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THE BEST **DIGITAL**
STRATEGIES FOR LOCAL
BUSINESS MARKETING

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INTRODUCTION

To say that today's businesses depend heavily on marketing is hardly a revolutionary statement—in fact, this has been a crucial element of any company's growth strategy for generations. It's also true, however, that business marketing has changed dramatically since the advent of the Internet, and continues to undergo periodic overhauls as new online innovations and applications reach the average consumer.

These days, we're often told that we live in a "global economy," as technological advances increasingly bring different nations and cultures in close contact with one another. Yet to a large extent, marketing remains a local affair, targeting a very finite group of potential consumers who live in or near the area where the business operates its storefront or facility. For many businesses, mastering the nuances of local marketing is fundamental in order to ensure their continued existence. Having said that, let's explore the world of local marketing.

CHAPTER ONE

What Is Local Marketing?

For businesses that operate on the national or international level, their marketing efforts assume proportions appropriate to the size and reach of the organization. They use TV commercials that air in national markets, print ads in glossy magazines, radio spots on popular music stations, and so forth. This is all quite expensive, of course, but for multi-national corporations that command revenues in the billions of dollars, it's a manageable goal.

Matters are quite different for small businesses, though. A tiny mom-and-pop restaurant simply doesn't have the kind of budget of a large corporation—not even remotely. Small business owners have to make do with available funds, and there's only so far that their budget can stretch. About half of all small business owners spend under \$5000 per year on marketing.¹

Fortunately, it's not really necessary for small businesses to spend massive sums of money to promote themselves properly. That's because they don't need to reach consumers in every region of the globe, or even the country. Also, a smart marketing campaign that effectively uses up-to-date communication tools uses substantially less resources than a traditional marketing plan would.

When we talk about local marketing, we're essentially referring to advertising campaigns of various types that are intended for current and prospective customers in the immediate area of a physical street location of a given business. It is also termed "neighborhood marketing" and "local store marketing" (LSM). As a general rule of thumb, local marketing efforts target customers within a 10-mile radius of the business.



Local marketing normally utilizes one or more tried-and-true promotional tactics. Many small businesses have found success with a combination of the following:

- Sending direct mail to residents in the immediate area
- Purchasing print advertisements in locally distributed newspapers or “free” publications
- Airing 30-second commercials on local television stations
- Sponsoring a charitable event occurring in the community
- Sponsoring a Little League team in the area
- Buying ad space on buses
- Distributing press releases locally

Bear in mind that this is hardly an exhaustive list of local marketing techniques. In all of these cases, the promotional efforts are directed at a specific community, as opposed to a nationwide audience. A local marketing campaign may involve promoting a single franchise of a larger chain, or it may center on a sole proprietorship or small business that has no additional locations.

These days, local marketing is rapidly moving away from traditional media like print ads and increasingly taking advantage of the flexible tools supplied by the Internet. This means that marketing is progressively becoming more digital, aimed more at exploiting online resources than bombarding mailboxes with flyers.

CHAPTER TWO

The Importance of Local Marketing

As we have noted, small businesses simply do not have the resources of large corporations, whether for advertising or anything else. It can be difficult to compete with a nationally recognized brand name that benefits from a seemingly 24/7 media presence. How does a small business avoid getting lost in the shuffle, so to speak? This is where local marketing comes into play.

By targeting local consumers, you effectively place your business on their radar. Grabbing the attention of today's harried consumers can be difficult, which is why so many people restrict their shopping choices to the major names that everyone knows about. Many people simply don't have time to "shop around" and figure out where the best deals are. As a result, a lot of people will drive 15 miles to a certain store without realizing that they could instead drive only five miles to a small business that offers more or less the same products and services they seek, sometimes at a better price too. As a small business owner, your job is to make sure that local consumers understand that they have another option.

Keep in mind also that a substantial number of your potential customers believe in the virtue of providing support, both material and intangible, to the community in which they live. Many people prefer to patronize a business that has established roots in the area rather than go to another anonymous franchise belonging to a huge corporation whose headquarters sit on the other side of the country. A strong local marketing campaign will appeal to customers of this type.

The effectiveness of local marketing has been confirmed by the experience of professionals who have devoted their time and energy to this particular field. No less than 49% of marketers believe that local marketing is essential to ensure the continued growth of a business.²

CHAPTER THREE

Tips for Effective Local Digital Marketing

Digital marketing is multi-faceted in nature, which is to say that it can draw upon a wide variety of tools, platforms, and strategies in order to reach a business' potential audience. The character of a particular company's digital marketing campaign will depend on a number of factors, including the population density of the immediate area, the available budget of the organization, and the demographic profile of the prospective audience. Having said that, let's look at some digital marketing tactics that have proven successful for many businesses.

Maintain Online Business Profiles

In today's increasingly "connected" world, it's important to have an online presence—but what do we mean by this? Among other things, it means that business entities must utilize online profiles to ensure that their audience can look them up on the Internet. It's likely that you already have your own website, but it's important not to stop there; you also should maintain Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts, to mention just a few of the most popular social media platforms in use right now. These accounts allow you to communicate with customers in real time, rather than depend on a more or less static website that doesn't encourage frequent visits. You can announce discounts, sales, and other kinds of promotions that can reach a wide variety of customers at the push of a button.

Additionally, bear in mind that your business may have other profiles out there in cyberspace—ones that you never set up yourself. Yelp, for example, typically has pages for companies frequented by its visitors, who rate the quality of service provided by the businesses in question and sometimes even post lengthy reviews describing their consumer experience. Sites of this type (Yahoo! Business is another) often fill out basic information relating to your business, such as a street address and phone number.



Luckily, it's often possible for a business to assume control of these pre-filled profiles, and that's exactly what you should do. Fill your profiles with attractive content and, where possible, use the opportunity to engage with customers, particularly those who post negative reviews of your business. Don't be shrill or insulting, but do what you can to address any valid concerns and correct false information—you will minimize the damage done to your reputation as well as show prospective clients that you are willing to communicate with them in a professional manner.

Support Local Charitable Organizations

As we have mentioned, getting involved with worthy causes in your community is a sound way to develop a positive reputation among the locals, while simultaneously supporting a charity or another organization that performs good deeds locally. Some businesses have a dedicated section of their website devoted to documenting their various charitable activities; if that sounds too elaborate, you should at least provide a link on your site to the charity's URL.

Use Digital Coupons

Most consumers use coupons on at least an occasional basis. In recent years, however, the business world has gradually moved away from print-based coupons mailed to street addresses or printed in newspaper ads. Nowadays, it's becoming increasingly common to email coupons to customers. E-coupons can be easily printed out and brought to the store; alternatively, they may bear a special code that may be inputted into an online shopping cart to earn an instant discount. Either way, it's a great way to promote repeat business, which is one of the keys to success in the world of commerce.

To be able to send digital coupons to customers, you must have their email addresses. Be sure to ask customers for this information when they're in your store or visiting your website. A lot of people are understandably leery of "spam" and may be reluctant to give out their email address; to counter their fears, it's best to have an explicit policy that limits the number of emails you send (e.g., no more than one per month) and assures customers that their information will not be shared with third parties.

Write Guest Blogs for Local Websites

A guest blog is basically a blog post written by someone outside the normal author(s), and it's a good method of reaching an audience that may otherwise be unaware of your business. The guest blog can be about nearly anything—a community event, a holiday, a brief how-to guide—so long as it somehow relates to the theme and content of the site where it is posted. The blog should feature a bio of the author (keep in mind that some blogs are ghost-written) that includes relevant information, and preferably a link, about the business.

Optimize Your Website for Local Searches

You probably have your business' contact information (street address, etc.) on your website already, but for best results don't just list it on one page. Try to include your address on every page of your site; this will help customers find you when they look for local businesses on search engines. You may also wish to include at least one page on your site with information on "cities served," where you mention other local neighborhoods that may show up in searches.

Post Online Press Releases

Press releases aren't just for the press anymore. It's not uncommon for the average consumer to stumble onto a press release while searching for information on a particular business or topic. This provides additional opportunities to connect with local customers. Nowadays, services like PRWeb.com and PRBuzz.com make it easy for businesses of any size to communicate with potential customers on the Internet at a reasonable price. Press releases don't have to be about anything momentous—they're often used to announce new products or services, a sale, or a new website feature. Better still, press releases can stay on the Internet for years, helping drive traffic to your website long after the event or sale it promotes has become history.

Use Testimonials

Do you use local suppliers for your products and services? This is another opportunity to promote your business. Offer to post a glowing testimonial on your supplier's website, and be sure to include a link to your business' website. Both your company and theirs will benefit.

Participate in Local Online Forums

Many communities have one or more online forums dedicated to discussing matters of local interest, from serious issues to just fun and games. Staying reasonably active on these forums keeps your name, and the name of your business, in the minds of potential consumers. Make sure that your message-board signature includes a brief description of your business and a link to your website.

CONCLUSION

To stay competitive in a tough economy, small businesses must exploit the power of local marketing to attract customers in the surrounding community. These days, local marketing increasingly relies on digital/Internet-based tools and techniques, such as social media, search engine optimization, and email coupons.

ABOUT US

SCORPION WINDOW FILM

Based in Cloverdale, Indiana, Scorpion Window Film distributes high-quality truck bed liners, auto window films, paint protection films, and related products.

The company has distribution centers across the U.S. as well as Canada and the U.K. Scorpion is a member of the International Window Film Association (IWFA).

SCORPIONWINDOWFILM.COM



SOURCES

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