



Six Secrets to
**Online
Marketing
Success**

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Published by New Spirit LLC

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1. Get a good website.

Traits of a good website include appealing appearance, useful content, ease of use and free of errors.

Your website should be visually appealing and invite the visitor to come in and stay a while. Remember it may be the first, and only, impression a potential customer might have of your company.

Make it easy to read. Black text on a white or a light-colored background is the easiest to read. Light text on a dark background can look sexy, but studies show that it's harder to read and often converts poorly. And avoid colors that are similar in density. Ever try reading red text on a brown background? Bounce! There goes a visitor to someone else's website.

Choose two or maybe three colors that blend well together and are appropriate for your company's image.

Use font styles that are easy-to-read and are common on most people's computers. Times New Roman, Arial and Verdana are all common fonts. By the way, this report uses Verdana.

Avoid anything cutesy – such as flashing text or mouse trails – unless it works for your company's image. (It usually doesn't).

Provide quality information about your company, your products and services, your people, your success stories, and especially how you can help your customer. For example, you can explain how to use your product, or even better, you can show them how in a video.

Use a spellchecker and a thesaurus to make sure there aren't any typos in your text. Be especially careful of 'there', 'their' and 'they're' or 'its' and 'it's'.

Use links to guide your visitors to other useful information - whether it's another page on your site or on a different website. Be sure you have navigation links on every page of your website so your visitors don't have to backtrack all the way to your homepage to find other information. Make it easy for them to get around.

Make sure your pages load fast. In today's world you only have two, or maybe three, seconds to entice your visitor to stay. Your website not only needs to load fast, but also what your company is about needs to be almost instantly apparent.

Optimize your photos so they load fast. Not just the size you see on the page, but also the file size. If you need to have a lot of large photos, consider using thumbnails that link to full-size photos.

Take a look at your website on different devices – a full-size computer, a laptop, a tablet, and even a smart phone. You should also check how your website looks in different browsers, including Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Google Chrome. Check your site stats to see what browsers most of your visitors are using.

Consider a mobile-friendly design. Smartphone usage is skyrocketing and many smartphone users won't stay on a website that isn't mobile friendly.

2. Optimize your website for your visitors – AND make the search engines happy.

Although there are lots of rules and guidelines for search engine optimization (SEO), if you keep in mind who you're writing for - your customers and potential customers - you'll have a great start.

By limiting each page to just one topic you can use very focused keywords and phrases. For example, instead of writing about 'tomatoes' write about 'growing tomatoes in containers on your patio.' Google lists over 38 million tomato websites with only about 2.5% of those discussing growing in containers on a patio.

Use your keywords and similar words and phrases in your title and sprinkled lightly throughout your copy. You should also include them in the ALT tags and captions of your photos. (The ALT tag is alternative text so that anyone or anything that can't see the photo will know what it contains.) Use your keywords wherever it makes sense, just don't overdo it.

Break up your text into small paragraphs, sometimes even just one or two words.

Skip the corporate-speak and write like you're talking to a friend. Use the word 'you' as much as possible instead of using words like 'I', 'we' or 'us.'

You may also want to sign up for Google+ and Google Analytics.

Google+ is a social media platform, but with a twist. Google is always trying to find ways to deliver the best content to searchers and one recent addition to the search algorithm is Author Rank. If your articles have your byline and you write quality content, Google will notice and reward you. It's only a small piece of the way they rank websites, but it's worth doing to give yourself every advantage.

Google Analytics is a service that provides statistics about your website – such as where visitors are coming from and what search terms they used, plus it tallies clicks and sales. Lots of good marketing information from a little snippet of code.

3. Connect with your customers using social media.

Many companies use social media as a way to push their message, much like they use a website. The most successful usage though is by connecting with customers and encouraging feedback.

There are lots of social media sites. The big ones are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and Google+, but there are many other sites that might be a perfect fit for your company.

Although it takes time – both to post and to build a following – the rewards of using social media can be worth it.

Customers are beginning to expect companies to be using it. They're even using social media to search for people and things, instead of using the search engines.

Some of the benefits of using social media include increased visibility, networking and building relationships with customers.

For example, if you're a restaurant or sports bar owner you could make great use of Facebook. Post pictures of food. Talk about upcoming special promotions. Share a coupon. Run a simple survey asking which beer is best. Post regularly and reply quickly to comments. When you engage your customers and get them to post on your wall, you also show up on their friends' walls thus increasing your reach.

To get started, set up your profile – including information about your company and you because people want to connect with other people, not a faceless company.

Be careful of tips and tricks that suggest you can get mega amounts of followers quickly and easily. One example is automated sharing of the same posts on both Facebook and Twitter. Unfortunately the people who follow you on the different platforms may have different desires, such as the type of content plus how and when the content is delivered. Instead you can share the same ideas, but tailor the actual posts for each audience.

Offer advice and even connections to someone else who might be able to help. Share your knowledge. On the flip side, ask for help when you need it.

Ask your customers what they think of your business. Ask what they would like improved and then tailor your products and services to your customers' needs.

Respond to any complaints quickly. You know the old saying – “Good news travels fast. Bad news travels faster.” It’s even more true now with social media.

In a well-known example of bad news, passengers saw United Airlines baggage handlers throwing guitar cases around during a layover. As a result, an expensive guitar belonging to one of the passengers was severely damaged, but because of technicalities United refused to compensate the owner. In the past, the owner would complain and his friends and family might know about it, but that’s about as far as it would go. With social media, it turned into a public relations disaster for United.

The guitar owner created a music video about his experience. It went viral. Mega viral.

What did United do? At first, nothing. Maybe they thought it would all go away. It didn’t. Later they offered to – partially – compensate the guitar owner, but it didn’t undo the damage.

By the way, the guitar owner is now a popular guest speaker about customer service.

4. Connect with your customers using email.

Not quite ready to commit to a social media campaign?

You can still connect with your customers using email. And your email has a better chance of being seen because your email lands in your customer's inbox, just waiting for them to devour the content. On the other hand, your post in Facebook may be one of hundreds of daily posts on your customer's news feed.

If you send email on a regular basis and provide quality content, there's a good chance your customer will turn to you the next time they need your product or service.

But what about spam? You need your customer's permission to avoid your message going straight to the spam folder – or worse – being reported as spam.

There are a few exceptions, however. When a customer buys something from you, email them a receipt and add some additional information, such as a welcome message, how to track their order and how to contact customer service.

Send another email when their order ships. These emails need to be fairly short and to the point, although you can add a little promotional information near the end such as 'customers who bought [this product] also bought ...' and 'if you'd like to keep up to date (or learn tips and tricks) about our products/services, sign up for our newsletter.'

You can also wait a bit, and then ask the customer to review the product they bought. Make it super simple for them to respond by reminding them what they bought and including a direct link to a review form. Be sure to thank them for their time!

Because the customer just bought something from you, they are very likely to open emails like these. They are also good candidates to buy something else. Can you think of an add-on or similar product they might like? Take advantage of this contact, but don't over do any sales messages. Remember to be helpful.

If you'd like to continue sending them emails, you'll need their permission.

To do that, set up an optin page on your website. It should be a very simple page. No links to anywhere else. No content except information about your newsletter and what they can expect when they sign up. Keep the form simple – just a box for them to type their email address and button to

subscribe. However make the text persuasive. 'Subscribe to our newsletter' is too generic. 'Join now and get a coupon for 20% off your next purchase' or 'Get the latest news and our best tips and tricks' might work better.

To make managing your outgoing emails easier, sign up with an email service provider. MailChimp and AWeber are two of the best known.

Drive traffic to your optin page by including the link to your optin page on every page of your website. Also include the link on your Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Set up a pay-per-click campaign – not to sell one item, but to entice people to sign up for your email so you can sell to them over and over.

Instead of selling space on your website for a few cents per click, make your own compelling ad and when someone clicks on it they go to your optin page. Just make sure your emails deliver on the promise you made in the ad.

If you have a brick-and-mortar business, you can still use technology to build your list. For example, place an iPad (on a tether) near the check out. Download an app that collects email addresses from your customers. Some of the email service providers provide apps like these for free. The iPad will attract attention and the app automatically inserts the new email addresses into your list. Easy peasy.

Increase your optins by offering a premium, such as an ebook or a special report or a free trial of your product or service.

Email regularly to your list. If they don't see something from you in awhile they might forget they signed up and mark it as spam.

Include a snippet in each email reminding the reader that they're getting the email because they requested it. And include an easy way for them to unsubscribe. You may want to include both at the top of your email so forgetful readers won't have to read far and will be less likely to mark the email as spam.

To make your email campaign super simple, set up autoresponders. These are emails that are pre-written and sent automatically. For example, a 'welcome' email that's sent when someone signs up. Or develop a series of emails. For example, if your product has five benefits you can write five emails that each explain one of the benefits and are sent out a few days to a week apart.

To get even more mileage, use your email and social media posts to support each other. For example, when you send your newsletter to subscribers, also post it on Facebook (or a snippet on Twitter) with a link back to a page on your website that also includes your optin form.

Also include social media sharing buttons in your emails to encourage your customers to share your information with their friends.

5. Test, test, and test again.

Although we can guess what should work, the only way to know for sure is to test.

By testing, I mean running a mathematical experiment called an A/B test. To do so, you make two different versions – A and B – of a particular item and show them to two different audiences of similar size. Promote the blog post or the optin page or the email containing the experiment and then wait until you have enough data to be statistically significant.

Sometimes it takes awhile. Be patient. But if you've run the experiment for over a month and both versions had lots of traffic and there's still not much difference, it probably won't make much difference which you choose. Maybe it's time to move on to another experiment.

So test, make adjustments and then keep what works and get rid of the rest. By the way, what works on one website, in one industry, may not work anywhere else. And, what works today may change in the future and not work as well, if at all.

Make use of tools such as your site stats, Google Analytics and even stats from your email service to help determine what works best.

You can test just about everything – the colors in your website, the location of your optin form, the color of your call-to-action button, even the text in the call-to-action (CTA) button. You can make minor changes, such as whether to use the Arial or the Verdana font in your headlines and see which does better.

So, say you want to find out which headline in an email converts better. Test it by sending an email with one headline to a portion of your list and the other email to another portion. Check your open rates and send the winning email to the remainder of your list.

Is your optin form working as hard as it can? Remember to make the text compelling, leave plenty of white space and add a CTA button. Did you know red and orange buttons tend to get more clicks? But the real question is whether that holds true on your website. How can you tell?

Test.

To get started, set up two virtually identical optin pages with one or two differences. If your website already uses plenty of red or orange, you may want to test how a blue or green button does in comparison. Send some traffic to the optin page with the red button and some traffic to the page with

the blue button. Because the blue color stands out against the red or orange already on the page, it may perform better, but you won't know without testing.

You can also use pay-per-click to test. For example, if you have a new information product, but aren't sure which headline is best write an ad for each headline and see how many clicks each one gets. It may cost you a little money, but probably a lot less than you stand to lose if fewer people bought your product.

Some changes may only make a small difference, but if your optin rate increased a little that means more people will see your message. If your conversion rate also increased a little that means more people saw your message and more people also decided to click to the next stage in your sales funnel thus compounding your reach.

Aim to optimize each portion of your marketing message so you can take advantage of compounding and make a positive impact on your bottom line. Just make sure that the changes you make to your marketing are based on data and not on a whim.

6. Set an achievable weekly goal.

Work on your marketing for half an hour to an hour day and before you know it you've achieved a lot.

Turn off distractions, set a timer and work on one thing per day. Keep this up and soon you'll be so far ahead of everyone else because they're still sitting in front of their computer, overwhelmed and unable to decide what to do.

There you have it! Six secrets to online success.

But, wait! We're not done. Here's a bonus seventh secret.

Network and reconnect with customers.

Call or email your best customers. Find out what they're doing, what challenges they're facing, what frustrates them and see if there's something you can offer that might help. It's not only a feel-good, stay-in-touch move, but you can also get great insights that could help boost your business.

Then call or email former customers. Find out why they're not customers anymore. Did they just drift away or was there a problem you may not know about? Can you bring them back into the fold? See what you can do to make them happy customers again. If not, perhaps you can gain insights that might help you keep other customers happy.

You can also join some local networking groups, but don't go with the thought of sell them something. Look for ways to help or add value. You may wind up with new customers or some inspiration, but don't fret if that doesn't happen right away.

About the author

MARCIA TALON is a business consultant, specializing in small business marketing.

With over 15 years experience in web design, she's worked in many industries, both retail and wholesale. She's worked for big businesses and small businesses and for government agencies.

Prior to becoming a consultant, Marcia was part of a small – very small – team that built a content management system for the City of Denver's website before most people had even heard of the concept. It allowed the city's website to go from a few dozen pages in the beginning to over 9,000 pages of content within a year. Both Marcia, individually, and the team won several awards for the website.

She also earned a law degree along the way that taught her how to look at something critically and analyze it from two sides. Both skills that can help you develop an outstanding business online.

Because each business is unique, how you engage your customers should be too. She enjoys working one-on-one to help find your unique voice.

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