
25 Things Your Webmaster Will Not Tell You

Marketing to Brides
Online

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1. Your Webmaster Probably Knows Very Little About Online Marketing

The fact is that online marketing is outside the expertise of most webmasters. In most cases, relying on your webmaster to develop and execute your online marketing strategy is a big mistake.

I can't tell you how many people have told me, "We love our website, it's great, but we're just not getting any inquiries."

Webmasters typically don't talk about, let alone focus on, conversion. They don't understand that traffic is great, but if it doesn't convert into an inquiry or sale then it doesn't mean anything.

They don't know how to write compelling marketing copy, the type that makes a bride want to get more information about the company. They don't understand the importance of testing, analyzing and measuring results, so that you are continually getting the best results from your website, staying competitive and online advertising.

Webmasters may be talented programmers or graphic designers, but they shouldn't be managing your online marketing.

2. Your Website Must Be Better Than The Competition

I bet your webmaster can't even tell you three of your biggest online competitors!

It would be foolish to think your website is the only one brides are going to visit when planning their wedding.

Chances are they've found three to six of your competitors and they might have even bookmarked their websites.

First, be sure your website has a "Bookmark Our Website" option prominently displayed.

Then, know that your website has to be better than your competition's. If it's not, you will lose sales and market-share to your competition. In today's competitive online marketplace making a good impression

online is a must.

Here's how you can make it happen: Find five of your competitors online. Have a professional analyze their website for strengths and weaknesses to help you develop your strategy. Then consider how you can make your website better than the competition.

Your website should look fresh, be updated often, and have better marketing copy than your competition. It should have better features, colorful and sharp graphics, easier navigation, and offer a more compelling reason to choose you and your services over someone else.

3. What You Consider A Good Website Design And What Actually Works Might Be Two Very Different Things

The gap between what actually works and what you think will work can potentially be a huge problem. If you don't have marketing design experience or the time to keep up with the latest techniques in online marketing, the best way to close this gap is to find someone who does!

Most webmasters will recognize they don't have expertise in this area and will welcome the input.

You want to design a website that presents your business professionally, loads quickly, is easy to use, gives clients the information they're looking for, generates interest in your business, and of course one that generates inquiries.

If you miss the mark in any of these areas, you'll lose a lot of sales to your competition. You'll also have wasted a good portion of the money you spent on advertising and promoting your website.

Poor design leads to poor CONVERSION. All the traffic in the world is useless unless it attracts inquiries that convert into sales.

4. Your Flash Website Is Making It Nearly Impossible For Brides To Find You!

Are you aware that if your website is build entirely in FLASH or uses a FLASH "enter here" or "splash" page, you are making it is harder (if not

impossible) for brides to find your website on major search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, or MSN?

The fact is that a website designed entirely in FLASH is almost invisible to search engine spiders. Few webmasters will tell you this.

If you don't care about traffic from search engines or if you have a huge pile of cash in your advertising budget – because that's what you'll be using to drive people to your website – then your FLASH site is fine.

But 80% of the people who log on to the Internet start at a search engine. They are SEARCHING for something.

Many of my clients get 60-80% of their traffic from search engines. That quickly translates into thousands of dollars in new business each year.

One caterer who signed up for my ADVANTAGE program attributes over a million dollars a year in sales to inquiries that have come in from Google.

Experience will show that if you're top ranked in a competitive keyword position it can easily translate into tens of thousands of dollars in new business monthly.

If you're stuck because you have an all FLASH website, my advice is to build a more search engine friendly html static site and start a blog based on your current website. The investment is well worth it.

5. Own Your Own Domain

I hate to see this happen, but unfortunately I still see webmasters who have registered a domain name in their name, or their company name, rather than in the name of the company they are working for.

In other words, you don't actually own or have control over your own domain.

Sometimes this is just an oversight or a result of trying to do things too fast. Whatever the case, you should know who owns your domain, it

should be who you think it is, who you want it to be (maybe your formal corporate name?), and it should have a current email address as well as a current regular mailing address associated and registered with it.

And if your domain name is registered through Network Solutions you're paying \$20/year more than you have to – I tell all my clients to move their domain registration to Go Daddy at GODADDY.COM.

6. Your Cheap Web Hosting Isn't Saving You Anything And Is Probably Costing You Thousands Of Dollars In Lost Sales

This one kills me and it's killing your sales too.

Most of you probably tell a bride “you get what you pay for” and have heard horror stories about the couple who hired a \$500 wedding photographer. But for some reason when it comes to website hosting people think \$5 dollar a month hosting is a bargain and a good idea.

I'm sorry but this is ridiculous. Poor hosting servers result in lost sales. How?

When a bride can't find your website because it's unavailable, you lose a sale. When your pages are slow to load and a bride gets tired of waiting, she leaves and you lose a sale to your competitor. When your scripts unexpectedly don't work and your inquiry forms freeze up, you lose sales.

Webmasters don't get it, but saving a few dollars a month is not worth it when at stake is hundreds or thousands of dollars in sales. You can get the highest quality website hosting available for between \$40.00 and \$80.00 month – and not have to worry about lost sales because of hosting.

7. Taking A Casual Approach To Your Online Marketing Is A Big Mistake

Take your website and online marketing seriously and you'll get great results.

Take a casual approach and you'll find your competition taking

market-share and sales away from you.

If you don't know how many inquiries a week you're getting from your website, if you don't know where they're coming from, if you don't know where the hottest places to advertise your website online are, if you don't know how many visitor sessions you have daily – on average, if you don't know your conversion ratios, if you don't know the top 10 keywords you're targeting at Google, Yahoo!, and MSN are – you're not taking your online marketing seriously.

8. Be Aware Of Your Conversion Rate

I have never heard a webmaster discuss conversion and most would rather eat worms than talk about it.

Unfortunately, conversion is what it's all about. Conversion is when a bride finds your website and actually takes action: She might make an online inquiry, she might pick up the phone and call, or maybe she'll download a summary sheet of your services and prices (after giving her contact information first, of course).

Conversion is the #1 way (and frankly, the only way) to calculate the success of your website. If you had 100 qualified visitors to your website and got 20 inquiries your conversion is 20%. If you got 3 inquiries your conversion is 3% and something is probably wrong with your website.

9. Follow-Up On All Inquiries Within 24 Hours

The inquiries you get from your website are some of the best leads you can find. They come from people who have visited your site, read the information, found it interesting enough to seek more information about your products and services by taking the time to fill in an inquiry form requesting additional contact.

In today's world of "I want it now," you'll want to follow-up on your inquiries the same day you receive them, or within 24 hours. Keep in mind, a bride has likely made several inquiries. A prompt follow-up will help you create a great impression and help you close more sales.

10. Follow-Up On All Inquiries By Phone.

A personal follow-up on all of your inquiries by phone will get better results and turn more of your website inquiries into sales.

Email follow-up is almost useless these days and if you use email as your primary follow-up with the brides who have made inquiries through your website you're probably losing significant sales to competitors who use the phone to follow-up on web inquiries.

I asked one of my new clients to use the phone to follow-up on her web inquiries and she doubled her monthly sales in only 30 days.

11. Online Inquiry Forms Work Better Than Email Links

Online inquiry forms will help you get better leads from your website because you'll get better information, you'll get more information, and it will be easier to qualify your prospective new client and give them the information they're looking for.

If you've done a good job telling a bride what you'll do for her, why you are a better choice than the last five websites she's visited, and why she should hire you, then filling out a form for more information is a no-brainer.

12. Hits Are Not Individual Brides And Grooms

The next time your webmaster says "hits" when talking about traffic at your website, fire him.

Why? Because either they don't know what they are talking about or they are intentionally misleading you.

"Hits" are not real people. "Hits" are not real brides and grooms. Real people (i.e., brides and grooms) create "Visitor Sessions."

When a bride visits a web page that has ten images on it she creates 11 "hits" on your server. Here's how it is calculated: your server was asked to deliver a full page of code and 10 images to that person's

computer screen, creating 11 “hits” on the server. This is only one visitor session, but registers as 11 “hits.”

13. Half Of Your Traffic Is No Good

Roughly half of your visitor session traffic is absolutely no good.

It is not qualified traffic and probably isn't even a bride or groom.

It could be a competitor, possibly a search engine reviewing the pages at your website, or some other unqualified visitor.

I tell my clients to take their total visitor session count and divide it by half. That will give you a better idea of the true number of “qualified” visitors. Use this “adjusted visitor session” number to analyze your traffic and calculate conversion.

14. Average Time On Site Is A Useless Measurement

When your website statistics, these days being referred to as “analytics,” refer to the average time spent per visit on your website, don't put too much emphasis on it.

There are too many variables involved for that number to mean much, in most cases.

Some search engine spiders act as a real person and impact that number. Some brides will load your website and then go to dinner and come back two hours later. Others might visit your website and then walk away from their computer for the rest of the day with your web page still “live” on their computer screen.

These visitor sessions throw the average time per visit number into the garbage. I'm not saying to ignore it, but don't lose sleep over it. The best thing to do with this number is to track it over time and make sure it does not trend downward significantly.

15. Website Analytics: Make Sure You Identify Referrers

There are many things to look at when reviewing your website statistics but one of the most important things to review is referrers.

Referrers show you which other websites are sending you traffic and how much are they sending. This is particularly important if you're advertising online as it will confirm that you are getting traffic from the sources you are paying.

When I review someone's log, I go straight for the referrers after reviewing total visitor sessions. I want to know where the traffic is coming from, how much, and over what period of time.

16. Website Analytics: Review Keywords Regularly

In your website statistics you should also find "referring keywords," or the words people used to find your website through a search engine.

If the keywords you are targeting with your page copy and in your search engine optimization strategy are not showing up in your keyword referrals, there is something wrong with your keyword strategy, search engine optimization strategy, search engine positioning, or all three!

If you are getting only a few visitor sessions from the keywords you are targeting it could be an indication of poor organic (i.e., free) search engine positioning.

17. Online Advertising Is Smart

Online advertising is a requirement in today's competitive chase for the online bride and groom. The days of a "free ride" and free traffic are over and free link exchanges are mostly useless for driving quality traffic these days.

Once you have a good website, one with a track record of converting bride/groom visitor sessions into inquiries, phone calls, and sales, online advertising is a no-brainer and should generate a

fantastic return-on-investment.

Where should you advertise? Look for sites where your competition is advertising. Ask your peers where they are advertising and getting good results. Look for sites that show up top ranked in search engines for your keywords.

Be sure to monitor your web statistics and referrers to confirm and track the results.

18. Pay-Per-Click Advertising Is Smart

Pay-per-click advertising, also referred to as search engine marketing, works and if it's not working for you there is something wrong with your website or your pay-per-click campaign set-up.

Driving targeted traffic to a website that converts visitors into inquiries – and then sales – is another no-brainer. Google offers Adwords, Yahoo! offers Yahoo Search and MSN offers AdCenter.

19. If You're New To Pay-Per-Click, Start With Google Adwords First

If you're new to the search engine marketing playing field I recommend you start with the Google Adwords "Standard" edition (avoid the "Starter" edition) because it is the fastest way to test and fine-tune your pay-per-click program – it generates more traffic than Yahoo! or MSN and I believe in the wedding industry the quality of traffic is better (i.e., brides and grooms).

If you are unfamiliar with the "pay-per-click" model you SHOULD hire someone with experience to help you.

Setting up the system is fairly easy, but setting it up properly, identifying the right keywords and keyword phrases, and writing ad copy that pulls the most clicks (and beats your competitors advertisements) isn't for amateurs. The money you save should more than pay for the investment.

20. Search Engine Optimization Takes A Lot Of Time

I wish more webmasters would discuss this with their clients.

The simple fact is that search engine optimization requires knowledge, expertise, and time.

Even with experience, it takes expertise and time to break a client into the top ten for any competitive keyword/keyword phrase position.

If you do everything right, it can take months, even a year or more, to see your website move into a top position for competitive keywords.

Keep in mind that someone has to fall out of the top ten for you to get into the top ten, and you're not the only one trying. Also, the algorithms at Google, Yahoo!, and MSN are each different and change from time to time.

21. Getting Top Ranked At Yahoo! or MSN Doesn't Guarantee A Top Ranked Position At Google

Getting ranked well at Google right now has a lot to do with the number of links pointing to your website.

That said, the quality of those sites pointing to you is more important than the quantity.

Yahoo! seems to really be focused on keywords and relevancy - in other words, does your website have the most relevant information to match the search performed. MSN also seems to be putting most of its weight on page content also.

I wish webmasters would tell clients that each search engine has a different algorithm and/or different rules. It's fairly easy to get a top position at Yahoo! and MSN. It's an entirely different story at Google these days.

22. The Most Important Variable In An Over-All Search Engine Optimization Strategy Is Your Page Title Tag

I think most webmasters understand the importance of page title tags but what I don't think they understand is how carefully they have to be created.

If the words brides are searching for when using Google, Yahoo!, or MSN, are not in your page title tag, it is very unlikely that you are going to show up top ranked - plain and simple.

Also, putting your company name in your page title tags is a waste of time.

If they search for your company name, your site should rank in a top position in the search engine results page based on your page copy (i.e., your company name on your pages).

In most cases brides aren't searching for ABC Videography (a Philadelphia based wedding videographer), they are searching for "Philadelphia wedding videographers" or "Philadelphia wedding videography services."

23. Search Engine Optimization Involves A Lot More Than Just Adjusting A Few Page Title Tags And Meta-Tags

I wish more webmasters would talk about all of the different variables related to search engine optimization, including: meta-tags, keywords in your page copy, content placement, content length (number of words per page), streamlined programming and coding, inbound links, outbound linking, deep linking into your sub-pages, and spider crawlability.

These are just a few of the other variables in the mix. Each one of these variables has multiple variables of its own.

Search engine optimization is very different from a year ago. Only when everything is correctly planned and everything is correctly executed, will you see results and your search engine positioning improve.

24. Don't Confuse Search Engine Optimization With Search Engine Marketing – You Need To Do Both

Search engine optimization is different from search engine marketing.

Optimization is the process of planning and modifying your website programming and page content to achieve organic or “free” top positions in the search engines on a search engine results page (SERP).

Search engine marketing is using “sponsored” links or paid advertising, in most cases pay-per-click advertising, to target and drive additional qualified traffic to your website.

What most webmasters fail to clearly communicate is the difference between search engine optimization and search engine marketing, the importance of each, and their role in the development of a solid, long-term, traffic-building strategy.

25. It Will Be Hard To Get Top Ranked At Google Without Backward Links

Also called inbound links, backward links are links pointing to your website from other websites.

For the past 18 months backward links have played a critical role in moving up in position at Google.

Inbound links to your website, not in the form of link exchanges, are an indication to Google that other people like your website enough to link to it.

It's pretty easy for Google to identify a link exchange and it's likely Google gives more weight to inbound links vs. link exchanges. Building inbound links is a difficult and a time-consuming task and should be

approached as a long-term strategy. Keep in mind, the quality of the links pointing to your website is more important than the quantity.

Also keep in mind that Google probably doesn't like to see dozens of inbound links show up over a short period of time – it can be an indication you are trying to just use links to move your positioning up.

The way to the top rank at Google is to have high quality websites linking directly to you using links that the Google spider can crawl – and to develop those links slowly, but methodically, over time.

Closing Thought: The Competition Is Getting Tough(er)

Every year, as the number of websites continue to grow, the competition is getting tougher and tougher and you can expect it to get worse.

Unless you have an effective online marketing plan, by next year I predict you'll have 30% more competition than you have today.

The competitors who “get it,” have online marketing know-how behind them, execute their online marketing strategy effectively, and day by day - although you may not know it - take away one sale after another from you.

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