



Connecting with your Customers online

September 2010

“The internet, as a marketing medium, now ranks ahead of TV, Radio and Print as the preferred marketing approach for many businesses and their brands in Australia.”

Blueprint Content

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Your customers are online, are you?

Whilst newspaper advertising and letterbox drops are still the preferred touch points with Australian shoppers, the market is changing. Increasingly, savvy consumers are turning to the web for product research, price comparison and purchase simplicity, which means you need an online presence if you want to stay connected with them.

A [website](#) is the fundamental component of an online marketing strategy. It allows you to reach prospective and existing customers en masse and to build and manage direct relationships with them.

Website Fundamentals

Every website should be part of a coherent marketing communications strategy. It is a vehicle for promoting your brand, products and/or services, and as such it should be integrated with your other marketing initiatives.

Most importantly a website is a living thing that requires regular attention if it is to keep pace with your business and make a contribution to your bottom line. Fortunately, it is also an extremely measurable and pliable tool which allows you to make changes quickly if something isn't working.

This requires vigilance on your part and a commitment to monitoring your customers changing habits and requirements in particular their onsite usage behaviour. When you treat your website like an evolving asset, making regular changes to it, you will be able to ensure it continually “speaks to your customers” (and meets their needs).

Website Objectives

When building a website you must first identify the key objectives you want it to achieve because this will influence the design. These could be anything from:

- **Distribute information**
- **Gather market research**
- **Build a customer database**
- **Build customer relationships**
- **Build brand awareness online**
- **Reduce costs of traditional marketing**
- **Convert traditional sales to online**

WEBSITE DO'S AND DON'TS

Look and Feel Considerations

Your website should match your brand image. It should convey the same look and feel and promote your Unique Selling Proposition (USP), just like any other communication platform. **Consistency of message is the key.**

Make sure your designer uses style sheets to create universal styles so everything will look the same – this is important from a branding perspective as well as assisting with the speed of downloading pages and ensuring consistency with the look of your website no matter what computer environment it is viewed in.

“Design is everything. It encompasses the look and feel of the website, the content and most importantly navigation around the site. The underlying principle to remember is KISS—Keep It Simple Stupid!”

DO

- ✓ Ensure your website is clean and simple
- ✓ Follow Corporate Style Guide for consistency
- ✓ Use consistent colours and type. Contrasting colours or simple backgrounds make your text easier to read
- ✓ Have plenty of white space
- ✓ Make sure people can identify your site instantly. Always display logo and tagline clearly and consistently on each page
- ✓ Minimise use of animated graphics and ensure “alt image text” is always used for images. This supports best practice SEO principles and also site usability for those with images turned off
- ✓ Provide a skip option for Flash. Give your customers the option if they don't have time to sit through flashy introductions
- ✓ Make sure your font is legible i.e. the style and size. Make text large enough to read i.e. 11 or 12pt and increase line spacing to improve readability
- ✓ Increase website readability. No line of text should be more than 600 pixels wide and don't make your page too wide
- ✓ Links should be blue or underlined or **both**. An alternative for links is that they change on roll-over for easy identification.
- ✓ Explain what you are linking to. Use descriptive text

DON'T

- ✗ Over-clutter pages
- ✗ Make your customers sift through pages and pages of irrelevant graphics
- ✗ Bog your website down with large image files. Busy backgrounds or full image backgrounds will hamper page loading time
- ✗ Let flashy multi-media and distractions overtake your site. Avoid too many annoying distracting elements i.e. auto-loading sound, animated GIF's, pop-up windows and blinking text
- ✗ Avoid text in images
- ✗ Don't type more than a few words in ALL CAPS
- ✗ Never use more than one exclamation point !!!
- ✗ Avoid requiring Plug-Ins
- ✗ Use horizontal scrolling
- ✗ Underline words if they are not links



WEBSITE DO'S AND DON'TS

Navigation Considerations

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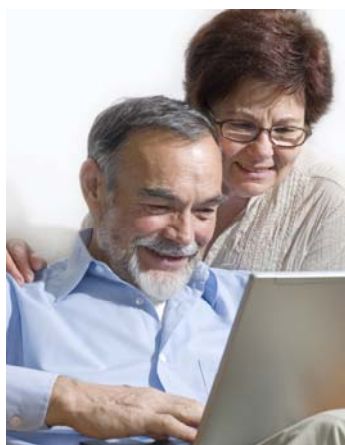
DO

- ✔ Be accessible – put contact information or a link to it on the top and/or bottom of every page
- ✔ Include your phone number – there is nothing more frustrating than being directed to an email address or physical address only
- ✔ Include a way to get back to the home page from every page. Include a clickable logo and text “HOME”
- ✔ Provide a Table of Contents, Site Map and a Search option. These tools will help people quickly get to where they want.
- ✔ Make sure your address bar is visible
- ✔ Include fully functional navigation bars and menus (preferably at left or top of each screen)
- ✔ On long pages include navigation elements on BOTH the bottom and top or left of pages, so that users don't have to scroll back up
- ✔ Make sure your site works in multiple browsers
- ✔ Minimise clicking and scrolling. Put as few clicks between your visitor and information as possible – it's a fine balance between putting a lot of information on each page to minimise clicking, and too much information
- ✔ Limit page length to 2 full screenfuls (or 6 - 7 screenfuls for articles)
- ✔ Consider utilising more vertical scrolling for pages with a lot of content. New research shows that the first thing people do after page upload is scroll down
- ✔ Have a bottom banner about your business, containing key links and contact information

DON'T

- ✘ Use cascading menus, rollovers and pop-ups
- ✘ Your Home page should not be a splash page with no meaningful information i.e. “Enter Site Here”
- ✘ Put navigation links only at the bottom of pages otherwise users have to scroll down to find them (unless your pages are very short)
- ✘ Force your customers to upgrade or download a new browser just to view your website. Aside from Flash and Adobe Reader plug-ins, don't force them to download software or other plug-ins

“When it comes to navigation - simple and functional is the key.”



Make sure your website is user-friendly and accessible to all potential customers..

WEBSITE DO'S AND DON'TS









Content Considerations

It is important to ensure you make proper use of text on your website. Search engines ignore graphics and flash files – so if you want people to find your website through a search engine you need to make sure you use text on every page, preferably with links on each page to other pages on your website.




Keeping content fresh and relevant is paramount. Remember a website is a long term investment which requires constant attention. Update the content on your website regularly to encourage customers to come back. Make sure you have supplemental links between related pages on your website so your user can pass between related topics with a simple click of the mouse.

*“Keeping
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DO

-  Use a consistent voice/tone. The tone of your website should mirror the tone of your traditional marketing communications
-  Check Spelling – make sure there are no typos and grammatical errors – this sounds obvious but it's amazing how many websites contain misspellings
-  Make sure content addresses WIIFM
-  Include dates on articles, catalogues and offers
-  Use bulleted lists or short paragraphs
-  Use plenty of sub-heads
-  Provide compelling content - every page should share something of value
-  Build date and time coding into your CMS to reduce time taken to update your site.

DON'T

-  Use superfluous text
-  Use excessive industry jargon, or if you do use jargon, make sure you explain it
-  Place too many links on a page (maximum of four is a good guide)

WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

Launching Your Website

Do not launch a website without testing to make sure everything is working. For instance, don't ask consumers to register for a newsletter or VIP club, and tell them you will send an email with a password to login, only to have the backend fall down, and the customer left hanging! Ensure that UAT (User Acceptance Testing) is completed in (at the very least) the most popular browsers to ensure the site is functioning as it should.

Have a plan for the year ahead. Remember your website requires commitment and the resources to update it regularly, but if you have a program in place with regular events and promotions established for the year you will already have the basis for your content updates and communicating with your customers online will become quick, easy and efficient.

WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

Measuring Your Websites Performance

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Like any communication vehicle, the performance of your website needs to be constantly measured. There are a number of metrics that are easy to measure, and if you can increase ANY ONE of these, your website will be more successful:

- The number of New Vs Returning Visitors
- Total Unique Visitors
- Pages per visit
- The conversion rate of new visitors ie. the percentage of new visitors who perform a specific action eg. Make an enquiry or purchase, click on an advertisement, sign up to a mailing list, enter a promotion, or do whatever else is the overall objective of the website
- The conversion rate of Returning Visitors
- Average time on site
- The average sale (this metric is only applicable to Centres performing e-commerce transactions)
- Bounce rate (this is the percentage of single-page visits ie. visits in which your customer left your site from the landing page). Obviously the key here is to reduce, not increase, this incidence.

Strategies for improving success metrics

There are three key metrics you can review to help you understand how your customers actually use your site, which pages are performing well, and more importantly which pages are not. If your landing pages have a high bounce rate, it is imperative that you make changes to the content or structure as soon as possible in order to increase your websites overall performance.

1. Onsite search items: By monitoring the keywords or tags that your customers use when visiting your site, you will be in the best position to meet their ongoing needs and keep them happy. It may mean making regular changes to your site, but it will ensure a far more enriching and supportive online experience for the user.

2. Top pages: Monitor the best performing pages of your website to gain an understanding of what works well. Do these pages have less or more content? Is the speed of loading these pages quicker?

3. Navigation Summary: Understanding how people move through your site will give you more robust insights into how you could change your site to improve its relevance and usability.

Strategies for improving New Visitors

- Promote website on all marketing collateral ie. business cards, brochures, letterheads)
- Affiliate programs
- Online banner advertising
- Online directory listings ie. Yellow Pages, UBD
- SEM or SEA (Search engine advertising)
- Search engine optimisation (SEO) should be planned and integrated into the design of your website. Make sure your web developer manually submits your website to each of the major search engines. Routinely monitor your search engine results and that of your competitors to prevent them from one-upping you in Search listings (see more on SEO over page).

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WEBSITE PERFORMANCE

Strategies for improving Returning Visitors

“If your landing pages have a high bounce rate, it is imperative that you make changes to the content or structure as soon as possible.”

- Email marketing is an efficient, affordable and flexible way to communicate with your target audience. It provides a platform to “Keep In Touch” with your customers and drive them to your centre and to your website.
- Provide next purchase offers ie. printable vouchers which can be redeemed in-store
- Membership – Capture as much information as possible so you can communicate with relevant offers and invitations that are more likely to appeal to the customer e.g. birthdays, interests, favourite shops, number of kids. Provide an incentive for joining i.e. a complimentary gift that can be collected at Centre concierge or entry
- Loyalty and VIP Programs – this is a good driver to get customers into your centre, but the program has to mean something extra to the individual e.g. entitlement to special discounts, offers and promotions, invites to special events and the latest news. Make sure the program is relevant to your centre demographic e.g. Mums and Bubs, Pensioners Clubs, Kids Club. If you’re centre is in an industrial area you may establish a local businesses staff club
- Run regular promotions in-store and drive customers back to your website to enter. Conversely, run regular promotions online which encourage customers to perform an action in Centre.

Strategies for improving Conversion Rate

- Fast loading website
- User friendly website layout
- Professional, personalised website design
- Compelling website copy
- Try to build your site so it customises content based on user navigation
- Clear sales process and pathway
- Integrate your CMS and CRM systems so that more relevant information is delivered to users
- Use consumer behaviour (usage stats) to customise content on your site, creating a richer online experience.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

This is a complex area, however there are some basic principles of best practice SEO that you should be aware of:

Onsite SEO

- Use links across your site to support related content
- Use descriptive URL’s
- Use image alt text
- Use descriptive links rather than just “click here”
- Implant key words into metadata for every page on your site
- Wherever possible, use your keywords within the text on each page
- Ensure each page has descriptive text included on the page
- Use descriptive headings for each page

Offsite SEO

- Use links between affiliate/partner sites
- Ensure your microsites link back to your main site
- Ensure your links and content are used across:
 - Social Media
 - Blogs
 - News Sites
 - Industry Forums
 - Online Directories
 - Online Ads

Shopping Centres and the Digital World

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Shopping Centres: What customers (and non-customers) want to know.

Use of the internet as a channel for communicating, researching information and conducting commercial transactions continues to increase year on year. Add to this the current explosion in social media and you can see why it is important for Retailers to engage in digital marketing with their customers.

The following recommendations are a guide to facilitating your customers online shopping experience:

- General accessibility and travel information i.e. Google street map, car park information and a centre map (particularly useful for non-customers)
- Contact details of shops: promote your retailers and their wares i.e. products, prices
- Support product search behaviour and product comparison if your tenants are open to this
- Promote Centre magazine/newsletter or store Loyalty/Gift Cards (if you them)
- Buying Centre Gift Cards online – make sure it is supported by a reputable supplier or use a secure server and facility i.e. PayPal if managing yourself.
- Trading hours, Centre Services and development updates
- A diary of events and news updated weekly – events are an opportunity to get everyone involved. Special appearances by personalities and celebrities are a good drawcard.
- Fashion Tips and Recipes – this may be a blog from a credible fashionista or a regular column with contributions from your retailers.
- Store and Retailer Promotions - make your website fun and interactive with competitions and games to play. Award prizes and get your retailers to sponsor the prize – they get recognition on the website and it doesn't cost your centre a cent in prize fulfillment.
- Retail Specials/Catalogues – these can easily be added in pdf format and removed when expired. Always remember to include dates so as not to mislead customers.
- Gift registry – bridal, baby shower, house warming – the opportunities are endless and it is another opportunity to get your retailers involved.
- Provide links to other services provided by your centre e.g. Cinema websites
- Careers and Leasing opportunities
- Seasonal Changes i.e. Christmas, Easter, Mothers Day, School Holidays etc – there are plenty of opportunities throughout the year to update content and “look and feel” to reflect special occasions.
- Database – if asking visitors to join a membership or subscribe to an e-newsletter service you need to include subscribe and unsubscribe options on your website.
- Include outwards links to provide supplementary information.
- Participate in social media by providing useful tools and apps
- Privacy Policy and Conditions of Use for the Website.

“Use of the internet as a channel for communicating, researching and conducting commercial transactions continues to increase year on year.”



Protect yourself and your customers by using secure and reputable server facilities and suppliers.

“When done right, publishing an email newsletter is one of the most efficient allocations of your online media budget. The trick is to do it right.”

e-Newsletters - 3 Tips for Success

1. Develop a subscriber acquisition strategy

You need a strategy to acquire new subscribers to your e-marketing initiatives or before long you will find your list shrinking. The reason is people unsubscribe at the drop of a hat. They change email addresses frequently too... the average churn rate is over 30%.

You should put your subscription box at the top of your home page (in fact – it doesn't hurt to have it at the top of every page). Offering an incentive to subscribe will also increase take-up (preferably one that will drive the user back into your centre to collect it.)

Only ask for the email address at first i.e. Make it quick and easy for them to subscribe. Then, once they've taken this first step, you can offer additional incentives and/or reasons for them to complete a more detailed profile of themselves. Display your privacy policy prominently.

2. Simple, personal and user - friendly design

Make it easy for your reader to skim – give them control to probe for more if they want to. Don't force them into reading. Subject lines are critical – short and punchy - tell them something they don't know!

Read your newsletter out loud – does it sound friendly or impersonal? It is a good idea to have your newsletter come from a person in your organisation instead of just your company name. Associating a human face with the newsletter helps to personalise the communication and make it more sincere.

3. Get feedback

Create a dialogue with your customers. Ask for their perspective and opinions on what they like and dislike about your brand. This information might even provide some interesting thought starters for new content e.g. Shopper Q&A.

Best practice principles for e-Marketing

Don't forget these basic principles when creating and sending emails:

- Include name personalisation in the email
- Avoid signs of SPAM such as \$\$, ALL CAPITALS, Free, WIN !!!
- Always use image alt text
- White space is good
- Do not send the email out as one image
- Less text and more links back to the corporate website for more information
- Subject should be no more than 7 words



CONTACT US

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