

How Businesses Are Leveraging New Internet Marketing Platforms Like Video, Social Media and Mobile to Acquire Customers and Build a Supportive Community



Introduction:

Businesses of all types and scopes are just starting to become aware of what a small percentage of early adopters already know: Internet and mobile device platforms have revolutionized marketing. Thanks to the development and proliferation of Broadband and high-speed wireless networks, Mobile devices for accessing them and communications software and social platforms, marketing has been transformed into a largely digital discipline, which is fast displacing old school advertising methods such as newspaper ads, printed business directories like the Yellow Pages, direct mail coupons—even radio and TV ads—for a growing number of businesses, regardless of whether their markets are local, regional, nationwide or global.

Online marketing also is effective whether or not a business currently sells products or services over the Internet. “Brick and mortar” businesses of all kinds are also using these strategies with impressive results. Consumers’ reliance on the Internet and mobile media is driving businesses to learn how to take advantage of these new platforms so their prospects and customers can find them, hear about them and, ultimately, buy from them.

The Marketing Paradigm Has Shifted

Nearly all consumers (97%) now use online media when researching products or services, according to BIA/Kelsey’s ongoing consumer tracking study. The misconception is that only young people use these technologies for shopping but in fact, nearly all of the buying public now use them. Marketing has shifted from a one-way broadcast to a multi-point conversation. In the past, communications were “broadcast” exclusively through mass marketing channels like radio, TV, newspapers and even the door-to-door distribution of directories like the Yellow Pages.

The Internet itself has moved in this direction in recent years with the advent of social media. Companies marketed online by building Web sites and sending emails to subscribers—both “broadcast” activities in the sense that communication was one-way. Banner ads, news items, emails and other tactics drive prospects to Web sites where companies communicate their messages and influence behavior. With social media, however, much of the communication is controlled by the prospects. Members can ask their community about a product, service or company and get multiple opinions, recommendations or referrals. Conversely, members freely discuss their experiences with their friends and followers. Online, the new “word-of-mouth” is social media like Facebook and Twitter which have more than 700 million members, combined.

Social Video Channels

YouTube is now the second largest search engine, according to comScore, with 50% more searches than Yahoo! And 180% more searches than Bing. YouTube has 300 million visitors every month who watch more than 12 billion videos.

As a social medium, YouTube features user generated content and facilitates video sharing, commenting, rating and the ability to create special interest channels that attract friends and subscribers who share interests and can interact with each other. Users look for videos to entertain and inform. Businesses participate by providing answers to users' questions, how-to content, product reviews, instruction, expert opinions, etc. It is a forum for establishing "social authority" that businesses seek for the topical areas most related to their services or products. According to Dr. Pamela Rutledge, Director of the Media Psychology Research Center, "One of the tenets of social media is that you can't control your message, you can only participate in the conversation." By building social authority in a subject area, a business can participate in the "conversation" and become a relevant influence in that conversation.

The image to the right shows a YouTube "channel" for eMarketingVids, a group of Internet marketing experts that provides insight for businesses that want to learn more about using online video, social media and mobile marketing.

Subscribe

There are multiple opportunities for viewers to subscribe to the channel and be alerted on their own YouTube login pages when new videos are added to the eMarketingVids channel.

Like & Comment

YouTube provides a system for viewers to "Like" and comment on the videos, which lends weight to the social authority of the experts who create and offer the videos.

Most recent "Channel Comments" are shown toward the bottom of the image. These comments appear much like they do in blogs. Their purpose is to engage viewers (prospects and customers) in the conversation and build familiarity and trust between them and the business.

Share

YouTube's "Share" functionality allows viewers to share the video link through their other social media



accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter, or post it to their own blogs via Blogger, Google's blogging platform. (Google also owns YouTube.)

Mobile Marketing Growing Rapidly

Almost every American (91%) own a mobile phone, according to CTIA-The Wireless Association's semiannual U.S. wireless industry survey. About 20% of them—approximately 50 million people—have so-called “smart phones,” that is, mobile phones with Internet browsing and emailing capabilities.

Moreover, the number of smart phones in the U.S. is growing by about 20% every three months, indicating that businesses should incorporate mobile phone marketing strategies if they wish to continue to reach this segment of prospects and customers.

The components of mobile marketing for businesses includes:

- Mobile version of Web site
- Map searches
- Email access
- Social media access for referrals
- Text messages and offers, coupons, etc.

According to Yahoo!, 92% of all business searchers start looking online. Because smart phones bring online search capabilities to a growing number of mobile prospects (currently 50 million Americans and growing), businesses should include mobile search strategies in their overall marketing plans.

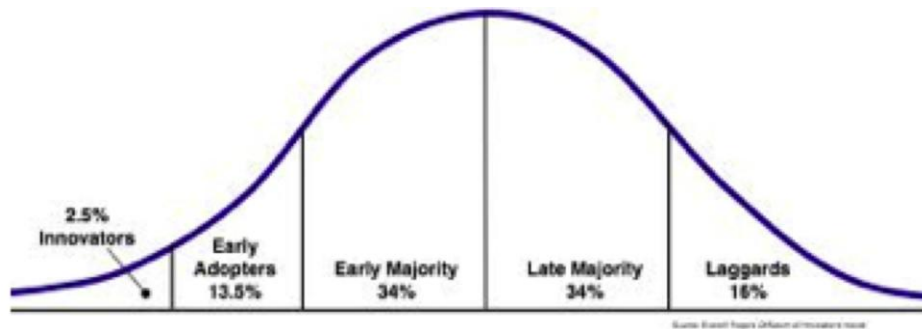
In addition to using search engines to find products and services on their mobile phones, consumers also rely on Map applications and social media to locate businesses near them when they are on the move.

One such social medium is Yelp, which has built-in search functionality coupled with ratings contributed by members. Visitors can become friends with reviewers they like and share reviews with others via text message or email.

Businesses can add discounts and coupons to their listings on Yelp in exchange for “check-ins” by customers with iPhones. A check-in occurs when a customer visits a business and uses the Yelp app on their iPhone to notify friends where they are, via Facebook and Twitter, if they choose to integrate with those media as well.

An Online Marketing Roadmap for Businesses

Only 26% of small businesses have invested any time or effort in marketing online. Those businesses in competitive markets or categories would benefit from developing an online marketing plan or roadmap and getting established alongside the early adopters.



For most businesses, the formula for success starts with visibility and traffic.

People need to hear about a business or product or see its name somewhere before they purchase. Online, this is accomplished when a business appears in the search engines, directories and social networks where prospective customers look for information, the business type, product or service.

Get Out There and Get Found

Getting listed in Google properties (Google search, YouTube, Google Places, etc.) is very important but there are some 50 other key online locations where businesses should actively join and participate to get found by their target prospects

This isn't a "set and forget" strategy. Once a business establishes itself in these online locations, it needs to ensure its information "stays fresh."

The Internet search engines, directories and social media are similar to big grocery stores. There's a "sell by" date on most information, which means its relevancy declines over time. Thus, if a business doesn't deliver new or updated content on a regular basis, it will get "knocked off the shelf" by another business that does.

Engage With Prospects on Their Turf

Businesses are wise to think beyond their Web sites and reach out to prospects and customers where they spend time online, whether it's on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, other social networks, or through blogs or podcasts. This strategy involves establishing extensions in multiple locations and through multiple channels where prospects can engage with companies in "conversations" that

eventually lead to business relationships.

Businesses unfamiliar with social media may think their prospects don't use it but the numbers suggest a different story. Consider that Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have a combined 750 million active users—people who use them every day. That's more than double the entire U.S. population. The fastest growing demographic among Facebook users is 35 to 65 year old women. Another compelling statistic: 300 million people visit YouTube every month and watch more than 12 billion videos, according to ComScore's January, 2010 figures.

Proactive businesses are making plans is to get these prospects to follow them, friend them, subscribe to their channels, etc. Once connected, businesses start offering information, expert perspective on the topics your business specializes in, recommendations, news, coupons, membership privileges, etc. in an effort to get prospects to give permission to follow up with them through email, text messages to their mobile phones, regular mail—whichever methods they prefer. These businesses are building relationships with prospects, earning their trust and, ultimately, earning their business.

Continue to Engage and Follow Up

Once a business establishes relationships with prospects online, they need to continue to provide valuable information and continue to make offers because it is proven that it's 6 to 7 times easier to get an existing customer to buy from you again than it is to get a new customer to buy from you the first time. It sounds simple, but this is where most businesses fail on an epic level. Most businesses miss opportunities to incrementally increase their income because they don't follow up with their customers.

One relatively easy and affordable way to follow up with prospects is through text messages. It also provides a simple entry into mobile marketing for businesses.

Text messages are effective because 97% are read—90% within the first hour of receipt. So a business like a restaurant using text message follow up to offer a two-for-one special on a slow Tuesday night to its subscribers can generate a near-instant response.

Furthermore, mobile coupon redemption rates are exceptional—between 5 and 20—compared to traditional print coupon redemption rates, which average below two percent.

To recap this roadmap:

1. Get online in the right places and get found
2. Engage with prospects on their terms and follow up
3. Continue to engage and follow up over time

Visibility equals traffic, which leads to prospects, which leads to more customers.

Four Keys to Establishing an Online Marketing Program

1. Get started now.
2. Build the program incrementally. Businesses can control costs by not trying to do everything at once.
3. Integrate all the elements so they work most powerfully with each other—search engines, video, social media, mobile marketing.
4. Do it with zero extra work.

Most business owners find it difficult to allocate their time to develop a marketing program. This is what contributes to the relatively low percent (26%) that invest time or money in this area. A social media marketing consultant can develop an online marketing plan and organize the resources to execute it so it generates results cost effectively without impacting the business owner's primary focus, which is managing their business.

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