

When the Economy Slumps, Rely On Your Website to Boost Sales And Save Money! Here's How!

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I spend quite a bit of time reading the news online. Most of that time spent is focused on articles coming through AP (Associated Press) that have headlines about the economy, housing market, stock market and political information. I also check out similar headlines from USA Today and Yahoo News. Why? Because we're business owners and these issues affect us.

In our line of business – digital advertising – we've noticed trends: gas prices go up and our would-be clients tighten their wallets, a major natural disaster drives up food prices and more would-be clients tighten their wallets, the housing market begins crumbling and our would-be clients... you guessed it! they tighten their wallets.

It goes without saying that, everytime there's a shift, Joe – our Sales, Marketing and Advertising Director, Cathy – our Financial Manager, and I spend a couple of hours trying to decide the best way to prevent major suffering on our part. We call it preventative damage control! Sometimes we're successful and sometimes we resort to prayers. Does this sound remotely familiar? Business, particularly in this age and time, can be scary! And it can make you feel very, very small in the course of all things that I've already mentioned.

But, like you, we're into business too deep to just give up. Like you, we've got people depending on us to keep going. And like you, we love our business, our clients and our job, and we want to keep doing what it is we love to do.

So, how does a business cope with this kind of malay? Repeat after me: Rely on the website! Rely on the website! Now that we have the mantra down, let's examine how this works.

Website Marketing Features!

Your website, if you got it from You And Me Enterprises, probably has marketing features built into it. All you have to do is use them. Now there are several different features, so let's take a look at each one.

The Contact Us Page

You have a Contact Us page. All but a couple of our clients have a form included on this page. And, in this form there's a question: "How did you find us online?" Now, based on your site, that same question may be asked differently, but the idea's the same. We – you – are wanting to know how your site visitors are locating you online. And in the drop-down selections we're giving the visitor answers from which to choose. These answers are comprised of your most commonly-used advertising media: Business card, Brochure, the Newspaper, etc. Once this form is completed, the visitor clicks the "Submit Request" button and you get an email message in your Inbox letting you know that someone's requesting you to contact them. In that message, all the information they entered into the form is displayed for you, including their answer of how they located your website.

Now look at those email messages and look for trends in the answer to the question of how they located you. Let's say you have they have the following possible answers to choose from: Business Card, Brochure, Billboard on Bells Highway, the Phonebook, and Referral from Friend/Colleague. Make a list of each possible answer. As you go through the messages, put a tick mark beside the answer that corresponds with how they located you.

All you have to do at this point, is tally up the tick marks and you'll know which advertising medium is working best. You can also do this by asking people who call you on the phone or come into your establishment. For each answer you get, place a tick mark.

So how does this help you survive the economy slumps? Well, if a certain media is doing better than others, pump your advertising efforts into the more-successful media. If a certain media isn't doing so well, then maybe you should think about putting those advertising dollars on hold until a later time. This saves money!

The Mailing List

Many of our clients who've purchased a "Marketing Web Project" from us, have some form of a mailing list building feature within that web project. Some of our clients give away coupons, some have newsletters, some have mailing lists whereby site visitors can subscribe and get sales literature from them on a regular basis. Whether our client asks for email addresses, snail mail addresses or both, determines how that visitor will receive future sales literature.

Successful advertisers know that "The Money's in the List!" and they keep in constant contact with their list members to increase their revenues. If you have a mailing list – whether you have 2, 50 or 500 list members – you should be sending them mailings at least once a month.

When the economy's tight, the mailing list is a good way to keep advertising and sales going without spending any true money, particularly if you contact your list members by email. All you lose is the time it takes for you to put an advert together. Then you mail it out to your list.

Are you running a special for a particular holiday? Then take a photo of your product, insert it into an email message body, write a paragraph or two about the product's features - sizes, colors, etc. – and then invite your list member to inquire more via the website or to call you about the product. If you sell products online through your website, call them to action by telling them to purchase any time of the day or night via your website. If you sell products exclusively through your offline business, invite them to call ahead for a credit approval or to express their interest so you can make sure to hold the product til they can get there. This also works if you're a service-oriented business. Just substitute your services for the products I listed above.

While these are just suggestions about what to say to your list members – you'll have to refine it to fit your business – I'm sure you're beginning to see how this works and how you can save money and time in printed media and postage as well as how you can generate revenues.

The Referral List

Referral Lists are something that we're beginning to see a request for. The best form of advertising is word-of-mouth. Have you ever wondered why movies make such a huge splash at the box office? Have you ever wondered why some do well and others bomb? It's not the television commercials entirely. It's the people who watch the movie.

Just the other night my husband, Joe, our daughter, Miriam – she's 8 - and I were in the Video House trying to find a movie that would be fun for us older folks and entertain Miriam. We're looking at the shelf and talking to each other about the movie, "Night at the Museum". A gentleman that we've never seen before and wouldn't know him if we passed him on the street says to us: "We rented that movie. It's a good one. You should get it." We said "Really? You liked it?" He said "Sure did and it's good for the whole family." He added the last statement right after looking at our little girl and seeing how young she is. We rented it and laughed hard for a couple hours. We couldn't stop talking about it the next day either. In fact, Miriam watched

it two more times. Whether he realized it or not, the nice fella we met in the Video House, became a salesman for 20th Century Fox.

You too, can have such great salespeople. No one sells your products or services better than someone who's already used them. Think about it! It's a real live, walking, talking testimonial! It doesn't get any better than that!

In the last quarter of last year – when we felt the start of the economic slump - we began planning our referral program. And many of our clients have already received their information about how to participate in our referral program. Basically, if someone refers us and the referral buys a project, the referrer gets a check for \$99.00 or they get a credit against their account for \$99.00 that they can use towards purchasing particular services from us.

You might think about putting your referral program on your website if you haven't already done so. Some businesses have coupons they give in exchange for referrals, others give away a free product or a discount on one of their services. It's always nice to give those folks who love you enough to refer you, a small token of appreciation.

**Advertise! Advertise! Advertise!
And Spend No More or Maybe LESS Than You're Currently Spending!**

Now you have some ideas of how you can use your website to expand your sales and save some money in advertising. What else can you do to thwart off the economic slumps?

Free Advertising Online

Are you aware that there are many places you can advertise online for free? Of course, there's no such thing as a free lunch, so it will cost you some time to get it going.

Take a minute and go to Yahoo!-Local. Type in your business type and then your city, state and zip code. Browse through the listings that are returned. This is known as a digital directory. In recent years, print directories have been losing some of their punch as more and more people begin using digital directories like this one.

And Yahoo!-Local isn't the only directory either. There's yellowbook.com (that's advertised by David Carradine), MerchantCircle.com, and several other local directories.

In fact, if you Google your business type, you'll find many directories. There are businesses online that do nothing but advertise pages and pages of specific business types. For example, go to Google.com and type in "restaurant directory" and your city and state. Since I live in Walterboro SC, I'd type in "restaurant directory in Walterboro SC." Then take a look at the search results that are displayed. If you click on any of them, you'll see restaurants listed for your local area – just like in a phone book except it only lists those businesses that are restaurants or are involved in serving the restaurant industry.

Now "Google" directories for your business type. Just go to Google and type in your business type in the search block. Many of these directories allow you to place your business with them for free or for a minimal fee. Check them out thoroughly though before you add your business to them. You should completely review their terms and any contracts they may want you to agree to.

Beef up your Offline Advertisement

Make sure that all of your printed advertisements carry your website address. People will not visit your website if they don't know you have one. But if you have one, chances are they'll visit it to see what you have, how "cool" it is and what you're offering. Remember, the people you're serving are feeling the effects of the slumping economy. They are not going to be able to waste money on gas, riding around to you and your competition to compare your business to your competitors'. They'd rather spend their money on paying bills or buying something they can locate online. Giving them your website address is an excellent way of saying to them "Save your money and look us up online. We care about your time and money!"

Use the "Direct Response" Method to Advertise

Direct Response? What's that? Well, it works exactly as it sounds.... Let's use an example of typical, traditional advertising and then you'll see the difference.

You sell energy-efficient windows. And these windows help keep your home warm in the winter and cool in the summer, saving your patron dollars in electric costs. This month, you're running a sale on installation. So you advertise this in your local newspaper. You put in a photo of a beautiful window and of course you put in your location and contact information. Then you add a "10% off All Installation Fees". You really want them to purchase the windows, so you're willing to let go of 10% of the money you'd make on the installation service.

Now you wait. And you wait. And you wait some more. The advertisement's run for two weeks and you can't figure out why you've only sold four. You thought for sure that people would be interested in your windows, simply because they need to save money. After all, the economy's slumping so everyone wants to save money, right?

Well, your theory about everyone saving money is correct. But what makes you stand out from every other business selling energy-efficient windows? Well, nothing really. Nothing you can define in the newspaper advert anyway. To anyone viewing the ad, you look just like all the other window companies.

But there is another way. This is where Direct Response comes into play. Generally speaking, people are looking for information. They want to have information because information is knowledge, and knowledge is power. Give the people what they want and they'll give you what you need. You need money and they need information. It's that simple!

Let's change up your newspaper ad by adding something to it. How about adding a headline that says, "Visit Us Online for your FREE Report: 14 Great Energy-Saving Tips & Techniques!" Now the person reading the newspaper says to themselves: "Well, I don't have the money for windows right now, but maybe there's something else I can do to save money. Then I can buy the windows I want!" So this interested person goes to your website and gives you their name and email address in exchange for the free report you're offering.

That's Direct Response! They saw your ad and responded to it. You know they responded to it because they went to your website, joined your mailing list and downloaded the free report. You received an email from your website that said they joined. And the money's in the list. Now you have someone who was interested in the report. You gave them what they needed. Now who do you think they'll buy from when they get the money to get the windows? Now they have loyalty to you!

So where do you get the free report? You find it online or you write it yourself. Oh and get this! There's bunches of articles online that authors write for free. Why? They want recognition. They want to be able to sell their articles, but they have to get noticed first. These people would love for you to use their

writings so their name gets out there. All you have to do is credit them with writing the article. Gotta love the networking!

So Let's Sum It All Up!

The economy's not doing so well right now and you're feeling the strain. Your patrons are tightening their wallets – and with good reason!

Does this mean you have to suffer? Does it mean you have to give up your paycheck? No, it does not!

What you do need to do, however, is to be strategic and use more efficiently that website of yours. Exploit it for all it's worth. You've paid good money for it, now make it work for you!

Streamline the advertising you're currently using. Get rid of what doesn't work and change the way you advertise to include interactivity with your audience. Make them take action. Get them involved so they can make the decision to use your business as opposed to your competitors'.

Spend a few minutes a day searching for “free” or “low-cost” advertising that yeilds a return. If you're paying for advertising, you should at least get back what you're putting into it. To stay in business, however, you're going to have to get back what you put into it and then some.

So how do we know this works? Because we're business owners just like you and it's working for us. We've also seen what's happening with our clients and their websites. We know that, when they use the information their site gathers, they receive a return on investment.

And I think you'll agree... We can all stand to gain a return in this economy!

Resource Information:

Janet L. Warren is the Chief Web Developer for “You And Me Enterprises” !
Learn to choose the right Web Development company for your Web-projects.
To learn more about getting more from your advertising, Visit our Library!
<http://www.youandmeunlimited.com>

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