On Digital Marketing

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May you live in interesting times.

Overview

Surely, the ancient Chinese curse has never been more apt than when applied to the current state of the space in which marketers, particularly those with budgetary constraints, are operating. Local advertisers and not-for-profit organizations face real challenges as they operate in this new digital marketplace. The traditional channels, print, radio, tv, and outdoor, have changed dramatically, and in the case of print are at best moribund. This is entirely due to the advent of the new digital delivery systems for marketing messaging. Even such traditional services such as the Yellow Pages, which though it carries ads, is considered primarily a listing of data, are succumbing to the wild market fragmentation that similar electronic data listing services (like google and yahoo) have engendered.

Currently, we can see the following digital channels for interacting with and marketing to consumers: websites, digital phones, other digital devices, digital outdoor, SEO, social media, online contests, digital radio, cable, online print, online viral marketing, as well as email and coop and affinity marketing. This wealth of digital clutter has already produced an audience that is savvy, even jaded, about new offerings, so any marketing effort that is undertaken has to be at least as good (well designed, well written, navigable, compelling, involving) as an offering from Disney, CNN, NASA, BMW, etc.

Because we are only about half way through this latest phase of Schumpeter's Wave of innovation we can expect there to be at least another five to ten years of on-going change in this space before equilibrium is reached. It therefore behooves us to respond to this change as it evolves, as we cannot reasonably assume that a business will survive without changing while waiting for the market to stop evolving.

This being said, the digital marketspace has also created unprecedented affordable opportunities for reach and frequency, as long as certain prerequisites are met by the advertiser, and the marketing program is designed with a clear scope and attainable objectives.

Prerequisites

Digital marketing is all about creating destinations that appeal to a self-selecting audience, we may PUSH messages to a broad audience but when they come to our site as a destination they are PULLING our message to them.

As such, our first prerequisite is that we must know who our potential audience member(s) are, and what interests we, as marketers, share with them. This can be a laundry list of potential interests, or it can be a single focus, though the former is more likely. From this list we can create a short list of areas that have a business value to us, and prepare our corresponding digital touch points. In general, these touch points can all be handled in a well designed website.

This knowledge creates our second prerequisite, relevant messaging. Because sites can now be constructed with enough intelligence to recognize inbound traffic sources we can in essence have the server configure a custom experience to each visitor, either by recognizing registered users and showing them their favorite content, or by actually placing our touch points into specific areas on the site to enhance their visual relevance. This last idea is tied directly to our knowledge that every visit is a self-selected one. Unlike older traditional media, every exposure to our in-depth messaging has to be initiated by the visitor. In marketing terms, this means they have PULLED our content, we did not PUSH it to them, and we therefore need to

craft our messaging to give them what they want.

A third prerequisite for us as marketers is to use our destination's intelligence by building commands into the url that we pass to our website, to track or customize the experience, for instance linking a visitor directly to a sign-up page for a coupon or a game from a banner, print, or even a QC that is scanned from a smart phone. These commands do not need to be a barrier to a visitor (www.thedomain.com/free/), but they are immensely valuable to us as marketers.

For visitors to our site who are not exposed to messaging from external sources, which will comprise most lower-budget clients for whom a banner campaign is probably unaffordable, we need to make sure that we have a clear presence on google, bing, yahoo, etc. This fourth prerequisite guarantees that inbound traffic will know what to expect from our site, and even be able to drill down to content specific to their interests, and they will know from our presence that our content will be able to address a clear need of theirs. In order to address this need we must have websites that change continually, daily if possible. In this way we can be sure that our content is current, targeted, and being propagated across the information web, whether to phones, or blogs, or even traditional media.

Ultimately, meeting these prerequisites will guarantee that we can create a plan for our digital marketing effort that is focused on clear and attainable goals. As to making sure that we define a realizable scope that will be driven mostly by the available budget. If Colgate wants to prepare a multi-lingual, global campaign to promote proper oral care they can afford it, for most smaller advertisers and not-for-profits the scope is necessarily limited to making sure that their website is as good as it can possibly be, and since it will not necessarily be possible to rebuild it annually, to make sure that their investment can be maximized out over a number of years.

Summary

What this means for us as marketers in today's wild media circus is we need to focus as we have never done before on our content and on how we deliver it.

Every marketing effort in this new world needs to have a destination, in most cases a website and this destination needs to have a clear goal or goals, whether lead generation, conversion, information, entertainment, or all of the above.

Unfortunately, the days of having websites that simply sit there, waiting for visitors to come and then go as swiftly as possible are long over. If a site isn't changing regularly (daily, monthly, hourly), then it isn't working hard enough to be considered an effective marketing tool.

Fortunately, it has never been easier for marketers to create and disseminate their content. The same technology that has made necessary all these changes in the way that we market has also made addressing these new needs both affordable and rewarding. Particularly for not-for-profit organizations, organizations that have more passion than money to spend, creating destinations that are highly relevant and frequently updated becomes just a part of their ongoing labor of love.