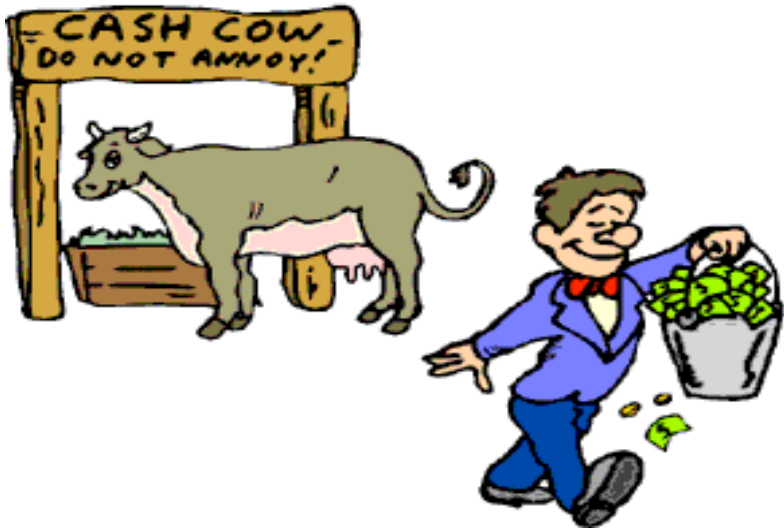


Developing A
Cash Cow Marketing Plan



Results Oriented Strategies for Maximizing
Opportunities and Profits With Internet Marketing

Developing
A
Cash Cow
Marketing Plan

By

George Lambert

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Introduction

Every business operator and entrepreneur needs to understand the basic principles of Supply and Demand, Resource Management, and the need to make (pardon the dirty word) Profit.

This book will teach you how to successfully use the Internet and maximize your profit and your ultimate success. You will also learn the pitfalls - and there are many - and how to avoid them.

Reading this book will help make you and your enterprise a success.

George Lambert

Special Thanks

The content of this work is a culmination of the lessons learned in my career. I could not have accomplished this feat without the friends and associates with whom I have worked, including the nearly 1,000 friends on LinkedIn and hundreds more on Facebook. Without the life experience of those individuals – this book would not have been possible.

It is often impossible to properly credit the most influential people in my life but, I will try. (If I neglected to include you, please let me know and I will grovel, separately.)

First – My wife and children to whom this book and everything else I do in this world is dedicated; and Mark and Cindy Wolf, too.

Secondly – My best friends in the world, Matt and Robin Goldworm, and our team at GoldenWare, Rory, Tal, Adrienne, Yong, John, Shawn, Mike, Kathryn, Steve and Ted. A quick shout out goes to Tony, Janet and Siva, too!

No list would be complete without pointing out the shining stars of my career, whom I think of all of the time: Ken Stevenson, Steve Tritman, Ralph “Raiph” Mellor (of Firefox marketing fame), Ingrid Regan, Gwynn Jones, (and the entire Serif Team), folks from my NetMasters – Borland years including Lance, David I, Charlie Calvert, Eulanda, Christine Ellis, and, of course, Paul McGee and Sukee Woodward. We cannot forget the podjacking folks; Adam Curry, David Lawrence, Erik Markus, and Drew Domkus.

And Tom! – Who could forget to list you! He who would always ask me – “is it is or is it aint!” for which the work book is named – “if it aint broke don't fix it!” He would always ask if I was “goin schoolin”.. To all of my former Internet marketing students, you taught me to think of the world and Internet marketing in a way that people could understand it – thanks so much (including my school posse – Kevin, Steph, Shawn, and Jeff). My political posse - Steve, Andy, Pat, Frank, Joe, Terri, Tommy, Andy, Sam and the drunken sailors, Ron Paul and of course Charlie Wilson.

Last and most of all, to those who inspire my creative side: Peter and Connie Marquez; my writing inspiration - Chin-Ning Chu and, of course, my publisher and editor - Joseph Ross.

I personally take credit for any bad grammar and typos that the people helping me edit this book missed. With the exception of the dairy market report at the beginning, all of the paragraphs are original. I am sorry to say that I cannot say the same for the content.

GL

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I always wanted to do that ;-)

You can learn a lot from a dairy farmer

The following comments are taken from the Internet about Dairy Farming in California in 1999, but the general principles apply to your Internet marketing initiatives, especially if you call them Cash Cows. First, a little background about dairy farming. Dairy Farmers understand Supply and Demand. They understand resource management. If they lose “only” a small amount of money on their herd every day, they soon stop dairy farming. They must be profitable for the herds to survive. Sometimes they are profitable but lose sight of The Rewards of Proper Herd Management.

The Economics of Dairy Farming

Under normal conditions, milk prices to the farmer tend to rise in the fall and early winter as holiday-season demand pushes up the price of milk. By spring and summer, demand falls, and with it goes the price.

The supply and demand model

Cows that don't produce sufficient quantities of milk are culled from herds to make way for better-producing cows. These culled cows tend to go to ground beef production. Lately though, the price paid for culled cows has dropped to between 28 and 33

cents per pound, live weight. These prices have closely followed the low beef price market.

Dairies adapt their market behavior to make the best use of limited resources

With the extremely high milk-to-feed price ratio, coupled with a low beef market, dairies aren't culling herds as they have in the past. As a result, cows producing between 40 and 50 pounds of milk per day that were once culled, are remaining in the herds.

As efficiency goes down, so will overall results

"it means that if a cow can walk to the barn, she's going to get milked!"

Smaller profitability lowers expectations

This can easily result in several problems. As dairies keep poorer producing cows, there is an incentive to breed those cows again. As a result, cows that should have been sold for ground beef are calving, and produce calves of poorer health. Additionally, when milk prices begin to tumble and force farmers to cull their herds, the flood of culled cows will drive beef prices even lower.

Circular cause and effect chains cause a downward spiral

As prices begin to plummet and farmers get less for their milk, they'll be forced to keep only the better producing cows. If weather predictions hold out, and if the winter remains cool, but with near normal precipitation, milk production will soar, exacerbating a projected decline in milk prices.

Unless behavior changes, the problems only get worse

Executive Summary

Your marketing strategies behave like the dairy herds. They need to be fed, and cared for. When they are well fed and cared for, they produce results. The performance results vary based on the cow, its age, and its breeding. Older cows produce lower results utilizing the same resources, and the longer they are left consuming those resources, the more difficult it becomes to maximize the overall results of the herd. Poorly performing cows increase overall expense and reduce your return on investment, often creating unnoticed increased liabilities. Maximum results come from investing in and maximizing only the most productive members of the herd, and cutting potential losses early. As the potential for long-term productivity decreases, liability increases the longer you invest and the higher the overall opportunity cost of having it around. The following text will help you learn to inspect the herd, to identify the cash cows, and to cull the herd, thus allowing the Cash Cows to maximize the profit potential of that herd.

Why Web Marketing Fails

Most Web Marketing Plans are the result of bad planning and missed opportunity!

Have you heard the expression, “when you build a better mousetrap – the world will beat a path to your door?” The Internet is proof that even if you have designed and built a better mousetrap, you still must overcome the classic challenges faced by traditional marketing, plus a whole set of problems unique to Internet marketers.

When companies begin trying to market products on the Internet under the assumption that, with millions of users on the Internet, thousands of those users will instantly and automatically show up to buy the company’s new “Better Mouse Trap.”

Unfortunately, most of the time, with all the noise on the Internet, most users will never even hear about that “Better Mouse Trap” even if they are searching for it.

Once companies realize that they are not getting traffic and selling their products and services, they often search for strategies to increase awareness. Many of these strategies require purchasing awareness through one mechanism or another, and these sites do not necessarily make sure they can maximize value from every critical and potentially expensive visitor. Many schemes to increase awareness and traffic fall short because they either fail to solicit the correct kind of traffic or worse, fail to make a compelling case for their product or service to the right customer.

Often, once a strategy begins to show signs of success, that strategy will be used as the exclusive approach to marketing the product or service. Many sites fail to analyze, track and adjust the strategies to maximize profitability.

This lack of planning, goal setting, tracking and refining tends to leave many Internet business owners and operators feeling frustrated and unfulfilled. Frustration often sets in when the untold riches of their dreams fail to appear. When hopes of a significant financial windfall vanish, it often turns into a desire to recoup as much return on a losing investment as possible. When

any strategy begins to demonstrate progress towards a positive result, that strategy is often considered a winning exit strategy.

Many Web Marketing Campaigns do not know what to measure!

Many Internet entrepreneurs and businesses fail to define and understand the metrics that constitute success. When traditional formulas for return on marketing investment are used in connection with Internet opportunities, there are two possible outcomes:

- The metrics measures irrelevant performance goals; or
- Sometimes a business gets very lucky, and the results are so positive that the business significantly outperforms realistic expectations.

Many web marketing campaigns do not define and measure results!

Due to significant amounts of market hype surrounding Internet opportunities, many business people have been led to measure misunderstood terms. Concepts and terminology are confusing and misunderstood. Determining the relative value of concepts like hits, visitors, and conversion rates cause confusion, since without context they have no measurable and quantifiable meaning. Many business people rave about their significant success in “the number of hits” that their websites have had, while those same individuals are unable to quantify the positive financial impact that the site has had on their business’s bottom line. Hits do not lead to success unless those hits result in initiating, building, or expanding the desired customer relationship.

In business, the absolute measure of success is financial performance. The perceived long term potential of a business is not a substitute for solid financial performance. You cannot spend potential. Unless you are able to find someone to underwrite your deficit spending, the unrecognized long term potential of your venture will ultimately succumb to the laws of

economics, which are as predictable as the laws of gravity... Sooner or later what goes up, must come down. Even in cartoons, while the Road Runner is often suspended in air, Gravity ultimately wins and he comes crashing down. The first time you are unable to meet your real world financial obligations with something as negotiable as cash, your business will stop operating. Any measurement of success for your marketing campaigns must include a break-even point, and ultimately a positive cash flow, or an underwriter for your deficit spending. However, even an underwriter will expect to realize a profit at some point in time and will not support “potential” forever.

Most current web marketing campaigns get marginal, if any, results!

Despite an expectation of reasonable results, without a clear set of metrics to track those results, most web marketing campaigns are unpredictable, at best. Many sites measure success by counting visitors, or worse, simply counting hits. Many of these hit counts do not focus on key concepts like:

- relevance of visitors
- improvements in retention throughout the site
- maximization of conversion ratios

- analysis of the source of the leads
- the path visitors follow throughout a site
- and the relevance of a new prospect visiting the site.

There is a large amount of information available to both site designers and analysts that enable the understanding of the customer acquisition funnel, and the rates of conversion from prospect to customer.

Once a site begins to show activity, the process of strategic analysis must begin. While many people might start that analysis on the home page, it is precisely the wrong direction. The home page is the result of this planning, not the starting point for it.

The first questions that need to be answered are:

- What is the single sales objective of a first contact with a new visitor?
- Is the visitor your site is attracting a qualified prospect?
- Will a visitor recognize that your site will be of benefit within the first 5 seconds?
- What action or actions do you desire the user to take?
- Is the path to that objective clear and uncluttered?
- Have all obstacles to achieving that single desired objective been removed?

Other points to consider include:

- Do you have a road map that tracks from the end result backward to the ideal path through your site?
- Where are your visitors getting lost or dropping off your site?
- How many visitors are following an undesirable path?
- What percentage of visitors are you losing at each decision point?
- How long is it taking for users to move farther down the desired path?
- How much time are they spending on each page?
- What is the key motivator to move them forward from each page to the next?
- Is there anything on each page that is eliminating qualified visitors?

Do you have any idea how to answer these questions? Later, you will learn how to clearly define your customer and create a checklist for page construction objectives.

Without detailed reporting and analysis, most designers cannot answer any of these questions. Worse, once your site is operational, you need to track whether those numbers are increasing or decreasing. How long will it take for you to notice? Once a site is up, the work has only just begun. The process of

refining and improving the results of your site must become your primary objective.

Your marketing campaign needs to be replicable

Without a clear understanding of what is causing your marketing campaign to communicate with your target customer, and therefore maximizing success, it is impossible to replicate. Unless the profile of your customers is clearly understood, expanding the awareness of your site to those who are not potential customers target the wrong visitors, resulting in a waste of your marketing budget, and lower conversion ratios on your site.

Your web marketing campaign must be scalable

The scalability of your profitability comes from your ability to increase the number of visitors, or what we will call prospects, and increasing the rate at which you convert them into customers. Many designers think they can increase revenue by

decreasing the price of the offerings to create more sales, or increasing the number of visitors. Be cautious. When you drop prices to increase overall revenue, you need to monitor the overall conversion rates from visitors to customers to insure increased overall profitability. Decreasing prices will not result in an increase in either gross sales or profit.

Your web marketing campaign must be both understood and exploited

The desire to increase revenue by increasing the number of visitors is a logical and correct thing to do, but it should only be your objective after it is clear that your site's marketing message converts prospects into customers. Increasing the traffic on your online site before your store is ready for visitors and can properly service them could result in contaminating the perspective of those potential customers.

Your first focus should be defining and refining the path a visitor will take through your site, and removing as many points of resistance as possible from the process.

Your second focus should be identifying the source of your visitor, and determining the rate of message retention among those visitors.

Your third focus should be identifying new sources of visitors with a high enough conversion rate to warrant new marketing expenditures or lead generation activity.

Seeing Your Product As A Customer Sees It

Who is your customer?

One of the first questions I ask the students in my web site design class is, “who is your customer?” The question seems simple enough, but the correct answer appears to be complicated. I tend to get answers like, “My customer is anyone who wants to...” that answer is ambiguous at best and, in most cases, totally wrong. I once thought that it seemed reasonable enough but, based on the growth of the Internet over the past few years, there are only two choices. You can go for developing a site that attempts to be, “All things to All People” within your vertical market, or you can become a Boutique specialty site of some kind. It seems that just about everything in-between fails, for lack of focus and direction.

The customers of Amazon.com are primarily people who want to buy books. That seems simple enough, but, unless your bookstore was the first to beachhead a target market on the Internet (and they are the most recognized name in that market), it is virtually impossible to beat a leader like Amazon in its own market.

Using that as a model, you might assume that if you were to become an Amazon.com, expanding into other markets would be reasonably easy. Based on the lessons of Amazon, and their attempts to use market dominance to take over the online auction business, and subsequent struggles in unseating eBay.com as the dominant player, it appears that expanding beyond your vertical market is a challenge even on the Internet.

Ebay.com, the undisputed leader in online auctions, recognized that a real world problem for its customers and a limiting factor to its business was online payment. It developed an online payment system that streamlined the rapid payment of eBay auctions, only to be overshadowed by the dominance of the PayPal online payment system. eBay's numerous attempts to overpower PayPal failed and PayPal's dominance in transactions ultimately resulted in the acquisition of PayPal by eBay.

One option for you to consider in order to become a dominant vertical market leader is to identify a niche market where there is not an already established leadership position, and become the dominant site in that area. This is the place where most sites have the best chance of successful results. If you can't become the dominant player, you should consider partnering or diversifying.

Generally, the most challenging, and the least productive, approach is to try to compete head-to-head with the largest and the most recognized site in a target market. This is often a difficult and pointless endeavor, unless you have been funded by very deep pockets and are ready for a continuous struggle against a Goliath-like competitor. The exception is if the large competitor has become complacent in the market space.

So, defining your customer is a direct result of identifying the industry you are in and, more specifically, the exact need within that industry that you will serve. Due to the disconnected nature of the Internet and the lack of geographic boundaries there can be many different sites competing for the same customers.

Unless your visitors can immediately and clearly recognize that your site suits their needs better than your competitors, and you have established yourself as the leader in that area, now would be a great time to redefine your customer.

My students who correctly answered this question described their target customer as someone who recognizes a need, who lives in a specific geographic area (when location is germane), and has a need for location-based services. For example, while a body shop in Nevada may have both the most competitive rates available and the fastest turnaround time in the country for automobile repair, if the vehicle in need of repair is located in the state of New Hampshire, almost 3,000 miles away, the transportation issues involved in taking advantage of those services are impractical if not impossible.

However, I have gone to a great many websites that offer services with an expectation of only local customers and, for reasons beyond all understanding, bury their geographic location and geographic limitations deep within the site, with no mechanism for geographic qualification on the home page.

How does location matter?

If your business services a specific local geographic region, your site needs to clearly identify that region to visitors on every single page.

One of the most challenging tasks in your design is to keep interested visitors restricted to qualified visitors. There are many sites for companies, which serve local markets only but hide which local markets they serve.

Will your visitors immediately recognize that they fit or do not fit into the target geographic region? How will you make it clear to your visitors that they are close enough to do business with you, or too far away for your business to be useful to their needs?

What is their unique need?

When a customer enters your site, it is critical that your site communicate the advantages of your product or service immediately. It is important that this need is clearly understood by the visitor, and that the visitor feels that your site is in a unique position to solve that visitor's needs. Part of your design must be to communicate the solution that your site is offering and the unique benefit that comes from being your customer.

What does your product or service offer them?

What is the need that your product or service fills? Your product will probably offer both a tangible benefit and a side benefit. There are cases where the memorable need is less tangible, and may include concepts like peace of mind, or increased time for leisure activities. Keep these in mind when defining need and an appealing message to highlight that need and how your company will fulfill that need. Which need or want does your product or service satisfy that will be readily apparent to your visitors, who will then become customers.

Where else can they fill that need?

Do you have a clear understanding of the alternatives that your visitor has when not selecting your solution to their problem? What is the impact to them if they do nothing at all? Where else can they go? What else can they do? Who else's products or services will they have considered? How would you describe the alternatives? Is your business the clear winner? If you are the clear

winner, why are you the clear winner? When your site is not the clear winner above your competitors, why not?

Are you a recognized supplier of that product?

If it comes to a side-by-side comparison, how will your solutions hold up? Are you recognized as the leader in the field? Are you the low cost leader? Are you the fastest supplier? Do you have higher cost but offer a higher value?

Know your competition. What are the compelling motivators for a customer to use your solution to their problem? If your customer will shop for solutions, what will their decision checklist look like? If your products cost more, is the difference in costs worth it? If you are the lower cost competitor, does your value proposition represent a compelling enough difference to justify the decision? Is your offering too good to be true compared to your competition? Be careful not to make claims that will cause doubt in your visitor. There is a delicate balance between price and value.

Often objections and rationalizations that appear to be about price are more often about perceived value and risk.

Is your product clear to the customer?

In the first 5 seconds of visiting your site, does the customer know what he will get from spending a few minutes there? Can customers relate to the product or service? Will they recognize the benefit they will get from learning more about your offerings?

You not only have less than 5 seconds to make a first impression, your message must be so compelling that they will want to invest the time to pursue the course of action that your site desires. If the process of becoming a customer requires an educational process and will take a substantial amount of time to accomplish, does the customer get the immediate impression that the results will be fruitful? Do you get value from educating the customer? Is this an opportunity to encourage interaction with you?

Does your potential customer identify with both their need and your solution?

While your solution may have substantial life impact, the customer may not have the vertical education or the experience to understand its value. This is described as not having a FELT NEED.

Sometimes, while the need may exist, it does not have a sense of urgency, and represents an action the customer feels can be postponed to a later time. You must educate the potential customer to the need, the value of your solution and, to an even larger extent, the “implied vocabulary” of your site.

Does the customer speak your language?

Some sites are so filled with jargon that both the designers, and the individuals who are evaluating the site agree that the visitor wants, needs and demands the product or service when they read the message?. Generally, those evaluators are usually conversant with the product, its usage, and the language used in the message. Unfortunately, unless the visitor shares the same vocabulary and

comprehension of the message, the power of the message can go right over the potential customer's head.

The problem gets worse when what I will call “Regional Jargon” gets incorporated into a site. Some words, phrases and concepts do not translate well across cultures and geographic boundaries. I have worked with people who use phrases, concepts, and quotes from movies or books which are beyond the scope of people outside of their direct circle, but I am sure that you grok it already. If you have not read “A Stranger In a Strange Land,” you might not understand that reference. The right answer is 42; oops, you might not understand that either, if you have not read “Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy.” These are two examples of assuming vocabulary. They are cute IF your visitor understands; they are annoying when your customer has no idea what you are talking about.

This does not mean you should exclude that regional or industry jargon from your site. Just be careful that your use of it will have the appropriate impact. I feel very comfortable using an assumed vocabulary when communicating about technical products because a prospect who is reviewing the material and does not understand the jargon will be unlikely to become a customer.

For example, if I were targeting avid golfers for a golfing product, a joke/headline like “Removing the slice of life one chip at a time” might get a chuckle from the target audience, while being misunderstood by people who do not know anything about golf. There are specific definitions for words like CHIP and SLICE, which are problems that a player would want to REMOVE from their game. Therefore, anyone in the target audience would understand the attempt at humor.

As a Texas Hold 'em Player, I spend a fair amount of time becoming familiar with the vocabulary of the game and, by the time I had become reasonably fluent in the vocabulary, there were inside jokes that were used at the table that were not understood by new players. Sometimes the vocabulary makes all the difference.

Understanding the Joys of being Your Customer

How does it feel to become your customer?

The process of BECOMING THE CUSTOMER can either be uneventful, memorable, or extraordinary. Depending on the type of businesses, enlisting a new customer can be a chance experience, or it can be a highly considered event. The process that a customer goes through is dependent on the industry in question and the profile of the customer. Take a moment and consider the restaurants that you frequent or dine at regularly:

- Who are you brand loyal to?
- Where will you go for lunch?

- Where will you take your best client?
- Where will you take your family?
- Where will you take a date?

Depending on the situation, the needs, wants and desires for a restaurant will vary greatly. Outside of the restaurant industry the reasons for the decisions will change, but the issues will be similar. While staying within the same industry and category, the needs associated with each situation are distinct, so are the choices and motivations for each potential customer. Understanding these subtle differences can make the difference between meeting the goals of a customer, and losing out on the business. You must have the right offering and deliver the right customer experience.

Each selection process depends on the values and metrics of each customer in each situation. The differences in the customer's needs change the process of making a buying decision. As with many customer decisions, the final determination between which restaurants a customer will choose is based on matching -the desired customer experience to just the right choices for that situation. Each possible unique customer experience will leave a different set of decisions for those potential customers.

When you are hungry for a quick bite on the way to the airport, time and geography are very important. For an anniversary date, convenience and geography are probably less relevant to the optimal over-all experience.

Your job is to understand the customer experience you wish to craft and then tailor your efforts to deliver on that exact experience. As part of that crafted process, it is critical that you understand the following:

- What drives THIS customer to THIS EXPERIENCE?
- Why is THIS EXPERIENCE important today?
- How will THIS customer EXPERIENCE be evaluated?
- How frequently will THIS EXPERIENCE be repeated?
- How will THIS EXPERIENCE recruit additional customers?

What is so important about the customer experience?

We have considered that the process of BECOMING THE CUSTOMER can either be uneventful, memorable, or extraordinary. We, of course, prefer extraordinary. Consider the

process of designing the extraordinary experience of BECOMING THE CUSTOMER. I used to ask myself. "What is it that makes a cup of coffee at Starbucks worth so much more?" at first, I did not think that it was the coffee. But after going to Starbucks a few times I found that if I wanted to have a conversation with someone, I wanted to have it AT Starbucks. I found myself scheduling discussions AT Starbucks. I found myself researching where I could have a Starbucks coffee. Yet, I was and still am a Dunkin' Donuts customer. Sometimes, I want the EXPERIENCE of a Starbucks.

So why is it that I go to Dunkin' Donuts for a coffee and a bagel; and I go to Starbucks for a coffee and a meeting? It is because, without exception, I have never had a bad experience at a Starbucks. At Starbucks, the music is always pleasant, the aroma is always consistent, and the ordering process is always streamlined. At Dunkin' Donuts, I have had more than my fair share of "wrong orders" or forgotten items. I have NEVER experienced a wrong order at Starbucks. Starbucks has designed a customer experience that makes me feel that my being there IS the most important thing to the person behind the counter, and they are totally focused on ME for the time that I am there.

The employees at Starbucks are waiting to serve me, they are NOT discussing their bad date last night or any other random

things. They appear to be focused on ME, THE CUSTOMER and EVERY DETAIL OF THE OVERALL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE. For that, I pay significantly more for a Starbucks experience than a Dunkin' Donuts experience.

It is safe to say that if I wanted a cup of coffee while driving down the street; I would stop at a Dunkin' Donuts; if I wanted to sit down and experience a coffee, I would go to a Starbucks at almost twice the price. The remarkable thing is that I not only behave that way, but I have taken many others with me to share in the Starbucks Experience. And as a regular part of my life, I share the joys of Starbucks with others. That is the experience that you want YOUR customers to share, RIGHT?

Customer relationships can last a very long time...

Some customer decisions are made once a year; some are made daily and some are made only a few times in life. It is certainly the intention of a young man going to buy an engagement ring to make that purchase only once, but that does not mean that he will only be a customer of that store once. It is the job of that store to “enroll him” as a long-term customer. On my first major jewelry

purchase, the salesperson invested so much time in getting to know my needs that she was sending me birthday reminders for my fiancé until long after the marriage ended. She assisted me in REMEMBERING that I needed to remain the customer. That saleswoman knew that I was not really a customer until we had a recurring relationship. It is important to note that it took many visits to her store for me to make that first buying decision, but on the second trip to the store, I had made the mental shift that I was HER customer, even though I had not yet committed to a financial transaction.

The decision to be the customer is a commitment to a relationship between an entity and a buyer. That relationship can be with an outlet, with a salesperson or a professional, or with a brand. Regardless of which it is, you must consider it, nurture it, and value it. In the best of all cases, plan for it.

Building a bond between a company or its brand and the customers is the essence of the process of defining and building a mutually beneficial relationship, which evolves into the “recurring customer” relationship.

When I bought my first house, I used a real estate agent who was a friend. As it turned out, the seller’s agent was his neighbor, and would become my neighbor at the end of the transaction. If I

were to reengage in the process today, the first person I would call is my neighbor, not the friend.

It was the seller's agent who left the lasting impression that he did the better job.

I have never been HIS CUSTOMER, since I had been in an arm's length transaction with him. Since that time, I have determined that he would be my first choice recommendation. For a friend who was. considering buying or selling a house. In fact, my realization was a major shift, both as a customer and as a professional. Because he had done such a great job representing his client, I NOW WANTED TO BE HIS CLIENT.

What is the process of suspending disbelief?

The process for becoming a customer varies by business and industry, but there are similarities in the process of being chosen by a customer. Yes, I did say chosen. If you are building a relationship, most meetings with "potential customers," often called "prospects," happen as a result of one of these activities:

- Direct Marketing / Indirect Marketing
- Personal Referrals; Industry Expert Referral
- Professional Introduction
- Chance Meeting

Your job is to refine your marketing message so that it can be heard and believed through all of these channels.

Use Caution. Don't let your marketing message be tainted by the idea that “if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is!”

To move an individual from “prospect” to “customer,” you must establish your entity with a number of key characteristics like:

- Trustworthiness
- Credibility
- Availability
- Affordability
- Relevance
- Reliability

Your process must identify a list of issues for your industry and address each of them, as appropriate. When using the Internet as part of your strategy, you must take into account that, if your story is too good, believability will need to be added to the list.

I call the process “the willing suspension of disbelief.” Your job is to craft a message, image and experience that will remove a sufficient number of obstacles for prospects to turn them into customers. It is not your job to tell an unbelievable story, but to tell your story in an honest, believable way that will enable you to deliver on your promise to create a long-term relationship with a customer.

Many salespeople are tainted with the “used car salesman” brush. “Nothing a salesperson says can be trusted” or “that solution is so unlike everything I have ever heard, it can’t be true.” Striking a balance between appeal and belief is critical to your success in the acquisition of a customer. It is not necessary to overcome all objections. Henry Ford overcame the color objection for his first cars by declaring that you can have it in any color you want, as long as it is black. If you can’t overcome an objection, do not hide it – make a point of it, and reduce its value as an obstacle.

What is the process of becoming your customer?

How does your business craft both your message and customer experience in such a way that a customer not only wishes to do business with you once, but is willing to do business with you on a recurring basis. Further, will that customer share the fact that status with others who may benefit from your services and products.

- Is your product or service clear?
- Is your market clearly defined?
- Is your marketing message in the customer's language?
- Is your value proposition well established?
- Has your product or service been proven?
- Are any potential risks clearly understood?
- Are your customer service representatives easy to deal with?
- Are your sales people friendly and respectful?
- Are your guarantees reasonable, appropriate, and believable?
- Would your existing customers recommend you?
- Would your existing customers stake their reputation and credibility on recommending your organization?

Is the pathway to becoming the customer clear, easy, safe, and predictable? Are there obvious safeguards in place that will reassure your customers that they need not fear identity theft or risk from being associated with your organization?

What is the benefit of becoming your customer?

Every product or service you offer must have a clear benefit to a customer. You must be careful not only to identify the benefit to ONE customer, but you must also identify the benefits of the relationship for each type of customer you are targeting.

Each type of customer may have different NEEDS, WANTS, and BENEFITS and each may be in need of a different message. Do not make your customers IMAGINE why they need your product or service. Speak to them in their own vocabulary based on their own needs and wants.

What is the reward for becoming your customer?

Every relationship has its own benefits and rewards. Your customers will get rewards by using your products and services. Therefore, you must make sure you know what those benefits and rewards are, and clearly communicate them. For each type of customer you identify, you must also identify the rewards that customer will enjoy by being your customer. Be sure to include items like:

- Lower costs
- Lower maintenance hassles
- Higher reliability
- Better profits
- Higher quality
- Better customer service
- Better financial controls
- Fewer unpleasant surprises

Items appropriate for your potential customers should be identified. If necessary, include those items clearly and articulately. Sometimes articulating these items can also be the

difference between two possible vendors with similar product offerings. In the early days of working in the computer industry, I can remember the frustration of learning that people made decisions not just on price or quality; but on their perceived risk profile.

After years of experience, I now understand why it was so important for IBM to convince the world that “No one ever got fired for buying IBM” and that when a customer does business with IBM nobody will ever be able to accuse them of cutting corners. Each decision maker needs to make sure they do not put themselves at an unacceptable level of risk by choosing the wrong vendor, solution, partner or company, even if it costs a lot more much of the time.

Your job in your sales and marketing message is to clearly identify concerns over risk. Balance them with reward in an honest and believable way and, while doing it, you may identify intangibles about your customer experience that your competition has not realized. Also, you may identify areas for improvement, many of which will have little or no cost, but may have very high value to your bottom line.

What is the freedom of becoming your customer?

When you have identified the elements of risk and balanced them with the rewards of being a customer (as identified in the last section), there will be a sense of satisfaction at the completion of the customer enrollment process.

Take a moment to consider that ‘aha’ moment and decide if it has a place in your overall marketing pathway and approach.

Is there a compelling sense of accomplishment for the customer at the end of the process?

In rush hour traffic, both a Mercedes and a Hyundai will move at approximately the same speed. Both cars will get you to the destination at the same time, but each takes a different approach to selling the ride.

The recent Hyundai ads claim that “your pocket book will feel better at the end of the drive,” while the Mercedes ads claim that “once you have experienced it, you will never want anything less.”

Which is right?

Both. Each answer depends on the value proposition and risk profile of the customer. A friend of mine bought in on the Hyundai sales message, and traded in her higher payment Honda for a Hyundai. Both cars get similar mileage, while the Hyundai experienced notably more visits to the service department. A service technician noted that she had not spent the money on a higher reliability vehicle, like a Honda.

The Mercedes marketing message takes that reliability message to the extreme by pointing out that they could have cut corners and costs; but that is NOT what their customers want or expect. The risk of NOT owning a Mercedes is that “you might end up with something less...”

What does the customer really want?

IT DEPENDS! WHICH CUSTOMER are you referring to?

Are you referring to the customer that wants to save money or the one that wants the reliability, convenience, and experience?

What is the experience of becoming your customer?

Some brands have made ownership and participation a club unto itself. One of my favorite ads is:

“It’s a Jeep Thing, You Wouldn’t Understand”

And sure enough, they are right. Jeep - I personally don't get it, but their customers do, and they appear to be loyal. I have known people who just had to have one and were so happy they did. Jeep has successfully aimed a message to THEIR target audience.

I am an affinity Saturn customer and, given two similarly priced and featured cars, would choose a Saturn almost every time; (the only exception is of course a competitive product from Mercedes - but I don't expect one any time soon.) Saturn appeals to my practical side. I love the negotiation game and trying to get the best deal is always a rewarding experience. Despite that, I still prefer the no nonsense purchasing practices at a Saturn dealership. The high quality experience makes me want to go there first. The night I bought my wife her first Saturn, I also visited a Hyundai dealership. It was both an unplanned expense

and a surprise, since we were about to have our first child. The high pressure experience at the Hyundai dealership has kept me from ever returning to consider another purchase, but I take both of my Saturn cars to THEIR service center where they make me feel right at home EVERY SINGLE TIME. I have not been pressured for an additional purchase even one time. One day, my wife took her car for a state required annual inspection, and while they were working on hers, she found a car that she liked and took me to lunch in a brand new black Saturn VUE. That car - yes, that very one - is now sitting in MY DRIVEWAY, five years later. And as we consider our next vehicle, we will first go to one of two Saturn dealerships. After our next purchase we will have spent a considerable amount of money with them. I do not expect that we will go shopping anywhere else, since my wife has determined that she wants the Saturn Outlook as a Hybrid. Once it is announced and released, we will immediately be on the list for a test drive. --- NOTE: I am committed to buying a product that, to the best of my knowledge, has not even been announced yet.

Every other dealership and brand will have a significant uphill battle selling me on the combination of reliability and value (with the exception of the Mercedes Dealership) that I have personally experienced with Saturn. I personally like sporty two-seaters. The logical choices are the BMW-Z series, the Saturn Sky, and, of

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course, the Mercedes convertible. Based on that long-term relationship experience, it will probably be a Saturn Sky versus a BMW Z as my next car toy purchase since I must admit the Mercedes convertible is still too expensive for me to get as a toy.

Don't you wish your customers had the same value for your business? It is your job to tailor the entire customer relationship to see that they do. When customers feel that the experience was all about them, the benefits will last for years.

Why do they want to share the experience of becoming your customer?

I hate to admit it; but I am both the best friend and the worst enemy for my vendors. If I have an exceptional experience, I am a raving fan; but if I have a bad experience, I am a vocal opponent. Why is that? I like to think that it is because I try to be an “objective witness” to the overall customer experience. For the reference to “objective witness” - see 'A Stranger in a Strange Land' by Robert A. Heinlein (an objective witness tries to remain impartial when observing subject matter).

I share the good, the bad, and the ugly! I will review the product, the marketing, the customer acquisition, and the customer maintenance processes separately.

Many people want to share their good and bad experiences with friends, apparently in the hopes of helping them share good experiences and avoiding bad experiences.

I will say the same things to my vendors as I will say to my friends. Smart vendors will listen.

Some people are vocal about their vendor and customer experiences. These people will influence the shopping and buying opinions of others, mostly within their own social circles. As social networks grow, the influence of those messages will only grow over the next few years.

Many marketers do not quite understand the impact of social influence in marketing. The power of word-of-mouth advertising is going to run through social networks like veins of gold, not because of the purchasing of advertising, but because of the strengthening of relationships with influential individuals within those social networks.

This can be a powerful tool. It is already being used by individuals to request assistance in finding a vendor, a job, a business opportunity, or any number of other things. These trust networks are an active part of our evolving society, and their changing nature should be a fundamental part of any active business and network strategy.

Identifying Your Customer

Who is your ideal customer?

The questions are about to get much more specific to you, and I do not know YOUR answers; this is not a one size fits all question. If you believe it is, then you have missed the point of building a Specialty Business or Practice. Only You know WHO you are targeting and WHY.

So take a moment and complete this brief questionnaire for yourself. Visualize the answers in your head.

This is my ideal customer:

What is my customer's Fictional Name?

What kind of car does my customer drive?

What kind of sports does this customer like?

What kind of things does my prospect talk about?

What age group is my customer in? _____

What kind of job does my customer have? _____

Is the job relevant to the buying decision for your customer?

We are going to consider together what motivates that prospect, and how you need to expend your effort talking to the prospect to gain a customer... or more specifically, THIS ONE INDIVIDUAL. When you craft your message to fit this one individual, that message will also speak to friends. At that point, you have a way to sell your story to the individual's values and the values of an entire social circle! Let's consider them.

Why is that person your ideal customer?

What is it about needs and life experience that makes your business a perfect fit for this individual? While every McDonald's has a company designed menu and identifiable look, their customer has a particular profile. I do not see myself as someone who matches the McDonald profile very well, and am certainly not their ideal customer, but my wife is probably closer to the company's ideal. She drives three little girls around; all of whom really like McDonald's French fries and Happy Meals. Our girls think of a trip to McDonald's as a treat (and so does Mom when she doesn't have to cook). But why do people choose McDonald's over Burger King or Wendy's? It is not just the kids' meal, but it is the kids' meal CALLED "the Happy Meal with toy for Girls ... " But the girls ask for a HAPPY MEAL by name, and are reminded of it every time they see the Golden Arches.

What is it a customer needs and what is it that attracts the customer to what you offer?

Why are you the ideal supplier?

What is about your business that reminds your customers that they want to visit and do business with you and not your competitor?

Your hours of operation?	YES	NO
Your method of contact?	YES	NO
Your product?	YES	NO
Your service?	YES	NO
Your expertise?	YES	NO
Your Style?	YES	NO

If you are Starbucks, perhaps it is the smell of the coffee, the sound of the music, and the overall customer experience.

If you are Dunkin' Donuts, it is probably just the coffee and convenience.

If you are Saturn, it is probably the low pressure, high value relationship.

If you are Southwest Airlines, it is probably the fact that you do everything differently, and you give your customers high value for low cost.

What is it that makes YOUR business stand out to YOUR IDEAL customer?

How will becoming your customer improve one's life?

What is it about your business that will leave a long-term impact on the customer's quality of life? And in your sales cycle, does it matter? Are you looking for a recurring customer? Does your customer need your service again, or is it a one-time thing?

As you are designing the message, consider whether or not you have other offerings to share with them, either directly or through partnerships with other vendors, in order to spread out your customer acquisition cost. The most expensive thing you will do is acquire a customer, and if you do not leverage that relationship to its fullest, you will be squandering that investment.

I assisted in developing a strategy to acquire customers for a company, as Vice President of Sales, in 1994. My strategy was to identify as many prospects as possible at the lowest possible cost of acquisition, and build our access to potential customers in a positive cash flow way. This company makes software and has been able to sustain a profit selling software upgrades, add-ons and similar products ever since. We not only dealt with short term sales, but considered a strategy that would make our products the obvious choice for years to come. We actually looked for opportunities that would create a pathway to additional customers in the future through partnerships, joint marketing, and technology licensing.

Your goal should be to improve the customers' lives today, and evaluate how the long term relationship will give them benefit on a recurring basis whenever possible.

Profiling Your Target Customer

Who is your ideal customer?

Take a moment and review your list of details about your ideal customer. Visualize them in your head. What does the customer look like?

What is my customer's fictional name?

What kind of car does my customer drive?

What kind of sports does this customer like?

What kind of things does my prospect talk about?

What age group is my customer in? _____

What kind of job does my customer have?

Is the job relevant to the buying decision for your customer?

**What does your experience tell you
about the customer?**

What is it the customer wants? _____

What is it the customer values? _____

What are their priorities?

save money? _____

higher quality product? _____

higher quality service? _____

added convenience? _____

What are their motivations?

What are the things that you can do for them that make it easier for you to appeal to their motivations? _____

What are their interests?

Do they participate in sports? _____

What are their hobbies?

Do they read books and magazines? (If so, which ones?)

What is their income level?

What are the things they value? _____

What are the luxury items they can afford?

What are the things they crave? _____

What are the things they stretch for? _____

What are the things they aspire to? _____

What are their driving motivators?

- Image?
- Power?
- Revenge?

Can you put a face on target customers?

Where do they shop? _____

What is their hairstyle? _____

Would you know them if they walked up to you?

Can you speak with them about your profile?

Once you have identified a target profile, can you set up an interview to confirm your assumptions? You want to find three to five individuals who match your profile and see what is and is not appealing to them about your product offering. It is best to make sure you get both the positive and negative. Make sure that they are being helpful, NOT NICE. You want to know what they are really thinking. In the early days of my software business, I asked people if they would buy XYZ solution. I got so many yeses that I would go and build XYZ, only to find that they thought OTHERS might buy it; but for them personally, it was

not a useful solution. Test your assumptions against real people who will discuss their own real needs.

Can you tailor your marketing message to speak to that profile?

After your discussions with individuals who meet your profile, and you know what motivations they have use the information to tailor your message to meet their specific needs and demands. Does it use language that is familiar and motivational to them?

Can you make that marketing message compel that market profile?

Can you refine the message that speaks to them in their element truly compel them to contact you to start the process of becoming a customer? Is the value proposition high enough that the time to act is now?

Can you remove any obstacles with a slightly different message?

Developing Your Value Proposition

**How does your ideal visitor become
a customer?**

What are the stages that prospects go through between knowing that they need a solution and picking you as the vendor?

Please identify these in as much detail as possible:

What are the steps and necessary conditions for each one of those stages to be completed? Include things like financial qualification, term approval, special order availability, acquisition of insurance, and validation of licensing. (Expand this list as appropriate for your product or industry.):

Is there any vocabulary specific to the process that might be new to the potential customer that you will need to provide education on?

What does your product or service offer?

In terms of overall customer value, how does your product or service meet the felt need of the profiled customer? Describe

these felt needs in simple one line phrases like: “it will save \$100 per week in fuel costs”; “it will save 4 hours per week in delivery time”; “it will more quickly notify customers of delivery times”; “it will make the lives of customers better due to a total quality experience”.

What is their unique need?

Many of the benefits offered will not be unique to your company or solution. How will your product offering or solution be different from others?

Where else can they fill that need?

In the last question we considered that many of the benefits offered will not be unique to your company or solution. Where else will they be able to solve the felt need with an alternative product offering or solution? (Be specific.)

Are you a recognized supplier of that solution?

Do those outside of your business recognize your company as a premier provider of your offering? Who are they, and how are they recognized by others? Are they licensed trade professionals, recognized experts, trade journals, or members of the Press?

**If you have been recognized, by
whom? Does the visitor know and
respect them?**

How will you extend the credibility of these external organizations into your marketing message? Do they have awards, logos, standard endorsements that your potential customer will understand? Can they be displayed on your web site?

Is the value proposition clear to the visitor?

Considering the questions that were just answered, how will you use these details to enrich the message and extend the credibility of your product or service offerings into your marketing message in a way that your potential customer will understand and embrace?

How does that value proposition positively impact the visitor?

How will this refined message impact the user profiled? Will the message have any unintended negative consequences to your potential customer?

**Are you sure that the visitors felt
need is identified?**

Will your refined message allow your visitors to relate - your solution to their felt need - and is there sufficient reason for them to engage your organization in the process of becoming a customer?

Are you sure that the visitors' understanding clearly matches yours?

Have you tested the message and the vocabulary with individuals unfamiliar with your product offerings? Does your vocabulary ensure that your customer will understand your message? Did you minimize the potential for language barriers or assumed vocabulary? Have you found the right balance of the correct message to the profiled target?

Will this refined message assist your visitors in identifying your organization as the best solution to their felt need - and is there sufficient reason for the individual to engage your organization in the process of becoming a customer?

What is your assumed jargon?

What language and jargon are you likely to use that can be easily misunderstood? _____

Are you sure that the visitors recognize the value proposition?

Have you tested the solutions and benefits with individuals unfamiliar with your product offerings, in order to validate that your features and benefits clearly match the expectations of your potential customer? Have you found the right balance of requirements and cost? Do your target customers have the available resources to be able to take advantage of your value proposition? How might you enrich that message and value proposition to make sure that the benefits are clear?

Creating Customer Awareness

**How do you create customer
awareness?**

How do potential customers find information about businesses like yours?

How long does that awareness take?

For each type of awareness campaign listed above, how long does it take to get the message out, and how long after that will you see a result? How will you measure that result?

What is an idea virus?

Is there a way to increase awareness with a different style of campaign called an idea virus? Idea viruses are messages, activities, and other events that you can spread through word of mouth and other forms of communication, like e-mail, that get people talking about your market segment and your unique solutions to their problems. The virus portion of the message is that it has to be Mentally Attractive (appealing); it has to be Mentally Stimulating (shareable); it has to be simple enough to distribute (an e-mail, a picture, a message, or a slogan).

Will idea viruses work for your message?

Idea Viruses do not work for many types of projects, but if it can work because of your unique situation, and if it has mass appeal, it may be a cost effective way to bring an audience to your site.

One of my favorite idea virus ads appeared in the 2008 Super Bowl, where GoDaddy.com ran an expensive ad making fun of the “wardrobe malfunction” of a previous year. They had created their own Not-Ready-For-Prime-Time “wardrobe malfunction” commercial and directed interested traffic to their site - where interested parties could see the intentional “wardrobe malfunctions” from the current year and previous years.

I am not sure that the Super Bowl commercial itself will be the end of it, because I would not be surprised to find out that it became a viral video link that is shared via e-mail and other social media sites across the globe.

Can I leverage someone else's idea virus?

If you can't create your own media virus, is it practical and possible that you can benefit from one that someone else has started? Can you contribute to the message? Or the distribution, to use it to further your own cause in a positive way?

Are there some real world events that enable you to share information you can contribute that will be of interest to people?

For example, in 2008, a common question is: How do the sub-prime mortgage problems affect the real estate market for both local buyers and sellers? Does your unique experience help provide insight? And if it does, how do you use that to get everyone talking about your expertise?

Who are the subject matter experts in your market?

Make a list of the names, faces and sites that are respected within your target audience. Consider bloggers, groups, forums and

other social media outlets that can improve the recognition of your product, service or brand. How can these outlets benefit from your participation? What knowledge can you share that will be of benefit to them and their circle of influence? Have you considered leveraging these individuals to get their thoughts and opinions on your direction, products or services? If they like or can relate to your product or service, they may get excited about what you are doing and share it with others. Recognition by known subject matter experts could lend needed credibility and awareness to your offerings.

Becoming Unique

**Is your site one of a million or one
in a million?**

I tell people all the time that, before the Internet, the problem was finding a cost effective way to get the message out. The network marketing phenomenon of the late 80s and 90s was a lesson in what is called “duplication,” or the ability to replicate what others have done to guarantee success. The problem is that, when the Internet is included in the equation, duplication diminishes value, rather than multiplying it.

The reason that 1,000,000 individual auction sites are less valuable than one eBay is the value of concentration of traffic and focus. If you can’t stand out enough to be at the top of a search engine, and if you are not well funded enough to invest in the

advertising to buy that placement, you are probably in the wrong business.

Your job is to be one IN a million, not one OF a million... If you are going to be one OF a million, you had better be in a geographical-based business like McDonald's, Starbucks, 7-11 or Exxon. These businesses do not need to be unique, they need to be local. They are not competing against each other because, in their case, geographic context matters.

It is for this reason that Starbucks can have two locations across the street from each other, and they can both do well. The location and availability of service makes a difference.

How will your business get above the noise? What is your unique message, that is targeted to your potential customer at just the right time with just the right message? Why? Targeted advertising is much less expensive in the long run, and you can take advantage of it. Because YOU are going to identify who to target, how they will be feeling, and the questions they have.

When you understand the questions they have, you can then target answering THOSE QUESTIONS - and getting top search engine placement to find the buying customer - and not do just what everyone else is doing.

Everyone talks about Search Engine Optimization, but too few start with, “What are we optimizing for?” Why will that optimization generate more business? Do you know who you are optimizing for and what your visitors are looking for or what they believe they need or want when they are looking at your solutions?

Have you carved out your compelling niche for you visitor?

Have you refined your message in such a way that your visitors will know instantly that they are in the right place? Will you be using the vocabulary that they are expecting and is familiar to them? Will you be answering the questions they were considering and guiding them on the path to become your customer?

Will the ideal visitor know that your solutions target them?

How will your visitors know that your solution is just right for their needs? What is it about your message that will make them feel comfortable? How will you help them relate to your company and your other customers? Is there any advantage or other benefit to being your customer? Do your other customers compete with them?

Can I buy traffic from the right types of visitors?

How do you go about communicating to just the right visitor? The first problem to consider is, if you spread your media buying dollars too widely, you will pay for the wrong visitors. Conversely, when you spread your marketing dollars too narrowly, you will not get any attention. The goal is to find the perfect balance, and that balance comes from a long-term marketing secret.

TEST, RE-TEST, ADAPT, RE-TEST,

COMPARE, ADJUST, RE-TEST

Finding your target market is a long-term, evolving process. You need to keep working to keep visitors coming. You need to adapt to changes in the market, changes in vocabulary, changes in needs, and changes in messages.

Yes, with enough effort you can buy the right type of traffic - but only if you can identify who they are - and send them a message at the right time for it to be of benefit to both them and you.

It is critically important that you find a way to monetize the traffic you are buying, at a rate to keep your entire business cash flow positive and consistent with your advertising and customer growth requirements.

Finding profitable traffic that you can replicate on demand is like finding a magic ATM machine that pays you for walking up to it and putting your card into it without taking any money from your own account.

Attracting The Right Visitor

Are all visitors created equal?

A popular way to get Internet traffic in the early days of search engines was to put “commonly searched for” terms as key words or in the early portion of the page. ‘Brittany Spears’ and ‘sex’ were always popular, but were they the best way to sell cars? I would guess not. If you would like to do an experiment in wasting money, buy Ad-Words on Google for a popular topic, unrelated to your business. see how many orders you manage to get, and how fast your advertising budget disappears. Placing your message in front of unproductive individuals is both unwise and expensive.

How do you know if you are attracting the right visitor?

While defining the right visitor is different for every business, you and your business should have an idea of who needs, and who can afford your products and services. I am a big fan of crafting a message that will only appeal to my target audience and use it as a “landing page” for my advertising messages. That page should funnel qualified individuals down a path of interest, and divert unqualified and inappropriate individuals in another direction.

This is a useful way to determine if you are attracting the right type of visitors, and in an appropriate percentage of the total visitors you attract.

You should focus on identifying one question or fact that your target visitor will agree with and find a way to put it on a page and make that visitor click on it. When I was teaching web site design, I asked my students to pick a single sales objective for a page - a preferred action - and then asked them to design a message around achieving that single action.

Where can you find the right visitor?

Once you know that you can screen your visitors, you can then begin the process of acquiring traffic. The simplest method to get started is to buy Google's ad words - but use caution. Remember we are going to TEST. Actually, we are going to MICROTEST.

We are going to try to refine our message for maximum effectiveness in an attempt to micro target our visitors. If those visitors are NOT relevant to our objective, we want to find a mechanism to divert them to an alternative source when applicable where we can re-monetize the unhelpful lead.

Once we have micro tested our ad content, we will look for opportunities to partner with other sites with qualified visitors. These may include:

- Search Engines
- Newsletters
- Discussion Groups
- Web Sites for other companies
- Organizations

Can I buy traffic from the right types of visitors?

Until we perform micro testing, we can not be sure if we can find the right visitors at the right time, but our process for tuning our message will make that easier. As we increase our authority and credibility, visitors will appear faster, and without our needing to purchase all of them. However, that should be a secondary focus since it takes so long.

We need to keep careful track of our visitor-to-customer conversion rates, and the marketing budget we can afford per customer acquired. How many visitors your site will need on average to convert from a visitor to a new long-term customer.

Fast Search Engine Visibility

What constitutes good search engine results?

All visitors are NOT created equal. Some companies have put so much emphasis on getting traffic, they often disregard the important information, such as:

- “Is the visitor one who is desired?”
- “Will a visitor gain a benefit from the visit, or be a benefit to my company?”

It is much more important to get three qualified leads than to get 100,000 who are not at all interested in what it is that you do.

I am constantly amazed at how some sites attempt to manipulate search engine results to get me to their site, while having nothing

relevant to the topic I was searching for. Some sites have done such a good job of manipulating the search engines that, when I click to their site, I click back immediately rather than waste my time. The worst offender for me is expertexchange.com. They have invested so much energy in spamming the search engines, only to return ‘useless’ content, unless you subscribe to their service that I refuse to subscribe – because they are a bad netizen.

They may have good placement, and lots of click thru, but they have lost the ability to get money from me, and I have heard of many others who feel the same way. You need to give visitors something of value. When you are bringing them to your site, you are using a very valuable resource of theirs – time. Give them something for that time and attention. If you do, they may give you something that you want or need, like consideration of your product or service.

Are all visitors created equal?

I recently went to a trade show, where there were visitors walking from booth to booth. While a trade show is different from web

visitors it gives a few easy-to-visualize examples of bad marketing and bad use of visitors.

The nature of this trade show was such that all of the visitors were interested in enterprise computing. That does not mean that each was, in fact, interested in buying high-end software or services. Not a single vendor bothered to ask me if I was a qualified potential customer, although they were quick to accept and/or scan my business card.

At that same event, I was stunned to find that vendors that spent so much money to be there, but did not bother to tell me why I should be interested in their products. All their marketing campaigns managed to do was tell me that I should not be interested in a competitive product. I was intrigued at the lack of vision of a marketing campaign that exerted all of its energy in telling potential customers that a Microsoft TM product was bad without explaining the benefit or advantage of their own product. I cannot tell you a week later what the name of their product is, or what problem it solved. But I can tell you that they spent a lot of money getting people to wear T-Shirts all over the conference, telling me that the Microsoft product was bad. It was a totally missed opportunity, because they failed to identify a message and make it stick with their target audience.

- It is important that you get qualified customers to your site.
- It is important that when they get there, the message they hear lets them know that they are in the right place.
- It is important that an opportunity is not wasted by telling a visitor why they should not use a competitor's product, but that they never hear about yours.

Which is better: buying traffic, trading traffic, and being found by a search?

Organic search results are always best. That means, being at the top of a search engine (like Google) in response to a search is preferred. If it does not cost you per click, it is probably because you have earned that spot through links, content, and good site design.

The second best way to get traffic is to be directed through some sort of referral from a credible site that attracts traffic relevant to your needs and objectives.

The easiest to control, however, is pay per click search placement services like Google's ad-sense service.

Tracking and Adapting your Strategy for Success

**Do you know what you said or did
to capture a visitor's attention?**

If you do not know where your visitors are coming from, it will be very hard for you to attract more of them, at least by increasing what you did to get them to visit you in the first place. That comment may be worth re-reading. If you do not know where your visitors are coming from, it will be very hard to attract more of them.

The business of direct response marketing uses ADVERTISING to create awareness of a product or service. They try to predict success and expect a return based on the number of qualified leads who are exposed to that advertising. Consider your website

a form of direct response advertising and, unlike radio and television commercials where you have to wonder what motivates customers, the links you put on the page can show you what is motivating them, based on the pathway they take through your site.

Your job is to identify the trails that customers follow through your sites, and to use those trails to lead them to the conclusion that they need to perform one of your desired “Sales Objectives.”

Sometimes that objective will be to establish a dialog, by collecting an e-mail address. Other times it will be to get them to join a Facebook group, sign up for a newsletter, get them to follow your updates on Twitter, complete a survey, enter a contest, or call a salesperson.

The advantages you have are things called ‘weblogs’ and tools, like Google analytics. I am constantly amazed by the number of people who worry about cookies on the web, but who do not understand the information collected in web-server logs. A web-server log tracks every page a visitor clicks on, and typically records the page that the user came from, which shows when and how a user navigates a website. It is the equivalent of digital breadcrumbs for each user.

I have personally used server logs to identify where we were (on which page) when we were losing visitors, and by following the path traveled through the site, I was able to make strategic guesses as to what the visitors were reacting to, and I could make changes to the pages to adjust visitor retention on a page-by-page basis.

I considered this skill so important while teaching website design, that I made my students analyze a random website, using its logs, to identify weaknesses in the site and its pages. It is remarkable how much one can learn about visitors by following them through a site. If the links on the site are coded correctly, you can even tell, which link they clicked on, and how long it took them to make the decision.

Do you know where or how a visitor became aware of your solution?

When a visitor comes to your site, that visitor brings something called a ‘referrer tag,’ which I just mentioned for tracking users through your site. These referrer tags help you to identify where in the outside world your visitors are coming from.

You should frequently look at where your traffic is coming from, especially your free traffic, to see what you can do to increase it, if it is having the desired effects.

Do you know the visitor behavior pattern to becoming a customer?

You can learn the pathways a visitor goes through on your site, but once you get a handle on those, do you see what turns a visitor into a customer and a buyer?

Are there pathways that potential customers never return from, and never become customers? If there are, should they really be on your site? How many pages does a customer visit? How many pages does a non-customer visit? Do many potential customers stop looking on the same page? I was able to double the revenue on a website by changing the page in the buying process where many potential customers were leaving. Once I find the page, I next need to know why they are dropping off. Having that information, I am able to improve the conversion rate for the entire site.

Once you find the pathway to convert prospects to customers, you may want to investigate making detours in your site to direct potential customers through that process. A little bit of trial and error will help you improve your profitability in as little as a few hours, if you have enough traffic.

Do you have the ability to repeat a behavior pattern?

Once you have identified a pathway to customer conversion, does that process work when you get more prospects? Can you use pay-per-click advertising to get potential customers onto that path? How much does it cost to get a click onto that path? What is the customer retention rate from that path? How much do you make when they get to the end? Does that pathway turn a one dollar pay-per-click purchase into a 10 dollar bill, 50 percent of the time? If it does – you have found a way to buy leads for one dollar that will make you an average of five dollars per click. If you can keep that up, you have managed to create a cash cow that will produce dollars as fast as you can put visitors on the path.

Do you have the ability to scale that behavior pattern?

You must be careful when buying pay-per-click advertising to assure that your quality of leads and visitors does not change. Watch it daily and pay attention to changes in conversion rates. If your conversion rates drop, try to figure out what has changed, whether it is the ad itself, the market, or the rate at which the ad is being seen. If your profitability is slipping, reduce the ad spend and fine tune the process for better conversion before increasing the ad spend once again.

Once your solution begins to show results, can it become more effective?

Do not be satisfied with good results. Experiment for short windows of time with different changes to your site. Within 20 or 30 visitors, you can predict the long-term changes to your profitability. Feel Free to ask your customers if you can call them

to see what they liked and did not like about your site. Give them a gift or premium for helping you out.

Your customers are going to help you find more customers, by telling you what they did and did not like, or what they did not understand about your site. They can tell you if it has too little or too much language appropriate for their level of expertise. If your site is too technical, it may be handy to develop a similar one for less sophisticated customers that speaks to them on their level.

Can you describe that pattern of behavior into a model for increasing results?

There is nothing wrong with tinkering with your site, as long as you focus on making it profitable. If the changes you are making are costing you money, change it back. The secret to a successful Internet business is reaching the right target audience with a message that speaks to them, and turns them into repeat customers.

Make notes of what you learn. Create ongoing dialogs with existing customers about new products they may be interested in, or about how to change and improve your products to increase benefit to the customer.

You will never be done fine tuning your process for better results, which sometimes will be more products, and other times, lower cost to increase volume, profit and the number of customers you will be able to sell other things.

The highest and best value of a customer is the long-term relationship you have with them. Build it. Cherish it. Nurture it. And of course, monetize it over a long and profitable relationship for both of you!

Oh, and one final thought. Happy and satisfied customers will often give you links to your site for free, but always consider sharing revenue with them in an affiliate program ... if your business model gives you the margins to do it.

If this book was helpful, please consider my field guide to making more money on your site called, “If It Ain’t Broke, Don’t Fix It.”