

Making the Internet Work for You!

*A Collection of Articles
by
Philippa Gamse, CMC*



Philippa Gamse, CMC, President
[CyberSpeakerSM](http://www.CyberSpeaker.com), The Internet in English,
A Division of Total 'Net Value, Inc.
P.O. Box 1427
Capitola, CA 95010-1427
Phone (831) 325-3307
<http://www.CyberSpeaker.com>
pgamse@CyberSpeaker.com

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Contact Information:

[CyberSpeakerSM](http://www.CyberSpeaker.com), The Internet in English,
A Division of Total 'Net Value, Inc.
Philippa Gamse, CMC, President
P.O. Box 1427
Capitola, CA 95010-1427
Phone (831) 325-3307
<http://www.CyberSpeaker.com>
pgamse@CyberSpeaker.com

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About Philippa Gamse



PHILIPPA GAMSE is a [consultant](#) and [professional speaker](#) on eBusiness and Website strategy. She helps companies, small businesses and nonprofit organizations to maximize their return on investment in their Internet presence. She is a Certified Management Consultant, a designation earned by less than one percent of professionals.

Her clients come from a wide range of industries in both N. America and Europe, including Harley-Davidson Motor Company, P&O Cruises (UK) Ltd., Reed Exhibitions, Prudential Real Estate Affiliates, the Produce Marketing Association and the International Association for Exhibition Management.

Her track record of innovative thinking around Web strategy has led to key improvements in the online enterprises of her clients, who report significantly increased levels and quality of leads, sales and customer relationships.

Philippa is regularly contacted by media for her expertise on subjects including eBusiness strategy best practices, creating Websites that produce results, and small business online techniques and solutions. Her business articles (available for reprint at her Website) appear widely across the Web, and in many association publications.

Originally from England, Philippa has extensive corporate experience in Europe and the US. She combines her knowledge and background with her British accent and dry humor. You'll be both informed and entertained when Philippa brings you "***the Internet in English***".

Exposing Your Expertise:

Creating & Leveraging Powerful Web Content

Writing and leveraging articles is my most successful strategy for promoting my Website, my speaking and my consulting services. Visitors to your site from articles tend to be higher quality leads than those from search engines, and potential buyers like to see that you're published in many credible outlets. Potential customers are likely to give more weight to your articles than they would a paid advertisement.

Here are my recommendations to implement this strategy:

1. Write the article or hire someone to write for you

You no longer have to write your own material. Affordable freelance writers can be found on elance.com, guru.com and many other sites. Create an outline on your topic and ask the freelancer to research important points.

Here are a couple of pointers if you write your own articles:

- a) Keep it short, and make the language simple, especially if you're targeting online outlets. People don't read word for word on the Web - rather, they'll scan the screen. Complex sentences and dense copy will lose readers fast.
- b) Develop a template that can be easily customized for different target markets. My "Top Seven Ways to Tune Up your Website" has been parlayed into versions for over a dozen different industries. The essential points remain the same and customizing simply involves adding specific examples.

2. Put it on your Website

One of the key goals of your Website should be to showcase your expertise. Content (combined with testimonials and success stories) is the best way to achieve this.

When adding articles to your site:

- a) Include a clear reprint policy. This should state whether you allow articles to be reprinted, and if so, under what terms (including your byline, copyright, notification of use, a requirement for your website link to be live, etc.)
- b) If you have a large number of articles, provide an index page that divides them into appropriate subject groupings, and give a two-line description of each.
- c) Create a byline with an enticing hook to get people to visit your Website. Mine refers to my popular free tipsheet "Beyond the Search Engines", which lists 23 alternative ways to promote your site. This is far more powerful than a bland statement such as "Philippa Gamse is an

internationally recognized . . ." Consider adding a coupon or using a discount page to drive readers to your products.

3. Research and offer it to appropriate venues

It's critical to be very clear about your target audience, and how to reach them. Who are the economic buyers and decision makers that you'd like to be in front of, and what do they read? Do those sites or publications accept outside articles, and if so, what are their policies around doing so?

My assistant, Bonnie Jo Davis, runs my highly successful articles placement strategy. She provides a complete primer of her methodology, along with many online submission sites at <http://www.ArticleSubmissionSites.com>.

4. Follow up links and references

It's extremely important to measure the success of these efforts, both in terms of the traffic to your site, and its quality.

Check the "referring URL" section in your traffic reports, and follow links to you from any site that you don't recognize. Often, site owners won't inform you when they've used your material. So you want to ensure that you have been properly attributed. But also, thank the site owner. I recently sent a note to a university professor who had added some of my articles to his course reading list. His response? "I really like your ideas, and by the way, we're looking for a speaker for our upcoming conference . . ."

The Proof of the Pudding . . .

Does all this work? Absolutely. One of my articles was recently highlighted as the "Cool Site of the Week" in Tekguide.net - an online technology and computer directory. But the page that it linked to was not mine, but PowerHomeBiz.com - another site that had featured this article. So I now have sites quoting sites that quote me . . . and that gets major brownie points in Google, Yahoo and other natural search engines.

I was also recently hired to consult for a site in the auto industry after the owner had read my article in eDealershipnews.com. He said "I liked the article, I can see how you think, and I'd like some of that thinking for me". No further selling required!

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Philippa Gamse, CyberSpeaker, is a Web strategy consultant and professional speaker. Check out her free tipsheet for 23 ideas to promote your Website:

<http://www.CyberSpeaker.com/tipsheet.html> Philippa can be reached at (831) 465-0317.

The Top Seven Strategies for Website Success

Whether you're concerned with business-to-business, or business to consumer, whether your organization is large or small, commercial or nonprofit, these are some fundamental questions around your Website and technology strategy that should be addressed.

Otherwise, you risk missing opportunities, and not maximizing the return on your investment in your online presence.

If you haven't visited your own Website for a while, look at it again in light of these questions:

1. Does your Website present an appropriate image of your company?

Marketers talk a lot about branding, and consistency of message. Does your company site reflect how you'd like your customers to feel about your business? Is it sophisticated, and professional looking? Does it speak directly to visitors in language that they'll understand, and in ways that relate to their issues and needs?

Image is also about public relations. Publicity is a powerful marketing tool, and reporters are increasingly looking for stories and information online. Does your Website offer a media center? Does it offer comment on current events in your industry? Do you face up to the bad news, and spin it to your advantage?

2. Does your Website suggest potential for new or currently untapped markets?

In almost all the sites that I've consulted for, we've identified markets or audiences beyond the "real-world" customer base of the business.

This may be because the site extends the geographic reach of your marketing. If you have good content on your site, it may also be because visitors looking for your subject area find you in search engines, and come to read your articles and white papers.

Either way, if you find many "non-traditional" visitors to your site, you should assess whether they constitute a possible new market area for your business.

3. Does your Website suggest potential for new products or services?

A clear understanding of your visitor needs may also encourage you to consider new products or services. On the Web, bundling expertise into downloadable, for-sale content provides valuable new revenue streams for many businesses and non-profits.

You can find great clues for development ideas by tracking the keywords entered into your own site search engine. These show what visitors expect to find on your site – and therefore what

they expect your company to offer.

4. Does your Website provide continuing added value for existing customers?

Most site owners focus on acquiring new customers, and fail to maximize the opportunities to support and service existing ones.

These include password-protected areas where your clients can follow the progress of their projects, share documents with you, etc. Personalization and pre-populated forms (i.e. which are automatically filled in with the customer's details) help to create a feeling of value, and save time for your visitors.

Check the average response time for a contact from your Website. One of the top complaints about major company sites is that e-mails are not answered in a timely (hopefully 24 hours or less) manner.

5. Does your Website support your internal operations and employee needs?

This question relates to whether you're making the best use of all available technologies, and integrating them with your online operations.

Example applications to consider include:

- Instant messaging, fast becoming a serious business tool
- Knowledge bases – continually updated databases that can provide automated customer support on a 24/7 basis
- Streaming media, perhaps for just-in-time training or on-the-spot manuals for your operatives
- Intranets and extranets, which are really just fancy names for password-protected employee and client areas

6. Does your Website integrate fully with your “real-world” activities and processes?

One of the most frustrating visitor experiences is to complete a form, an application, or to submit a search on your Website, only to receive an error message.

Customers want the security of an e-mailed purchase confirmation. They want to know that they'll be taken off your mailing list quickly and without the need for multiple requests.

With the complexity of technology and programs today, sometimes a change to a seemingly unrelated system can wreak havoc. Do you regularly check all the input forms and processes on your site to ensure that no unexpected gremlins have crept in?

7. Does your Website provide you with a justifiable return on investment?

This is probably the most important question of the seven, and possibly also the most difficult.

That's because the answer depends on a clear understanding of the goals of your site, both in direct financial terms, and in other less tangible benefits, such as name recognition.

The keys to evaluating ROI, to improving your site, and often to further business development ideas can be found in your traffic reports. These show what visitors are looking for, how long they spend on the site, where they go, where they leave, and what rate of response you get to the various calls to action.

These reports can be daunting – a mass of figures, graphs and URL's. But I'd strongly suggest that someone in your organization should understand them. Otherwise, you're shooting in the dark with your Web investment.

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Byline

Philippa Gamse, CyberSpeaker, is a Web strategy consultant and professional speaker. How "Emotionally Connected" is your site? Visit <http://www.CyberSpeaker.com> to find out. Philippa can be reached at (831) 465-0317 or <mailto:pgamse@CyberSpeaker.com>

The Top Seven Ways to Tune up your Website

Hopefully your business is booming, or perhaps it's a little slower than usual. Either way, it's always a good time to take stock of what's working for you, and what needs some attention - including your Website!

Here are my suggestions for a great tune-up audit - take a fresh look at your site and your promotional strategy with these pointers:

1. Is your site appealing to all your markets?

Do you have different potential buyers for different aspects of your products and services? Is there content on your site that's designed for each of these? Have you considered whether your Web audience might be different from your traditional markets, and if so, whether you can exploit that?

2. Does your content engage your visitors?

Your site should be written from your visitors' point of view, not yours. Does your home page clearly recognize why the reader might be there - what's in it for them, and why they should care? What are the problems or issues that they might have, and how will you solve them?

3. Do you make your case?

If you claim that your products or services achieve results, do you have clear content on your site that substantiates this? Do you have case studies, sample client lists, and testimonials from happy customers? Third party endorsements are worth far more than your own promotional text, and they should be spread throughout your site, not relegated to a separate page that few visitors will go to.

4. Do you position yourself as an expert?

One of the most effective ways to get exposure is to publish articles, and white papers around your area of expertise. Even if you sell widgets, you can help people get the most out of using them! Articles on your site will be picked up by the search engines, and you can also offer them to publications that your target markets read - always with a link back, or reference to your site, of course.

5. Do you ask for the business?

Whatever the outcomes that you want from your site, you need to ask for it. Too many Web pages end weakly, with no clear calls to action. Don't make your visitors have to work to decide

what to do next - they won't! Every page on your site should have a strategy - invite the visitor to interact with you, or go to the next page, but make it easy and obvious.

6. Do you have a diversified promotional strategy?

Don't depend on free search engines to get you traffic. Are you exploring other ways of promoting your site - such as using your content and articles, advertising in e-zines, appending a signature file to your e-mail, regularly sending updates to your database, and ensuring that your traditional marketing is integrated with your online activities?

7. Are you reviewing your traffic analysis?

Last, but really key - your Website traffic reports will tell you what's working and what isn't. Without this information, you're really shooting in the dark - what if you were to find that the majority of your hard-earned visitors never go beyond your home page?

This isn't an exhaustive list, but it's a good start. I hope that your Website passes the test!

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Growing Your Meeting In CyberSpace

As increasing numbers of people search for information on the Internet, it becomes more imperative to have a compelling Website to promote and support your meetings.

Here is my list of “The Seven Most Important Things You can do Online”:

1. Identify all your Online Markets

It's a common mistake to focus your attention on the obvious target audience for your meetings site – the potential attendees.

But many other types of visitor may find your site, and it's important to consider whether they're important to you, how you want to engage them, and what outcomes you'd like to achieve with them.

Visitors to your meetings Website might include:

- past / potential attendees
- suppliers / vendors / exhibitors / sponsors / insurers
- Board members / employees / volunteers
- content seekers
- media
- job seekers
- competition

“Content seekers” is the term I use for members of the public who may not be regular customers or members of your organization, but who find you through a keyword search because they're interested in the content of your meeting. If you admit the public to your events, this is an important audience who might require different communications from your regular participants.

If you're looking for publicity, don't forget the importance of a press center. This should be very easy to find, and should contain all the information that a reporter would need to cover your event – they're usually under tight deadlines and will really appreciate this.

I include “competition” in this list because many people have asked me whether it's dangerous to put too much good information on your Website “in case the competition sees it”. My (somewhat obvious) answer? “If your competition can't see it, neither can the people you're looking to attract!”

2. Set your Goals

This sounds self-evident, but is often overlooked. You can't evaluate your return on investment (see #7 later) if you don't know what you want to achieve. What will be your measures of

success for this site in terms of your meeting? What are the key outcomes that you want – registrations, exhibitors, media attention, ongoing discussion forums, etc.

Also consider the expenses of the site against any potential savings – for instance, if you're implementing online registration, you want to be satisfied that your system can replace (and hopefully improve on) your real-world processes in a cost-effective manner.

3. Make it About Them, Not You

Your site should be written from your visitors' point of view, not yours. Does your meeting description page clearly recognize why the reader might be there – what's in it for them to attend your event, and why they should care? What are the problems or issues that they might have, and how will participating in this meeting address them?

Include some testimonials from previous attendees giving clear examples of how they've benefited from this event in the past. Third party endorsements are worth far more than your own promotional text. They should be spread throughout your site, not relegated to a separate page (because few visitors will go to it).

4. Make it Easy to Do Business With You

It's all too easy to throw online roadblocks into the paths of your visitors, perhaps without even realizing it. A couple of my favorite examples of this are:

- Site search engines that return “no results found”, making the visitor feel foolish. Clearly they're looking for something, so offer to have a representative call them – or provide further help with your search process.
- Asking for registration details prematurely, before you've created enough trust with a new visitor. Privacy issues and concern about spam are major barriers to volunteering personal information.

5. Every Page of your Site should Have a Strategy

Whatever the outcomes that you want from your site, you need to ask for them. Too many Web pages end weakly, with no clear calls to action. Don't make your visitors have to work to decide what to do next – they won't! Every page on your site should have a strategy – invite the visitor to interact with you, or go to the next page, but make it easy and obvious.

So, at the appropriate place in each page (or at several points in the page), include a link to the appropriate form - “register for this meeting”, “ask for an exhibitor packet” – or whatever invitation may be relevant.

6. Practice Multi-Channel Integrated Marketing

Offline marketing activities, such as postcard campaigns can be extremely useful in driving traffic to your Website. Think of all your marketing tactics as inter-related, and not as separate.

Don't rely on search engines to bring traffic to you – there are many other ways to create online buzz:

- paid advertising – e-zine sponsorship / banners / pay-per-click searches
- public relations and coverage on other sites
- placing articles by your experts and speakers on sites and in publications read by your target audiences
- and of course, targeted e-mail marketing to your existing mailing lists

7. Measure your Success

The keys to evaluating the return on investment in your site, to improving it, and often to further business development ideas can be found in your Web traffic reports. These show what visitors are looking for, how long they spend on the site, where they go, where they leave, and what rate of response you get to the various calls to action.

These reports can be daunting – a mass of figures, graphs and URL's. But I'd strongly suggest that someone in your organization should understand them. Otherwise, you're shooting in the dark with your Web investment.

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Fair Measures Corporation: A case study in online “thinking outside the box”

The Fair Measures Corporation Website, at <http://www.fairmeasures.com>, contains over 500 pages of free in-depth legal information and analysis, provided for both employers and employees. It includes a monthly e-newsletter, and an “Ask the Lawyers” page where visitors can post additional questions. The site attracts frequent media attention, and has been featured in “HR Magazine”.

A few years ago we completely restructured the site to add content for the many employees who come there looking for information. Previously, we'd been concentrating on the traditional markets for Fair Measures - human resource professionals and managers who hire Fair Measures attorneys for workplace training programs. But we realized that in doing so, we were missing out on a very different audience for their expertise - and one that really only exists in the online context.

How did we know this?

In two main ways:

1. By looking in our traffic analysis at the key search phrases that brought visitors to the site; and
2. From the content of questions submitted to “Ask the Lawyers”.

We could see that many visitors were looking for information around sexual harassment, overtime exemptions, Internet e-mail monitoring and privacy issues, and wrongful termination. Employers wanted to know how to create policies and practices that would protect them against costly lawsuits, and employees wanted to enforce their rights.

So, we created a whole series of new products - instantly downloadable online guides and sample policies around these topics. They are available in Word, pdf, and html formats - at the buyer's choice, and come with a full money back guarantee. The price point - currently \$10 for the guides, is intended to encourage impulse purchases.

The latest of these products - “[Wrongful Termination Guide](#)” is now achieving a nearly 5% conversion rate in sales. This is far higher than the average 1-2% that is typical of most e-commerce sites (and perhaps indicative of the current economic climate!) And, with real-time traffic analysis from [WebSideStory](#), we are tweaking the language and length of our selling pages to see what's most effective with each audience.

Our downloadable products are now generating a steady additional revenue stream, from a source that is very different from the traditional markets for this company.

So, lessons learned (and still being learned) from this exercise:

1. Be open to new and different potential audiences for your online business;
2. Study your traffic analysis - there are many valuable clues as to visitor needs that can be translated into new products and services; and
3. Keep monitoring your visitor response and try new spins on your content.

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Prophesying Profit in CyberSpace . . .

Many business owners rushed into creating Websites, perhaps because "my competition has one", or because "it's the hot thing right now".

Often, these sites are little more than online brochures - and maybe that's all you really need.

But have you really considered whether you're making the most of the online opportunities that exist? As with any aspect of your business, some preliminary thinking will help to maximize the return on your investment in this key part of your marketing mix.

Here are seven key issues to consider from the outset:

1. Are your markets online?

In February 2003, Jupiter Research reported that 61% of business decision makers use the Internet to look for information on products and services. Does that include your buyers? Try a customer survey if you don't know the answer to this.

Alternatively, there may be new markets that you would like to tap, who are already online.

An excellent Website for researching Internet demographic information is at:

<http://www.clickz.com/stats/>

2. Where is your geographic focus?

Is your operation confined to a local area, or can it have national or even international appeal?

It is not currently possible to restrict display of Web pages within geographic boundaries (e.g. "only Illinois"). So if your business is only local, or you only serve the U.S., you should state that clearly on the site, otherwise you might receive leads and orders that you can't fulfil.

On the other hand, perhaps there are ways that you can modify your "real world" offerings to reach online buyers everywhere - perhaps by packaging your knowledge into e-books or downloadable white papers.

3. What are the specific goals of your site?

What outcomes do you want from the visitors to your site? Will you be selling product online, or are you generating leads for a product or service? Do you want visitors to leave their contact details? If so, how will you encourage them to do this? Do you have a newsletter that they can subscribe to, or a competition, or a free offer of some kind?

And don't forget your existing customers. Will your site also be providing ongoing support and education for these clients?

4. How will you engage your visitors?

Remember that your Website may be the first contact that a prospect has with your business, and if they don't relate to your site, it may well be the last! Make their experience as close as possible to actually speaking with you, and engage them in all the ways that you might do offline.

Incorporate answers to the questions that are most frequently asked during the buying and support process. If you don't know these, have your staff keep a log of customer interactions for a few days - you'll soon see a pattern.

And, if you usually help the customer through product selection, ask them to make their choices in an online survey that can be e-mailed to you as a lead.

5. Do you want "hits", or qualified leads?

It's important to know whether you want as much traffic and as many responses as possible from your site, or whether you would prefer only to hear from serious buyers. A nonprofit organization might want as many people as possible to see its message, but most businesses have a specific focus.

If you decide to qualify the responses that you get from the site, what criteria will you use to do this?

6. Do you have a promotion plan and budget?

Even the best-designed Websites require effective online marketing and publicity to generate traffic. You'll need a strategy to position your site as well as possible in the Internet search engines and directories.

There are also many ways to promote your site "Beyond the Search Engines" - check out my [free tipsheet](#) with twenty-three proven ideas for doing this . . .

Remember that marketing your Website is an ongoing activity, and allocate time and resources to this.

7. How will you measure your success?

If you've made decisions on all these issues, you'll need a way to evaluate the results of your site and your promotional efforts against the goals and outcomes that you set.

Your Website traffic reports can provide really valuable information about your visitors - in fact, I'd suggest that without this data, you're shooting in the dark with your online investment.

The reports will tell you how many users come to your site, which search engines and keywords they're using to find you, which pages of your site are the most popular, and which are rarely accessed. You can use this information to tweak your site, and to make strategic development decisions which can often impact not just your Internet marketing, but your entire business.

So, think before you leap, and may your business prosper in Cyberspace!

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Are Search Engines Worth It Any More?

The “Number One” Question - the question that I (and probably every other Internet marketing expert on the planet) am most frequently asked: **“How do I get to be Number One in the search engines for widgets?”**

After all, my company is the world’s leading provider of widgets - it’s ridiculous that these other nobody companies are coming up in search engines ahead of us . . . ”

My response is almost always along the lines of: **“Forget that right now, and get a life!”**

OK, so I am a little more tactful than that - and I do occasionally encourage an in-depth search engine optimization strategy, but usually I’ll encourage clients to spend their website promotional budget in other ways.

Here are the main reasons why I’m not generally enthusiastic about free search engines:

1. You have to be really careful in choosing keywords

Many people make the mistake of focusing on very generic keywords. Not only are these even more difficult to get top placement in, but they also won’t generate you targeted traffic.

A prospect approached me recently for help with a coaching site. This site promotes teleseminars to help clients implement life changes described in various motivational books. This prospect initially said that he wanted to be “Number One” on a search for “books”.

I’d suggest this would be a virtually impossible challenge for any search engine optimizer. But in addition, someone searching for “books” is probably looking for Amazon, or Barnes & Noble, and not my client’s teleclasses. He could spend a lot of money for very few qualified leads.

2. You need to speak the language of your visitors

We all talk “geek speak” - it’s often second nature to us within our industry or area of expertise. And it’s easy to forget that our prospects don’t always use the same terminology. One of the most difficult areas in copywriting that I see is when technology sales people are trying to describe their products to a non-technical market - the result is usually incomprehensible!

But there’s also the jargon that we use as a matter of pride, or because we’ve lost touch with how our markets think of us.

I worked recently with an association of plastic surgeons. They had their member database on their Website, and wanted to attract visitors there to find a local practitioner.

Their “Number One” target keyword for the search engines was *“rhinoplasty”*. Well, I can only spell this because I just looked it up for this article - but usually you and I in the general public would never think of that - of course, we’d be searching for . . . *“nose jobs”!*

The surgeons didn't like this at all from an academic standpoint. But they had to concede the point when I presented evidence on most common searches from Yahoo! Search Marketing's very handy Search Engine Submission Tool (at <http://inventory.overture.com/d/searchinventory/suggestion>).

3. It's very passive marketing . . .

My most pressing argument for not spending too much time on free search engines is that it's a very passive form of marketing. You're relying on a prospective visitor waking up in the morning, and realizing that they need something that you might provide. Then, you're relying on them choosing the precise keywords that you've targeted for search engine optimization. It's a fairly hit or miss business.

When do I disagree with myself?

There are some exceptions to all this. I do believe that search engines are well worth it when you have a niche product or service with extremely unambiguous and well-defined keywords.

For example, an audience member in one of my recent programs was working on a Website to sell some incredibly advanced yoyos. I did recommend a search engine strategy to him - after all, if someone puts in "yoyo" as a search term, they'd almost certainly be a qualified lead!

What do I do instead?

In short, I much prefer aggressively seeking out sites where your target markets are likely to be reading, or searching for information. That way, you can proactively bring your ideas, products and services to them, in places where they are much more likely to be receptive and interested. And there are so many options for different budgets and campaign sizes, both online and offline.

So, are search engines worth it any more?

I'm not advocating ignoring search engines. And I like the better paid models, such as Yahoo! Search Marketing.

But I suggest that you should be very clear about how much passive marketing you want to undertake, and whether the product or service that you're offering lends itself to this.

And if you do decide to optimize your site for search engines, pick the keywords that will be in the mindset of your customers . . . and be willing to settle for "Number Two" sometimes!

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Outsourcing Your Web Marketing

The internet is constantly evolving. You may be thinking about outsourcing your Web promotion to an expert who is immersed in this world as their fulltime occupation, rather than trying to acquire this knowledge yourself, and cope with the pace of change in-house.

So, what should you look for in a consultant, and what guarantees can you expect?

Choosing The Consultant

The consultant should ask a lot of questions about your business and your objectives. They need to be very clear about the specific goals of your site. Do you want as many visitors as possible (as in: "*We get millions of hits on our Web site*"), or are you more interested in attracting qualified leads? Are you selling products? Are you looking for new customers, sign-ups for your newsletter or events, media coverage, etc.

It's possible that there could be different markets for each of your objectives. The consultant should show that they clearly understand the demographics of the audience you want to attract. This includes whether your markets are currently online, whether they are comfortable using e-mail, etc. It's also important to clarify any restrictions on your marketing - for example, if you're only targeting specific locations.

The key to effective Web marketing is to have a comprehensive, integrated plan that focuses on where your markets "hang out" online. It's absolutely not enough to concentrate your efforts on search engines - that's a passive rather than an active approach. You want to reach out to your potential visitors, not wait for them to come to you. And, you want to ensure that your offline marketing includes your Web site - up to a third of your traffic can now come from real-world sources.

So, the consultant should propose to you a wide-ranging plan (assuming that's appropriate for your goals) that includes:

- Search engine strategies
- Paid (bid for placement) listings
- Review sites and directories
- Linking with other appropriate sites
- Advertising / e-zine sponsorships (depending on your budget)
- Online public relations opportunities
- Integration with your real-world marketing

Effective Web marketing must also include an e-mail strategy. The consultant should include in their proposal some ideas for targeted, personalized (and fully opt-in) e-mail that is compliant with all State and Federal laws. This requires a contact database that you can use to select the different audiences that you might have for these messages. The consultant should also be able to help you create this, if required.

And finally, the consultant should explain how they propose to evaluate the success of any marketing campaign against your goals and objectives. Marketing is an ongoing process, during which you'll learn a lot about your site and about your visitors. This knowledge should be analyzed and used to tweak your site and refine your business strategies. A good consultant will be able to work with you to achieve this.

What Guarantees Can You Expect?

Let's be very clear - there is a distinction, which often gets blurred, between sales and marketing. The job of a marketing consultant is to bring qualified traffic to your site (or in other words, into your storefront). Completing the sale is then a separate challenge.

Marketing is also a very gray area, in which it's difficult to provide cast-iron guarantees of results. This is particularly true in the area of search engine optimization, since the search engines are so unpredictable. In my opinion, if a consultant promises you "top ten placement" you should be very wary - it's possible that they are using tactics that could be classified as spam - soon if not now.

And that can really hurt you - I have a colleague who was banned from Google because he hired "experts" who used this type of approach.

Obviously you do want to check that the consultant has a good track record, and that they can provide references from other clients. I believe that good Web knowledge and proven online marketing tactics are as important as an in-depth familiarity with your industry.

In setting your contract with the consultant, it's important to have a mutual comfort level with your goals, expectations and budget. There are many opportunities for free promotion online, but if you're prepared to spend some money, you can potentially build your traffic faster. Since building awareness of a site takes time, perhaps a minimum six-month period would be advisable, but with appropriate termination clauses for both parties.

Conclusion

Good Web marketing is a team effort! Hire a consultant who you feel very comfortable with, who asks lots of questions to really understand your business and your goals, and who seems

genuinely interested in promoting you. But then be prepared to work with them - respect and consider their suggestions, and allow them to be creative in their approach.

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Byline

Philippa Gamse, "CyberSpeakerSM", is an internationally recognized e-business strategist. Check out her free tipsheet for 23 great ideas to promote your Website: <http://www.CyberSpeaker.com/tipsheet.html> Philippa can be reached at (831) 465-0317 or <mailto:pgamse@CyberSpeaker.com>

PRofiting from Publicity: Online Public Relations

One of the cheapest ways to market your business is to take advantage of the many opportunities that exist for free or low cost public relations. The exponential growth of the Internet provides constantly expanding virtual public relations resources.

"SpeakerNetNews", an e-zine for professional speakers, asked readers for experiences about using the internet for marketing. Here are some of the comments received about the public relations aspect:

"My Web site has allowed my articles to be published in many national magazines, such as Presentations, T&D, numerous newspapers and industry publications. My free articles have been downloaded by over 50,000 people each year from over 60 countries."

- Lenny Laskowski, <http://www.ljlseminars.com>

Richard Thieme's site, at:<http://www.thiemeworks.com> has received numerous awards, including both a "Hot Site of the Day," and a "Cool Site of the Day" from USA Today.

Readers forward Richard's weekly column, "Islands in the Clickstream," to numerous friends and other online discussion groups. Richard receives frequent requests from many different countries to republish the column, for which he charges a reprint fee. So, although his original articles are available for free via his Web site, they are highly leveraged into other media, and speaking engagements.

Hopefully now you are inspired to look for free PR opportunities, and ready for some practical tips.

Integrating your PR Message

One key factor is that your total message and corporate image should be consistent both in the real world and online. Used effectively, public relations activities in the traditional media can draw traffic to your Web site, and conversely, articles on your Web site can generate business. Jesse Weeks told me: "For each article I print, at least one inquiry for services results, often many."

Therefore a cardinal rule is to keep the look and feel of your Web site in line with your printed materials. Your Web site is your online press kit. As David Arnold says: "I have my company logo prominently featured both on my Web site and printed materials. As soon as my package arrives meeting planners connect it with my site, and that in turn reminds them of our phone conversation, reducing the common "Hmmm, who's this from?" or "Gee, where have I heard this name before?"

Promote your Articles!

If you have any published articles, (or even unpublished ones), consider putting each one on a separate page of your Web site. This has several advantages:

it plays to the Web philosophy that "content is king", and showcases your expertise and the breadth of your knowledge.

you can construct keywords and descriptions specifically for each article, and promote them individually in the search engines. This allows you to further differentiate yourself, and significantly improves your chances of being found online.

For example, I recently discovered from my access logs that my Web site was receiving many hits from Sweden. I checked all the Web sites that currently link to mine (which I had neglected to do for a while), and discovered that an article I had written about effective online research techniques was being cited as a resource for a course at the University of Uppsala! Searching for Web links can be done in [Google](#) by entering link:yourdomain in the search box, e.g. link:CyberSpeaker.com

I have noticed that a number of speaker's Web sites state that visitors may request articles that are not immediately available. For the reasons explained above, I am not sure that this is the best tactic. It may be a great way to get leads and build a mailing list, but it doesn't help your visibility.

And while we're on this subject, don't just put the plain text into your site exactly as it is on paper. The article should be formatted so that it reads well on the screen, and has good navigation both within the page, and back to other areas of your site.

Online Press Releases

There are ever expanding numbers of newspapers, newsletters, and e-zines (electronic magazines) online, and also reporters looking for stories. Since Web sites have to be constantly updated (even more than in the real world), they are hungry for your news!

A great resource for finding appropriate places to send press releases is [Mediafinder](#). This site can be searched under numerous different subject areas, geographic locations, etc. It provides Web site addresses, e-mail contacts and media kit details.

E-mail Releases

Remember when sending an e-mail press release to follow some basic rules:

- not all e-mail readers can display formatted text, so stick with plain 10pt Courier, and keep your line length to 65 characters;
- be sure to include your contact e-mail address and Web site URL in a prominent place, and make sure that you have a great signature file (the piece of text that appears at the end of every e-mail message). It should be brief, but contain your name, company, one line about what you offer, telephone, fax, e-mail and Web site address. Your e-mail program should help you to create this, unless you are using America Online (where you

can cut and paste);

- use a "knock their socks off" subject / headline, such as "Internet Benefits For Business Discussed On Web Site Broadcast" - not just "Press release" to entice the editor to read your message; and
- don't "spam" reporters (i.e. blitz your e-mails indiscriminately). Send your release to targeted and appropriate places only.

Some real world rules also apply here. Don't bombard the editor with e-mails asking why your piece was not accepted. But if you do make it into "print", perhaps a real card to thank the editor is a better marketing ploy than e-mail (and I don't often say that!)

Caryn Amster picks up postcards while on vacation and uses them for media thank you notes. Why a postcard? Because everyone in the newsroom sees it, wonders why someone is sending a card from Disney World to the newsroom. One card gets a lot of mileage.

Press Release Web Pages

There are some major advantages to using press releases on your (or others') Web sites. You can include:

- hyperlinks to related stories, or further background information;
- sound and video clips to enhance your presentation; and
- buttons to access your release in different languages (great for international speakers!)

You can also easily track where your press releases are published and how many people read them. If they are included on your site, you can find this information from your own access logs. If you submit press releases for other publications, consider using different e-mail contact addresses for each. Often your Internet Service Provider will supply multiple e-mail boxes as part of their Web hosting service, which is a great way to quantify your responses.

There are several Web sites that allow you to submit press releases under a number of different searchable categories. Two such sites are: [PRWeb](#) and [Webwire](#).

Online Radio Shows

As speakers, we need to be heard! In addition to "print" publications, there is an increasing number of "online radio shows". In fact, Yahoo! has a [whole category](#) devoted to them.

The shows are generally broadcast in "Real Audio", or a similar program. This is software that is free to download and easy to install on your computer. The "streaming audio" is heard as it comes to your machine, so you don't have to wait for the whole clip to download before you can hear it.

Again, these shows are looking for content and guests. The Yahoo! listing often includes each one's subject matter or focus, so you can identify appropriate targets for your message. Gloria Petersen, a colleague of mine, was very pleased with her appearance last year on Ann Online, a 15-minute daily show hosted by Ann Devlin.

So Do It!

Other than an investment of time, and some research savvy, all of the opportunities outlined in this article are free. You don't need to have a Web site to pursue many of them (although I believe that it enhances your visibility and credibility if you do).

Public relations is an area that most of us can take better advantage of. So venture into Cyberspace, and "PRofit from Publicity!"

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Is your Online Business Customer-Friendly?

Customer service is increasingly seen as one of the most valuable uses for a commercial World Wide Website. Your Website is available on a 24 hour, seven days a week basis. So it is well worth exploring ways in which your customers can virtually "serve themselves," without the need for overtime staff, or lengthy voice mail procedures.

James Feldman is President of JFA, Inc., an online business offering high quality and unique gift items including automatic watch winders, Grundig shortwave pocket radios, and nitroglycerine pill fobs. The JFA Website, at <http://www.jfainc.com> has been online since 1997, and has doubled its income every year - it's now a multi-million dollar e-commerce enterprise.

Jim, who's also a professional speaker and expert on customer service, highlighted for me how the online buying experience differs from the bricks-and-mortar model.

Buying online eliminates the physical presence and personality of the salesperson from the process. This makes the Website copy critical in creating a one-to-one relationship with the customer or prospect.

Which echoes one of my favorite mantras:

Every page of your site should be written from the visitor's point of view, not yours.

A visitor should be able to look at your offerings, and immediately answer the questions:

- "Why me?" - that is, is your Website the right place for me?
- "Why should I care?" - does this copy convince me that you can meet my needs?

It's much easier and immediate to jump from Website to Website than to move between real-world stores. So the visitor has far more freedom of choice online. Jim says that the challenge for customer service is very clearly to focus on one customer, one purchase at a time. E-customers expect great service, with little or no direct interaction. They will tolerate some mistakes, but not many.

Jim offers five rules for effective online customer service:

1. Be accessible.

Show very clearly on your site all the ways that your customer can contact you - including e-mail, phone and fax numbers, and your office hours.

And, if it's practical for your business, be personal - give your visitors a real person to call who has a name, as opposed to sales@mycompany.com

Of course, if you're really upscale, you can include a "Call-me" button on your site.

2. Return every e-mail or phone call in the same day.

Or at least as far as reasonably possible. This may sound simplistic, but a recent experiment with the top Fortune 100 companies showed that nearly a third failed to respond to e-mail sent through their Website within one month! Some of these companies still don't provide a usable e-mail address on their sites at all.

3. Acknowledge all orders.

Send e-mail confirmations (this can be done very effectively with autoresponders), and if you're shipping actual products, give tracking numbers and expected delivery dates.

4. Provide a clear return policy.

Honor it and learn from it. This may give you more information about what's working and what's not. Jim's products are sometimes returned with no explanation, so his staff always calls the customer to establish and resolve the problem.

5. Expect more phone calls.

Jim says: "Customers can't read or write!" If your Website traffic and response rates grow (which, of course, is what we want), so will the volume of phone calls, whatever your business or industry.

Regardless of the site quality, clear returns and privacy policies, secure servers, etc., people still require human interaction. All of my clients report talking to customers on the phone, and walking them through the Website, where their questions are clearly answered. Maybe these psychological barriers will lessen, but right now, they are very much there.

If you can get the customer service aspects of your business working well, there'll be a definite bottom line impact. Jim is quite clear that his business has grown substantially through repeat business and referrals from satisfied customers.

And in contrast, we can see the impact of poor customer service and fulfillment procedures in many of the dot.coms that failed. Jim says that people buy things online in the expectation of getting something more valuable than the actual money they spend.

Does your Website do this??

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Metrics Matter!

Recently, I talked with a speaker about her “extremely successful” Website. She based this opinion on the fact that she was selling several e-books every day and generating “some calls”. When I asked if she was reviewing her traffic analysis, she said “No, why should we – it’s clearly working – we can tell that from the sales”. I didn’t ask if she knew how her sales and calls compared to the actual visitor numbers for the site – I suspected that she’d have been shocked to learn how many more opportunities she was losing.

Metrics Matter!!

If you don’t know what’s happening with your Website visitors, where they go, what they’re looking for, what they respond to, and what turns them off about your site, you can’t possibly make the most of your online potential. Your Web traffic reports offer unprecedented opportunities to analyze these relationships on a one-to-one basis.

Here are some examples of using your metrics to ask intelligent questions and make informed adjustments to your site:

Tracking your Promotional Efforts

There are many ways to promote your site, both online and offline. Some are free and some, while not costing money, do take up time and effort. It’s important to know the marketing options that generate the best return on investment for all your resources.

Joyce Weiss works with her public relations consultants to analyze the immediate impact of her radio appearances on her Website traffic <http://www.joyceweiss.com>. She said “This way we can decide if the Website needs to be tweaked for radio shows, or if I need to say something different on the shows to get people to sign up.”

Following the links to your site (called “referring URL’s in the reports) can be very useful in creating good professional relationships. Often, site owners won’t tell you that they’ve quoted you so it’s important to check that the reference is appropriate.

And, it’s important to say thank you. I once followed a link to my site and found that one of my articles was required reading for a course at the University of Southern Oregon. When I dropped a note to the Professor telling him how honored I was, he replied “Not at all, I really like your ideas – and by the way, we’re looking for a speaker for our next conference . . .”

Dave Paradi does this too: “I do check out those sites that link to mine. One time I found that the link was to an old page, so I wrote to them and suggested that they update the link. I was also able to mention my other articles that would benefit their visitors.”

If you’re paying for traffic, make sure that the keywords you’ve selected, or the sites that you’re advertising on are generating good quality leads. Abby Marks-Beale told me how she does this:

“I’ve set up separate portal pages for those who come to me from my pay-per-click program through Overture. This way I can see if the program is really working.”

In other words, you can create special entry pages for visitors from Overture, Google AdWords, e-zines that you sponsor, or other campaigns. If a visitor enters through one of these pages, they can only have come from this one specific source. Then you can follow where on your site these visitors subsequently go, how they respond and ultimately decide whether they’re good leads and whether your money is well spent.

Hot Content Areas

Your traffic reports list the most requested pages on your site, telling you what’s hot and what’s not about your content. If you’re offering downloadable articles or special reports, you can see which of these are most popular.

Mitchell Gooze makes a point of doing this: “We track white paper downloads by person, and we know exactly who downloads which white papers. We store this information in their data records. We also know which topics are most interesting to visitors.”

Knowing the hot content areas on your site can give you great ideas for future product and program development. Rita Risser <http://www.FairMeasures.com> developed a whole set of online checklists and policy guideline documents based around the subjects that her visitors were searching for.

Calls to Action

One of my favorite mantras is “*Every Page of your Site Should Have a Strategy*”. You should absolutely know which segment of your target audience each page is aimed at, what’s in it for them and what you want as a result. Provide clear (and clickable) calls to action at every point in your copy where the reader might be ready to make the next move – whether it’s “Sign up for our newsletter”, “Buy our product”, or “Contact me to ask about our services”.

Sometimes this means directing the visitor to the next page that you’d like them to see. Dave Paradi told me:

“I realized that people were entering my site on one of two specific pages, which are a couple of my articles that now have great placement on Google. I also noticed that almost all of these visitors entered and exited on that page, not visiting any other pages.

“So how could I get them to see the rest of the site - particularly the products that I hoped they would buy? I included a link to my products page at the bottom of each article. And last month, the products page jumped to the second most visited page, and it appears that many visitors, based on the value of the articles, are checking out the products.”

And he’s taking this a step further:

“It hasn’t yet resulted in increased orders, but I think the next area I need to address is writing more successful copy for the products page.”

At the Risk of Repeating Myself . . .

I like to think of Web traffic analysis as “market research that cannot lie”. The reports show you what visitors do on your site of their own accord, without prompting or other influence. Not to discount focus groups, surveys and asking your favorite clients for feedback – those are important tools as well, but not as powerful.

So, if you haven’t clearly defined the strategies, target markets and outcomes for your site, and if you aren’t looking at your metrics to evaluate the success of these, then you’re shooting in the dark with your Web investment. The examples in this article show you just a few of the many ways that you can use this information – I hope that you’re now motivated to find out more about your own site.

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Mining For Gold . . . In Your Web Traffic Logs

Understanding your Website's traffic patterns is a crucial component of your marketing mix. The information in these logs is collected as visitors find and move around your site at their own volition. So, it's "market research that cannot lie" - and therefore provides unprecedented insights that can help you to strategize not only for the future development of the site itself, but also for your overall business and marketing plan.

I'll describe the most important sections of the log report when analyzing your site's marketing effectiveness. Often, deciding what's right and what's a problem is a gut feel that you'll develop by looking at your log reports over a period of weeks or months, by trying some new tactics, and observing the trends and results.

General Statistics

This introductory section shows the overall traffic to the site, including the number of actual visitors and / or visitor sessions, as opposed to "hits". This is an important distinction - one hit is generated for every page and every individual image that a visitor requests (thus a page with some text and five pictures will take six hits to download). So the ratio of hits to individual visitors can be quite high.

By the way, it's also important for you to appreciate this distinction if you are selling advertising space on your site. You may be asked by a potential advertiser to prove your traffic levels, and if you happily say "millions of hits", they may look suspicious!

This section also shows the average time spent on the site, which should give some indication as to how engaging it is. If your site is rich in content, but the time spent on it is relatively low, it may not be meeting the needs of the visitors it is attracting, or it may be targeted at the wrong audience.

I had a client who earlier this year placed #1 in one of the major search engines for a very competitive keyword. He was ecstatic! But his site had not been worked on for some time, and was very dry and boring. We discovered from his logs that the average time spent on his site was less than two minutes - obviously indicating a problem. And to make my point again, without this evidence from the logs, he would have continued to believe that his site was successful.

Most and Least Requested Pages

The most requested pages are a great barometer of the "hot" areas of your site, and thus the most popular aspects of your online products or services. These may be different from your original expectations, and so this information can be very valuable for overall business development decisions.

If the least requested pages (i.e. the ones that attract the fewest visitors) contain important content, then something's wrong. Usually, it's either that their content is not interesting to your markets after all, or that the site is not driving your traffic to these pages in ways that are attractive.

Top Entry and Exit Pages

If the inside pages of your site are well promoted in the search engines, there should be a number of top entry pages (i.e. the first page that the visitor sees), in addition to the home page. This is a good reminder to include clear navigation back to other areas of the site from every page, to ensure that the first-time visitor gets a complete picture of your offerings.

The top exit pages are also an indication of your site's effectiveness - if these are not the right places for most visitors to leave from, some adjustments are needed. Make sure that every page of your site has an objective, and that you clearly direct the visitor to the next page or to the action that you wish them to take.

Single Access Pages

These are pages that a visitor views, and leaves without exploring any further. Typically, this will be the home page, and I am often asked whether this is an issue. I usually give the standard consultant's answer: "It depends . . ."

Your home page should quickly show the different audiences for your site that they've come to the right place for what they want, and where to go to find it. So you might have sections for members, prospective members, journalists, consumers, etc. The home page should do enough to engage them, and send them on to the appropriate inside pages.

If the home page does a good job of this, there will probably be some remnant of visitors who came to your site by mistake, in which case they will leave immediately. But that's OK - they aren't the right traffic for you.

It's really your judgment call as to what constitutes a problem. But, that client I mentioned earlier whose visitors spent less than two minutes on his site also had about 85% single access figures on his home page - some things are obvious!

A splash entry page to your site (i.e. one that says "Welcome, enter here", but with little or no actual content) will often also show large single access figures. Although these pages can look very striking, they unfortunately tend to be unpopular with impatient surfers. I've seen splash pages that have lost one third of a site's visitors. If you have a splash page, check the single access figures for it in your logs, and be prepared to remove it without hurting the feelings of your Webmaster!

Most Active Countries and Cities

If your site is aimed at an international audience, this section will show which country visitors originate from. This information can be useful in making decisions such as providing pages in languages other than English.

The most active cities report is unfortunately very misleading, as it relies on the registered location of the Internet Service Provider. Most log reports therefore show very disproportionate visitor numbers from Virginia - the home of America Online!

Top Referring Sites / URL's / Search Engines

These are the Web pages that send visitors to your site. The largest figure here will usually be the "No referrer", showing people coming directly to the site. This means that they are typing in your URL, or have your site bookmarked, and implies that your other forms of marketing are working.

The log reporting program should display other Web pages that send you traffic as html links, allowing you to click on the URL (when online!) to see the originating page. This will show the effectiveness of your reciprocal links or paid advertising. You will also be able to see other sites that are linking to you. It's worth checking these out if you aren't familiar with them - either to thank them, or to check that their link to you is appropriate.

For search engine referrals, clicking on the link will resubmit the search, and allow you to evaluate competitors' sites and positioning relative to yours. It's also possible to review keywords that are bringing traffic from one particular source, and to try to improve the site's performance for those words in other search engines.

Top Search Keywords and Phrases

This is crucial information, as it shows exactly what people were looking for when they came to your site. Often Website marketers take their best guess at these keywords on their first design, but because the search engines index every word on all your pages, other terms can be found, especially in a content rich site.

So the most popular search phrases can tell you what's really "hot" in your products and services. Understanding these is another great key to understanding the current needs of your site's market(s), and making business strategy and development decisions. One of my clients recently decided to write a book on a topic area that, until she saw her logs, she had no idea was so sought-after.

Conclusion

There are other sections in the log report, especially around the technical data for your site. The pieces that I have covered here are the significant ones for marketers. If you don't have this information available, I really urge you to get it, and review it - I guarantee that you'll find some gold nuggets!

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Beyond "Hits"

Your Website visitor reports are a goldmine of information. If you don't review these on a regular basis, you can't fully evaluate the return on your Web investment. And, you could miss critical clues as to how user-friendly your site is, how effectively your message reaches your visitors, and what unmet needs they may have.

But the reports can be overwhelming - a confusing mass of graphs, numbers and URL's. How can you find the information that you really need, how do you know what to look for, and how do you make strategic decisions using the answers that you obtain?

Step 1: Knowing Your Markets

First, identify all the different types of visitor to your site, together with the reasons that they might be coming to you.

This may sound obvious, but in my experience there are nearly always visitor segments that are overlooked. Here are my starting suggestions for an association site:

- Current and prospective members
- Board members and staff
- Current and potential vendors, advertisers and sponsors
- Media
- Content seekers
- Job seekers
- Your competition!

If you don't have a press center on your site, you should consider it if you're interested in publicity. Reporters are increasingly looking for information online, and appreciate ready access to press releases, sample interview questions, and downloadable photographs of your key spokespeople.

The content seekers category describes visitors looking for content that you provide, but who are not prospective members. They might be searching your member database for a referral, or they might be interested in your information products - and so they're great prospects for non-dues revenue.

Step 2: Knowing Your Goals

It's also key to know the required outcomes, not only for your overall site, but also for each individual section and page.

I have a mantra in my speaking programs:

"Every page of your site should have a strategy".

Too many pages on the Web give great information, and then tail off, with no clear call to action. They expect visitors to go back to the navigational elements, and decide what to do next - but instead, many of them will leave.

Step 3: Asking The Right Questions

Now that you have the audiences and outcomes for your site, you can start to make sense of all those numbers and graphs.

Based on what should be happening, you can formulate questions with which to approach the traffic reports to measure your site's effectiveness.

Here are some ideas:

Are your long pages effective?

Often, I see long pages with key content "below the fold" - below the first screen of information. Many visitors won't scroll down the page if they're not immediately engaged by it; therefore they'll miss the lower elements.

Is this happening on your site? Look for clicks on the links that are further down the page - are you getting an appropriate amount of traffic to the inside sections that these lead to? How much time is the average visitor spending on your long page - are they clicking off to the first thing that catches their eye - if so, is this really where you want them to go?

Can you measure member benefits?

If you provide an online database for prospective customers to find a supplier, track how many searches are done, and how many click-thru's your members receive. This can give you some powerful statements for your member benefits material.

What are the hot content areas?

Knowing your "Most Requested Pages" gives you some key clues about what's hot - and from that, which content might be worth developing further, either as a member benefit, or for non-dues income.

It can be helpful to design your site to delineate this. For example, instead of having a long page of different pamphlets, show each product on a separate page. Now you can track which ones are most sought after, and perhaps consider offering these as online, instantly downloadable e-books.

What are your conversion rates?

If there's a hot content area - a highly requested page that doesn't translate into its required outcome, something's wrong. Possibilities include:

- You believe you have an exciting offering, but your visitors don't - so perhaps you should rethink your content or product
- You do have an exciting offering, but the page copy isn't reflecting that effectively, or perhaps the price is too high
- Something else is stopping visitors from completing the transaction - perhaps you're asking for too much information, or the shopping cart isn't working
- Your traffic reports may not tell you what the solution is - but they should give you a pretty clear idea of where your problems lie.

Step 5: Tweaking And Testing

The good news about the Web is that it's a great testing ground for new products and ideas. When you find an area on your site that isn't performing optimally, you can make small incremental changes, and immediately see the results reflected in your traffic reports. So you can keep tweaking until you hit the winning formula for each page.

Step 6: Don't Forget Your Internal Search Engine

Your internal search engine allows you to track the keyword searches that visitors perform once they're on your site. This also has some valuable clues:

- You'll almost certainly see searches for content that should be obviously apparent. This proves that visitors won't work to find anything - but it can also give indications as to the usability of your structure and navigation
- Lots of searches for content that you don't currently provide will give you ideas for developing future products or services, based on visitor demand.

I think of Web traffic reports as "**market research that cannot lie**". They represent what your visitors do, unprompted, and really can contain some gold nuggets. Happy Mining!

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Website Strategies That Work!!

1. Review your goals and markets for your site:

- a) Are there clear business goals and desired outcomes behind your Web site, and for **each major page** or section? How will you evaluate your success?
- b) Have you defined all the target audiences for the site, and the “languages” they speak? Do you have compelling benefit statements, testimonials, case studies?
- c) Does your home page appeal to each of your target markets and audiences? Does it effectively direct them to appropriate areas of your site?
- d) How compelling are the “calls to action” on each page?

2. How can you take your online business to the next level?

- a) Is your site making the best use of available technologies? How will you stay on top of online developments in your field? Are all appropriate staff involved?
- b) Does your content effectively position the expertise of your business? Are there media or public relations outlets that you could tap for wider promotion?
- c) Are you taking full advantage of “real-world” opportunities to promote your site?
- d) Does your business offer other services or customer support functions that you could provide online? Are there further efficiencies that you could achieve?
- e) Review your contact databases and your use of e-mail to support your marketing. Do you have clear opt-in and privacy policies?

3. Review your Web traffic reports:

- a) Are there any obvious patterns in your traffic, or the paths your visitors follow that you could capitalize on, or need to change?
- b) What are the top exit points from your site? Where are you losing conversions?
- c) Which external sites link to you? Are these appropriate? Are you generating sufficient return on investment for paid online advertising?

- d) Do the search phrases for your site suggest ideas for new areas of business development?

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“How Does Your Website Make Me Feel?”

When people think about the Internet, they think about technology. When people hear that I am a Website strategy expert, they see me as a “*techy type*”.

But for me, the most intriguing aspect of your online business isn't about the technology. It's about human connections, and how you can create these in a virtual environment.

It's commonly understood that “*people buy emotionally, not intellectually.*” Even when people think they're making a rational decision, powerful subconscious factors come into play. To sell effectively, we're told to anticipate our customers' needs, to demonstrate that we “*feel their pain*”, and to respond to clues in their body language and tone of voice.

In the “real world” we do this very well. And we know that if we can have a direct, in-person conversation, there's a pretty good chance that we'll close the sale or keep a happy customer.

For the online visitor, your Website is the next best thing to that in-person conversation with you, your colleagues or employees. And since so many people are researching products and services on the Web, it's critical that your site has maximum impact in persuading them to take the next step with you.

So how does your Website connect emotionally with your visitors? Do they feel listened to, understood and appreciated by your Internet presence? Are you instinctively meeting their real needs? Do your existing customers feel supported and valued when interacting with you online?

Or are you failing to evoke the crucial emotional responses which can significantly enhance your response rates, sales and ongoing return on your Web investment?

The Critical Emotions for Website Success

I've been working with client Web strategies in a wide range of industries since 1995. Based on this experience, I've identified some key emotions that you need to evoke in your online visitors to create and sustain a profitable relationship.

How well your Website does this can have a major effect on the visceral, instinctive reactions of your visitors, and their propensity to buy from or connect with you.

In total, I have twenty criteria for emotional connectedness that I suggest for any Website. That's too many to discuss in this article, but let's look at a few highlights:

Do I Feel Recognized?

When we first meet in a business setting, we're introduced, or we introduce ourselves with some statement about what we do, and why we should connect with each other.

When we talk with customers or prospects, it's important to show very quickly that we understand their issues and needs, and that we have ideas and solutions to address these.

The most important task for your home page is to accomplish this initial introduction. You've heard the "ten-second" rule about how long a visitor will stay on a site that doesn't engage them.

So, does your home page really tell me what you do? Does it speak to me in specific terms that make very clear what services you provide, and what type of customers or clients you work with? Does it use language that I'll understand even if I don't know the jargon of your industry or specialization?

Sounds simple?

There are astounding numbers of Websites that fail to provide basic information on the home page.

If your goal is to get the customer to visit your store, does your home page clearly show your location, and how to get there? Every time you force the visitor to make a decision, such as "Do I click on the Contact Us page to find their address?", you open up the possibility that they'll make the wrong choice (from your viewpoint), or worse still, they'll just leave.

And is it clear to me whether you can – or would want to – help me? Are you geared towards corporate bulk buyers, or small businesses, or both? Do you operate nationally or only in your immediate location? Will your visitors know what you mean by generic terms such as "business systems" or "total business solutions" or should you be more specific as to what you offer?

Do I Feel Engaged?

As we continue our "real-world" conversation, we start to find common points of interest, whether personal or professional. We begin to feel that we can relate with each other, and this helps to build our business relationship.

So your Website has to make the visitor feel drawn in – that they want to know more about your business, your products and your services – but again, from the viewpoint of their needs and interests. And you have to give the visitor a clear sense that you want to find those points of connection, and to learn more about them.

If the visitor doesn't feel invited in, if they feel left to themselves to find their way around – if they're overwhelmed, confused, or simply not interested in your site, they'll leave.

Does your site present a bewildering array of manufacturers, products, or options without any guidance as to selecting from these? Think about the conversation that you'd have with a customer in your store. You'd find out what they were looking for, and then you'd ask a number of questions to help them find the right solution for their needs.

So how can you mirror this process online? You could offer a "Help Me" page that guides visitors through some Frequently Asked Questions or other choices and provides links to recommended products based on their answers. You could incorporate an interactive chat facility with a customer service agent during office hours, or access to a searchable knowledge base.

Do I Feel Convinced?

If the visitor is seeing your business for the first time, they need to be comfortable that you are who you say you are, and that you can deliver what you promise.

One of the most important elements in establishing this part of the connection is to show the "faces" of your business. Have you noticed how many Websites don't name any of their owners, or the people that customers will interact with? It's much easier to have a conversation when I know who I'm talking to!

Customer testimonials and other third-party endorsements are critical elements in establishing trust – they say far more about you than your own marketing statements. How many sites have we all seen that trumpet "nationally recognized" or "premier provider . . ." ? Prove it!

Include client quotes and success stories right across your site where they're front and center as visitors are engaged in your content. If you win an award, tell the visitor what that means for them in terms of how you were evaluated.

Do I Feel Motivated?

Towards the end of our "real-world" conversation, we'll hopefully close a sale, or we'll talk about some next steps, or we might say "Let's stay in touch". To do that with our online visitor, we need to persuade them to buy something, or to tell us who they are, and give us permission to reconnect with them.

Too many Web pages tail off with no call to action or directions about where to go next. If you don't issue a clear invitation, you again leave it to the visitor to work out what to do – and you run a big risk of losing them.

So at every point on every page where the visitor might be thinking “Tell me more”, or “How do I get this?”, provide a clickable link to the next step, to your shopping cart, to your newsletter subscription page, or to whatever you want them to do. Don’t wait until the end of the page – they may never get there! Look for the emotional “tipping points” on every page where they’re ready to talk more with you and grab them in the moment!

Diluting the Connection

Of course, it’s all too easy to undo all the good feeling that we create by frustrating or annoying the visitor, or simply by giving them a dead end.

One of my favorite bugbears is the site search engine that allows me to enter my query, and then tells me “No results found. Please try again with different search terms”.

How is that supposed to make me feel? What was wrong with my keywords or my parameters if the search page allowed me to select them? Am I being stupid? Or do you really not want to help me?

Your visitor is clearly looking for something, and has taken a step towards connecting with you. So how about a results page that lets them know that you can’t immediately answer their question, but offers a link to your contact form so that they can send a question, or some tips or suggestions on how to find more information.

The ultimate customer service feature is an opportunity to interact with a live assistant – if your site offers this utility, the search results page is a perfect place to maximize its visibility.

So how “Emotionally Connected” is your Website?

I hope that I’ve sparked your curiosity enough to take a fresh look at your Website.

Think about specifically why visitors are coming to your site, what might be on their minds, and review your copy and navigation accordingly. Think about new customers and existing ones, employees, media – everyone who might have a reason to visit. Are you doing everything that you can to create an “emotionally connected” experience for everyone?

The right mix will gain you significantly higher time spent on your site, more calls from pre-qualified leads, more signed contracts, happier repeat customers, attention from new markets, offers of strategic alliances and collaborations, and insights into creating successful new products and services.

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Using Clicktracks

Part 1: Getting Started

If you're just getting started with ClickTracks, you'll find it's a very versatile tool. It presents information by overlaying it on your actual Web pages. It also allows you to create reports "on the fly" so that you can look at your visitors' behaviour on your site in very different and detailed ways.

But if analyzing Web metrics is new to you, the charts, figures and mass of potential data can still be quite overwhelming. It's helpful to have some starting points and questions in mind as you study the reports so that you can find the most useful information.

This article offers some ideas and examples to spark your thinking:

Navigation Report

This report shows you (among other things) how many visitors clicked on each link, and how long they spent on this page.

If you have links that receive few or no clicks:

- Is the link image or the link text too small?
- Is it in a colour that doesn't show up well or could pose problems for visitors with visual impairments?
- Is it badly placed or hard to find on the page?
- Is it too far down? – check the time spent on the page to get an idea of whether
- visitors are reading most or all of the content. Remember that the first screenful of the page has the best chance of being seen.

If none of the above seem true:

- Is the link text confusing – perhaps the wording is different or not included on other pages?
- Is the link not attractive or engaging to your visitors?
- Or, is the content behind the link simply not of interest?

Links that receive many clicks:

- Should the content behind this link be highlighted even more on your site, since it is clearly of interest?

Placements to think about:

- If you have an internal search engine on your site, is it linked in a prominent place on each page?
- Featured products or other items – can you increase the clicks that they receive by improving their position?

Time spent on the page:

- Does the average time on this page seem too short, especially if the page is long? – check the number of visitors who are exiting the site from this page. If a lot of people are spending a short time on a page and leaving, consider splitting the content across more pages:
- This can be especially helpful, e.g. when displaying a list of items for purchase – showing each on a separate page allows you to track which offerings are the most interesting to visitors, and to highlight them better
- Shortening pages also reduces the risk that visitors will miss items further down if they choose not to scroll

Search Report

This report shows the keywords and phrases that brought visitors to your site, broken down by individual search engines.

Which keywords or key phrases are most effective for you:

- Which search words or phrases draw the most traffic?
- Which search words or phrases result in the most time spent on your site? These are the visitors who are most engaged in your content, but what were they looking for when they came to you?
- Are there any surprises? Sometimes search engines pick up keywords from your site copy that you may not have thought of as significant – these can be valuable information about how your visitors describe or think about what you offer. A lot of demand for something on your site can give you ideas for enhancing or expanding your products and services.

Which search engines are the most effective?

- If your site is optimized for one search engine in particular, is that engine bringing you traffic? If you're paying for search engine optimization (other than pay per click), is your service providing a justifiable return on investment?

- If you have very effective keywords on one search engine, can you improve their position on others?
- Do you recognize your non search engine referrers?
- How are you linked to?
Are the references to you legitimate? Are there sites that link to you that you're not comfortable with – either because they're not describing your site offerings correctly, or perhaps you simply don't want to be associated with them!
- Should you thank the referrer?
Often, sites will link to you without letting you know. If you appreciate them for doing this, you can create an even stronger – and potentially more profitable relationship.

For help in creating specific ClickTracks reports, see Part 2: Labelling Options. For help in using ClickTracks to evaluate your "must-see" pages, see Part 3 of this series.

Part 2: Labelling Options

ClickTracks allows you to segment your visitors in many ways using the "Create Labels" tool. You create instant reports to answer questions about the patterns of specific types of visitor, and track their responses to your site.

Here are some ideas for using this option:

Comparing Search Engine / Non Search Engine Traffic

Visitors come to your site either from search engines, from other sites that link to you, from e-mail marketing messages or e-zines, or perhaps from their own bookmarks.

Use the ClickTracks "Create Labels" tool, and select "referred from any search engine" as your criteria to track all search engine visitors. Then, create another label using the same criteria, but select "Inverse" to identify all the visitors not referred from a search engine.

Now you can investigate:

Are search engine visitors more responsive to your site than those who find you in other ways:

- Which type of visitor spends longer on the site?
- Which type of visitor is more likely to reach one of your "goal" or "must-see" pages? (see Part 3 of this series for more on this topic).

If you have very specific keywords, then probably search engines will produce your most valuable traffic.

However, if you are publishing content on external sites that link to you, visitors from these sites may be more valuable than those from search engines, since they already know about your products or services, maybe have read something that you've written, and are more ready to do business with you.

Comparing Short / Long Visits

Looking at the amount of time spent on your site can give clues as to how well it's meeting visitor expectations and engaging their interest.

Use the ClickTracks "Create Labels" tool, and select "had a certain session length" combined with "at most 5 seconds" as your criteria to track people who left your site almost immediately. Then, create another label using the same criteria, but select "at least 60 seconds" (or your preference) to identify all the visitors who spent some significant time on your site.

Now you can investigate:

Which are your best performing keywords and referrers:

- Which keywords and referring sites result in long visits?
- Which result in short visits?

If you have a lot of traffic from certain keywords, but these result in very short visit lengths, check the landing pages for those searches (see Part 3 of this series for more on this topic). It may be that the first page that visitors see is not meeting their expectations, and should be modified.

If you have keywords that are very successful in generating visitors who stay on your site, check that you've optimized them for as many search engines as possible.

Which pages do the people who stay on your site (long visits) see:

- Which pages engage your visitors the most? (check the time spent on the page from the Navigation report). Then ensure that you have appropriate calls to action on these pages to drive your traffic to the next step, so that visitors are not leaving from these points.
- Are these pages attracting enough traffic?

If you have pages which are clearly successful once you've got visitors to them, are there ways to increase the number of people who see them? Is the navigation to these pages sufficiently attractive from other parts of your site? Should they be better positioned?

For help in using ClickTracks to evaluate your "must-see" pages, see Part 3 of this series.

Part 3: Evaluating Critical Pages

Landing Pages

It's important to know the exact pages of your site that the various search engines link to for each of your major keywords and phrases. These are called "landing pages", and are the first pages that visitors see when they click on search results.

Landing pages are critical for initial impressions and credibility, especially for people who are not familiar with your business. It's also important to ensure that these pages fulfill the visitors' expectations based on their search terms.

Use the ClickTracks "Create Labels" tool, and select "used a certain search engine query" combined with the keyword or phrase as your criteria to track people who came to your site with that search.

Now you can investigate:

What are the Top Entry Pages (i.e. "Landing Pages") for this search term:

- Is the search term included in the page content? Often, visitors will be looking for their keywords to confirm that they're in the right place. If your page doesn't seem relevant to them, they'll leave.

Combine the landing page information with Top Exit Pages or Short Visits for this term for clues as to whether your landing page is sufficiently engaging.

Does the Landing Page drive visitors into the rest of your site:

- If you do have relevant content on the page, but visitors still leave, could there be other reasons for their lack of engagement?

Landing pages are also those that you link to in your e-mail marketing messages - and again, are the first thing that the reader sees when they click through from one of your campaigns.

Often, site owners assume that every visitor sees their home page, which is the primary means of navigation. Your landing pages are the first that visitors will see, so they need to act as mini-home pages too.

Use this information about what visitors are seeking when they arrive at your site and what their expectations may be to direct them to other pages that will meet their needs.

Goal or "Must-See" Pages

The key pages on your site where people make decisions to buy a product, download a sample, subscribe to your newsletter, etc are known as "goal" or "must-see" pages. These are the places to which you drive your traffic to in order to achieve your site objectives.

Use the ClickTracks “Create Labels” tool, and select “visited a certain page” combined with your goal page name as your criteria to track people who visited that page.

Now you can investigate:

Is this page hard to find?

- Do visitors take a long time to reach this page? (check the average time to the page from the Navigation report)
- Are there other “must-see” pages that are critical on the path to this page? (check the “Previous Page” information in the Navigation report)

These findings can give you ideas for improving the navigation to, and positioning of your “Goal Page”.

Does how the visitor found your site affect the success of the “Goal Page”?

- Are there critical keyword searches or referring URL’s that generate better traffic in reaching your goal?

Combine this information with your most effective keywords data to ensure that you’re paying for the best return on investment in generating quality traffic.

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Emotionally Connected WebsitesSM

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So how "emotionally connected" is your Website?

Are you failing to create the crucial emotions in your visitors which can significantly enhance your response rates, sales and ongoing return on investment?

When did you last take a good look at your own site in this regard?

Based on my extensive experience since 1995 with clients in a wide range of industries, I've developed an Assessment Tool to examine how “*emotionally connected*” a Website is. My ideas will open your eyes to a whole new approach for acquiring and retaining online customers.

In applying my Assessment Tool I create a report that rates your Website against four criteria under each of the five emotions, together with my brief comments and suggestions for improvement. A score for each emotional factor and a total score are shown, and an executive summary is attached.

"This is most interesting - I've never seen an approach to content review as you've taken here."

Gretchen Sand, Skyline Recruiting Corporation

[Apply](#) for my assessment and receive a **roadmap** to take your site to the next, more profitable level. Learn how to leverage the powerful emotions that drive your visitors' decision making.

"Excellent. Incisive, easy to read, constructive critiques. Just the kind of succinct report I needed to make all of the necessary changes to the Website."

Susan Shaw, Central City Association of Los Angeles

"LOVE the report -- what I like best are the very clear definitions about what emotional connection means -- your points are well taken."

Vickie Sullivan, Sullivan Speaker Services

"When I showed your recommendations to my webmaster, he immediately realized how we could take the site to new heights."

Dr. Vincent Muli Kituku, Kituku & Associates