

25 Things Your Webmaster Did Not Tell You

A Micro-report

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Topic: 25 Things Your Webmaster Will Not (or Did Not) Tell You (and it could be killing your Internet marketing success)

Key Point: In most cases your webmaster is not qualified to help you develop a successful Internet marketing strategy that works and delivers great results consistently.

1. Your Webmaster Probably Knows Very Little about Internet Marketing

The fact is that Internet marketing is outside the expertise of most webmasters. In most cases, relying on your webmaster to develop and execute your Internet 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, or 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 your 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.

Webmasters may be talented programmers or graphic designers, but they should not have the responsibility of managing your Internet marketing.

2. Your Website Must Be Better Than Your Competition

I bet your webmaster can't identify 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, realize that your website has to be better than your competition's.

If it's not you will lose sales and market-share to them.

In today's competitive marketplace making an outstanding impression on the Internet is a must.

Your website must create what I call the "Oh Yes" moment.

That's when a bride visits your home page and says "Oh yes, this is what I have been looking for..."

Here's how you can make it happen: Find five of your competitors online. Have a professional analyze their website for strengths and weaknesses. Take this information and capitalize on your competition's weaknesses.

Your website should look fresh, be updated often, and have better "more engaging" marketing copy than any of your competition.

It should have better features, colorful and sharp graphics, easier navigation, and offer a more compelling reason to choose you and your company 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 be a potentially huge problem.

If you don't have INTERNET marketing design experience, and the time to keep up with the latest techniques related to Internet marketing, the best way to minimize this gap is to find someone who does!

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

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 (i.e. no inquiries).

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!

Did you know 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/Bing?

FACT: 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 might just work.

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 BOOK MORE WEDDINGS ADVANTAGE program attributes over a million dollars a year in sales to inquiries that have come in specifically from Google.

“In-the-trenches” experience tells me that if you're top ranked in a competitive keyword position it easily can translate into tens of thousands of dollars in new business every year. Maybe more!

If you're stuck in this spot because you have an all FLASH website my advice is to build a new website with a more search engine friendly design. The investment is well worth it in the long-term.

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 website hosting is a bargain and a good idea.

I'm sorry but this is ridiculous.

Poor hosting servers that are slow or unavailable 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 loading and a bride gets tired of waiting, she leaves, and you lose a sale.

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 Internet Marketing Is a Big Mistake

Take your website and Internet 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 one bride after another.

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 – you're not taking your Internet marketing seriously.

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/Bing are – you're not taking your Internet marketing seriously.

8. Know 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 at 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, and found it interesting enough to ask for 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 on the same day you receive them, or absolutely 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 it will 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 the first month!

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 them as soon as possible.

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

Based on my experience and what I've seen when reviewing website statistics, roughly half of your visitor session traffic is poor quality and not likely to convert – in most cases.

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, commonly 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 items to review is referrers.

Referrers show you which other websites are sending you traffic and how many visitor sessions they are 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 website analytics, 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.

I highly recommend that you use Google Analytics for your website statistics. Any webmaster who doesn't recommend this, or doesn't already have them set-up for you, isn't looking out for your best interests.

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 search engine positioning.

17. Online Advertising Is Smart

Online advertising is a requirement in today's competitive chase for the Internet 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.

19. If You Are New to Pay-Per-Click Start With Google Adwords First

If you're new to the search engine marketing (pay-per-click) I recommend you start with the Google Adwords "Standard" edition.

Avoid the "Starter" edition as it doesn't give you all of the appropriate tools to optimize your advertising campaigns.

Additionally, if you are unfamiliar with the "pay-per-click" model you should hire someone with experience to help you.

Setting up Adwords 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 competitor's advertisements isn't for amateurs.

Setting up Adwords incorrectly quickly leads to poor results, unnecessary costs, and a poor return-on-investment.

The money you spend to hire a professional should more than pay for

itself.

20. Search Engine Optimization Takes a Lot Of Time

I wish more webmasters would discuss this with their clients.

REALITY CHECK: Search engine optimization requires knowledge, expertise, and time.

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

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/Bing are each different and change from time to time. As a result, what worked six months ago and what "was" your strategy might need to be adjusted.

21. Getting Top Ranked at Yahoo! or MSN/Bing 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/Bing also seems to be putting most of its weight on page content.

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/Bing. It's an entirely different approach 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 what page title tags are but 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/Bing, are not in your page title tag, it is very unlikely that you are going to show up top ranked for those words - plain and simple.

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

If brides and grooms search for your company name your site should rank in a top position in a search engine results page based on your page copy (i.e., your company name is already 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.

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 positions 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 Tougher

As the number of websites continue to grow there is more and more competition. You can expect this trend to continue on the Internet.

Unless you have an effective Internet marketing plan in place, I predict you'll effectively have 30% more competition than you have today in less than 12 months.

Competitors who "get it," have Internet marketing know-how behind them, and execute their Internet marketing strategy effectively, will steal dozens of sales from you over the course of a year.

The best advice I can give you: Find a competent, experienced, Internet marketing professional to help you with your Internet marketing strategy. It will be one of the best investments you've ever made in your business!