

## **Marketing Spin: Web Site Marketing vs. Marketing Your Web Site**

It's amazing to me that it was just a few years ago that we were advising our smaller clients that it was neither wise nor necessary to be the pioneer on the Web. "Wait," we said, "until people really start not just using it, but relying on it as a legitimate informational tool." Looking back, I still think that was sound advice.

Funny thing has happened pretty quickly however. People are now in fact utilizing the Web as a resource whether it's to uncover vendors, prospects, potential partners, or simply travel directions. It's become as much a part of our resource option as the telephone book or a trade directory. So despite fears of losses on NASDAQ, the Internet has become a legitimate medium to be utilized as a marketing tool by any business that wishes to be seen as... well... legitimate. A business today simply can not afford to be conspicuous by its absence on the Internet.

Having said all that, let's get one thing straight right away. There's a big difference between marketing your Web site and using your Web site to market. Sometimes there may be a relationship there, but more often than not, the two require completely different approaches.

Let's start with the latter first – using your Web site to market. The Web is really no different than any other marketing tool in that it has a specific reason for being, significant advantages and inherent drawbacks. More than television, radio, magazines, etc., a Web site is an information source. In many ways it is similar to a Yellow Pages ad, as a company's Web site represents a place where an individual can go to learn more about an organization or product. Potentially it can even be better than such an ad, because it represents a more economical way to get a lot of information across. It can be updated frequently and can also provide the opportunity for direct sales. On the other hand, Yellow Page listings are easy to find – the whole world, it seems, is listed alphabetically. Web listings aren't so organized.

So what does all this mean? In means... be smart. Recognize that your site where people will access information about you. In some cases, it's also a place where someone can do business with you (more about that later), but it is not an outreach vehicle – nor is it the vehicle with which to establish an image. That task requires a multiplicity of exposures, and unless someone for some reason decides to repeatedly surf to your site, branding is not your objective here. Your goal should be to provide the information that prompts the call, the application, the yanking out of a credit card, etc. Net, net, in most cases, the Web serves as a sales conversion tool.

But what prompts the visit to your site? That's the question of marketing your Web site. And it has two answers. The first involves being listed on all the significant search engines – not just listed, but prominently listed. Getting that done requires submitting your site often to the major players. It requires carefully choosing your metatags with a clear understanding as to what a prospect would search for when looking for your product or service.

The second means by which to market your site is not an answer most may like, because it involves money. The reason is simple – if your site is where the customer or prospect is making a decision to buy or is actually buying, then you need to ensure they visit what is not just a “page” but what is in essence your “store.” Getting people to visit the store involves traditional marketing – promoting your site in every way you can, be it through sales material, advertising, public relations, direct mail, etc. A common mistake small businesses make is that dollars allocated to a Web site somehow replace those allocated toward traditional marketing vehicles. That is simply not a wise move. A site should be marketed just as a store or business should be marketed. The advantage is that once there, the customer can make a more informed and hence, quicker decision. So you see, the more things change, in some ways, they really stay the same. You're still developing a marketing mix from the same group of options you had ten years ago – plus of course, one new one.