

7 Tips for an Effective Online Business

These seven important tips are based on many years of online development experience for over 70 clients, ranging from promotional, entertainment, community, commerce, and business Websites.

1) Avoid "cookie cutter" solutions.

There are many companies that offer pre-designed Website templates that you can put your content in. Some of these templates are attractively designed BUT you need to ask yourself:

- Will this generic design sell my specific product and/or services?
- Does this design provide adequate promotional areas?
- Is this design consistent with my brand?
- Who will maintain and make updates to the site?
- Can I trust this company and their support and hosting services?

Cookie cutter solutions can be a good option but don't expect them to be as good as a site designed by an experienced person who understands your business goals and can proactively help you to maximize your online opportunities.

2) Drive your customer to the goal

Don't think that just by putting your information on a Website, customers/clients will be motivated to action. Your Website must be designed around your business goals. For example if one of your business goals is to build an email list of prospective clients then you must motivate site visitors to sign up from the first page. The email signup should be repeated throughout the site, and designed to entice your target customer.

If one of your goals is to sell a product, then don't bury it 2 or more pages into the site. Bring it to the home page and design it's presentation to be attractive to your online customers.

3) Offer free stuff

Something of perceived value can be used to drive visitors to your site, entice them to give you their information, and motivate them to purchase products and services. Following are some things that you could offer on your Website:

- Download a white paper or article on your field of expertise
- Download coupons or certificates for products/services
- Free consultations, assessments and workshops
- Promotional merchandise (samples, T-shirts, caps, etc.)
- Entry into a contest or drawing

4) Seek out relationships with complimentary Websites

Broaden your marketing punch by forming co-marketing efforts with appropriate Websites. A good way to start is to make a list of businesses that attract your target customer. Next, eliminate the businesses that are your direct competition. Review the remaining businesses to find ones that you think would benefit from a partnership with you and visa-versa. Contact them and see if they are interested in:

- A cobranded email campaign
- A banner exchange with your Website
- A cobranded, printed mail campaign
- A cobranded promotion
- A referral program

If you can create just 3 relationships with complimentary businesses you could triple the number of people who will be aware of your business.

5) Emphasize your differentiator

There are probably many other businesses similar to yours on the Web right now, but don't be discouraged, think about what makes your business different from the others, for example, is it:

- Local service
- Experience/Knowledge
- Low prices
- A specific focus

or anything else that makes your business stand out. Capitalize on this differentiator and make sure your Website reflects it. I have a client who developed a unique tool for his profession. He included it in his Website but it was buried and it was difficult for clients to find it. On the surface his site seemed to be just like his competition's. I encouraged him to bring it to the forefront because that is his unique value that he brings to potential customers.

6) Learn from the competition

Remember that saying "Keep your enemies closer than your friends". Don't recreate the wheel. Take a day to review what your competition is up to. Create a list of what they are doing well and what they are doing poorly. How do they position their key services? What imagery are they using to appeal to the customer/client? Are they doing anything innovative? Would you buy from them? This background is invaluable in establishing your position in the online world.

7) Build a targeted email list

Most of the people who visit your Website are potential customers, if not today then perhaps next week or next month. Motivate online visitors and offline prospects to give you their email address. This list can be like gold if handled correctly. Use the list on a regular basis to send promotional newsletters or other 'valuable' messages to. This will keep your businesses name in your customers minds, so when they're ready to make a decision, your business will benefit.

These 7 tips will help you to understand some of the important factors in online business success. Remember that with so many businesses online, and so many customers/clients going to the internet to make a decision, it's the online business that is strategically designed that has the advantage. If you would like further details on any of these tips or a free evaluation of your current media, email us at rparr@executionist.com, or call 310-435-7452.