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Edu-Marketing on the Web

By Jack Guerin

Close your eyes for just a minute. Search your memory for images of the first very first cars which were made about 100 years ago.

The first cars looked very different from modern cars. They looked more like horse driven buggies or carriages than the cars we drive today. Think of images in photographs or movies and visualize those old cars. The first applications of new technology often resemble old technology.

This is the problem with the Internet today. Many organizations have failed to understand the marketing potential of the Web creating websites which are the equivalent of www.horseandbuggy.com.



Let's be Clear

Let's review some areas of confusion about the Web. The Web isn't TV. Web visitors are readers not watchers, and the Web has millions of sites vs. a limited number of television channels.

A website isn't an ad. Ads are designed to interrupt people and get their attention. In fact, there are now radio ads which are only two seconds long so people won't switch stations.

But when visitors come to your website, you already have their attention. They searched and found your site. You don't need to interrupt them. A website is a publication. To publish simply means to make public, and the Internet represents the greatest publishing revolution since the printing press.

Graphics aren't the most important element of a website. No print publication ever won a Pulitzer Prize by tinkering with the graphics on the masthead. The three most important elements of a website are the content, the content and the content.

Content-savvy organizations are cashing in with Internet marketing strategies based on providing high quality information. Content is what turns Web browsers into buyers. We live in the information age, and information has replaced puffery and hype as the most powerful marketing tool.

The Internet has created an edu-marketing revolution fundamentally changing the way goods and services are sold. Web browsers are seeking information and solutions. They are demanding to be told not sold.

Edu-marketing isn't a new concept. Providing information and education has always been an effective marketing strategy. One famous example is Listerine's use of the word halitosis—the medical term for bad breath.

Live and Learn

However, several factors have increased the importance of edu-marketing making it the most effective Internet marketing strategy. Fifty years of mass media advertising has created a public who are demanding and cynical. Promotional claims and hyped pitches are discounted in a nanosecond.

The Internet was originally founded as a computer network for university and government scientists and has evolved into a culture of information exchange vs. commerce. The Internet has created more sophisticated consumers. Today's consumers respond best to marketing they perceive to be informational rather than promotional.

Web visitors overwhelmingly flock to websites that provide useful information instead of a "sales pitch. Consumers want to be educated. Providing quality information treats customers with respect. Web browsers are seeking solutions and edu-marketing is solution based, not product service or company oriented.

The Internet has also provided new low cost forums for edu-marketing including website content, email newsletters, white paper downloads, and Webinars.

Edu-marketing produces many benefits. Providing a gift of valuable free information begins your relationship with a prospect on a positive note. People love to get free stuff.

Publishing advice and information positions you as an expert and thought leader. Consumers are deluged with information today, but they are hungry for solutions and knowledge. People increasingly turn to those they perceive as experts. Through edu-marketing you become a unique trusted advisor.

It also positions your product as an essential component of the proposed solution. Information is best way to persuade consumers that you offer the best solution. In addition, consumers feel loyalty to a marketer who provides educational content.

Your educational information "sets the specs" providing guidelines for product selection in your category. Prospects will review products based on the information which you have provided. Writing the requirements helps make the sale.

That's Not All

Edu-marketing has longer shelf-life than promotional materials appealing to prospects with both current and future needs. Prospects are like submarines—most of the time they're underwater and not in a buying mode. Prospects without an immediate need will ignore promotional messages, but may retain information which they perceive as valuable.

In addition, edu-marketing materials are easier to create and less costly than traditional advertising which is judged by its creativity. High priced talent is required to create impactful messages which can interrupt and gain attention.

Helpful and factual information is the key to generating positive word of mouth that is spurred on by edu-marketing. The Internet is the most powerful word of mouth medium ever invented. Email is a viral medium which spreads word of mouth like wildfire. Online word of mouth is published and remains part of the record almost indefinitely.

Your website is the public face of your company. On the Web, you are what you publish. Edu-marketing provides the formula for using the Internet to grow your business.

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