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Introduction

The Internet Has Changed Customer Acquisition and Retention Forever

The internet has made a revolutionary change in our everyday lives; it's no secret that the internet is the first place we go when we need information. This includes searching for local products, services, and businesses.

However, many businesses still are not utilizing online technology to its full potential when it comes to bringing in new leads, sales, and customers. As a matter of fact, millions of businesses still don't use it at all.

Did you know that 97% of internet users search for LOCAL goods and services, but more than 1/2 of small businesses still do not have a website?

In order to run a sustainable business these days, companies must focus on several key points:

- ³⁵/₁₇ Getting NEW customers (Customer Acquisition)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Keeping EXISTING customers coming back (Customer Retention)
- ³⁵/₁₇ Developing EFFECTIVE acquisition and retention strategies
- ³⁵/₁₇ Keeping a strong balance between COST and BENEFITS
- ³⁵/₁₇ Using techniques and strategies that will work LONG-TERM

The first step is to understand and implement marketing methods that are effective TODAY vs. YESTERDAY.

The internet has drastically changed the equation by becoming one of the most effective marketing tools to hit the business world; and it's grown into much more than simply having a website.

In fact, the massive level of internet usage amongst consumers has impacted the way businesses generate new leads and retain existing customers *forever*.

You may be aware of this, but are not sure exactly WHY or HOW the internet is changing the dynamics of your business. Unfortunately, you are not alone

as most businesses still do not understand. Many think that the internet is all hype and no substance; but this is far from the truth.

If you've found that you are not getting results from traditional advertising methods such as paper coupons, yellow page ads, TV commercials, and newspaper ads, it's time for you to take a closer look at internet marketing.

But before we get into how the internet impacts today's marketing sphere, let's take a look at the explosive growth of internet usage...

The Growth of Internet Usage

Since the 1990's, the internet has emerged into a worldwide interconnection of individuals, companies, organizations, government, and so much more. It has changed the way we communicate, as well as the way we do business.

Back in those days, there were just a few million internet users across the globe. But today, that number has grown to more than 2.5 BILLION users (39% of the world population) – and 70% of us use it every single day.

The internet has had a revolutionary impact in all of our lives. In just a short period of time, the information highway has become the most-used digital platform ever to exist.

Imagine your life without the internet – no email, no websites, no search engines, no social networking... it's really hard to fathom. This is because we – as consumers – have grown accustomed to using the web to handle many of our daily tasks.

Starting out as a slow dial-up service that we only used "every now and then," the internet has evolved into a high-speed tool that we simply cannot live without.

What are we doing online?

Here's an idea of how MUCH we really rely on it:

³⁵/₁₇ 91% Using Search Engines to Find Information

- ³⁵/₁₇ 88% Sending or Reading Email
- ³⁵/₁₇ 84% Searching for a Map or Driving Directions
- ³⁵/₁₇ 78% Researching a Product or Service
- ³⁵/₁₇ 71% Watching Online Videos
- ³⁵/₁₇ 67% Engaging in Social Media
- ³⁵/₁₇ 61% Doing Online Banking

... and SO much more; all at our fingertips

Do you recall what it was like the first time you were able to do so much on the internet? If you're like most people, you quickly realized that life was all of a sudden a lot more convenient.

We have seen the internet evolve from a simple leisure tool into a robust "must-have" piece of technology that most of us use every single day; and this growth is expected to increase at astonishing rates in the coming years.

The Way Local Consumers Do Business Has Changed

When it comes to finding local businesses, the process has drastically changed over the past two decades. Years ago, we never imagined that we would be able to fire up a computer or mobile device, type in a few keywords, and get all of the information we need about a company within just a few minutes.

As a result, purchasing decisions have become easier and faster than ever before. Since information is so readily available on the internet, we can see exactly what products and/or services businesses offer, get their address and/or directions, get their hours of operation, and learn more about their company – all with just a few clicks.

When it comes to reaching more local consumers, your company should be there every step of the consumer purchase decision process – from the beginning to the end.

Adapting your marketing strategies to the current way consumers do things means you must first understand how the purchase journey has changed:

Websites are the NEW Flyers and Brochures

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ When we wanted to get specific details about a company's products and services, we had to visit them in person, call them up on the phone, or wait for a flyer or brochure to land in our laps. When we wanted to do comparison shopping, we spent a lot of time going store to store to assess prices, features, and more.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We can pull up a company's website at our convenience and get all the information we need about their products and services. Comparison shopping has never been easier, as we've become accustomed to doing our own research online. This way, we feel more secure about choosing companies to do business with instead of going in totally blind.

Search Engines are the NEW Phone Books and Classified Ads

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We grabbed our Yellow Pages phone books, or looked through a bunch of newspaper classified ads to find a local business that provided the products and services we needed. These were very expensive methods for business owners because they had to pay top dollar to get ad space that would generate a real response.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We go straight to an internet search engine such as Google, type in a local keyword phrase that describes what we're looking for, and go through the list. Most of us do not go past the first page of the results, so those businesses with higher rankings naturally get the most attention. As a result, most of us no longer even use Yellow Page books or newspapers to find local products and services.

Email is the NEW Direct Mail

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ Establishing a “relationship” with a company simply involved being on their direct mail list and receiving promotional offers in the mail from time to time. We had to check our snail mail boxes for special offers, discounts, deals, and announcements from local businesses. These paper advertising pamphlets and coupons cost businesses a lot of money due to printing and postage costs. Furthermore, it took a few days for the content to reach consumers, which caused a delayed reaction as far as redemption.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We can open up our email to find coupons, special offers, deals, and announcements from our favorite local businesses. Once an email is sent, it is delivered immediately. Email is extremely cost-effective for small businesses because there’s no printing or postage involved. Companies are also using email campaigns to build relationships with local consumers by providing helpful tips, industry information, and other valuable information – keeping their company fresh in the minds of their target audience.

Social Media is the NEW Word-of-Mouth

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We found out about local products, services, and businesses by personally talking to family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, and other personal connections. While this was OK, it was a slow way of getting the word out.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We can log in to our social media accounts and see what companies the people in our network “like.” Internet users can refer businesses that we like simply by using the multiple social networking platforms. With features such as a “share” button, we can refer companies to our entire social network with one click of the mouse. This creates a potential viral effect and sends a lot of more eyes to a company’s social media profile; all due to their followers generating more buzz surrounding their business.

Online Reviews are the NEW Personal Recommendations

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We asked the people we knew for recommendations about local products, services, and businesses. We asked them which businesses they had great experiences with, as well as which ones they suggest we avoid. Many times, we even trusted our gut instinct about companies that we chose to do business with – going in blindly without knowing anything about their reputation at all.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We visit sites such as Google+ Local, Yelp, Citysearch, Yahoo Local, and others to see what other people have to say about local products, services, and companies. Social media is another huge player when it comes to finding out what other people think about local businesses. Consumers are quick to share both their bad and positive experiences on social media and online review sites. In fact, studies show that most internet users actually trust “online” reviews as much as personal recommendations.

Online Content is the NEW Local Newspaper

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We would read the local newspapers to keep up with what was going on in our areas – including local businesses and their products and services.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We can read content that companies are publishing online to keep up with what's going on in their industry. Online content is considered as "pull marketing" because it draws consumers to the business; vs. the traditional, expensive "push methods" that went out to the masses with very little results.

Online Videos are the NEW TV Commercials

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We chose local businesses based on TV commercials we saw. In fact, the TV was invented as an advertising platform originally – TV shows were later added to keep consumers glued to the set so they could see the commercials. So it was the perfect way for businesses to capture new leads and customers. However, commercials are extremely expensive.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ We can perform an online search for a local product or service and find videos for various local companies that can provide what we need. Not only are businesses producing commercial-style online videos, but they're also producing product demonstrations, helpful tips, and other videos that present value to the viewer; ultimately turning them into customers. The best part is that online videos are very cost-effective to produce – costing just a small fraction of what it costs to create a TV commercial.

Online Coupons are the NEW Paper Coupons

THEN:

³⁵₁₇ We've always loved to save money; so we were addicted to scouring our stash of paper coupons that we received in the mail. It was also exciting to clip tons of coupons from the local newspapers each week. Again, due to the printing and postage costs associated with these methods, most companies usually struggled to see any real profit margins.

NOW:

³⁵₁₇ In addition to email, we can find coupons for local products and services via sites like Groupon, which receives a lot of traffic from consumers who are looking for great deals. Companies that use these sites put themselves in a position to grab some of that attention, resulting in more sales.

How Local Businesses Can Adapt to the Shift

As you can see, the internet has totally changed the way we do business. It's become a major force in acquiring and retaining a solid, profit-producing customer-base. This powerful shift presents a great opportunity for you to close the gap between local online consumers and your offline business.

If not, you risk losing potential leads, customers, and sales to your competitors who are taking measures to keep their business in-line with internet technology and popularity.

Savvy business owners understand that the internet can drive a large amount of foot traffic to any local business. Therefore, they are grabbing this powerful tool by the horns and making it work to increase their sales and profits.

If you are still operating based on marketing methods you've always used, it's definitely time for a change; especially if you are spending a lot of money on them and not getting results. While some of them may still generate

minimal results, you cannot ignore the internet if you truly want to stay connected with more local consumers.

It is critical that every business – no matter how large or small – gives some serious thought to what they “should” be doing in terms of marketing based on current consumer buying behavior.

Consumers today expect businesses to keep up with technological advances that make their lives easier and more convenient. In fact, many studies show that companies that do not cater to internet users are losing a fair share of their target audience to their internet-friendly competitors.

Here are some ways your business can utilize internet marketing to get more customers, as well as increase overall revenue:

³⁵₁₇ **Get an EFFECTIVE Website**

Many businesses today still do not have a website, which is mind-blowing. Unfortunately, some companies that do have websites are suffering because they’re not helping them generate more sales.

That’s because most of those websites are missing some critical components.

Websites are much more affordable today than they used to be; so they are definitely worth the investment. An effective website is one that has a professional appearance with a clean layout that truly reflects your brand.

In addition to being appealing to the eye, it should be easy to navigate so visitors can find the information they need quickly without a lot of hassles.

Visitors should immediately see your contact details and call-to-action on all pages in order to increase conversions.

Speaking of conversions, your website copy should be complete and written in a way that focuses on the “needs” of your target audience – and not all about your business.

³⁵₁₇ **Use Email Marketing**

A huge benefit of having a website is that it allows you to capture leads so you can follow-up with them; this is usually accomplished with an email opt-in form that encourages visitors to join your list.

You can give something away or implement a loyalty and rewards program as motivation for visitors to opt-in. Then, you can follow-up with them using an email Autoresponder series to build a relationship with them and keep them coming back.

It will also help you increase sales because you can send out coupons, newsletters, special offers, and other content that will result in more business coming through your doors.

³⁵₁₇ **Gain a Strong Search Engine Presence**

People all over the world have become increasingly connected to the internet in one way or another; but searching for information via the search engines is the top activity.

A website that is buried in the search engine results will not help you get in front of more local consumers. Again, most consumers do not go past the first page of results. This means that we do not spend time combing through pages and pages before we take action and make a decision about what we're searching for.

In order to get right in front of this massive amount of traffic, your company needs to have a fully-optimized website, along with other online content showing up in the results.

To accomplish this, you need on-site, off-site optimization, keyword-optimized content, and social media all tied together to gain the type of attention that could seriously turn your business around.

³⁵₁₇ **Claim, Verify, and Optimize Online Local Listings**

Local listings are also a major component when it comes to getting more search engine visibility. When consumers search for local products and services, most of them stop at the local listing section.

Sites such as Google+ Local, Yahoo Local, Bing Local, and others cannot be ignored if you want more online exposure. If your company's listing is not claimed, verified, and optimized, your listing is probably buried in the search results.

If someone does find your low-ranked listings, they won't get the information they need if your listing is incomplete or contains inaccurate information.

A thorough listing will allow you to take control of your company by providing viewers with the correct information regarding your company. The more details you provide the better.

³⁵₁₇ **Monitor and Manage Your Online Reputation**

If you don't stay on top of what your customers are saying about you online, you could be setting yourself up for a hard road ahead. As mentioned earlier, people now flock to the internet to see what others have to say about local products, services, and businesses.

It can be expected that any business will have a negative mention here and there. However, if you're not careful, your company could end up on a slippery slope to an overall negative online image.

Even just one negative online mention can seriously cripple your business. Therefore, it is critical that you monitor what is being said about your company and handle these reviews accordingly.

While you can't stop anyone from writing negativity about your brand, you can handle it in a way that shows other consumers that you actually care about your customers.

Another way to buffer any negative online reviews is to encourage positive online reviews from your happy customers. There are plenty of ways to ask for online feedback; but if you don't ask, you will not receive in most cases.

The fact is... unhappy customers are more likely to post a review than happy customers. But if you ask them to do it, many of them will do it without hesitation.

Take control of your online image by making sure you manage your reputation frequently and thoroughly on an on-going basis.

³⁵/₁₇ **Publish Helpful, Relevant Online Content**

Your website should contain valuable, relevant keyword-optimized content because it will build trust with your visitors. One way to accomplish this is by creating a company blog.

Effective content revolves around providing the type of information your target audience craves – building your credibility in the process. Good, consistent content will keep them coming back for more.

Content, however, should not stop at your website. Content marketing is quickly becoming a powerful way to pull in new leads. This involves publishing different types of content in various places all over the web.

Articles, press releases, presentations, videos, graphics/images, social media, and other types of content all work together to bring as much attention to your business as possible on auto-pilot.

³⁵/₁₇ **Get Involved in Social Media**

Social networking is another top online activity; sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and others have more than 2 BILLION users combined – Facebook being #1 with more than 1 BILLION users.

If your company is not engaging with your local target audience on social media, you are missing out on an opportunity to utilize a cost-effective method to get more eyes on your business.

People love to connect with their favorite companies on social media sites. In addition, they share these companies with their friends, family members, and other associates in their social network. In turn, your business gets “free advertising” due to the fact that your followers are doing the work for you.

³⁵₁₇ **Use Online Videos**

People spend a lot of time watching online videos every single day; even videos related to products, services, and businesses.

Therefore, videos are a great way to show potential customers “first-hand” what you have to offer. This can be accomplished with commercial-style videos, product demonstration videos, helpful tips and hints videos, and more.

Online videos are powerful for generating more traffic and increasing conversions. Not only that, but they can provide a nice Return on Investment (ROI) because they are much more cost-effective than traditional videos and TV commercials.

Short, simple, and to-the-point videos work best.

In addition to posting videos to your company website, videos can be posted all over the web to give your business even more exposure. This includes YouTube and other video-sharing sites.

When distributing videos online, make sure your video titles and descriptions are optimized for local viewers so they show up higher in the search results.

Conclusion

The secret to your business success all lies in how well you can generate new customers and keep the ones you have coming back.

So, it must be said that businesses today can no longer afford to put internet marketing on the backburner.

The internet plays an important role in our everyday lives. We are in a constant state of "saving time" and the internet allows us to do a variety of tasks quickly and easily.

The internet is the glue that helps us get through daily activities, as well as stay connected with the world. Technology surrounding the World Wide Web is constantly changing and advancing.

As a business owner, now is the time to get on-board with online marketing if you want to stay ahead of the marketing game and keep up with your local competitors.

I help local businesses get new leads, boost sales, and increase revenue using various internet tools, strategies and techniques. Contact me for a free, no obligation consultation to find out how I can help you.

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