



The beginner's guide to online marketing

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How relevant is your marketing? Are you targeting the right people at the right time? How do you know? Jonathan Crossfield provides some tips and ideas on marketing relevance.

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Introduction

A couple of years ago I was a rail commuter, spending hours each day on trains and in stations. It wasn't unusual to walk through the ticket barrier to be accosted by promotional models handing out flyers for something completely forgettable. Yet, at that uncivilised time of the morning, I'm more focussed on getting where I need to be at a time that won't earn me scorn, on a public transport network designed to thwart me. Are commuters really the best people to receive marketing for a new movie, clothing outlet or bank account?

On returning home, there were almost always some bits of paper sticking out of my mail box. In amongst the pizza menus and tradesman fridge magnets, there would invariably be a real estate flyer suggesting I have my home valued. "A home similar to yours sold for a gazillion dollars in this neighbourhood! Imagine how much you could get if you listed with us!"

Yes, I could list my house with them, but I'd probably go to jail for it. You see, I rent. My neighbours rent. Probably half of the people in the surrounding streets rent. Each one of those leaflets is not only wasted marketing dollars but are also a great way of convincing renters to stay out of the market. We want to hear that house prices are going down. We don't want to have realtors telling us about their record prices! It's the wrong message to the wrong audience.

Marketers are attracted to major stations and mailboxes for the same reason they like big television commercials, newspaper adverts and sky writing; it gets the message to the largest number of people at once. Yet it is also a highly wasteful tactic where the majority ignore what you have to say because it simply has no relevance for them. But you're still paying for every postcard you print and mail, even when the vast majority go into the

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recycle bin unread.

How can you develop relevant marketing that hits the right people at the right time, in the right place and with the right message? Online, of course!

Making your business relevant

Let's start with the message that should form the cornerstone of any marketing strategy. Identifying the message means accepting some hard truths. Your goal should be that every person who sees your message feels that it speaks directly to them. That means your message is about them, not you.

No one is interested in your products. People don't care that your thingummy is bigger or better than the next one. They're not interested in how long you've been making whatchacallits or how many thingy-whatsits you sell each month. They're not impressed by complex lists of specifications or chunks of technical jargon.

Why? Customers don't buy products – they buy the means of achieving a personal goal, need or desire – and that can change from moment to moment.

Today you may be suffering from back ache while you type. Tomorrow your most pressing need might be renewing your car registration. The day after that, you may become obsessed with fixing that smell in the spare bedroom. Each of these may result in you purchasing a product – a new office chair, tyres or a scented candle perhaps - but the product wasn't the goal.

This is why marketers insist on talking about benefits and not features. You don't care how many knobs are on your office chair. You want to know how you can adjust the chair for

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maximum comfort and support. Your choice of tyres (and tyre fitter) may not be influenced by how many rally drivers swear by them. Instead, you may be more concerned with how quickly they can be fitted without breaking your budget, as your next stop is the RTA before they shut at midday. The particular scent of the candle may be less important than the fact that it masks odours.

The customer goal, need or desire changes the criteria for making a purchasing decision – and those criteria speak directly to the relevance of your marketing. Your business isn't really about the product you are selling, but the goals your customers are achieving.

Let's take a real world example. Telstra's product is primarily bound up in cabling that links your house to a complex network, coupled with the devices

people can use to access these cables. But if Telstra launched a marketing campaign describing copper cable and the efficiency with which they can get under your house to install it, you wouldn't be too impressed. Who gets excited about copper cable and trenches in the pavement?

Telstra is not in the business of selling copper cable or fibre optic cable or whatever they use these days, even though in its most basic form that is the product. It's not in the business of selling telephones, or bandwidth, or even connections. Telstra sells the ability for its users to communicate, access information and build relationships.

It is because Telstra understands the difference between product and goal that the marketing focuses on people communicating. One campaign revolves around the central idea of calling mum. Another campaign builds on the goals of family relationships and information access into the highly popular advert featuring a father and his son and the rabbits of Emperor Nasi Goreng. Yet, never once do any of these campaigns describe cables, junction boxes and the related hardware our money pays for that makes that call or internet connection possible.

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We may be paying for cables, phones and infrastructure but in our minds we're buying something else entirely.

Apply the same thinking to your own business. What goal are your customers meeting by buying your product? That's the real business you are in and will go a long way to helping you design a more relevant marketing strategy.

Right here, right now!

The right time and place is when and where a potential customer is considering a purchase. If you sell office chairs, tyres or scented candles, it is unlikely anyone is interested in hearing about these things unless they have an immediate need or desire for one. But if someone is typing 'scented candle' into Google, it's a safe bet they have that need.

This is why the search engines have become so essential to business and far more effective than targeting people on the street or in their mailboxes.

But with search engine optimisation, the trick is in knowing which keyword searches to target. Appearing prominently against every search for the word 'jewellery' could be a costly and difficult exercise, because of all the other jewellery and related outlets that are also relevant to the term. But 'jewellery' is such a wide term that those that click through to your website may not find what they are searching for.

Far better to target more relevant and descriptive terms, such as 'gold pendant', 'antique jewellery store in Sydney' or 'platinum wedding bands'. There may be far fewer people searching for these phrases, but it will be easier to appear near the top of those searches. Also,

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those that click through will be more likely to be interested in your offer. The more specific the keywords, the more qualified the customer. The best results can be gained by targeting long tail phrases of up to five words.

Don't forget the customer goal. For example, your ergonomic office chairs may be the perfect solution for people typing "back ache" into their search engine, looking for relief, or "Father's day" looking for a present. Relevancy doesn't need to always be product specific, but should always tap into whatever events or triggers cause someone to seek out a solution your product can answer. Research the most common event triggers that cause someone to search for your product and then identify the best phrases related to these.

Google's Keyword Tool

Visit www.google.com/sktool

Enter your website details and some associated keywords. You will receive the best phrases related to your business and an estimate of how many people search for those phrases every month.

How many thousands of potential customers can you attract with the right words?

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Relevancy changes over time

What may be true of your customers today may be entirely different a month from now. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 dramatically changed the priorities, needs, goals and desires of most consumers. Smart brands adapted their marketing quickly to remain relevant. Foxtel deftly turned the expense of a cable TV connection into an economic blessing by pointing out that it is cheaper than taking the family out for entertainment.

Search engine advertising, such as Google AdWords, can be developed to target just the right phrases, with the text more likely to trigger a response. Unlike natural SEO, AdWords campaigns have the ability to be changed and updated as results change or consumer behaviour shifts. For example, you wouldn't continue running your AdWords campaign for woolly scarves in December. Instead, it is short work to update it with your latest line of t-shirts.

This makes search engine advertising capable of far greater manoeuvrability than traditional search engine optimisation. If a campaign isn't working how you want, it can be tweaked and relaunched quickly and easily until you find the perfect wording.

Still, appearing against the most relevant searches is not the end of the process. When the potential customer clicks on the link, the landing page needs to directly answer the need. Too often, links from search engine advertisements lead to the home page of the website and not to the most relevant page for the query. What started as a highly relevant and focused campaign is lost. If you hit on a link promising a bargain watch only to find yourself on a home page offering a variety of products, you probably won't be willing to search through the website to find the offer.

The best strategies incorporate landing pages specifically designed to be as relevant as possible

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to each AdWords campaign by eliminating anything on the page unrelated to the offer. You want a bargain watch? Here it is – no distractions – click here, buy now, job done. These landing pages may be unique to each advertisement, allowing the greatest amount of tailoring. The only people who will ever see the page are those who have willingly clicked on a link because they are interested in an offer - and you only pay when they do. No wasted marketing budget and highly qualified leads that can be changed and updated whenever necessary

Topical email

Email marketing is highly effective in building valuable customer relationships and encouraging repeat business. Yet, too often, email campaigns make the same mistakes as the direct mail campaigns targeting my mailbox.

A “one message for all” strategy fails to distinguish the individual customer. Why send an email promoting a product to those customers who already have one? Imagine how annoyed they'll become if you've just notified them that the item they've just bought is now available at 50% off! What about those customers receiving entry-level communications and offers when they're a highly skilled high-end user of your services?

Customers will only open and act upon an email if they perceive something in it for them. This means understanding the varying needs and goals as well as their position in the customer journey.

It can be possible to segment your customer email lists into different groups; those who have bought product A, B or C; those who have yet to purchase; those who are business or high-end customers and those who are not. Each would require a different message and unique offers that build on what they have previously purchased. An email that provides content attuned to

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the current individual situation of the reader is guaranteed a far higher response rate.

Free for all!

Online marketing allows every campaign to speak directly to a customer's individual needs. By clicking on the link, searching for certain words or opening an email, the customer qualifies themselves as a potential lead.

Don't waste those opportunities by treating everyone the same. With careful planning, experimentation and refinement, you can produce online marketing campaigns that convert more customers for less outlay and far less wastage.

Staying relevant means talking to those who want to listen and giving them what they want – not leaflet bombing a neighbourhood and hoping the percentages will get you over the line. Online marketing in this way uses technology to ask the right questions of the right customers before inviting them to view the right offer.

I'd like to see the promotional models at my local station try that!

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Focus your marketing with tools from Netregistry

The Traffic Accelerator (SEO) from \$165 per month

- Australia's most popular SEO solution
- Get your business to the top of the search results
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