

How to attract people to your site

As selling online becomes a popular way for your small business clients to trade, how will people know that they are there? Chris Barling of Actinic provides some timely tips for you to pass on.

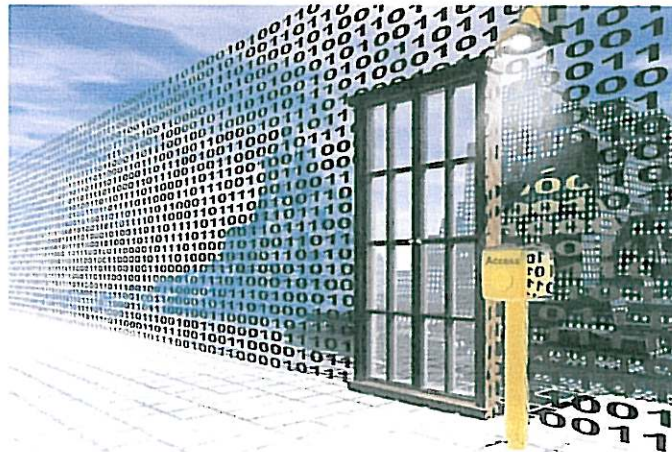
Creating an online site for selling on the Web is not enough on its own, just like getting a new telephone number and expecting it to ring is not realistic. To attract visitors to websites and convert them to customers the site has to be marketed. Here are some pointers on how your clients can persuade their prospects to visit and buy from them.

1. Start with your existing marketing materials. Put your web site address on your existing brochures, advertising and business cards. Wherever you promote your company name, promote your web address as well.

2. Manually register with the top search engines. Either research the most effective way to do the registration yourself, or employ a professional who comes recommended. Just using the free, automatic registrations without any thought or investigation will leave you in the middle of the crowd. Search engines can provide considerable traffic, so it's worth investing some time in learning about them.

3. Newsgroups and forums. There are lots of places where people hold discussions online. Some of these forums will be talking about your speciality. For instance, if you sell yachting gear, there are plenty of specialist boating forums. Provided that you participate responsibly, you can get the chance to talk about your company, products and offerings. This has the added benefit that it can be enjoyable and is likely to provide lots of useful tips for you, too.

4. Target your web marketing. There are lots of opportunities to



advertise online – pay per click adverts, email mailing lists (where people have opted-in to the list), directories and so on. Before parting with your cash, you should use the same judgement that you would use when deciding whether to advertise in conventional media. Who will be looking at this medium and are they my target market? Getting your message in front of large numbers isn't the issue, they must be interested and potential customers for your products.

5. What's working? It's a sad fact that when it comes to marketing, the anoraks are in the driving seat. Although being creative is crucial, measuring the results and putting the next round of money where you got the most results last time is the way to success. So measure everything you do, and try to find out where all your leads and customers come from. Use questions on your Web site to ask buyers how they heard about your site.

6. Links and affiliations. If you can, find specialist sites that cater for your particular niche and if they'll link to you or put you in their search results. In return, put a link back to them. Alternatively, set up a referral, or

affiliate scheme so the linking site is rewarded on results. This can offer added value to your visitors as well as boosting your traffic – it's a win-win situation.

7. Use PR to get your site noticed. Several of Actinic's customers have had national coverage because they have an interesting story, from selling live pond fish online to using ecommerce to correct a work/life balance. If you can get the press interested, it's worth a fortune in marketing.

8. Try and get a Web address that is memorable. It's worth spending some time thinking about your web site address (URL). Ideally it should be easy to remember, stand out from the crowd and communicate your message. This will take some time and probably a lot of investigation, as many good domain names have already been taken.

9. Learn from others' successes. Keep an eye on your competitors, and on successful sites in other market sectors. Don't just try to copy them, but do learn from what they are doing, and think about how you can adapt good ideas in appropriate ways. 'Trawl' magazines and ecommerce suppliers' web sites for

case studies, and find out what other sites attribute their success to.

10. Provide extra value. Also known as being 'sticky', a site that gives visitors a reason to return is more likely to win repeat orders. For example, ecommerce solutions specialists provide free advice on selling online and the suitability of your business for internet trading. You could use some of their ideas and copy their approach by having information on your site that is relevant and useful to the sector you are selling into. Or can you come up with special offers at your site, like 3 for the price of 2 or buy X widget and get free batteries?



Reader offer: 50 free copies worth £5.99 each

'Selling successfully online - over 120 top tips for running an ecommerce web site' by Chris Barling and Bruce Townsend has a wealth of great ideas for anyone running or thinking of starting, an ecommerce business - all condensed into an easily digestible format. Go to www.actinic.co.uk/tips to claim your free copy now.