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How much has your website done FOR you?
Call today for a free evaluation

Your FREE report on how to use websites to: Increase sales – promote your business – reach new customers

By: Keith Boisvert, Owner – www.Folingo.com

We are almost a full decade into the new millennium. So much has changed in the past ten years, and the Internet is at the center of most of those changes. Ten years ago or so, the Internet was really just a baby (although it's only a toddler now), and everyone wanted a piece of the Internet pie. The lure of fast cash and more business exposure drove many businesses to build websites.

The problem was that 99% of these sites were nothing more than:

- Placeholders.
- Online brochures.
- One way communication.

Most business owners paid WAY too much for their sites, and got little or nothing in return. The large design costs coupled with poor performance drove quite a few small business owners away from the Internet. They were happy to just have email...

So, here we are in 2008; technology has continued to revolutionize the Internet and how companies do business on it. The cost to design a site is but a fraction of what it used to be, and the tools and free resources to maximize your sites potential are almost endless.

Let's take a look at *content management systems* or CMS. Most small business owners are familiar with these; they are just large databases, such as MS Access, Lotus, QuickBooks and Peachtree. Well, there are also similar set-ups for websites and *blogs*. I'm sure you've heard of

them before, and heck, you might even have one. However, if you don't have one, you are missing out on a lot.

Blogs have literally revolutionized the Internet yet again. With social media sites such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace, web surfers and visitors are now accustomed to conversational marketing. What this means is that they are used to conversing with other people...online. They can leave feedback, comments about things going on in the world. They can share news, things they like, things they don't like, cool new products, etc in a single click.

Essentially, conversational marketing online is word-of-mouth advertising, and it travels fast! Within hours, news of Paris Hilton's new shoes can be known by hundreds of thousands of people, along with pictures and even a candid video or two.

So how does this affect you? It doesn't, *unless you are part of it*. In order to maximize your business's online potential, you need a way to be able to converse with your existing and potential customers. So, how can you do this? There are countless ways to do this, and a lot depends on your business. For the most part, you need way to grab your customer's attention...and keep it.

Let's take blogs, for example. A simple and attractive blog looks just like a regular site, but it allows you to write "posts" whenever you want, from wherever you want, without the need for fancy software or a full-time webmaster. What are "posts"? Posts can be anything you want. They could be just thoughts on your business, thoughts about you, a new product line you are selling, a new entrée you are serving on Saturday nights, a half-off sale...anything!

What happens is that people visiting your site will see fresh content (as new posts show up first) and they will keep coming back if they like what you write, AND they can leave comments for you, if you like. Maybe someone has a question about a sale or a new product...they can leave a comment and ask you. Now it's there for others to see who may have the same question. If they did happen to ask a question, you can comment back. This can go on and on, and it is all stored in the site database so you don't have to worry about it.

Ok, so we have established that blogs are great for conversational marketing. So are email lists. Do you have the contact information for your current customers? How about prospects that haven't bought anything yet, but like to browse? You have their email addresses at least, right? If you answered "no", then you are *leaving money on the table*. Think of an email list as money. The more people you have on

your list, the more opportunities you have at making much more money.

Getting people to give you their email address is not that easy, but it is not as tough as it may appear. There are countless ways (such as promotions, coupons, special sales) to have people give you a little bit of their info.

What to do with an email address? Put it into another database, of course! This database for emails is called an "auto-responder" and it allows you to send out the same email to as many people on your list as you want, at any time you want. Heck, you can pre-write emails and have them sent on a schedule. Why is this so important? Because, again, it allows you to converse with your customers and clients.

Let's say you have an email list with 500 names on it because you did an in-store promotion, gave something away for free and got the contact information for each person that received your promotional item. You now have permission to email them. If you do this properly and not try to sell them with every email, but instead give them valuable information, when you do want to sell...they are ready because they already "know" you, and you are no longer a stranger.

Back to our example of your 500 email addresses. Let's say you sell mountain bikes. Obviously if people are on your list, they are into mountain bikes and gear. For the sake of argument it's October and business is slowing down. You have some excess inventory you want to blow out that excess by having a sale. Announce it in an email.

Maybe one of the benefits of being on your "prospects" email list (the motivation to get people to sign up) is that they get special advanced notice of sales and special day early shopping. Suppose 500 prospects read your email and only 10% actually come in and buy something. First off, that's 50 new people who come into your store and buy something. 50 customers that you didn't have before is always a plus and could turn a bad day into a good one.

Now, down to one of the most important parts of having a website: getting it to show up in the search results. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a weird art & science – there's no one formula that works. Google for example has its own algorithm (set of rules) that is top secret and no one knows what it is. Plus, they change it on a regular basis. So how does your business get found?

There are always the basics, like using good relevant keywords (words or phrases that people are actually typing into search engines), how long your site has been online, how many incoming links you have to

your site and what sites they are on, and of course *fresh content*. Search engines love fresh content, because there are so many dead or irrelevant websites out there, it's hard to distinguish the current ones from the ones that were built and left abandoned. Plus, if your site has fresh content, it shows that you are taking good care of your site.

Again, blogs are a great way to "beat the system", as far as SEO goes. Search engines like Google tend to favor blogs over regular static sites, and they are much easier to get great optimization out of.

SEO is tough to explain to someone who never thought about it before, but the fact is that without it...no one will know where you are or who you are. What point is it to have a site with no visitors? It's like have a store with no sign and no front door!

Without good search results, you will get little to no traffic whatsoever. So, using targeted keywords in your site will certainly help. For example, back to our mountain bike example. You have a store located in Leominster, Ma. You sell mountain bikes. You have a website. What keywords do you use? It comes down to what are people typing into Google, Yahoo or MSN to find mountain bikes.

When you type "mountain bikes" into Google, there are over 2 million matches for that phrase. But how about "buy mountain bikes"? You sell them, so you want people looking to buy right? Well there are over 7.5 million matches for that phrase! The odds of getting on page one of Google for that phrase is slim. Not impossible, but slim. Plus, you want people to come to you, so someone in India looking for a mountain bike is not a good customer for you (unless you sell online)!

So, let's keep going: "Leominster mountain bikes" only yields about 50 thousand matches. This is easy to get onto page one, if not in the top spot in Google for that phrase with the right application of SEO! But, *is anyone looking for mountain bikes in Leominster?* How about Massachusetts? Central Mass? Surrounding towns? These are your keywords!! Drill down to more exacting matches. It doesn't matter if your main keyword is "mountain bike" when you show up on page 2,000 in Google's Search Engine Results Pages.

There are (as of this writing) over 650 searches a day for terms with the word "Leominster" in it. That doesn't count any of the surrounding towns!! Of course not everyone is looking for mountain bikes, but the ones that are (who are your potential customers) will find you.

Maybe you sell mountain bike parts? There are over 900 searches a month just for the phrase "mountain bike shocks". How about

targeting that phrase? See the potential here? Imagine if you had an online shopping cart?

Speaking of shopping carts...have you ever thought about selling your items online? Of course this is not for everyone, but it certainly may be an option, and has the potential to increase your business exponentially, especially when you can get orders 24 hours a day!! Ecommerce is something that has to be evaluated, and tested to see how viable it can be for your business. If you're currently doing a mail order business, this could be a great way to expand it!

Do you use eBay? Again, this is not for everyone, but if you own a store and sell items, you may have some dead products that you can't return. They might be great eBay material. Blow them out in an auction; you never know what people will go for! The great thing about eBay is that you can sell items, but you also get to chance to get buyers to BUY MORE directly from you.

When you ship your product(s), insert a little flier into the box with your website's address on it. Maybe include a coupon for 5% off their next purchase. Now if they buy again they will go direct to you and bypass eBay, saving you the fees involved with auctions. Again, this is not for every business, but there is potential there for those who can use it.

So as you can see, there are many forms of income-generating strategies and tactics that you can use online. Regardless of what type of business you have, there are too many advantages to being online to pass this up. It's all in how it's executed and orchestrated.

I will be more than happy to sit down at YOUR convenience and discuss your business and web site potential. As always, the evaluation is free I will work with you one-on-one to find out what may be the best avenue for your business.

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