

ideas

ONLINE

{ **GREAT IDEAS**
for *increasing* your
visibility, credibility and profitability
(on the Internet) }

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(Business Activist)





Ideas ONLINE

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Far be it from me to exclude one of my favorite topics: online marketing. *Ideas Online* covers many facets of marketing your products and services on the World Wide Web. During the Internet boom of the 90's, many companies created websites that were nothing more than online brochures. They did this, primarily, because they were hearing the Internet buzz and feared being left behind. As more and more companies have developed an online presence however, it hasn't been enough to simply be "on the Web." As awareness has expanded, so has the initiative to make a company's website a real player in the sales, marketing and production arm of the business. In order to do this, however, you need to know how to draw traffic to your site. This is how the game of search engine optimization (SEO)* was born.

In support of your efforts,
Matt Schoenherr
Dreamscape Multimedia

(*Note: The terms "search engine optimization" and "SEO" are often used erroneously to refer to every activity performed in marketing a website to the search engines. This is actually known as search engine marketing or SEM. Search engine optimization tends to be more focused around "on-site" techniques performed to your website itself, while search engine marketing focuses more on activities performed at other websites. To keep things simple, however, we'll follow the convention of calling it all SEO.)

A Word on Marketing Before We Begin

(subtitled: What Have You Done For Me Lately?)

While not all advertising we see, hear, taste, smell or feel makes us better people after the experience, all of it is felt at some level—if it can pierce through the marketing mayhem and reach into our spheres of awareness, that is. So how do you break through the noise and get noticed? One of the best ways is to bring value first.

In addition to the two reasons we engage in most marketing—to persuade and to establish your brand within the minds and hearts of your audience—there are at least two ways to provide greater value in your communications: by informing and by entertaining.

Inform Them

Ads that inform or educate their audience go beyond the typical this-is-who-we-are and this-is-what-we-do messages. It is easy to spot these latter types. They usually are fairly dull and they all end in “buy our stuff.”

However, if you take the time to bring value to your audience in the form of education, now that buy-our-stuff call-to-action becomes much more likely. For example, a television ad for a high-speed Internet company may eloquently educate its audience on a fairly complex problem: bandwidth issues and how they affect online performance. In the opening scene, colorful squares (described as bits of data) containing moving videos, pictures and text fly by the viewer in harmony with classical music. As the squares move into the horizon, they join hundreds of other such squares in a darkening, swirling funnel. As more and more squares join the funnel, the music slows, the motion slows and the narrator makes the point: all this information bogs down your Internet

performance. The solution, of course, is to use this company's high-speed Internet service, whereby the bottom of the funnel drops out and all the colorful squares are allowed to rush through, unimpeded, presumably to your computer and into your waiting arms. The ad wraps up with "buy our stuff."

This makes for a simple and brilliant ad that both teaches and promotes—all in 30 seconds.

Entertain Them

Another way to provide value to an audience is to entertain. A dramatic or funny story engages the audience and flexes the imagination. Creativity and fun are elements we all need, so providing a story within your marketing message can go a long way toward delivering your idea. The danger here, however, is losing the message in the story. If the story or comedic skit fails to resonate loudly enough with the core message, you may succeed in entertaining them but you may also be left wondering about your conversion rate—or lack thereof.

May an ad that is informative also entertain, and vice versa? Absolutely; the strongest ads likely do both. Knowing what you hope to accomplish prior to creating the ad will help you raise your chance of being on target with your marketing message and thereby increase your chance for success.

As you draft your next television, radio, print or web ad, seek opportunities to build more dimension into your marketing communications. What story could bring more impact to your message? How might you educate your audience in a succinct and compelling way? What additional value might you bring to the brief, fragile moment where you have been granted your audience's attention? Bring value to your message and you increase the chances of holding that moment in your hands just a little longer.

Remember: The longer you engage them, the more likely they are to remember you, refer you and reconnect with you. The more they do this, the more likely you will make the sale.

[Insert "buy our stuff" message here.]



Google is Not the Only Holy Grail (When Promoting Your Website)

Scenario: After months of laboring, a company launches a shiny, new jewel of a website. A few weeks later, they determine no one is visiting. Wasn't building that pretty website enough to create throngs of customers beating down the doors?

Welcome to the small business owner's foray into the world of website promotion. This is alien ground for most, to be sure. Between client meetings, vendor meetings, minding the store and dodging mountains of paperwork, many of us may have a hard time *spelling* SEO, let alone know what it stands for. These days, most organizations rightly believe they need a presence online, however a majority of today's business owners and nonprofit directors think this means putting up a website (and a few hardcore do-it-yourselfers will even try to do this themselves) and then letting it ride. Wrong.

Enter the game; the online marketing game. Promoting one's company or cause online is not a destination—not unless one sees their destination as holding the top spot in Google amid their local, state or national competitors. While this can certainly be done, given enough time, patience and money, top placement in Google is not the only Holy Grail when marketing online. After all, Google has only to change their algorithm for indexing websites and your coveted king-of-the-mountain position can crumble away overnight, taking all your eager prospects with it.

No, the online marketing game is a journey and it's a journey that requires a fair understanding of the rules, as well as enough patience to play the game. If a small business owner or non-profit wants to take things into their own hands, they will want to foster a fair grasp of the following arts:

- 💡 Building a successful website by paying mind to layout, navigation, colors, calls to action, keywords and key phrases
- 💡 Leveraging the websites of others by using banners, backlinks, affiliate and referral programs
- 💡 Positioning a website with natural SEO versus Pay-Per-Click (PPC)
- 💡 Writing for a blogs, using audio, video, webinars, ebooks, article and news release marketing, and RSS syndication
- 💡 Using social media including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social networks
- 💡 Strengthening a brand's impression through the return trip by using memberships and subscriptions, email signatures, opt-in e-newsletters, autoresponders, and by leveraging TV, radio, print and events to direct traffic to a website and keep visitors returning
- 💡 Engaging visitors through videos, music and games
- 💡 Using forums and discussion groups to create community
- 💡 Empowering visitors with shopping carts
- 💡 Collecting (and understanding) key website traffic statistics and performing traffic analysis on things like impressions, page count, time on site, and bounces

As one might guess, it may take a while to get a handle on all the staples of a powerful online marketing campaign, so again, patience is a must here. The recommendation is to find one vehicle for generating traffic and work it for a

while. Then expand into another channel as confidence and results grow. Do a little marketing everyday and soon that website will be the 24/7/365 storefront to the world it was intended to be.



Dispelling 7 Common SEO Myths

Let us begin by dispelling a few myths about the art and science of search engine optimization (SEO).

Myth #1: If you purchase a new domain with maximum information per square inch, you'll rank higher in the search engines.

Answer: Yes and no. Domain names are the first things a search engine looks at, so if you have the name of your product or service in your domain name, kudos to you. Google, on the other hand, uses what's known as an "aging delay" for all new domains. This allows Google to weed out many of the fly-by-night's and give priority to the sites that have remained staples the longest (thereby making Google a more valuable resource to those who use it.) This is just one of over a hundred metrics used by Google to ascertain where your site shows up in the search results.



Myth #2: If you pollute your website with your targeted keywords, you'll propel your site to the top of the search results.

Answer: Maybe. You may also be blacklisted by the search engines, causing you to plummet in rankings or disappear altogether. For months. Or years. Sound worth it?

You must strike the balance between optimizing your website for the search engines and optimizing your website for your target audience. Yes, construct your content with keywords and search engines in mind, but always write for your customer. What keywords are they going to use to find what you're offering (read: What are they looking for?) The keywords your customers are using are the ones you want to target, so once you know those keywords, work them into your

site. You will do this a number of ways:

- 💡 Domain name (if the opportunity makes long-term business sense)
- 💡 Your title (specific to every page)
- 💡 Meta tags (description, keywords, et cetera, built into each page's code)
- 💡 Copy (your content about your, your services, ideas, etc.)
- 💡 Your links (use descriptive links instead of "read more" or "click here"), and
- 💡 Your image "alt" tags (which tell the search engines what the picture is)

While these are some important staples, there are still more items to consider. More about those later.



Myth #3: Pick the top words for your keywords and stick with them, regardless of whether you ever see those keywords generate any traffic for you.

Answer: Continually refine your keywords. You must know what your customers are searching on. It doesn't matter if you sell the best widget in the world. If your customers call your widget a thingamabob, they will never find you. Worse, they will find your competition who may make a very fine widget as well, but they refer to their widget as a thingamabob, which brings them up in the search engines in front of *your* prospective clients. To see what people are searching on, use keyword research tools such as the Google AdWords keyword tool (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>) or Yahoo Search Marketing (<http://marketinginfo.yahoo.com>) data. Create lists of the most relevant keywords and key phrases for your website and choose different ones to embed on each page (in the meta data and content.) The more specific you are, the more qualified your visitors will be to buy from you.



Myth #4: We can save all this keyword optimization mumbo-jumbo until the end of our web project and just add our keywords in later.

Answer: Construct (or reconstruct) your site with your keywords in mind. Once you know what your clients are looking for, now you can ensure your site offers it in the way they would like to see it presented. For instance, if we go back to our earlier widget example, you might consider that people may be looking for a particular brand of widget, type of widget, size of widget or widget genre. The more you know about how they're searching, the better you'll be able to set up your site to show them what they're looking for. When applied properly, your keywords will affect what you name your images, files and folders all across your website, so settle on them as much as possible prior to breaking ground on that big website overhaul.



Myth #5: I made my site in Adobe Flash. It's really killer. Whoever lands there will be really impressed.

Answer: Maybe, but they have to find you first. Back to optimizing your site for the search engines. There are certain things most search engines choke on:

- Flash
- Frames
- JavaScript links and menus
- Image maps
- Dynamic URL's

Search engines also can't read graphics, so without descriptive alt tags and file names, the graphics may as well be ignored.

When search engines get caught on these things, years ago they would simply stop indexing your site and not dig any deeper. Obviously, this didn't win you any visitors. Search engines are smarter these days and most can sniff past troublesome areas. You can certainly use these technologies on your site, however you also need to ensure a search engine can find what it's looking for. Using text links, linking images to web pages (and using appropriate alt tags), including `ror.xml` and `robots.txt` files in your website's home directory, and using sitemaps will help search engines make sense of your website.



Myth #6: See? I have the same keywords at the top of all my pages. This should work, right?

Answer: Only if you're in a very small niche or your local competition is just as lazy as you are. Make every page title unique. It's terribly easy to use the same title for every page as you're constructing a website. Take the extra time, however, to vary the title, meta description and meta keywords for each page. Ensuring each title is different and uses the keywords used within that page will take you further than relying upon the same title, description and keywords for every page on your website. The search engines rely heavily on page titles, so use them wisely. The title will be what the search engine presents as a link to your site (providing your site appears in the results at all.)



Myth #7: Okay! I've optimized my site! I'm done! Right?

Answer: Not quite. Search engine optimization and marketing is a *journey*; not a destination. Even if you make it to the top of the first page in the search results, you'll have to contend with other sites jockeying for the same position. Fostering backlinks to your website is a very important strategy for achieving search term

dominance and maintaining it. How do you do this? There are a number of ways.

First, ensure people *want* to link to your site. If you've worked to make your site helpful, informative or just plain cool, you may earn the links from other websites that will increase your standing with the search engines.

What if your site is lame? Well.. it's likely your search engine ranking will be as well. Don't be afraid to approach other webmasters with an offer of "link reciprocity". If your websites compliment each other, a reciprocal link campaign may be just what the doctor ordered to help drive traffic and rankings. Just be sure to link to only the best and the brightest; your links are a reflection upon you and your site to your visitors and the search engines. Other ways to grow backlinks may include social bookmarking, article marketing, news release sites, and posting your link when commenting on blog sites. All these methods need to be handled responsibly and maturely, otherwise you risk rebuke by the Internet community. Strive to provide value in whatever you post and you go a long way toward keeping your reputation in good standing.

50 Ways to Make Your Website an SEO Powerhouse

Do you want a website that gets found in Google, Yahoo, and other top search engines and directories? Do you want more traffic? Do you want more revenue? It's not terribly hard, but it takes some work. Now that we've dispelled some of the SEO myths out there, here are 50 ways to optimize your website and increase the march of qualified traffic to your door.

What's In Your Code?

1. Add brief descriptions to the alt attribute of image tags. The attribute should describe the image, not be a summary of the article.
2. Use H1, H2, and H3 for titles and headings. Ensure the main body content is immediately after the H1, with no breadcrumbs* or navigation in between.
3. Create a relevant title specific to every page. Using the actual article title that appears in the page is a good idea.
4. Use style sheets as much as possible to keep page sizes lower and download times faster.
5. Use brief and relevant meta tags (keywords and descriptions) to provide a backup for the description that appears in search engine listings. If your business is geographically relevant, make sure your keywords are too.
6. Don't fill the meta tags with words that don't appear in the content of the page. The exception to this is to put common misspellings in the meta tags.

(*breadcrumbs is a hierarchical list of links, usually displayed at the top of a web page, offering a path back to previous pages, i.e., Home | Used Cars | Toyota | Camry.)

7. Don't repeat meta tag content (descriptions, keywords) on every page. The content should be specific to the page.
8. If addressing a different topic, consider creating a separate site rather than making a site a sub-site of a larger one.
9. Do not make every visit to a URL unique by appending a session ID or something similar.
10. Create a site map. This is as much for users as for search engines as it can serve as a gateway to deeper content.
11. Don't link to redirects. Better to link directly to the destination page.

Images, Flash & Video

12. Avoid creating images that contain only text (i.e. if an image contains just text, consider using HTML instead.)
13. Ensure all images are named appropriately, have alt tags and are placed near text that is relevant to the image.
14. Don't place important content in Flash movies. Better to have the content outside of the Flash and in the HTML where it can be read by the search engines.
15. Include transcripts for video or audio interviews.

Copy and Content

16. Create a title that uses words that describe the main theme of the article.
Bonus if you can work in a keyword or two.
17. Use headings and sub-headings that describe the main theme of the copy that follows.
18. Don't automatically swap out repeated words and phrases in favor of less common words and phrases.
19. Post all content on the website including newsletters.
20. Keep all special content such as Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving specials online.
21. Don't use pop-up windows for content. If pop-ups are necessary, provide an alternative link to the same page that isn't a pop-up.
22. Try not to remove content from a website. Once indexed, removing it can create a 404 event ("Page Not Found" error) or leave the visitor disappointed. If you must remove a whole page, section or site, use 301 redirects to point search engines to an alternative.
23. Ensure all content—in particular old content—has a link pointing to it. Use a sitemap or archive list page if necessary.
24. Allow search engines to view forum discussions. This is free content.
25. Update content as often as possible. Search engines like frequently updated sites and will visit more frequently.

26. Don't worry about writing articles that are too long. The longer the better when it comes to SEO.

Links

27. Use link text that is relevant to the destination page. Avoid creating links that read only "click here" or "read more".

28. Don't create links out of entire sentences.

29. Don't fill the page footer with links to other sites. Better to keep the list short.

30. Cross-link between pages in the web site.

31. Link to external sites sparingly, only when valuable to your visitor.

32. Encourage external sites to link to specific content. Many sites are open to sharing links.

More Search Engine Marketing Best Practices

33. Decide what search phrases you want to target. Use a tool such as the Google keywords suggestion tool to see what search phrases are popular, and optimize your site for these. You can optimize for any number of phrases; a bigger site can target a greater range of phrases.

34. Clean up URLs. No capital letters, no spaces, no special characters. Separate each word with a "-" dash. Make sure each URL accurately describes the page.

35. Remove query strings from URLs. No question marks in your URLs.
36. Redirect the non-www version of your site. When you enter domain.com into the browser, it should redirect you to www.domain.com using a SEO friendly 301 redirection.
37. Make sure you don't link to "index.htm" or "index.php" when referring to your homepage. Instead, link to "/".
38. Remove frames from your site.
39. If your main navigation is flash or image based, ask yourself if it can be done using CSS. If it can, do it.
40. If using CSS styled text for navigation is unthinkable, then add text-based footer navigation on every page.
41. Add a Google XML sitemap, even if it's just a simple list of all the URLs on your site. Submit this to Google through the Google Sitemaps program or Google Webmaster Tools (<http://www.google.com/webmasters/>).
42. Is your website tables-based? Consider a cleaner CSS-based layout for your site.
43. Have you got a website statistics program installed? Do you know how to access it, and do you check it regularly? If not, discover Google Analytics.
44. Do you know where your website currently sits for your main phrases? If not, check Google, the localized version of Google (e.g. google.co.nz,) Yahoo and MSN. Remember: few visitors will search past page three.

45. Check the optimization of each page. Pick one search phrase that is relevant to the content on the page. Ensure the page contains the phrase in the title, H1 heading, twice in the meta description, twice in the opening paragraph, and also in the URL if possible.
46. Have good content? SEO will be much harder if you don't have plenty of original text content, so engage in more time writing good content.
47. Check the source order of your page. Good source code will have the page content as close to the top of the HTML document as possible, and the least important elements such as sidebars and footers last. If you can get the content above the main navigation, great.
48. Action all recommendations that it makes, such as fixing broken links. Look carefully at the list of URLs, and make sure they are clean (no spaces, capitals, etc.)
49. Check the search engines to see how well indexed your site is. If the search engines have indexed pages that have since been moved or deleted, setup a 301 redirect to redirect all traffic that these pages generate (or lose it).
50. If you are a local "bricks and mortar" business, make sure you use your town / city / country on every page, in the title if possible, and in close proximity to your chosen search phrase.



How to Choose Keywords for Your Website

Say you are in the process of (re)building your website. You have heard you want to make your website more relevant to the search engines, but why? There are two important reasons for optimizing your website toward this end.

Your first goal is to improve your website's rankings and therefore the amount of qualified traffic. "Qualified traffic" is a term to describe a stream of visitors actually seeking what you're selling as opposed to the random spray of

- 💡 'Bots and search engines spidering (indexing) your website,
- 💡 Accidental, I-thought-you-were-this-but-you-are-really-that hits, and
- 💡 Your competitors or those of casual curiosity.

The second goal, of course, is to generate "sales" or "conversions". If your website isn't prompting anyone to read, watch, listen, call, buy, write or sign-up, it is essentially an ineffective online brochure. As a website owner, your goal is to make your site compelling enough to inspire your visitors to take a desirable action.

Your mission is to eventually convert them from unmoved onlooker to enthusiastic participant. However, you must first get them to your website. Here it is time to recognize the search engines are one of the largest conduits into your site. It's time for you to romance them.

We know one of the best ways to make your website relevant to the search engines is to work keywords into your site. (See the next chapter "How to Work Keywords into Your Website" for further guidance on this.) But how do you pick them? How do you decide which keywords to use?

Brainstorm for Search Terms

Begin selecting your keywords by placing yourself in your customer's shoes. Here are some questions to ask:

- 💡 What are the products and services that compel your customers seek you out?
- 💡 If they went to the phone book, under what category would your customers find you?
- 💡 What services do your competitors offer?
- 💡 How many different ways can you phrase your product or service? (i.e. lawn care, lawn mowing, lawn maintenance, grass mowing, mow grass, yard mowing, yard care, yard maintenance, edging, and landscaping may all be considered as viable keywords by someone simply looking for a service professional to come in and mow their lawn.)
- 💡 If your product or service is limited to your location, be sure to list some of your service locations and neighboring towns. For instance, if you're a lawyer, you're probably practicing law locally—not on the other side of the country. Your town or city will be one of your keywords then.

Build Your Keyword List

Create a list of about 30 keywords and key phrases and—if applicable—include your service area among these. For more ideas, you can go to the Google Adwords keyword tool (just do a search in Google for “keyword tool” and you're sure to find it at the top of the results. The address is too long to include here and it occasionally changes.) Enter your key phrases and you will receive even more

suggestions. You'll also find statistics detailing how often those keywords are used and how much competition there is among Google's pay-per-click customers for those keywords.

Remember: Your keywords should reflect what your prospective customers will use—not necessarily what you would use.

By now, you should have a pretty good feeling for the keywords and key phrases you'll use on your site. Your next mission will be to place them into your site.



How to Work Keywords into Your Website

One of the most important things you can do to improve your rankings in the search engines and directories (Google, Yahoo, Bing, DMOZ, et cetera) is to ensure your website is optimized in accordance with the keywords and key phrases you are looking to target.

To “optimize” a website for search engine relevancy means going over it with a fine-tooth comb and seeking out ways to make the website more targeted toward the topic it incites. There are a number of ways to do this.

Domain Name

Does your domain name carry with it “maximum information per square inch?” As in, is your product or service in your name? While this can help your rankings, it is not the end all, be all. After all, do a search in Google on “fast food” and you will notice McDonald's and Wendy's sites come up to the top and their domain names are not mcdonaldsfastfood.com or wendysfastfood.com.

Page Titles

Each web page on your site should have its own distinct title. A web page title should tell the user and the search engines what the page is about and you want to make sure to work in a couple keywords relevant to your website and specific to that page.

Recommendation: Resist the temptation to place your company name first in the title—your keywords are more important to both humans and 'bots, so they go first.

Metadata

Add keywords and key phrases into your website's metadata. Every web page has the capacity to have within it a hidden description and set of keywords. Whether web designers make use of this feature is another matter. Besides your domain name and page titles, this is one of the first things the search engines use to determine where in their indexes your site should be placed.

Content

Your copy (the text you write,) your links and the images you choose can all be constructed to give the search engines a greater idea about your website's singular reason for being.

When you seek to "keyword optimize" your website, you begin by knowing the keywords you want to target. Once you have a list of 20 to 30 keywords or key phrases, you may then begin to craft your message to your public, sprinkling in those important words along the way. A good rule of thumb here is to focus on a few keywords per page, rather than trying to stuff them all onto every page.

Marketing Tip: Write for humans, but optimize for search engines. Do not pack your site with your keywords. The top search engines have algorithms in place that will penalize for "keyword stuffing." (Keyword stuffing is considered to be a "black hat" search engine optimization technique and is wonderful way to get your website banned from the search engines. Not recommended.)

Links

Descriptive links are another great way to tell the search engines what your site is about and they carry a good amount of weight and should be used wisely. If

you are merely stating “click here” or “read more” you are missing an opportunity. Instead of stopping at “read more”, build a little more information into the link by saying “read more about online marketing” (or whatever your topic.) Assuming “online marketing” was one of our key phrases, we just gave that search engine a little more reason to promote our site when someone searches on online marketing.

Images

Even the images you use can build relevancy for your website. For example, if you have a dog grooming company, abstain from putting up pictures of your clients that still carry the same filename as the day they were pulled off the digital camera. “DC3459.jpg” tells the search engines nothing about the subject of that image. Since search engines cannot actually see the image to interpret it (yet,) they can only rely upon the filename you give your image (and an “alt” tag, which we will discuss later,) balanced against the rest of the page on which it resides. A better filename might be “dog-grooming-service.jpg” or “pet-grooming.jpg.” This same principle holds true for every filename you use on your site (.doc, .pdf, .gif, .htm, .php, etc..) including even the pages of your website.

Afterglow

Does it sound like we are catering to the search engines? We are. Search engines and directories are large conduits into your website. Without them, there would be considerably less traffic on your site, so you want to make it clear to them you are 1) an authority in your field, and 2) your website contains great value to those who will find it.



What to Look for in a Web Design Company

You have a website. Maybe it looks good, or maybe.. not so much. Maybe you've tried to get help fixing it, but your current webmaster seems to have fallen off the face of the Earth. At the very least, they have been ignoring your pleas for help. Here are nine signs it's time you had best be shopping for a new web company:

1. Lack of response (or even signs of life) when you need help.
2. Email goes down regularly.
3. Website goes down regularly.
4. Website doesn't work right.
5. You can't create and manage your own email accounts.
6. You can't create or edit content for your own website.
7. You are paying monthly maintenance fees but you don't make monthly updates.
8. You tell colleagues what your web hosting costs are and they fall out of their chairs.
9. You have been paying into a search engine marketing program for months with no results.



Okay, so now you know what you don't want. What to look for in the next web company then? Your new web company should:

1. Have been in business for a couple years, minimum.
2. Speak to you on your level; not above your head.
3. Operate during reasonable business hours.
4. Possess an attractive, easy-to-use website.
5. Provide a mature portfolio of client work you can view.
6. Have references you can call and/or testimonials you can view.
7. Have a support path they can explain to you, including contact details and directions on opening up a helpdesk ticket.
8. Offer tools that allow you to help yourself if you're the do-it-yourself type. This includes ways to administer your own email accounts and webpage content.
9. Come up near the top of the search engine results. (This tells you they will also likely know how to market your site online.)
10. Be able to ask intelligent questions that help you frame your web goals.
11. Provide you with a free estimate on web work, even if that estimate includes a "discovery" meeting where you both engage in a more in-depth analysis of your project requirements.
12. Feel comfortable to you by the end of the first phone call.

Like choosing a lawyer, doctor or dentist, selecting a web designer is a commitment, so be sure to do your homework. Interview a few different companies to get a sense for personalities, the client base they are accustomed to working with, and their fees (both hourly and renewing.) Ultimately, you are seeking a smooth, pleasurable working relationship that marries your vision and goals with their insight, talents and skill. Seek out the web professionals who feel right to you! Owning and maintaining a successful website can be great undertaking, but it can also be great fun when you've teamed up with the right people!



The Slippery Slope of E-newsletter Marketing

So you've decided to produce a newsletter. Better yet, you've decided to make it an e-newsletter and send the whole thing electronically. Where to start?

Consider this:

When to say it?

How often do you expect you'll send out the newsletter? Keep in mind the frequency, the size and the complexity of your e-newsletter, as it will dictate how long it takes you to produce it. Regularly putting an e-newsletter out into the world can be a fulltime job.

Caveat: When considering the frequency of your e-newsletter, start conservatively and work up into the ambitious—not the other way around. Most e-newsletters start out as a hot idea, but as lack of time, shifting priorities and the day-to-day grind creeps back in, only sheer commitment will keep the pace going.

Recommendation: Unless the e-newsletter is at the core of your business, start bimonthly or quarterly, then speed up to monthly if time and schedules allow. That way, if things get busy and you miss your quarterly deadline by a month, your readers won't feel it—as much.

Say it to whom?

Who is on your list? Do they know they're on your list? Six words of advice here:

Opt in, opt in, opt in.

Using a fresh list is one of the best ways to avoid getting spam reports from your audience. (Yes, even though they may sign up one month, they may also unsubscribe or list you as spam the next.) Internet service providers and e-mail service providers watch spam reports very carefully. If spam reports are too high, servers and connections can be shut down and—in the Internet world of connectivity—this spells death to these providers. Ensuring your list members have opted and double-opted into your list is a solid way for ensuring you're working with a clean list and keeping your spam reports low.

What to say?

Bring value; that's your mission here (as always.) Don't talk about yourself or your company until you have provided value to your readership. This begins with asking the right questions:

- 💡 What do they want to read about?
- 💡 What challenges do they face?
- 💡 What are their successes?
- 💡 Are there laws, regulations or environmental concerns that affect them?

Here are some ideas for newsletter content:

- 💡 Articles of value to your readership. You don't even have to write the articles yourself. You can write the article author for permission to reprint and provide them with full credits and a link back to their website.
- 💡 Client spotlight. You just completed a cool project for a client? Give that client some free press by showing off their project (which, of course, illustrates your own Herculean abilities as well.)

Marketing Tip: This same material will provide the case studies you later post on your website.

- 💡 Client testimonials. What glowing things have your clients said about you?
- 💡 Letter from the editor. This is a nice way to intimate the newsletter and organization to the readership. Bring the personal touch. This should be written by the newsletter editor or some other key leadership representing the organization.
- 💡 Banners, ads and links to other sites and services of value or interest to the audience.
- 💡 Coupons, promotions and more!

Additional elements you may want to include are contact information for your organization, your logo, the publication title, your brand colors and a few interesting images.

How to say it?

Don't place entire articles in your e-newsletter! One of the huge advantages to an e-newsletter is the power to place links within them.

Step 1: Place only an opening paragraph. This is otherwise known as a "hook" paragraph, and is used to introduce the article and generate interest.

Step 2: End your hook paragraph with a link that says something like "Learn more about [article subject]..." or "Read more about [article subject]..."

Step 3: Finally, link to the whole article which has been expertly placed on your website. (If you didn't write the article, you already received written permission to reprint this, remember?)

Not only does this drive traffic to your site but most e-newsletter services (Constant Contact, iContact, MailChimp, Aweber, etc.) will track and report a link's click-through rate, allowing you to gauge the interest level in that topic.

Marketing Tip: Want to increase your click-through rate? Make sure to include an interesting, related image next to the hook paragraph.

Afterglow

All in all, an e-newsletter marketing campaign can reap great benefits over the long haul, but—like blogging or keeping up with your social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)—it is a commitment. Use e-newsletters to bring resources and information to your readers as well as strengthen your own brand. Having your clients and prospects looking forward to seeing your brand in their inboxes is a reward that will pay in spades.



8 Email Marketing Sins Sure to Shorten Your Mailing Lists

After hours of tenacity and perseverance, you're about to hit 'Send' on your latest brilliant email solicitation. You want everyone on your mailing list to sign up for your "highly anticipated" workshop, buy your "amazing, not-available-in-stores" product and subscribe to your wonderful "breakthrough" service. You know it's exactly what your audience needs to make their lives complete in every way.

Wait.

Did you forget to include a compelling reason for investigating your latest offer? Does your message suffer from any of the following email marketing sins?

1. No actual details about all the magic included in your event, product or service. (No kidding. This happens. Sometimes we just expect them to do what we tell them, right?)
2. Nothing about why they should care about your event, product or service.
3. Nothing about what miracles they'll be able to work once they've received your event, product or service.
4. Nothing about why they want to move from their current way of life into your proposed "new and improved" way.
5. Nothing about how you are reducing their risk in trusting you if they decide to make the purchase today. Nothing about how they can they experience the event, product or service before they buy.

6. Nothing about the support, commission or affiliate program (if these exist.)
7. No link to that deeply informative page on your website for getting additional answers. (You probably lumped all the information into the same email didn't you? So you'll have no way of determining if they even read your email unless they actually sign up. Next time, just spare the lives of those poor pixels and send your list a one-way, direct mail postcard. That's (in)effectively what you're doing by committing this sin anyways.)
8. No sincere testimonials from others who have taken the plunge with you and been better for it.

Sound eerily familiar?

Often, email marketing blasts stop at features and forget to sell the benefits. Or, worse, they miss mentioning both altogether. In these cases, they simply fail to remind us why we care. So—unless you want them to completely miss the point of your email—you had better make sure you are dialing into your audience enough to give them a reason to care. As you're probably aware, we're usually dialed into a different station: WIIFM (What's In It For Me.)

Your audience needs to believe in you and whatever you're peddling first. How do you help them do this? How can you paint a true picture of great benefits and low risk to help them understand their own challenges? More, how you can help them overcome those challenges?

This is your mission, should you choose to accept it.

So, before you click 'Send' on your latest bit of email marketing brilliance, take stock. If a quick audit shows you are missing some key points, take the time to correct them. So what if that email has to wait a week before it goes out

properly? Better you exercise some patience and get it right rather than send out a transmission that misses the mark.



About the Author

Matthew J. Schoenherr is a husband, father of four, business owner, and marketing consultant. As the author of *Ideas*, he continues his work in supporting the worthy goals of service and commerce in the business and nonprofit communities. Matt crafted the *Ideas Online* and the *Marketing Mastery* series to help jump-start sales and branding efforts while improving marketing literacy through a format that is no-nonsense, easy to read and easy to implement.

About Dreamscape Multimedia

Dreamscape Multimedia is a full-service web design and marketing clearinghouse offering web design, web hosting, branding and marketing services for small businesses and nonprofits. www.dreamscapemultimedia.com

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For More Information

For more marketing brilliance, see Matt's website at www.mattschoenherr.com.



