to build Web traffic is to push information out to prospects via email.

The best response rates are generated through emailing to in-house lists of people who have "opted in" by agreeing to receive your email. This is the concept of permission marketing which was originally developed by Internet marketing pioneer Seth Godin. Permission marketing is a fundamentally different way of thinking about advertising and marketing.

Pushing out edu-marketing content via emails, which include links to targeted website content, creates a dynamic push/pull synergy. Your email drives traffic to your website where visitors opt-in, agreeing to receive additional email.

### Two Dimensions of the Marketing Equation

There are two dimensions to the marketing equation—reach and frequency. Reach refers to the number of prospects receiving a marketing message. Television provides reach.

Even with the fragmentation of broadcast media, the number of television stations remains severely limited with most consumers having access to only forty or fifty channels. With millions of websites, the Internet is ineffective in generating reach.

Frequency refers to the number of times the message is sent. An enormous body of experience has documented the importance of frequency. Frequent repetition of marketing messages is required to gain attention, familiarity, and ultimately trust. Frequency is an essential element of brand development. For this reason, marketing efforts are structured as campaigns instead of individual communications.

The power of the Internet is frequency which email provides for free. The Internet is the tool that unlocks the power of permission marketing. Frequency builds trust and trust is the holy grail of marketing.



## **The Greatest Challenge**

The greatest challenge of permission marketing is getting people to sign up. Most of your marketing budget will be devoted to this step. Your ongoing permission marketing campaign is virtually no cost once people opt in. You can build your email list through networking, cold calling, and website promotion, but you may also have to invest in advertising.

Your advertising should be targeted as narrowly as possible at your target market. You're narrowcasting—not broadcasting. Advertising is the most costly component of your marketing budget and should be used sparingly to prime the pump for permission marketing.

You can advertise online with pay per click or with banner ads on sites related to your business. You can use online or offline yellow pages or place ads in publications targeted at your market.

Your advertising shouldn't be directed at the ultimate sale. Instead, focus on the more modest goal of getting people to visit your website and opt in. Concentrating on this limited objective should increase your response rate significantly.

Offer an incentive to get people to sign up. One of the best incentives is a free download of valuable information. Providing prospects with free information positions you as an expert and “sets the specs” for product selection. Only qualified prospects will respond to this incentive.

The primary objective of your website should be signing up visitors to give you permission to market to them. The quality of the content on your site should position you as an expert and motivate visitors to receive more information from you.

Make it easy for site visitors to sign up. Include a prominent sign-up button on every page of your website and ask for minimal information. The email address and first name are all you really need to provide personalized email communications.

## **Reengineering the Process**

Permission marketing reengineers the process of getting new customers, changing the focus from finding as many prospects as possible to converting the largest number of prospects into customers. Permission marketers minimize the resources they expend communicating with strangers and move as rapidly as possible to get prospects to opt in.

With permission marketing you're communicating with qualified prospects who have expressed an interest in your product or service. The objective is to persuade the prospect to give more and more permission over time. Prospects move through a continuum from unknown to loyal customers.

Traditional advertising intrudes and interrupts to gain the attention of viewers, listeners or readers. This type of marketing is becoming increasingly ineffective. Decades of media advertising has created a suspicious and unbelieving public who ignore the onslaught of promotional messages.

Advertising interrupts with random messages at random times and places. Communications with opt in prospects have infinitely greater impact because they are expected, personalized and pertinent. Permission marketing is a measurable process which requires patience. Your opt-in list grows over time and becomes an increasingly valuable asset.

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