

# Internet Technology for Fun and Profit

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**E**very intelligent dealer wants to grow their business, increasing revenues while minimizing costs. Advertising, marketing and reputation management are critical to your business. In a depressed economy, a smart dealer will leverage the power of cheap technologies to help grow their business.

Over the last decade, the Internet has changed the way we all do business. Information is easier to access, exposure is limitless, and the world has certainly become a smaller place. When exploring an Internet strategy, there are many factors to consider, pitfalls to avoid, and best practices to adopt that can help you leverage this exciting medium without sacrificing your core business assets or breaking the bank.

The question you need to ask yourself is, what do I want the Internet to do for me? Do you want to create a credible presence, do you want to impress your friends, do you want to sell online, or do you just want to generate leads? Before making your foray into Internet technology, decide what you want it to do for you.

The following are fundamental steps to a successful Internet campaign:

- Understanding your existing presence and reputation
- Evaluating the effectiveness of your current Internet strategy (if any)
- Creating an Internet strategy
- Implementing an Internet strategy
- Evaluating the success of your strategy
- Refining your strategy and campaigns

### ***Understanding your existing Internet presence***

Whether you want it or not, you probably already have an Internet presence. Search for yourself with any major on-line search engine, like Google, Bing, Dogpile or the litany of others available today. Search your company, the brands you represent and the names of your employees. This little exercise can be quite revealing, as you will be able to quickly see what prospective customers see when they do the same thing. Do you like what you see?

### ***Evaluating the effectiveness of your current internet strategy (if any)***

What have you already done? Is it working the way that you thought it would? Are you getting the results that you were promised?

### ***Creating an internet strategy***

Your Internet strategy should include a minimum of the following components:

- Corporate presence
  - Your corporate presence should be clearly defined, with your own website and your own domain name that describes your company, where to find you, the area that you service, the products/brands that you represent, and the kind of service that your customers should expect.
- Reputation management
  - Your customers will post reviews about you. Competitors may say bad things about you. Guard and protect your reputation by responding quickly to complaints and providing excellent customer service.
- Pre-sale support
  - Give your customers and prospects the tools they need to make informed buying decisions about you, your company and your product line. Be sure to include real testimonials from satisfied customers, provide simple information about the technologies that you promote, and inform customers about the service experience they can expect from you and your team.
- Post-sale support
  - Give customers an easy way to contact you by email, on-line form and telephone, if they ever have service, maintenance, disinfection or repair needs.
- Cross-marketing
  - Promote your website on all company stationery, advertisements, billboards and truck signage.

In addition to the minimum, you might also consider the following resources:

- Social networking sites
- Blogging
- Newsletters and promotional emails
- Advertising on home-improvement websites
- On-line community participation
- Search-engine optimization services

### ***Implementing an Internet strategy***

Implementation should be carefully considered while balancing the costs/benefits of doing it in-house or hiring a professional. Anyone with a computer or suitable Internet-

connected device can create and host a Web presence with very little effort. The appearance and stability of this presence depends heavily on how it has been created. If you have the time, creativity and necessary skills to create a website, feel free to do it; but if you're like most small-business owners, you have better things to do than trying to become a Web expert. Weigh the costs and benefits carefully and make an intelligent decision.

If you do hire a professional, be sure to clearly define the scope of the project, the timeframe, and a definite budget. Professionally provided websites should include comprehensive tracking and visitor statistics to help you shape and refine your Internet presence to suit the needs of your company. Resist the temptation to go overboard on media, graphics and audio—simple sells!

### **Evaluating the success of your strategy**

After deploying your website and other strategic components, define specific metrics that you can use to determine the value of your Web presence.

- Where do your visitors come from?
- How long do site visitors stay on your site?
- How often do visitors visit more than once?
- Are visitors finding you directly, or are they linking from another site?
- What search terms are people using to find you?
- Are visitors calling your office because of your website? (Always ask customers how they found you)
- What percentage of your sales derives from Internet referrals?

### **Refining the success of your strategy and campaigns**

A smart leader is brave enough to make decisions, yet humble enough to change/improve plans when they're not working as intended. Set reasonable goals, as well as timeframes for re-evaluation. Each campaign should be given a minimum of 90 days before making changes.

Be realistic and honest about your evaluation. Even if cousin Cindy designed your website and she's your favorite cousin, you need to think of your customers and business requirements first.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### ***Should I sell systems online?***

This question will certainly prove to be divisive in our industry over the next decade. I personally believe that under the current business models I've seen to date, Internet retail sales of POE, or undercounter POU appliances, is a disservice to the industry as well as to the consumer. Due to the complex nature of water-processing technology and the fact that every home/business is unique, the local water treatment expert (Certified Water Specialist) is still the very best resource to help end-users make informed decisions. They will assure clients of the very best water at the best prices, while providing the comprehensive pre-sale, post-sale and periodic maintenance/disinfection services that are so critical to ensuring uniform water quality.

### ***Should I pay for clicks?***

You should only pay for clicks if you have a way to directly monetize every visit to your site. Many dealers report that when paying for clicks, they receive a large number of visitors, but very few of them result in direct sales. *Caveat emptor.*

### ***Should I twitter?***

Twitter is a social tool to help friends stay connected; don't feel obligated to use it, unless you're prepared to invest the time to use it properly and consistently.

### ***Should I have a Facebook account?***

If you do, make sure that the friends you keep and activities you engage in represent you and your company appropriately and in a positive light.

Use the Internet as powerful tool, where you can leverage massive publicity at minimal cost, but use it wisely.

## **About the authors**

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