

C H A P T E R 1

BUILDING AN ONLINE MARKETING FOUNDATION

Online marketing is like the Wild, Wild West: it has few rules, endless opportunities, and a vast open space. The innumerable possibilities can be exciting, but the geek-speak and limitless choices can sometimes seem overwhelming. Fortunately, online (or web) marketing is also very logical. Online marketing pioneers simply need to take that first step on the wagon train to get started. Journeys go more smoothly with a map and directions. And you have just picked those up.

There is a place for everyone on the web. Online marketing strategy helps define and refine what those roles are. The evolution is fast and ongoing. The rules of web marketing change every day. Smart professionals become continual learners to harness the power of the World Wide Web to brand, build relationships, and boost results. Moving slowly in the wild online marketing world is the equivalent of being at a hard stop.

The good news is that online marketing, compared to other marketing media, is still relatively new. It has little to no barrier to entry, allowing anyone to participate and strike gold at any time. Whether you have some experience with online marketing or none at all, this book will help guide and empower you on all the wild and wonderful ways web marketing can support artistic, technological, and strategic goals.

So, congratulations! You've taken the first, most important step of braving the unknown and forging ahead. Whether you're new to online marketing, need to refine areas of marketing expertise, have been recently assigned the role of online marketer at work, or are in search of a reference to support other goals, this book is your guide.

The McGraw-Hill 36-Hour Course: Online Marketing is going to lay it all out in easy-to-understand terms and actionable steps. The Chinese philosopher Laozi famously wrote, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." You have made the important first step by investing in this book. You will discover the wealth of web marketing possibilities, and learn how to apply them to support specific goals.

HOW THIS BOOK WILL HELP

Making smart strategic online marketing choices happens by understanding the breadth and depth of puzzle pieces you can work with. You make better decisions when you know your options. The art and science of online marketing "clicks" with a strategic (aka a game plan) bridge. *The McGraw-Hill 36-Hour Course: Online Marketing* will teach you about the various pieces of the online marketing puzzle so you can think critically about how to use online marketing now and in the future. Although every online marketing puzzle will vary, there are three constant online marketing rules that will hold true through continuing evolutions (and revolutions!) of this wild web marketing world.

Online Marketing Rule 1: Online marketing is not something one *spends* time or money on. It is something that (when done well) becomes an *investment*.

Online Marketing Rule 2: Online marketing success is not about what you know, it is about what you are open to learning and what you are committed to managing.

Online Marketing Rule 3: Optimal online marketing cannot occur without help. You have conquered all three rules by picking up this book. Don't let it go!

Teaching how to get the biggest web marketing bang for your buck in the shortest amount of time is what *The McGraw-Hill 36-Hour Course: Online Marketing* is all about. People do not plan to fail, they fail to plan, so the process of learning how to embrace online marketing has been divided into 12 bite-size chapters that can be digested in about three hours each. Add it up and there are 36 action-packed hours that will lead you to web greatness.

Don't think that 36 hours is enough time? Web phenomenon Facebook started with only a few hours of very simple programming (honestly), and now has a valuation in the billions of dollars. Yahoo!, Google, eBay, and IMDb all have similar simple origins. If they can do it, so can you. Approach online marketing with a "start small and snowball" mentality. Compared to Facebook, Yahoo!, Google, eBay, or IMDb, you have an even easier job. They had to invent a business. All you have to do is web-market one. There's no better time than now to get armed and dangerous to tap into the many ways that this is possible.

This chapter, "Building an Online Marketing Foundation," will define what online marketing is and show how the most important computer to use for web success is the three-pound information processor in your skull. After answering the questions in this chapter, you will have a greater edge on how to create and execute an online marketing strategy than someone with a decade of experience or a degree in marketing.

Chapter 2, "Planning the Website," covers how to plan for the most important piece of web marketing an organization can create: their website. Once again, the hard part is the thinking, but this chapter will show you how to break it down.

You continue this important process in Chapter 3, "Building the Website." Here you discover the process to create a marketing website that incorporates best practices to target an audience and prompt action. The most valuable marketing real estate is on the web—use it or lose it. Working sites are now deemed web solutions. Learn the secrets to making a website that serves, supports, and sells. This chapter will show you how to execute the website from the initial concept down to the final details like a privacy policy.

Chapter 4, "Content Marketing," addresses how to capture eyeballs with content. Often, content does not have to be created from scratch, it can simply be repurposed to create the desired results. A website is today's publishing platform, so you are what you publish. There are sensible content marketing techniques that attract and retain customers without requiring a full encyclopedia of text.

Chapter 5, "Blogging," brings the former world of online journaling into its current purpose and focus. Today, leading authorities (note the word *author* in the word *authority*) in every field have blogs. Blogging is one of the easiest ways to start building credibility and increase visibility. This chapter will disclose why blogs work, teach the types of entries that will enhance sales, and share the six steps for blogging success.

Chapter 6, “Social Media Marketing,” embraces the social web. Social media may seem overhyped, but it’s not a fad. It is effective, and it’s here to stay. Learn the valuable impact that social media marketing has, and why it is necessary for business.

Chapter 7, “Web Analytics,” dives into how vital web analytics are, and how leveraging the art and science of analytics can boost business. Creating a website without web analytics is like being a stand-up comedian who doesn’t know if he’s getting any laughs. Learn how to use web analytics data to optimize a site, make informed decisions, and reach goals.

Chapter 8, “Search Engine Optimization,” delves into SEO. To many, SEO sounds technical and scary, but there are some very simple strategies that anyone can learn, apply, and integrate to create a big impact on the bottom line. You will also learn how social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) can boost SEO for total web domination.

Chapter 9, “Online Advertising/Search Engine Marketing,” teaches quick ways to rocket web marketing into the stratosphere and avoid blasting a crater in your advertising budget. It isn’t rocket science, but you need to know the basics to be savvy about online advertising.

Chapter 10, “E-Mail Marketing,” covers opt-in e-mail, one of the most effective web marketing tools. Learn best practices and how to create an enticing e-mail that will be opened, read, and generate results. E-mail marketing technologies, how to maintain spam compliance, and ways to streamline e-mail execution for high return on investment are addressed.

Chapter 11, “Online Public Relations,” will show how PR can be done in your pajamas. Anyone can engage in online PR to gain media awareness, maximize selling power, and reap search optimization benefits. Online press releases are different from the old paper ones that are now ignored by newspapers. This chapter teaches a dazzling dozen tips for making online PR the secret to success.

Chapter 12, “Managing Multitasking Web Marketing,” brings it all together, making all of the pieces of web marketing click with an actionable set of steps and procedures to keep online marketing on track. Online marketing’s breadth and depth of options can work together and scale up, boosting a portfolio and multiplying value. Learn how to apply your education and claim your newfound web wisdom (or shall we say “webdom”?).

ONLINE MARKETING DEFINED

Online marketing is simply defined as using the World Wide Web to market products or services. Online marketing is also described as e-marketing, web

marketing, and Internet marketing. The term *web marketing* is technically the most correct description and will be used primarily in this book along with *online* marketing. The *Internet* is a system of interconnected computer networks, and *online* describes a system that is connected (often electronically) to a larger network. The *web*, an abbreviation for World Wide Web, is a system of interrelated documents contained on the Internet. Online marketing means many things to many people, but at heart, it is about making, keeping, cultivating, and rekindling relationships.

There are five key components to effective marketing:

1. **Awareness.** Marketing builds awareness. You can have the best service or product in the world, but if nobody knows, what's the point? Awareness can come from many sources including advertising, search optimization, referrals, online marketing, traditional marketing, word-of-mouth marketing, and, in these online days, "word-of-mouse" marketing.
2. **Communication/information distribution.** Marketing communicates, educates, and informs. Getting a message in front of current and prospective customers is the key to success. Communication can serve as information distribution (pricing, value, competitive value, distinction, product/service information, sharing, directions, videos, testimonials, photos, how to find you, etc.). Communication can also serve as a way to help educate current or prospective customers so they understand the full value that you provide and why they want to do business with you. Communication is a critical component of marketing.
3. **Connection.** Meaningful marketing makes, builds, and sustains relationships, and all relationships are ignited with a meaningful connection. Successful marketing helps build "know, like, and trust" factors. Buyers of a product or service need to know, like, and trust you, the product(s), service(s), and organization. On the web, connections are shared by positioning expertise, evoking passion, distributing content, using the "show me, don't tell me" power of video, voicing values, and much more. Connections count for most of marketing success.
4. **Service.** Marketing is about serving before selling. Service is the most commonly overlooked form of online marketing, and can be the most powerful. Customer service helps close new sales and cultivate repeat sales. The best customers are current customers—service support reminds customers why they want to work with your

organization. Being a service superstar on the web can yield mega results and leave the competition scratching their heads. Marketing strategy needs to include web use (website, e-mail, social media, and more) for the best customer service.

5. **Sales.** There is a saying that everyone is in sales. Marketing supports sales whether you're trying to sell yourself for that new job, sell products/services for an organization, or inspire donations or volunteers to support a nonprofit. Think of web marketing as a trusty sidekick that will help build relationships and close sales. To achieve this, all the previous points (awareness, communication, connection, and service) must be part of the marketing puzzle.

The old rules of marketing involved a “one to many” approach. One message was distributed in a scattershot fashion to appeal to as many potential customers as possible. The “sell to the masses and live with the classes” approach still works. However, today online marketing allows for a much more targeted one-to-one relationship. Online marketing is not about the tools themselves (like websites, e-mail technology, blogs, social media, TV, magazine ads, and public relations). It is about how they are used to build relationships. Whether you are in B2B (business-to-business) marketing or B2C (business-to-consumer) marketing, you need to embrace the new rules of P2P (people-to-people) relationship-centric marketing. That is where the money is.

We are living in a time-crunched society that is addicted to immediate gratification. Online marketing serves this “I want it now” mind-set. Everyone under 50, and a lot of people over 50 (who are growing younger while living longer), realizes that the web is the key to immediate information and wish fulfillment. No matter what age your target market is, they are online, so your marketing needs to follow them.

The number of people who use the Internet is staggering!

- More than 75 percent of the U.S. population are online, and this number grows every day. (Sites like InternetWorldStats.com have updated statistics.)
- Ninety percent of Internet users use search engines to find products, services, or information, according to iProspect.com.
- Social media use is on the rise. In 2010, Facebook reported that every 24 hours 175 million active Facebook users (out of over 500 million total users) share about 500 million pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, etc.).

The growth of the World Wide Web has changed the way we approach marketing. The power of online marketing can be accessed by anyone anywhere, as long as they have a device (computer, phone, TV, car console, tablet, etc.) with an Internet connection. There is no elitism on the web. (Most of the developing world accesses the Internet via their phones.) Relationship tools that were once available only to big businesses with big budgets can now be accessed by anyone at the touch of a button. Benefits of web marketing include:

- Twenty-four/seven availability to information and sales and product support
- Worldwide visibility
- Direct sales (no need for a storefront)
- Targeted market, or “riches in the niches” (finding and serving people who want specific products and services with a click of their fingertips)
- Competitive advantage (to open new markets, save on operating costs, take calculated risks, get found faster, connect better, and serve/sell harder, leaving competition in the dust)
- Customer acquisition and retention (using all five marketing musts mentioned above to gain and keep customers). Our best customers are our current customers.
- Savings in costs and human resources (automating processes, using the web to answer customers’ questions, streamlining order processing)
- Immediate tracking to measure, optimize, and spend money where it counts

It’s time to put on your online marketing thinking cap. Remember, a little can-do attitude makes a big difference. Setting goals, having an open mind, keeping your eyes on the prize, and maintaining a positive outlook works. Online marketing is a dynamic, fluid, ongoing piece of the marketing puzzle that will always have imperfections and need improvement.

What you will find is that web marketing is a lot of fun. And more to the point, it can be extremely lucrative. Making good money, connecting with people who count, and investing time and energy into something scalable is rewarding all around.

HOW ONLINE MARKETING WORKS

The key goal of online marketing is to maximize relationships, starting with increasing awareness. Online marketing, compared to other marketing media,

has the lowest cost and boasts the highest potential to brand, build, and boost business. There is no right way to approach web marketing. Application varies based on target market, goals, management resources, strategy, previous history, competition, and organizational distinctions.

Online marketing methods can include online advertising, online PR, paid search, search engine optimization (SEO), e-mail marketing, social media, and affiliate marketing. A mix of methods frequently creates the maximum impact. Search engine optimization takes time, but the earlier you start, the sooner you'll see results. SEO is a mix of site architecture, use of content, linking, frequency of content, and popularity. If you are with a local organization, improve your search results by adding a local listing to Bing, Yahoo!, Google, and some online address directories to achieve great exposure for no cost.

Blogs are a huge driver for search engine optimization. The way blogs are coded (their architecture), the frequency of content added to blogs, as well as the linking built into blog content management systems (CMS), make them search engine magnets. Consider including a blog in the overall online marketing strategy to boost awareness, communicate, connect, serve customers, and support sales. A blog can serve as a source of information and become a valuable piece of marketing collateral to help build marketing alliances. Content can include company news, "insider" information about products and events, and core values, all liberally sprinkled with key phrases that best describe the products and services to help boost search visibility.

The power of social media is undeniable. Social media allows millions of people to discuss, review, recommend, and give feedback about an organization. Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn are not merely propaganda tools. These are two-way conversations that support P2P marketing, allowing organizations to listen, understand, educate, and share valuable information about products or services. Social media marketing executed intelligently will save time and money, boosting visibility in search engines and on multiple web channels. For instance, every time a new blog post is created, there are tools that create automatic updates with a link to the new blog post, allowing people to post to the blog and feed it instantly to Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts. Voilà! One blog post gets immeasurable exposure. (See Chapter 6 for details on how to make social media work for you.)

E-mail marketing is a critical web marketing tool. It is also the heart and soul of spam. Don't confuse the two. Use a third-party e-mail management tool. It's more professional and legally compliant. Third-party e-mail management tools help manage contacts, maintain a current database, send e-mail blasts to appropriate groups, design professional-looking messages, stay off of ISP (Internet service provider) blacklists, and use online marketing best practices.

Your work e-mail might be flagged as spam if it's used directly to contact large numbers of recipients. While you might feel you get better results from direct e-mails, sending large quantities from a personal account can cause problems. Building an e-mail marketing program with a third-party management tool will allow you to sell, serve, and stay in touch.

No matter which online marketing tool you choose, the only constant with web marketing is change. Online marketing works to brand, build, and boost business. It can help support awareness, get a message out, serve and connect with current and prospective customers, and generate sales. No one builds a house without a blueprint. The same is true of web marketing. Building an online marketing plan on a strong foundation is the healthiest approach to ensuring that web marketing works well!

AVOIDING PITFALLS

Markets boom and bust, but smart professionals always operate as if the hounds of financial ruin were hot on their trails. Let online marketing be the proverbial canary in the coal mine. A shift in the number of website visitors or completed sales could be a warning of an imminent change. Fortunately, online marketing boasts nimble tools that can be tapped with little or no lead time. There is no need to wait for the printers to produce new brochures. At the touch of a button, it is easy to stay ahead of the curve and make the changes needed to serve, support, and sell to established and potential customers.

- **Remember that marketing means maximizing relationships (connections, leads, reselling) to grow revenues and profit.** Think about marketing not as spending but investing, and make the investments count. Online marketing collateral is a brilliant place to invest (it's low or no cost) and lives forever (unlike print ads, online ads, direct mail, or TV/radio ads that die when you stop paying for them). Consumers today are more conscious and empowered, and they vote with their wallets. They need to know, like, and trust before they buy. Does the online marketing evoke trust? What is being said about your organization on the web? Invest in marketing that supports attracting, developing, and retaining relationships, and it will be an investment that carries an organization for years.
- **Tap free online marketing tools.** All organizations can take advantage of free online marketing tools. If a company is based in a particular geographic location, then it can get listed for free in local search directories that rank high in search engine results pages. Comprehensive web

data from Google Analytics is free to most websites. Buzz can also be built brilliantly with social media: blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, Yelp, and Squidoo are all free to implement. You just need time to develop content and create community.

- **Be an educator.** Any industry insider can share expertise to build trust and credibility. Experts can offer value and boost marketing impact by simply sharing educational materials, content, and tips. Being an educator via online content can make leaders into authorities, and *that* is where buzz kicks in. Education and information sharing build credibility, visibility, and sellability.
- **Be authentic to differentiate your company.** Tap the power of personality to position your organization as leaders, innovators, and experts. Pack some serious pow into web marketing efforts by incorporating value, values, and voice via web channels. Whether the organization's personality is serious, funny, informative, controversial, activist, playful, or powerful, it can be a life-pump to create wild web results.
- **Repurpose marketing assets and collateral online.** Recycling is not just good for the planet, it's good for online marketing. Content like videos, photos, articles, e-mail messages, and press can be repurposed on websites and shared on e-zine sites, newsletters, blogs, sites like eHow.com, and more. If you or your organization makes the news, populate your website's press page with this information. Write your own press releases that share company news, awards, events, or new services and push them out to free PR wires. It is easy to tap existing assets to build buzz, boost credibility, and create new content that will result in higher search results.
- **Stop selling and start serving.** Build a community. Customer service via well-managed websites, educational content, helpful tips, easy-to-find contacts, FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) pages, blogs, e-mail newsletters, and other valuable items will rise above the clutter and allow you to do what marketing is really all about: building relationships.

As organizations evolve, so will web marketing. No two entities approach online marketing the same way, and that's okay because with all the shapes and sizes of target markets, products, and services, there is opportunity for everyone and everything. Critically evaluate who you are, what you do, and whom you serve (the audiences who you want to offer your products and/or services to), then look at the website and web marketing strategy and ask if the people you are trying to reach and serve are truly being served well.

Sometimes one site does not fit all, and it's wise to create multiple sites and online marketing strategies for different audiences, or make the home page a North Star that guides all types of folks who come for various products and services. Remember, it's the wild, wild web. There are no rules.

FIRST STEPS TO SUCCESS

Your online marketing success mantra is “Strategy first, execution second.” A little introspection now will save a world of heartache and bankruptcy paperwork later. Get ready to answer some pertinent questions. There are no right or wrong answers, but your responses are an assessment that will help sketch out required optimizations or smart first steps.

The answers to online marketing success are within organizational leaders. It is important to look within before planning outward marketing execution. The questions below will help facilitate the organization's value and distinction, and identify assets that can be used to support web marketing and goals. Clearly defined goals become the guide to online marketing execution. Remember, it is not the web marketing tools but rather how the online marketing is used to support goals that breeds successful results.

The first six questions help form a big picture to gauge your readiness to enter the world of web marketing. The latter questions clarify who you and/or your organization are, what you do, and whom you serve—all points that will lead to online marketing optimizations, strategy, and eventual online marketing execution. These questions can be answered singly or in a brainstorming session with a team. So grab a legal pad or open a blank Word document, sit down with a warm or cold beverage of your choice, and mull over these queries.

ONLINE MARKETING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How will your product or service change or help your customer?

All stories or marketing messages have to do with change: A cosmetics company provides change from plain to beautiful, from self-doubt to self-confidence. A vitamin supplier provides change from poor health to

good health, from feeling sluggish to feeling vibrant. A self-help program provides change from defeat to victory, from depression to well-being.

Some of the best marketing stories highlight the changes that an audience wants to make in their business or personal lives. All successful campaigns are about change for the better. People who are satisfied aren't motivated to be customers. You want to target people who are motivated: people who want to be better, stronger, smarter, prettier, healthier, and richer; people who want more out of work; people who want to make a difference and get more out of life. If the audience isn't motivated to change, and if the product or service can't deliver change, then you're wasting time and money.

2. Is what you have to say different?

If you're saying the same thing, and in the same way, as the competition, you're in trouble. You must differentiate yourself. Find that unique something that makes you different and says you are not a follower but a leader. If the product or service is substantially the same as the competitors', you should market it differently or concentrate on the "high concept" need it delivers, rather than the standard "same old same old" that everyone else is touting.

Which one of psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs does your product or service fulfill: physical, safety, social, self-esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, or self-actualization? Chances are, the competition has completely ignored the psychological and emotional marketing angle, and is focusing on specifications and features that have little to do with why people really choose one product over another. Spending decisions are emotional, even for the most seemingly rational products. Why? Because humans are making the choices. Doing a little web marketing therapy on the messaging can work wonders on your results.

3. Do you know how to tell your story?

Beyond having a story to tell or a message to deliver, you must know how to tell it. This is called *story-selling* in the marketing world. Strong marketing creates a recognizable corporate image that establishes a unique identity in the mind of an audience. If the audience sees no difference between you and the competition, then you become interchangeable. Apple didn't capture the lion's share of the MP3 market just because its product is better than everyone else's. It did so because iPods are more

than just MP3 players—they are a lifestyle choice, as clearly demonstrated in Apple’s marketing messaging.

4. Can you say your message boldly?

The meek may inherit the earth, but if they’re in business they’ll probably go broke. If you’ve got something to say, say it loudly and clearly! There are just too many organizations, too many websites, too many advertisements, too much clutter to hope people will pay any attention if you are afraid to stand up and be noticed. Go boldly, or don’t go at all. With online marketing, the biggest fear is fear itself.

5. Who is your target audience?

Decide whom to target and what motivates them, then design your website, videos, and advertising campaigns to trigger every hot-button, motivating message you can. Develop a message so it speaks directly to that audience. It must have purpose, be focused and concise, and deliver a clear impression of identity. This means that you can’t be all things to all people. By focusing on a clear audience with a precise message, you have a better chance of capturing nontargeted audiences as well. The fact that Apple iPod commercials are aimed at a hip young audience has not stopped them from capturing MP3 market share across all demographic profiles.

6. Can you take the heat?

Last, but not least—do you have what it takes to tell your story in a way that people will remember? Are you prepared to deliver the message in the most memorable manner possible? Are you ready to give up on nonproductive audiences and concentrate on those motivated to say yes? Are you able to ignore the odd complaint or nasty e-mail objecting to a cutting-edge approach? Are you ready for the web-video revolution? Do you agree that success comes in cans and failure comes in can’ts?

If you have made it to this part of the questioning, good work! Now it’s time to delve down to a more micro level. Please answer the questions that follow with great detail, thought, and expansion. Focus and be mindful to answer the questions thoroughly. This is a critical web marketing mapping step. These questions are designed to pull out necessary online marketing musts and optimizations. Your answers will help bring clar-

ity that you will use to move your web marketing efforts in the most effective direction.

Marketing Goals

- Where are you and where do you want to go? What do you want to accomplish? (Think big.)

Product/Service Description

(Answer these quickly, like you were giving a casual explanation during conversation.)

- Describe your product or service in great detail.
- What are the benefits of your product or service?
- What do customers get and experience when they buy, use, or engage your product or service?

Market/Competition/Niche

- Who is the competition? (Describe them in great detail. Include their websites.)
- What marketing tactics/media are the competitors using?
- What makes your product and/or service different from the competition's?
- What is the main advantage of doing business with you or your organization rather than the competition?

Target Market and Customer Description

- Describe the ideal customer/client. This could include age, income, profession, marital status, hobbies, interests, and gender. Focus on the target market and describe who they are.
- What are your customers' needs, fears, frustrations, and desires?
- What problems does the ideal target market/customer possess that your product or service can resolve? (These are called hot buttons.)
- What end result are customers looking for from your product or service?
- How do customers want to feel when experiencing your product or service?

- Under what circumstances does the target market/customer start thinking about buying what you have to sell? What would cause someone to want or need to buy what you sell in the first place? (These are called trigger points.)
- What things are important to the ideal customer when buying what you sell?
- What are the important and relevant issues customers need to be aware of before they buy what you sell?
- What objections might customers bring up when contemplating buying what you sell?
- How can you help customers overcome those objections?

Web Marketing Asset Inventory

- What do you already have to work with for your online marketing? (Assets include anything from a charismatic CEO who is a wealth of wisdom to great photos to a low-cost web-wiz intern. Identify what you have, not what you don't have!)
 - Website
 - E-mail list(s)
 - Team members (writers, web people, a strong organization leader with valuable expertise that can be shared)
 - Blog
 - Press coverage
 - Photos
 - Business alliances
 - Content (old articles, previously written content, helpful information)
 - Data from past web history or marketing campaigns to guide future decisions
 - Success stories
 - Videos

Revenue Channels

- How is your organization currently making money? What fuels the organization? How is this revenue generated? What marketing supports this?

- What are the main lead, sale, and relationship drivers? What is the average customer lifetime value (CLV)?
- What revenue-making opportunities can be explored?

Relevant Website Questions

- What do you want people to do when they visit your website or web pages?
 - What is the primary purpose of your website?
 - List key phrases that best describe what you offer. Approach it from the customers' perspective. If you are a "lending" company, customers "borrow money."
 - Do you have testimonials or success stories?
 - Does your website offer anything to prompt people to take action?
 - What is the primary action you want visitors to take when they come to the site?
 - Is there a secondary or tertiary action you want customers to take when they visit the website?
-

Okay, now go take a brain break and play for a half hour. You're in the home stretch, but there is still some serious thinking to do when you come back!

Armed with some ideas and clarity about who you are, what you do, whom you serve, where revenue comes from, goals, assets, and what the content of the site should include, it's time to nail down a tagline, value proposition, or unique selling proposition. Since web users tend to scan instead of read, one of the best online marketing resources an organization can have is a pithy and powerful central marketing message.

A unique selling proposition (USP) is used to *differentiate* a product or service from competitors, as well as *communicate unique value*. Value is not just about price. If it was, we'd all be wearing the cheapest shoes and driving the cheapest cars. Not every organization has a USP, but if you can create one, it will work wonders for your web marketing. A good USP should be:

- Only one sentence (The 140-character length of a Twitter tweet is a good limit; half that is even better.)
- Clearly written so that everyone can understand it
- Composed of benefits that are *unique* to your company or product

In order to find your central marketing message, figure out what distinguishes your product or service from the competition. This unique selling point will become the central message in the marketing copy, sales pitches, press releases, web marketing “about” description, and website. An online marketing consulting company that wants to rise above the competition might have a value message like “Making Small Businesses BIG with the Web!” to communicate their unique value and show the distinction of their approach. This one-liner serves as a marketing investment that can be used as the central tenet of all marketing.

NEXT STEPS

Remember that the heart of marketing is about relationships. Let this be your focus as you embark on an online marketing journey. Be sure to answer all the questions in the Online Marketing Questionnaire no matter what your level of experience is in business or marketing. Get clear on what the goals are, and understand revenue drivers. Critically evaluate who you and/or your organization are, what you do, and whom you serve. Then look at your website(s) and other online marketing assets, and assess the overall web marketing strategy. Ask if the people you are trying to reach and serve are truly getting what they want and need. Look at your answers to the questionnaire and see if your online marketing truly communicates distinction and value and connects with the market.

You may be surprised how many disconnects exist between an organization’s marketing questionnaire answers and how well the web marketing messaging communicates them. Maybe the marketing messaging is lacking and a value proposition would help. Maybe testimonials could be collected and added. Getting the CEO’s expertise into online articles or a blog to position the organization’s thought leadership could be an opportunity.

Building on your answers to the previous Online Marketing Questionnaire, use these follow-up questions to help define immediate optimizations or items that need to be part of the website and web marketing messaging plan:

- Is your distinction clear on your website? What is your value proposition?
- Based on the “Who are you? What do you do? Whom do you serve?” questions, are these points clear on the site?
- Are the key descriptive words used on the website? This will help communication and search optimization.

- Are you doing the best possible job of promoting the benefits of your product or service? Like champion boxer Muhammad Ali said, “It ain’t bragging if it’s true!”
- Are testimonials, case studies, or success stories easily found? Try using them throughout the website.
- Does the site appeal to your ideal client? Is it designed well? Is the message clear?
- Is the website showing visitors that their needs can be met and problems solved?
- Do all of your marketing materials cater to your ideal client?
- Are current customers being served via the web?
- Are you leading them through the sales cycle as effectively as possible?

As you read the other 11 chapters in *The McGraw-Hill 36-Hour Course: Online Marketing*, more ideas for using the power of online marketing, and/or optimizing what currently exists, will emerge. Save the above questions as a launchpad for building a healthy web marketing foundation, and reread this chapter whenever an online marketing checkup is needed to bring the focus back to the ways web marketing works.

Chapter Quiz

1. There is B2B and B2C marketing. What is the new way to look at business? (Hint: It’s an acronym.)
2. What are the five key components of effective online marketing?
3. What is the only constant with online marketing?
4. What are six ways to avoid online marketing pitfalls?
5. What are some free online marketing tools that can be tapped?
6. Marketing is about _____ before selling.
7. What is the online marketing success mantra?
8. Online marketing work must be done to support _____.