

Volume

1

Online Community Start-Up Guide



Blacks Gone Geek

The Online Community for African Americans in IT

7/14/09 – Final Version 1



Letter from the editor...



Do you have a cause that you want to promote? If you're thinking about starting an online community, then this guide is for you.

In our quest to uncover the "who, what, where, when, how and why" of starting an online community, we used the experiences that we've gain in growing the Blacks Gone Geek community and studied tons of articles, studies and podcasts in cyberspace. It was a great learning experience and a true "labor of love".

Remember, **the nature of social networking is to "share," so if you find value here, please let your family, friends, and neighbors know about this guide.**

You can find the link to the original guide here: <http://blacksgonegeek.org/Publications.aspx>

Thanks!

Even though I had my hand in most of the chapters of this guide, I can't take credit for this body of work. My heartfelt thanks goes to all of the authors who contributed their volunteer time and energy to this project: Tiffany Miles, Vera Holman, Nancy Ford, Karla Williams and Thyrsa Gravely.

And a special thanks goes to our co-editor Nancy Ford for proofreading and meticulously editing every word in this guide!

I hope you find this guide useful. And remember, working together we can do great things!

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Introduction

Author: Tiffany Miles

At Blacks Gone Geek, we believe that whether you looking for a job or starting a small business, you will need the same thing, an online presence, a web presence that brings legitimacy to you and your cause. Believe it or not, it has become really easy to get started with little or no financial investment. All it takes is a little time and know-how and a passion for building an online following.

What is an Online Community?

An **online community** (also known as a **virtual community**, **e-community**) is an interactive group of people joined by a common purpose and interest by electronic forms of communication mediums such as newsletters, telephone, email, internet social network service or instant messaging. Electronic forms are instituted rather than face to face interactions, for convenience, social, professional, educational and other purposes. When used for computer networking, an online community is a powerful mechanism for marketing, product development customer retention and insight, and overall web presence. Virtual and online communities have also become a supplemental form of communication between people who know each other primarily in real life. Many means are used in social software separately or in combination, including text-based chat rooms and forums that use voice, video text or avatars. Significant socio-technical change may have resulted from the proliferation of such Internet-based social networks.

In a survey conducted by Deloitte Services, LLP director of product innovation, Ed Moran noted, “[Online] Communities can extend the edge ...in truly transformative ways -- tapping into new talent, helping design products and services, providing customer support and, most importantly, building the brand with the customer,”.

Deloitte also noted that the [online] community features that most contribute to community effectiveness are:

- 53%-Ability for community members to connect with like-minded people.
- 43%-Ability for members to help others
- 41%-Community focus around hot topic or issue

What is social media?

Social media is [information content](#) created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies that is intended to facilitate communications, influence and interaction with peers and with public audiences. The term also refers to activities that integrate technology, telecommunications and social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio. This interaction, and the manner in which information is presented, depends on the varied perspectives and "building" of shared meaning among communities, as people share their stories and experiences. (Wiki) The goal of social media is people engaging with one another to share; thus providing an electronic platform for word of mouth marketing and networking that can deliver engaging and socially relevant products and services with cutting edge technology applications.

Online communities use social media to provide tools that foster intuitive conversations around topics that are identified by its users. Businesses rely heavily on social media for its products and services. They refer to it as user-generated content (UGC) which is defined as various kinds of media content, publicly available, which is produced by end-users; or consumer generated media (CGM) defined as a reference to posts made by consumers within online venues such as internet forums, blogs, wikis, discussion lists etc., on products that they have purchased, questions they have or problems they are trying to solve. (Wiki)

What is social networking?

Social networking is the practice of expanding the number of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individuals. Based on the six degrees of separation concept (the idea that any two people on the planet could make contact through a chain of no more than five intermediaries), social networking establishes interconnected Internet communities (sometimes known as personal networks) that help people make contacts that would be good for them to know, but that they would be unlikely to have met otherwise. In theory, any individual can make contact through anyone they have a connection to any of the people *that* person has a connection to, and so on. The internet has the unparalleled potential to promote such connections is only now being fully recognized and exploited, through Web-based groups (such as online communities as social networking websites) established for that purpose.

Social networking facilitates the building of online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services Social networking has created new ways to communicate and share information. Social networking websites are being used regularly by millions of people, and it now seems that social networking will be an enduring part of everyday life. The main types of social networking services are those which contain directories of some categories (such as former classmates), means to connect with friends (usually with self-description pages), and recommender systems linked to trust. (Wiki)

Social networking websites allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to

site. Networking sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but the actual networking with others helps strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Most sites cater to diverse audiences, and attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing.

How much time does it take to build and grow an online community?

Some of the strongest online communities have grown naturally in supportive environments. Craig's List grew out of one man sending out job notices and apartment listings to his friends. Now Craig's List is a nonprofit organization reaching 37,000 people daily (Knefel 1998). Echo, a famous New York City based virtual salon, grew from the mind and energy of one very dynamic woman and a close group of friends (Horn 1998). The most famous online community, The WELL, was started in 1985 by a very small group. 11 years later it had 10,000 members and over 250 quality conferences (Hafner 1997). As architects of online learning communities, it is important to remember to try and control the growth, not the group. You can create an environment and plant some seeds, but it's the members of a community that grow that community. Even the big companies who are said to be "building online communities" are really growing them by giving, or selling, the tools with which people can grow their own.

Most online communities grow slowly at first, due in part to the fact that the strength of motivation for contributing is usually proportional to the size of the community. As the size of the potential audience increases, so does the attraction of writing and contributing. This, coupled with the fact that organizational culture does not change overnight, means creators can expect slow progress at first with a new virtual community. As more people begin to participate, however, the aforementioned motivations will increase, creating a virtuous cycle in which more participation begets more participation. (Wiki)

Community adoption can be forecast with the Bass diffusion model, originally conceived by Frank Bass to describe the process by which new products get adopted as an interaction between innovative early adopters and those who follow them. (Wiki)

Why do we use a web centric model?

A web centric model is the switch in focus from outbound marketing (solicitation of the customer) to an inbound (customer initiated solicitation) marketing focus. The inbound marketing focus attracts the customer to a site for products, information and services needed. It offers the possibilities of a 'one-stop shopping' experience where traffic from one main (parent) site can be re-directed to several different outside sites. There are three key components of a successful web centric model that will be discussed: Content, Search Engine Optimization and Social Media.

Why build an online community?

Online communities allow members to form a strong bond promoting social interaction and an exchange of ideas between users in a virtual setting. The uses and purposes of online communities are infinite and respectfully defined by its members allowing diverse talents to converge and explore one or several different experiences. These communities provide

products and services in an ever evolving world that allows people to get connected to new people and become connected to new people who may have been previously geographically unreachable.

Job seekers can post resumes, search for employment and find a wealth of help and information regarding their career and aspirations. They can also be found by potential employers by creating an avenue that gives an employer direct access to an individual. Efforts can be concentrated differently as the days of walking into an establishment to fill out an application and submit a resume are long gone.

Churches, non-profit and community organizations can provide a wealth of services to reach their membership as well as attract new people with an interest and curiosity for their followers.

Entrepreneurs can use social media to promote their businesses. Your online community can be used to generate traffic to your website and your website can be used to convert leads into paying customers.

What are the steps to create an online community?

1. Establish your purpose products and services
2. Identify your target market
3. Determine how you will reach your target market.
4. Determine how you will attract your target market to your online community.
5. How will you make money (e.g. leads, conversions)?
6. Who is your competition and how can you learn from them?
7. Pick your team (webmaster, co-editor, moderator, etc.)
8. Select the components of your technical solution (website, blog, discussion forum, profiles, e-mail marketing solution)
9. Establish and monitor operational metrics, key performance indicators (KPI's) and measures of success (e.g. number of community members, Facebook friends, etc.)
10. Generate traffic using inbound and outbound marketing techniques.

Beginner's Guide to Website Creation – Part 1

Author: Vera Holman

Overview

This material provides an overview of the web creation process from a novice perspective at the beginning of the process. Prior experience with a graphical user interface such as Macintosh or Windows is required. We supply the question of how to use low cost or no cost options to create web sites when launching your service.

This chapter will address the following topics:

- ≈ Choosing a Good Domain Name
- ≈ Key Aspects for Identifying a Web Host
- ≈ How Do you Know I'm Here? – Getting Discovered by Search Engines
- ≈ Pages All Web Sites Should Include
- ≈ How Well Did I Do? - Scoring Your Web Site's Effectiveness

Choosing a Good Domain Name

Your Domain Name Should Be Your Website Name

Naming your site after your domain is critical, for the simple reason that when people think of your website, they'll think of it by name. If your name is also your Uniform Resource Locator (URL), your customer will automatically know where to go. For example, when people think of blacksgonegeek.org, they don't have to wonder what URL to type into their browser to get there. The name of the site is also the URL (e.g. <http://blacksgonegeek.org>)

Don't make the mistake of attempting to retrofit your domain name to your business or website.

Long or Short Domain Names or Is It Available?

Domain names can be up to 67 characters. You do not have to settle for an obscure domain name like xyz.com when what you mean is LastThreeLetters.com.

Some argue that shorter domain names are easier to remember, easier to type and far less susceptible to mistakes. For example, "getit.com" is easier to remember and less prone to typos than "connecttomywebsite.com". Keep your customer base in mind when choosing domain names.

If you can't get the domain name you want, the domain name registrar (see definition below) will suggest alternate forms of the name you typed. For example, if you wanted website.com, and it was taken the registrar will suggest alternative, such as:

- ≈ • thewebsite.com
- ≈ • mywebsite.com
- ≈ • websites.com

Registration Overview

A **Domain Registrar** is a company, accredited by the [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#) (ICANN) or by a national [ccTLD](#) authority, to register [Internet domain names](#). These "retail" companies are often distinct from the "wholesale" [domain name registry](#) operator. Examples of gTLDs include [.com](#), [.net](#), [.org](#) and [.mobi](#). ICANN does not have authority over ccTLDs, or [Country Code Top-Level Domains](#), although it is quite common for domain name registrars to offer ccTLD registration services as well. Most registrars provide [DNS hosting service](#), but this is not required, and is often considered a separate service. (source: Wikipedia)

Getting a domain name involves registering the name you want with an organization called InterNIC through a domain name registrar. For example, if you choose a name like "blacksgonegeek.org", you will usually have to go to a registrar and pay a registration fee for that name. That will give you the right to the name for a year, and you will have to renew it annually. Some web hosts will register and pay for the name as part of a packaged service to its clients. Others will do it for you but you'll have to foot the InterNIC fees.

Your registrar and web host DO NOT have to be the same provider. But it makes life a lot easier.

Step By Step Instructions

If you want to register a domain name, here's what you need to do

Think of a few good domain names that you'd like to use. It won't do to think of only one - it might already be taken!

Obtain from your web host the Domain Naming Service (DNS) Internet Protocol (IP) addresses and names of their primary and secondary nameservers. (Please refer to the index for clarification on these terms.)

You will need either a credit card or a PayPal account to pay for the domain. This is a requirement of most, if not all, registrars. This process allows you to claim ownership of the domain name immediately upon application. This is not optional!

If you already have a web host, you can contact a registrar listed online and apply for the domain name. Be sure you have the information mentioned in step three.

If you do not have a web host, you can always use one of the registrars and be allowed to park your domain name at a temporary website set up for you. This way you can quickly secure your domain name before it's too late and still take your time to set up the other aspects of your site. Most registrars also provide you with at least one free email address

and a small amount of storage at your own domain name, like sales@yourdomain.com. For an additional cost, more space is available for high-volume email activity.

Key Aspects for Identifying a Web Host

Hosting Provider/Service. There are two kinds of web site builders. On-line proprietary tools provided by [web hosting](#) companies cater to people who wish to build and publish their websites without learning the technical aspects of web page production. Professional web design software runs on a computer, creating pages off-line, then publishing these pages to any host's servers. Web hosts organize and manage the server to which a website is connected.

Advertising. Most free web hosting organizations compel advertising while most commercial hosts do not. This is strictly a question of preference: some people hate pop-up windows and dislike preformatted advertising frames (which may cause problems when submitting your website to search engines). We will tackle search engine effectiveness in a later chapter. Whichever method is used, check that you're comfortable with the method.

Disk Space. How much space do I need? Plan for future expansion. Web hosts are competitive in the area of minimal space provided and most have packaged offers. Everyone's needs are different –some may require simple text content and others have a high variety of animation, audio/video (A/V), etc. The A/V content will demand three times the space needs of text.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) is a method used to transfer a file from one computer to another across the Internet. FTP is the process to transfer web pages from a local computer to the Internet (web server). The transfer of files is usually accomplished by a program called an FTP client. Some free hosting providers only allow you to design your page with their online builder. In these cases, FTP is not needed. I feel it is essential to have FTP access.

Can you meet my type and size requirements? There may be a maximum size restriction placed on each of the files you upload by some hosts. Some sites restrict the file types you can upload to HTML and GIF/JPG files. If your needs are more wide ranged, keep looking.

Are You Reliable? Nothing is more important! If your site is frequently offline –you lose credibility resulting in lost revenue. A slow transfer rate will prompt the customer to search another site. How do you know if a host is reliable or fast? What is their ranking in the market place, do they guarantee reliable, fast uptime? No hosting service allows “unlimited” bandwidth/traffic. Some of the most prominent sites “crash” due to excessive hits. Visit your site periodically from different computers. You can also attach various counters on the website to record hits. More information on these types of tools is available on line (where?).

Technical support? Is the technical support area available 24/7 - all year around? Having reliable support on weekends and holidays is critical - particularly if you provide a seasonal service. Confirm what 24/7 means to ensure both you and the host are on the same page. What are the methods of correspondence? What is the guaranteed reply timeframe? If your site is mission critical, you need to have a very clear understanding of technical support. You lose money every moment you are off line.

Correspondence options. Are Email, Auto reply, and mail access available? It makes good business sense to have email addresses at your own domain, like

sales@yourdomain.com. Again, you want everything cohesive. Is rerouting, automatic replies, (lets your customer know you are aware of their inquiry) or forwarding offered? Do you have mobile access to your mail (online or device)? These are business critical functions and most host packages offer these options; but verify.

SSL (Secure Sever). This feature is mandatory when conducting business through your website. If this is not a direct feature, you can search online for an array of service providers offering subscriptions for a fee. You will definitely need SSL if you want to collect credit card payments on your site.

Price. "YOU DON'T GET WHAT YOU DON'T PAY FOR!" The most expensive host may not be the best one for you. So do your research using all of the tips provided above. NEVER ASSUME!!!

Payment Plans. There are as many payment plans as there are host providers. The annual payment plan affords a cheaper rate than if you were to pay monthly. I suggest you start out with a monthly recurring charge. This will allow time to effectively appraise the host's services. If they don't meet your needs, you can easily move on with no cancellation fee.

How Do You Know I'm Here? – Getting Discovered by Search Engines

Promoting your website is a constant process. It ensures your site has an increased number of hits. Like any other resource, search engines work best when you know how to use them. Unfortunately, no two are exactly alike and some are better than others, depending on what you're searching for. Generally, there are three types of engines:

1. computer-generated indexes
2. directories
3. meta search engines

Promotion means more than submitting your site to search engines. But this is a key vehicle for letting them who you are and what you have to offer. Search engines are more commonly referred to as crawlers or spiders in the IT industry. Computer-generated indexes like WebCrawler scan the web looking for words relevant to your search. Directories like Yahoo are lists of sites edited by humans and organized by topic. Most are a combination of the two.

The third category includes meta search engines, which search other engines for you. The most popular [Google](#) is a meta engine. [Ask Jeeves](#) is a meta engine that allows users to enter queries in the form of a question. [Ask Jeeves For Kids](#) gives 7-14 year olds access to a screened metasearch.

There is a wealth of information on search engine optimization. Two key questions to take in to account are:

How To Create a Search Engine Friendly Site? There are a few basic principles to keep in mind while designing your site to be search engine friendly.

Make your text readable. Busy backgrounds that obscure the text are not only hard to read but can make your site look unprofessional. Make your text readable: standard size (Web standard is 12), no silly fonts that have to be painstakingly interpreted, and make sure whatever font color you pick is readable as well (black is the preferred text color). Bells and Whistles are not all ways a good thing.

Make your navigation clear. How many sites have you been to that give you the dreaded "page not found" error? This can be avoided by making your site hierarchy clear and consistent. Make sure that your navigation tools are obvious, and don't cloud them up with catchy titles. A site map or index page for clarity on a website with more than ten pages is a good idea.

Images. Every image on your site should be there for a good reason. Make images accessible for those searchers who might have their images turned off due to slow download times by giving every image an "alt" label and a corresponding text link. Minimize the graphics –unless this is the service that you are delivering.

Overall Effect. While Flash is a great tool, it increases download time. Make sure that whatever technologies you are using to spiff up your pages don't drag you down. In addition, be consistent with your site design. Make sure that every page in your site has some element that ties it in with the rest of the site; otherwise visitors can be confused by the conflicting design. In other words, "user friendly" sites are well received.

Tips on Google (world's largest) search engine results placement? When you are anxious to get your site noticed, and have a budget for your site's promotion, one instant way to get to the first page of Google's results page is to buy advertisements ([Google adwords](#)). It permits you to place the advertisements on precisely the keywords you want for your site in the search engine results. Unlike the normal search engine indexing procedure, you control the exact keyword which will trigger your site's advertisement and its prominence. Of course, it comes with a price! But if you're doing a business, this is an investment vehicle that cannot be matched.

Pages All Web Sites Should Include

Here are seven pages every business Web site must have (source: [MS Office Live Article](#)):

1. Contact Us
2. Testimonials
3. Privacy Policy
4. FAQ
5. A "gimme" page
6. About Us
7. Confirmation

Click this link for the full article: [7 pages every business Web site must have](#)

How Well Did You Do? - Scoring Your Web Site's Effectiveness

Here's a [link](#) to an objective scoring system to see how your website rates

For those of you unfamiliar with the tool, <http://WebsiteGrader.com> is HubSpot's free website analysis tool that measures the marketing effectiveness of a website. It looks at things like traffic, social popularity, [SEO](#) ([Search Engine Optimization](#)), page structure and a bunch of other things.

Beginner's Guide to Website Creation – Part 2

Authors: Milt Haynes, Vera Holman, and Tiffany Miles

Overview

This material provides a more in depth overview of the web creation process. Prior experience with a graphical user interface such as Macintosh or Windows is required. We supply suggestions on how to use low cost or no cost options to create web sites when launching your service.

This chapter will address the following topics:

- ≈ **Website Complexity:** It looks great, but are you willing to devote the time and money it takes to get a high complexity website up and running?
- ≈ **So Many Designs Who to Choose:** Creating a website is not as difficult as you may think.
- ≈ **Validating Your HTML Code:** After you write your code, it may not translate the way you expect. There are tools out there to verify your code.
- ≈ **Getting from Here to “Up” There:** How do you FTP, publish and upload your code to the web site?
- ≈ **Website Design Considerations:** Is the page too busy? Too much flash? Does it take too long to download because of too many bells and whistles?
- ≈ **Webmaster Selection:** Do I need one? How much should I be prepared to pay?

Website Complexity

When determining the steps to build a website, it is imperative that consideration is taken in several key areas. The first consideration is in regards to the level of complexity the website will need.

There are three (3) major levels of website complexity that must be examined:

HIGH: The higher the technical intricacy, the greater the level of complexity that is attributed to the website. For a high level of functionality, advanced database knowledge, expert level scripting and development tools are needed. Product type and audience help determine how intricate the website must be. Here are a few examples of highly complex websites with Subject Matter Experts (SME) contacts.

- ≈ [Thoughtworks](#): (Matt Simons, Jeff Norris)
- ≈ [A Mighty River](#): (Rudy Martinez)

MEDIUM: Requires a mid-level knowledge of technical expertise with scripting and development tools. It does not require the use of advanced databases. (e.g. Blacks Gone Geek website). Here are a few examples of medium complexity websites with SME contacts.

- ≈ [BDPA Chicago](#): (Martin Brown)
- ≈ [Blacks Gone Geek](#): (Milt Haynes)
- ≈ [Project CIO](#): (Martin Brown)
- ≈ [Mount Zion Baptist Church - Woodlawn](#): (Brice Baumann)

LOW: Requires novice level expertise with basic web page design experience. The website is highly functional to a broad base community without technical attributes to maintain. Here are a few examples of low complexity websites with SME contacts.

- ≈ [North Alabama Interdenominational Golf Association](#): (Brice Baumann)
- ≈ [V Lan Technologies](#): (Vera Holman)
- ≈ [Designed for a Purpose](#): (Victoria Hook)
- ≈ [Well Spring Design](#): (Lendrear Freeman)

So Many Designs Who to Choose

Creating a website is not as difficult as you may think. Understanding terminology such as HTML, CSS, JavaScript, etc. are critical; however, not overwhelming to master web page editors and HTML editors are very important tools when you want to design a web site. Choosing a Web page editor or HTML editor can be a hard and tedious task. There are so many different web page editors and HTML editors to choose from, how do you choose the right one?

When choosing the HTML editor or web page editor that's right for you the first thing you want to decide is if you want one that is a strict HTML editor, a What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) type web page editor or one that does both. Another deciding factor for you may be the price. web page editors and HTML editors alike can run anywhere from free to hundreds of dollars. There are three primary editors and a useful publication tool: Dreamweaver, FrontPage, PHP, and Publisher.

Dreamweaver is a web page editor, designed to allow users to create web pages with a wide variety of features without having to write the HTML code by hand.

FrontPage is a web authoring tool that allows you to create and manage your site. It helps you to manage the pages in your web as well as create and edit web pages in a WYSIWYG fashion.

PHP, Hypertext Preprocessor. HTML embedded scripting language used to create dynamic web pages on the server –not the local machine. This helps to ensure your code cannot be copied from the web. Much of its syntax is borrowed from C, Java and Perl with some unique features. The objective of the language is to allow Web developers to write dynamically generated pages quickly.

Publisher helps you create, personalize, and share a wide range of publications and marketing materials. Since it is included in the Microsoft suite of basic tools, many people find this an inexpensive way to produce their web pages.

Validating Your HTML Code

What does it mean to validate a web page (i.e., code)? Validating your code refers to using a program or an online service to check that the web page you created is free of errors. This ensures what the designer intended to display is what the customer sees.

More importantly, an HTML validator checks to make sure the HTML code on your web page complies with the standards set by the W3 Consortium (the organization that issues the HTML standards). There are various types of validators - some check only for errors; others also make suggestions about your code, telling you when a certain way of writing things might lead to unexpected results.

The W3 Consortium has its own online validator which you can use for free: <http://validator.w3.org/>. You can also visit <http://htmlhelp.com/tools/validator/> for validation of your entire page.

Getting From Here to “Up” There

After creating your web pages you are ready to publish them. This process is known as “uploading.” The most common way to upload your content is via File Transfer Protocol (FTP). Your web hosting provider may have a step-by-step web form to facilitate the uploading process. Once you have committed to a hosting provider and you know where you're going to upload your files, you will need the following information to successfully upload your files:

- ≈ Your username
- ≈ Your password
- ≈ Your host name that you will connect to and upload your files to
- ≈ Your URL or website address

Website Design Considerations

Put Up Easy to Read Articles. The most common reason people use the Internet is either for emailing or for researching information. When researching on the Internet, people look for websites that provide quality information. If a site is poorly written, hard to read or is purely theoretical, a customer will not stay on your site for long.

Use A Simple Navigation Menu. The navigation menu is the only tool that your customers have for navigating your site. It is critical that you design the navigation menu in such a way that it is both intuitive and easy-to-use. Unfortunately, many customers leave these sites not completely getting what they want because the information is either too technical, not practical, or simply because of poor navigation designs.

Optimize Your Pages For Quick Downloading. The optimal file size for any individual web page is between 30KB and 50KB. Your website design should factor in people with slow Internet connections so that they can easily download and view your web pages. Remember, the smaller the file size the quicker your customers can download and view your web pages.

Avoid Dead Links. Make sure that after you upload your site, you go through and check your internal links. Check regularly for dead outbound links. Nothing is more frustrating to a

customer than to click on a reference link only to find that the website doesn't exist. Dead links can give your customers the impression that you are careless and unprofessional.

Keep Site Content Fresh and Relevant. Always try to keep the content on your website fresh so your customers will have reasons to revisit. Provide data that would benefit your customers. Don't write a lengthy thesis; keep your content simple, practical and straight to the point. In today's [Web 2.0 environment](#), make your website not just a place to read, but a place for information sharing. Keep it simple and free of jargon.

Browser Compatibility. All browsers do not translate all material. It's hard to know the actual statistics for browser usage, but in general Microsoft Internet Explorer commands the lion's share of the browser market, while Netscape shares about 4% to 12%. However, Firefox has become increasingly popular due to the unpredictability of Microsoft's IE version 7.0. During your website design and testing phase, test the contents of your website using other popular browsers such as Firefox, AOL, Mosaic and Opera. You will also find that earlier versions of the same browser will display your pages differently. Mozilla Firefox is a good alternative to Internet Explorer and it follows the web guidelines of the W3C.

Color Compatibility. We cannot stress enough the importance of the color scheme of your site. Begin with [web-safe colors](#) and stick with them where possible - there are 216 colors that are universally supported by most computer platforms and browsers.

Your customers will return to your site, and even recommend your site if your website design is simple and the menus are intuitive. Keep your design simple and unobtrusive so that people can focus on understanding information. Ask yourself these three questions at the onset:

1. Is it easy to read and navigate?
2. Are the pages optimized for quick downloading?
3. Can it be viewed on most browsers and platforms?

Once you can answer "yes" to these initial questions, you will have the perfect blueprint to base your website design on - a blueprint you can use with confidence to build your site from the ground up.

Content Management System (CMS): A content management system (CMS) is a computer application used to create, edit, manage, and publish content in a consistently organized fashion. A CMS (e.g. Drupal, Joomla, Ruby on Rails) is designed to simplify the publication of [Web content](#) to Web sites. In particular, allowing content creators to submit content without requiring technical knowledge of [HTML](#) or the [uploading](#) of files. CMS products provide the capability to create and edit web pages and they also provide other types of advanced web content capabilities. You will need to use a CMS to develop and maintain medium to high complexity websites.

Webmaster Selection

After the level of complexity has been determined, a [webmaster](#) must be considered. A webmaster should be researched based on the following considerations:

- ≈ Level of commitment and complexity needed to create and maintain site
- ≈ Level of capital being invested and/or budgeted
- ≈ Ultimate goal site is to accomplish

≈ \$50 an hour for a freelance web master is a reasonable rate for a low to medium complexity site.

Blogging

Author: Nancy Ford

Overview

This section of the Online Community Start-up Guide explores blogging. I'll define it, provide a little historical information, and discuss a few things related to blogs including:

- ≈ Types Of Blogs
- ≈ Things to Consider When Planning Your Blog
- ≈ Choosing a Site/Software for Your Blog
- ≈ Creating Your Blog
- ≈ Increasing Traffic to Your Blog
- ≈ Blog Etiquette
- ≈ RSS Feeds and Feed Readers
- ≈ Enhancing Your Blog
- ≈ SMUG - Social Media University, Global

Definition and History

A [blog](#) is an online diary, personal log or journal that exists in what has become known as the [blogosphere](#). It's an excellent way to quickly create an online presence when a full blown website is either not ready or not desired. Its cost is minimal, actually free unless you want a personal domain name or certain enhanced features. The most popular blogs are updated daily at a minimum. In order to encourage the regular return of readers to your blog, you should make some type of comment on it at least two or three times a week.

The word blog is an abbreviation for weblog. [Dave Winer](#) is credited with popularizing blogs when he launched the [Scripting News](#) website in April, 1997. This was followed a few months later by the launch of [Slashdot](#), still a popular site for techies and nerds. [Jorn Barger](#) coined the term weblog in December, 1997. The rest, as they (whoever *they* are), say is history.

Types of Blogs

There are probably as many different types of blogs as there are people's interests so I'll only discuss a few very general things that I feel are essential to your decision making process. The two major categories are text-based and media-based. Text-based blogs can be simple and short, like [Twitter](#), or more involved like many that can be found on

[WordPress](#). Media-based blogs might house music like the very popular [YouTube](#) or photographs like [Flickr](#). There are also blogs, like [Tumblr](#), that host mixed media.

Things to Consider When Planning Your Blog

As with all successful ventures, you should plan your blog before you sign up for a service. The first thing you should determine is why you're creating a blog in the first place. A blog usually focuses on a specific topic or area of interest. If you choose a topic that is too narrow, your audience will be very limited; on the other hand if the topic is too broad, it might be difficult to bring enough focus to a relevant area, thereby also resulting in a limited audience.

The first thing to decide is whether you're blogging principally for personal or professional purposes. There is no such thing as "strictly personal." Anything you post on the World Wide Web is there forever for anyone to see. So, if your blog is personal, remember it can still affect you professionally. Be careful what you post.

Next decide on a topic and select a title. The title should be intuitive. Cute has its place but if you want to attract people who are interested in what you are discussing, your blog's title should reflect its topic. If you are going to purchase a domain name (see the chapter on Basic Websites) it should be the same as the name of the blog. Invest some time in finding an available domain name that accurately represents your topic and does not require the prospective reader to try and figure out what you mean. The old [KISS](#) principle applies. You'll also want to determine your audience at this stage. "Blogging Made Simple" doesn't necessarily mean the same thing to a person whose online experience has been confined to checking email with Outlook Express as it does to someone with 10 years of extensive Information Technology experience who has never blogged.

Finally, you should get clear on what you want to accomplish with your blog. Are you simply ranting to get some things off your chest? Do you want to share or obtain information? Do you want to drive traffic to your website and/or create business opportunities? The answers to these questions will determine if and how you measure your blog's success.

Choosing a Site/Software for Your Blog

Decisions, decisions! Will they ever end? Once you've decided on a personal or professional blog and a topic, etc. it's time to find a host, a place on the web for your blog to live. The choices are almost endless and growing daily. [Mashable](#), a social media guide website, lists 40 blog hosts with a brief overview of each. The three most popular at the time of this writing are [WordPress](#), [Typepad](#) and [Blogger](#). Because they are so popular, it's easy to find [plug-ins](#) for them; to promote them on search engines and social networks; and to connect them to a website that is hosted elsewhere.

Creating Your Blog

Finally, you're ready to get started! One of the first things you'll do after setting your account up for your blog is choose a theme. This step is more important than you might think initially. Most blog hosts have free templates available in a variety of styles and colors. As with most free things, however, there's usually a built in cost. The template will generally include a link to the site of the designer. If the designer includes too many links it could affect how your blog is indexed by search engines so be careful. Try to select a design that will allow you to

feel good about giving the designer credit for the work put into the design; after all that's only fair, right?

Do the very best you can to ensure your blog contains quality content. Quality content refers to the quality of the posts at least as much as it refers to the content of the posts. Many readers will be turned off quickly if there is an abundance of typographical errors and poor grammar. Even though most blogging hosts provide a [WYSIWYG](#) editor that allows you to run a spell check, I recommend that you type your post in a word processor that tracks spelling and grammar errors as you type. When you've finished typing your post, have someone else - preferably someone with writing skills superior to yours - proofread it. If that's not feasible and you have to do your own proofreading, read it ALOUD. This method increases the probability that you will detect errors in your own writing.

Remember that blogs began as *personal* online journals. Therefore you want to share stuff in a personal manner. Write in the 1st person so your readers will feel they are getting to know you. Use "I" and "we" regularly - you're creating an online personality. Just as in real life, your "friends" will stop coming to visit if they don't feel welcome or if they feel you're distant and aloof.

Make sure you remain true to who you are. If you post something you don't believe in, it could come back to bite you if in a later post you write your true view which is different. Your readers will notice the discrepancy, search your archives until they find the older post and call you on it. You don't have to try to remember the truth because it doesn't change. Whenever possible, validate your content and post links to information that supports your position.

Don't write posts when you're angry. If something has upset you, allow yourself a "cooling off" period before you post about it. Go ahead and write it if you must, but wait 12 to 24 hours then read it aloud before you post it. Keep in mind that once it's posted, it can take on a life of its own and you can't take it back. The jury cannot disregard what it has heard no matter how much it might want to.

Increasing Traffic to Your Blog

You've created a beautiful blog with lots of quality content and no one sees it except you and a few of your friends who aren't really interested in this topic, but they post to your blog because they really are good friends. Take them out for coffee then let them off the hook. It's time consuming and will require patience and persistence but there are things you can do to get people to read and comment on your blog. Here are a few things to try.

1. Promote your blog by placing a link to it in your email signature, on your website (if you have one) and on all of your social network profiles.
2. Subscribe to and comment on blogs with similar topics. Make sure you include a link to your blog in your signature.
3. As a blogger you are now a part of the greater social networking community. Add links to other's blogs from your blog and other bloggers will reciprocate and do the same.
4. Ask open ended questions. People love to help, express their opinions and show off their knowledge.

5. Ask your readers for help on something specific, giving them the opportunity to share resources they know about and to possibly self promote.
6. Encourage everyone in all of your networks to visit your blog and let you know what they think.
7. Use forms to make it easy for people to comment on your blog.
8. Have contests. The contests need not be complex. You can see who comes up with the most unusual way to do something. Involve them even more by allowing the readers to choose the winner. The prize can be as simple as posting the winner's picture and/or screen name in a prominent place on the front page of your blog for a specified period of time.
9. There is still no more valuable resource than word-of-mouth. Ask your readers to tell others about your blog.

Blog Etiquette

There are no hard and fast rules but in order for your blog to thrive, you'll want to observe some unwritten rules of [blogging etiquette](#). Well, they are written but they're not really rules - more like tips. I linked to them to both save space and observe the rule/tip about not stealing other people's content. That's called [plagiarism](#) and is universally frowned upon.

RSS Feeds and Feed Readers

[RSS](#) (an abbreviation for **Really Simple Syndication**) is a family of [Web feed](#) formats used to publish frequently updated works—such as [blog](#) entries, news headlines, audio, and video—in a standardized format. People who subscribe to a site's RSS feed are able to retrieve new content from the site without visiting the site or subscribing to the site's newsletter. Feed readers are software applications that allow you to get the RSS feeds from the sites to which you subscribe. The feed reader checks the site for updates and signals you when an update is available.

Enhancing Your Blog

Once you've become comfortable with blogging you might want to try a few things that are off the beaten path, so to speak. Be sure to keep the basic function of a blog in mind, however, to make sure you're not trying to use your blog as a higher level website. Here are some things that might interest you if you want to spruce up or add functionality blog.

- ≈ [Search Engine Optimization](#)
- ≈ [Add a blog to your website](#)
- ≈ [Make money with your blog](#)
- ≈ [Get help from the PMB forum](#)
- ≈ [Blog from your phone](#)
- ≈ [Add gadgets to your blog](#)

If you're really serious you might want to attend a blogger's conference.

[Blogging While Brown](#)

[Blog World Expo](#)

SMUG - Social Media University, Global

[SMUG](#) is a private college in the sense that it receives no government funding, but is a public university in that it is open to all. There is some great Pre-Admission Coursework that is free: All prospective students should at least read [Social Media 101](#) (formerly known as the 12-Step Social Media Program for PR Pros), [Social Media 102](#) (Intro to RSS) and [Facebook 101](#). With completion of these prerequisites, as well as [Facebook 102](#) (10 Steps with Facebook), you will be adequately prepare to complete the SMUG.

Conclusion

Blogging has come a long way since 1997 and continues to evolve. It began as a way for people to express their opinions on various topics. Many still employ it primarily for this purpose. However, blogging is increasingly being used to promote businesses and generate revenue. Regardless of your purpose for blogging, remember to post accurate information, proofread it, think it through before you post it, and follow the unwritten rules of etiquette. I'll see you in the blogosphere.

Social Networking Sites

Author: Nancy Ford

Overview

Let's explore the wonderful world of social networks! This is not just your grandchild's pastime anymore. After we define social networks, among the things we'll discuss are:

- ≈ Profiles
- ≈ Relationships
- ≈ Connections
- ≈ Types of Sites
- ≈ Groups
- ≈ Creating Your Own Social Network
- ≈ Safety
- ≈ How Wayne Hicks Has Grown the BDPA on Groupsite.com
- ≈ Consolidation for Time Management

Definition and History

Social networks are web-based services that allow individuals to:

- ≈ construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system
- ≈ display a list of other users with whom they share a connection
- ≈ view and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system

Memberships are free but some social networks have premium features and/or content that is available with a paid membership upgrade.

[Friendster](#) is credited as being the very first social networking site. It was created in 2002 to allow adults 18 and over to connect with friends, family, school, social groups, activities and interests. Shortly afterwards in 2003, [MySpace](#) came along. [FaceBook](#) targeted college students when it was created in 2004 but has since opened up to everyone.

Profiles

Your profile is your face to the world. You must create a profile in order to join a social network. The minimum requirements to create your profile are a user or screen name, a password and a valid email address. Once you've signed up you'll usually be prompted to

create a bio that includes your age, geographical location, interests, photo, and contact information. Most of this information is optional and it's a good idea to exercise care with what you share, especially when you're new to the process.

Fortunately, on most social networking sites you are able to control who sees your personal profile information. Unfortunately, however, most people simply leave the default settings intact and the defaults are usually the settings that allow the maximum amount of access to the information on your profile. Profile visibility options vary from site to site but some of the choices include:

- ≈ Visible within network
- ≈ Visible to friends only
- ≈ Visible to everyone
- ≈ Visible to search engines

After you've adjusted your preferences, take a look at your public profile. What others see will differ from what you see. Looking at your own public profile ensures that others see only what you want to disclose.

Relationships

There are two main types of relationships. *Bi-directional* confirmation is required for friends and contacts on sites like [FaceBook](#), [MySpace](#), and [LinkedIn](#). This means that both parties must agree to the connection. *One-directional* ties are called fans, and followers. Certain [FaceBook](#) users, especially celebrities, have accounts that allow anyone to become their fan. This helps protect them from stalkers. [Twitter](#) users merely follow each other and very few people require a potential follower to obtain permission.

Connections

Unlike traditional offline networks, with online networks each of your social connections (friends) by default is visible to all of your other connections. Because of this, it is much easier to revive latent ties and obtain new introductions. Periodically, I scroll through the connections of those to whom I am connected. If I see someone I know with whom I'd like to connect or reconnect, I send them a request. I've also made connections with people I wanted to get to know the same way.

[MySpace](#) and [LinkedIn](#) are geared more toward protecting your privacy from people who aren't 1st degree (direct) connections. This is important because connections can't always be trusted. We'll discuss that in the Safety section of this document.

There are quite a few interactions available once you've made a connection. You may view profiles and status updates, leave comments or send messages. A private message will only be seen by the sender and the recipient(s) while a message blast goes to everyone but might appear to have only been sent to one individual. Other ways to share include posting links and uploading photos, music and videos.

Types of Sites

There are probably as many different types of sites as there are interests of people. For our purposes, we will focus on three broad categories - niche communities, professional and passion-centric - and [Twitter](#).

[MySpace](#) and [FaceBook](#) began as niche communities but have since evolved to become more inclusive. Niche communities are places where members share common interests but might not be as passionate or as focused on any one specific interest as people in the passion-centric social network communities.

Professional sites like [LinkedIn](#), [Visible Path](#), [Groupsite.com](#), [Brightfuse](#) and [Xing](#) are designed to support career oriented networking. There are very few “fun” related activities and little tolerance for requesting connections to people that you do not know personally. You’ll find job postings and answers to questions related to topics designed to help promote professional knowledge and activities. Members on these types of sites are usually able to upgrade to a paid membership and receive access to “premium” features and content.

Passion-centric sites like [Dogster](#), [Care2](#), and [MyChurch](#) are communities for people who are passionate about a common interest. The key word here is *passionate*. They are excellent places to find community related resources and information. Most of them have forums that provide members with a place to engage in discussions about their passion.

Media sharing sites such as [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#) and [last.fm](#) allow people to share photos, videos, and in the case of [last.fm](#), music preferences. On sites like Flickr and YouTube you upload content from your personal computer or data-enabled cell phone. They act as a server and host your content so that you can link to it or upload it to other places on the web.

[Last.fm](#) allows members to upload music (audio and video) and even create their own radio station. Music is rated on the site based on user input. As members choose music to listen to, suggestions for other songs and artists they might like are made based on the principles of the [Music Genome Project](#). [Pandora](#) is an Internet radio website that was created specifically to implement this project. Some of these Internet based radio stations have applications that can be downloaded so they can be used on certain Internet enabled cell phones.

[Twitter](#) is a unique combination of blogging and social networking. It is very simplistic, allowing only updates of 140 characters or less at one time. Members “follow” other members and are able to know “what they are doing” based on updates.

[Yammer](#) is a [microblogging](#) service launched in September 2008.^[1] Like [Twitter](#), it allows users to post updates of their activities, follow others' updates, tag content, and create memes. Unlike Twitter, Yammer focuses on businesses, and only individuals with the same email domain can join a given network.

Groups

Most social networking sites have groups that help its members meet colleagues and enthusiasts from around the world. Group members are able to learn about upcoming events, as well as view photos, images, and links of other group members. The group administrator(s) sets rights and permissions for group members that usually include the ability to upload your own photos and videos to share with the group and participate with other group members in the discussion area at various levels.

Creating Your Own Social Network

Although most existing networks will allow you to create your own group, if you want to take it to the next level you might consider creating your very own social network. The platform

provider is much less visible and you are able to brand the network with your own identity. [Ning](#), [KickApps](#) and [CrowdVine](#) are sites that allow users to create and customize their own networks based on templates.

Safety

Protect your “personal” information. As previously stated, you are required to provide a username, password and email address to set up a social networking account. Beyond that most other information is optional. Unless your only “friends” are people you actually know, there are some profile settings you might want to omit. The only information that is validated on most sites is your email address. Because of this, there’s no real way to determine if your 15 year old male friend isn’t really a 51 year old female.

Use caution when posting photos and updates. Predators are extremely patient and will often enlarge photos to scour images in the background. These images quite frequently provide clues to geographical locations. When enough of these clues coupled with tidbits of information from updates and other text-based posts are combined, it becomes amazingly simple to find people.

Exercise caution if you decide to meet Face to Face (FTF) with an online contact. Here are some basic guidelines:

- ≈ Meet only in a well populated, public place
- ≈ Share the details of the meeting with several people
- ≈ If at all possible, take someone you know along

Follow this procedure consistently for several meetings until you feel completely comfortable. I would even recommend that you have someone you know remotely observe your meetings the first couple of times after your new friend thinks you’ve become comfortable with the relationship.

All social networking sites have a provision for reporting suspicious activity. Please, do not hesitate to use it. The next potential victim might not be as well-informed and astute as you. Remember to report any and all suspicious activity.

I recommend this article for more information on how to [Help Protect Your Privacy in Online Communities](#).

How Wayne Hicks Has Grown the BDPA on Groupsite.com

We were fortunate to be the first BDPA-related group on [Groupsite.com](#). So, we had a number of months of building it when nobody was looking or caring. In addition, I created all of those BDPA-related [YahooGroups](#) (back when they were eGroups) in 1999-2000 era. The email addresses collected from those sites were invited to join [BDPA Groupsite.com](#) group. Also, we have worked hard to create content on [BDPA Groupsite.com](#) ... such as the centralized calendar of events ... that give people a reason to come there. Finally, you will find that many of the links I provide on my [BDPA Foundation](#) blog point back to a profile or event on CX.

Our growth has been slower in recent months ... while I've seen your [BGG CX](#) site have explosive growth. You are doing good things for social networking of BDPA. ~~ Wayne Hicks, 2009

Consolidation for Time Management

It can be tremendously time consuming and frustrating to keep all of your profiles up to date, especially when you're posting essentially the same thing to each. Fortunately, some other folks experienced the same frustration and decided to do something about it. They created [Ping.fm](#), a free service that allows its members to update multiple profiles simultaneously. Once you log in, you may set some defaults then update based on your default settings or choose the profile(s) and type of update for each instance. A mobile updating service is also available for many devices.

[TweetDeck](#) is an [Adobe AIR](#) desktop [Twitter](#) application. Like other [Twitter](#) applications it interfaces with the [Twitter API](#) to allow users to send and receive tweets and view profiles. According to TwitStat, it is the most popular Twitter desktop application.

[twhirl](#) is a desktop client for the popular [microblogging](#) service Twitter. It allows you to post short 140-character updates about what you are doing, as well as following your twitter friends and read all their updates, replies anyone sends to you, and direct messages to your account. You can also answer to another user by replying or sending him/her a private direct message.

[HootSuite](#) won Best App at the Shorty Awards, Manage multiple Twitter profiles, pre-schedule tweets, and measure your success. [HootSuite](#) is the ultimate Twitter® toolbox. With HootSuite, as you create a tweet, you are provided with the option to shorten your URL and have it appended at the end of your tweet. The shortened URLs appear as ow.ly/xxx. Once you've published tweets with the shortened URLs, you can track the clickthroughs from within the tool by clicking on the "Stats" tab. The Stats show Clicks by Region (broken out by country), Top Referrers (by click), Most Popular Tweets and a click graph. All data can be filtered by date range as well, which is really helpful when preparing client reports.

Conclusion

Social networking has become all the rage, even among many major companies. What began as a way to have fun and stay connected or reconnect with friends and loved ones has morphed into a very lucrative industry. Many businesses are using social networks to promote their products and services as well as to check out potential new hires. It's easier than ever now that there's an easy way to keep all of your profiles up to date. So, get connected, have fun and remember that once it's on the web, it's there forever and you can't take it back so use caution.

Beginner's Guide to Internet Marketing – Part 1

Author: Thyrsa M. Gravely

Overview

Internet marketing is an effective method to promote and sell a product or service by focusing on a target market at a rate usually less costly than promoting to a broad audience as is common in old marketing. The basics of marketing includes identifying your target market, understanding the marketing mix, focusing on variables when designing marketing materials, and learning the difference between outbound and inbound marketing.

Among the topics we shall consider are:

- ≈ Target Market
- ≈ The Marketing Mix
- ≈ Developing a Promotion Strategy
- ≈ Outbound Marketing
- ≈ Inbound Marketing
- ≈ Inbound Marketing University (IMU)

Definition

According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, marketing is "the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service". Marketing encompasses advertising, promotions, public relations, and sales (i.e. salesman, telemarketing).

As defined in [Wikipedia](#), "**Internet marketing**, also referred to as **i-marketing**, **web marketing**, **online marketing**, or **eMarketing**, is the [marketing](#) of products or services over the [Internet](#)". In general, Internet marketing is less expensive than traditional marketing such as print, television, radio, and billboard advertising when considering cost per intended market reach.

Target Market

It's important to define the customers your business targets. Identifying characteristics of your target customers will help better design your product or service, distribution, and marketing.

There are multiple things to consider when defining a target market. Think about your market and what they have in common. For example, if your product is a Bible designed

especially for children of color, it might be better to identify your target market as parents and children of color who attend church. Instead of marketing to all parents or to all parents of color, focusing on the aforementioned niche market will likely have a better return on marketing investments.

Three common traits to consider when defining a target market are:

- Geography – Where is the market based? Do the customers live in a particular state or Region? Are they on a specific side of town, in the suburbs, or inner city?
- Demographics – Are there common demographic characteristics of the target market? Perhaps the customers are of a common culture, race, income range, or education level.
- Psychographic segmentation – What lifestyle preferences are similar in the market? For example, are the customers athletic or sedentary? Do they enjoy the arts? Are they business-focused? Family-oriented?

Be sure to research your customers to clearly identify who they are before developing a marketing plan. This will help you determine the best way to reach your customers. Consider all media your target market frequently encounters or visits. Research each medium. Identify methods of communicating with your market through each medium.

The Marketing Mix

The core of marketing is often agreed to be the Five P's of Marketing, also known as the Marketing Mix. They are variables that marketing managers can control in order to best satisfy customers in the target market.

1. **Product** – The product or service offered to the customer. It also refers to aspects such as appearance, packaging, benefits, function, service, warranty, etc.
2. **Price** – The price the customer pays for the product or service. Pricing strategies should consider profit margin, competitors' prices, price ranges customers are willing to pay, financing options, etc.
3. **Place (or Distribution)** – The method of getting the product/service to your target market.
4. **Promotion** – The communication of your product/service and its benefits to a market. Includes advertising and public relations.
5. **People** – The customer service provided to customers.

Developing a Promotion Strategy

A key principle that should help develop a promotion strategy is [AIDA](#): Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. Focusing on AIDA will help you when designing marketing materials and their content.

- **Attention (or Awareness):** materials or tools plus language must attract potential customers' attention.
- **Interest:** increase interest by demonstrating advantages, benefits and/or features
- **Desire:** pique customers' desire for the product or service by demonstrating how it will add value and satisfy wants or needs.
- **Action:** lead customers to action of purchasing

When creating internet marketing, consider how each aspect of your marketing will build customers' attention, interest, desire and action.

Outbound Marketing

With outbound marketing, the business pushes a message out to an audience to capture attention and gain a sale. Examples of outbound marketing include:

- Inside sales and cold calling
- Telemarketing
- Tradeshows
- Seminars
- Advertising (including print, television, radio and billboard)
- Direct mail/email
- E-blasts to purchased lists

Outbound marketing typically reaches a broad audience and is considered successful if the response is 1-3% of the total reach.

Inbound Marketing

With inbound marketing, customers find your website, product, or service when researching or shopping in the industry. People are much more in control of what information they receive and how they receive it.

Examples of inbound marketing include:

- Search engine marketing ([SEM](#))
- Search engine optimization ([SEO](#))
- Blogging and leveraging the [blogosphere](#)
- [Banner](#) ads on specific websites
- [Affiliate](#) marketing
- [Social](#) media marketing
- Targeted [landing](#) pages
- E-mail marketing to target market
- Web [2.0](#) strategies
- [Pay-per-click](#) (PPC) advertising
- [Buzz](#) marketing
- [Conversion](#) tools
- Sophisticated [analytics](#)
- Lead [generation](#)

To be found by qualified prospects today, your company must be at the top of search engine results pages, linked-to from popular blogs and talked-about on social media services. An online social network is a great venue to increase interest in a product or service by providing range to discuss features and benefits with an audience of common interest in the industry.

Inbound Marketing University (IMU)

[Inbound Marketing University \(IMU\)](#) is a free marketing retraining program for marketing professionals—as well as marketers between jobs—looking to gain new skills to get ahead in the competitive workforce. The IMU program includes ten webinar classes and one review session. The university program concludes with the inbound marketing certification exam. Those who will complete IMU and pass the exam will become Inbound Marketing Certified Professionals and will receive a certificate. This program is highly recommended for anyone interested in developing internet marketing skills.

Conclusion

The basics of marketing are important to understand when developing an Internet marketing strategy. Although there are multiple forms of Internet marketing, in order to effectively create content and materials that will sell a product or service, you should:

- define your target market,
- identify your Five P's, and
- design promotions to capture your customers' attention, interest, desire and action.

Beginner's Guide to Internet Marketing – Part 2

Author: Thyrsa M. Gravely

Overview

Seeing examples of internet marketing may help better understand how to maximize options. To an internet marketing newcomer, it's good to try more popular methods that others have tested and proven successful.

Among the topics we shall consider are:

- ≈ Advertising
- ≈ Promotions and Incentives
- ≈ Ping
- ≈ Lead Conversion
- ≈ Sources For Outbound Marketing
- ≈ Sources for Inbound Marketing
- ≈ Example of Optimal Online Marketing

Definition

As defined in [Wikipedia](#), “**Internet marketing**, also referred to as **i-marketing**, **web marketing**, **online marketing**, or **eMarketing**, is the [marketing](#) of products or services over the [Internet](#)”. In general, Internet marketing is less expensive than traditional marketing such as print, television, radio, and billboard advertising when considering cost per intended market reach.

Advertising

Online [advertising](#) uses the internet to communicate with and persuade potential customers to purchase or use a product or service. Examples of online advertising include contextual ads on [search engine results pages](#), [banner ads](#), [Rich Media Ads](#), [Social network advertising](#), [online classified advertising](#), [advertising networks](#) and [e-mail marketing](#), including [e-mail spam](#).

Using [Adwords](#) is a good place to start with online advertising. Google offers [pay-per-click](#) (PPC) advertising, and site-targeted advertising for both text and [banner ads](#). The AdWords program includes local, national, and international distribution. Google's text

advertisements are short, consisting of one title line and two content text lines. Image ads can be one of several different [Interactive Advertising Bureau](#) (IAB) standard sizes.

Promotions and Incentives

Promotions are activities, materials, devices, and techniques used to supplement the advertising and marketing efforts and help coordinate the advertising with the personal selling effort. [Sweepstakes](#) are among the most well-known sales promotion tools, but other examples include special displays, coupons, promotional discounts, contests, and gift offers.

An **incentive** is a program used to promote or encourage actions or behavior by a specific group of people during a defined period of time. Frequent flyer or buyer programs are commonly used incentive programs that encourage loyalty by recurring purchases from one business in order to obtain gifts or discounts as rewards.

Ping

A [ping](#) is a method of notifying search engines and news aggregators of updates to a blog. A ping will motivate others to view new content to a blog. Many blogging systems will automatically ping blog updates.

Lead Conversion

Lead Conversion is the process of converting a lead into an account, contact, and/or opportunity. Leads can be generated from marketing events, such as trade shows or mailing campaigns, as well as affiliate marketing and lead generation businesses like www.lendingtree.com.

Once enough information is gathered about a lead to qualify that lead as a potential opportunity, the lead can be automatically converted to an account and/or contact by using a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) application. Salesforce.com is one of the most popular CRMs that is web-based with reasonable fees.

Sources for Outbound Marketing

Constant Contact – www.constantcontact.com

- Provides email marketing and survey products. Provides templates which allow small businesses and organizations to create professional-looking an [email newsletter](#), a high-impact [email promotion](#), an [email event invitation](#), an [online survey](#), or [build an email list](#).

Facebook – www.facebook.com

- Businesses can advertise through social ads on Facebook as well as create and host events. Instead of printing out flyers and mailers to advertise an event, use the free Facebook calendar function to promote it.
- [Tips](#) for marketing on Facebook include: enhance a profile page to include information about a business or product, network with a target market through a

Group, sponsor a group by purchasing a link that hosts ad content and message boards.

Twitter – www.twitter.com

- [Twitter](#) is a free [social networking](#) and [micro-blogging](#) service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates. A Twitter post is called a tweet. After setting up a Twitter account, tweet your company's news, blog updates, special announcements, incentives, etc.
- Twitter can be used as a means to promote an event or gathering by way of a tweetup. A tweetup is an in-person meeting between two or more people who communicate through Twitter. People twitter logistical information about a get-together so others will come and join.

Yahoogroups – <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

- A person can join a group or create a group on Yahoo. Join or start a group with a common interest that may be indirectly connected to a product or service. For example, if your product is baby clothing, a group for moms would be a good social network to share information about your product with. However caution should be taken so that your group e-mails are not reported frequently as spam in the group. Consider your e-mails' content and frequency.

Sources for Inbound Marketing

Delicious – www.delicious.com

- Delicious is a social bookmarking service that allows users to tag, save, manage and share web pages from a centralized source.

Digg – www.digg.com

- Digg is a website in which anyone can share content from anywhere on the web. Content could be posted from popular website or obscure blogs. The community votes on submissions. Those with the highest number of votes are moved to the front page of the website.

ShareThis – www.sharethis.com

- ShareThis allows sharing profiles, blogs, friends and contacts. A company can place a ShareThis button on its website to allow visitors to share the website's information with others.

StumbleUpon - www.stumbleupon.com

- **StumbleUpon** is an [Internet community](#) that allows its users to discover and rate Web pages, photos, and videos. It is a personalized [recommendation engine](#) which uses peer and [social-networking](#) principles.

Example of Optimal Online Marketing

President Barack Obama's internet campaign changed politics. His campaign continued to gain and connect with supporters through the internet and used its database as a source of marketing, fundraising, and volunteers. Consider how your business can use similar internet marketing sources to grow and stay in front of your competitors.

Read more about ["How Obama Won It With The Web"](#).

Conclusion

Internet marketing is essential to company sales and growth. There are multiple sources of inbound and outbound marketing on the internet. A good start for online advertising is to use Adwords by Google to reach a target market searching for information about a subject or product.

Online Branding

Author: Nancy Ford



Overview

Companies have probably used some form of branding for identification purposes from the time competition began. According to Wikipedia, a [brand](#) is the symbolic embodiment of a product or service. Thankfully, the process has evolved. Although we no longer sear flesh with a hot iron, we want our brand to be universally recognized and remembered. This chapter of the Online Community Startup Guide deals with establishing and maintaining online brand recognition. Among the topics we shall consider are:

- ≈ Developing your own “look and feel”
- ≈ Trademarks and Copyrights
- ≈ Developing Brand Loyalty
- ≈ Tools

Developing Your Own Look and Feel

Probably the most difficult task of creating a brand is developing your own look and feel. When creating your brand it's important that you create something that is uniquely yours while conveying a sense of what your business is about.

Most businesses will develop a [logo](#) that will hopefully one day be all that is needed to identify their business. A logo will generally consist of a combination of a graphical representation and the company name in a particular typeface. Sometimes colors are also an integral part of the logo. Who doesn't recognize  or , even without the words? Nike and Pepsi have spent many years and millions, perhaps even billions, of dollars developing brand recognition but they began as unknowns. Nike paid just \$35 for the [SWOOSH](#) logo in 1971. Pepsi recently spent several million dollars to update its logo. It's similar to the old one so that it can still be recognized as Pepsi.

Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents

Before you expose your brand to the world, make sure you've taken the necessary steps to protect your rights. It's a good idea to establish that your logo is your [Trademark](#) once you have decided on it. That's not as difficult as you might think. All you need to do in order to establish that you're your new logo is your unique intellectual property is begin using the [trademark symbol](#) (™). There are, however, benefits to trademark registration. In addition to

being able to use the [registered trademark symbol](#) (®), trademark infringement protection is expanded beyond the local geographic area.

If you have an original work you'll want to obtain a [Copyright](#) to protect yourself from piracy. "Copyright applies to any expressible form of an idea or information that is substantive and discrete and fixed in a medium" (Wikipedia). Copyrights are temporary and the length of time one is valid depends upon the authorship of item that is copyrighted. Once a copyright has been obtained the Copyright symbol, a circled C, (©) may be used to indicate the Copyright status. In the case of sound recordings, the Copyright symbol of a circled upper case P (P) is used.

Some people employ what is called the [Poor Man's Copyright](#). In these instances, the US Postal Service, email or a Notary Public is used as an attempt to establish an ownership timeline. This method might not hold up in court because advanced technology sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between the real thing and a very good fake.

A [Patent](#) is recommended if you've come up with an invention that is substantially different from anything already in existence and considered useful. The terms and duration of patents vary. If you make a "significant" change to your invention, you might be able to renew your patent. This practice is widely used in the pharmaceutical industry.

For more information on Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents visit the [United States Patent and Trademark Office](#) website.

Developing Brand Loyalty

As of April, 2009, it seems that you'd encounter [231,510,169](#) websites before you reached the [end of the Internet](#). With this number growing exponentially each day, how will you get traffic to your website... and keep them coming back?

Bob Baker has an article online called [9 Ways to Communicate a Rock-Solid Identity](#) that I think is very good. He discusses brand definition, the human element, word usage, visual elements and more. In addition to the quality information contained in the article, there are some other things I feel should be mentioned:

- ≈ Bob's article is posted on a "competitor's" Blog
- ≈ Bob included links to other "experts" in his article
- ≈ Bob included links to his own site in his article
- ≈ Bob entices the reader to his site with the promise of something "free"
- ≈ [Affiliate marketing](#) is used to possibly generate another stream of income

The things in the list above help to establish Bob as an expert in his field.

Branding Tools

The logo as a branding tool is obvious but its usage might not be. Put your logo on everything, including but not limited to:

- ≈ Your website
- ≈ Business cards
- ≈ T-shirts
- ≈ Banners
- ≈ Business stationery
- ≈ Greeting cards
- ≈ Brochures
- ≈ Email signatures
- ≈ Magnetic car sign
- ≈ Calendars

≈ Packaging material
(boxes, tape, tissue
paper)

≈ Pens
≈ Clipboards
≈ Promotional items

Conclusion

When it comes to creating and maintaining a reputable brand, quality and consistency are the keys. Always provide the best possible products and services at a fair price so that as you develop name recognition, your reputation as a vendor of choice is developed as well. Use ideas from other chapters of this guide to develop a strong online presence, always remembering to include your logo and links to your website and/or Blog whenever possible.

Writing Tips for Providing Content for Online Communities

Author: Karla Williams

Overview

When you build a blog or a social networking site, the purpose, of course, is to get people to follow you, join your site, and build your reputation as an expert in your chosen discipline. But how do you decide what to write about and how to write it? What can you do to promote it? How can you determine if it will meet your professional/business needs?

We will answer these questions and provide other tips in this chapter that will help you write persuasive and interesting online content. Among the things we'll discuss are:

- ≈ What to Write/Include
- ≈ How to Write It
- ≈ How to Use and Create Titles – Your Basic Promotion Tool
- ≈ How to Maintain a Professional Image
- ≈ Where to Go for More Writing Tips

Some people start social communities because they have a passion for a topic or an area. Others do so because they need or want to build their online brand to help them sell their product or service. Still others do it because they want to be seen as a knowledgeable individual in professional circles as part of an integrated strategy to protect their general employability status. Whatever your reason for building an online community, my observations have been that the only way these communities flourish is if they are founded around a topic for which the creator has passion.

Only by providing useful information will people care about your online community and want to be a part of it, either actively or passively. The key is to remember “what’s in it for them”. With this in mind, the only true rule is to provide unbiased, useful information that is thought provoking. In my opinion the information should be a combination of original content and exceptional content provided by others – with full credit given to the author, of course.

What to Write/Include

You have to keep your purpose in mind when selecting topics. But here are some ideas concerning what to write.

It all hinges on Useful Content. Ask yourself “What information do my target readers want most?” and then give it to them. This will be highly subjective depending on the perspective of both the reader and the author, but overall content should add value to their lives or endeavors.

Examples include:

Information on the latest trends. Review new products. Give your take on a popular news topic relevant to your community and what it means to them.

Satirical posts. Stories, anecdotes that inform, but are mainly for fun.

Discussions. Know about hot topics? Write a conversation starter that will inspire thoughtful interchanges between the readers.

Educational articles. These pieces are designed to teach the reader something they did not know, to provide a different perspective on a topic, or to further educate the reader on something that is changing.

Resources. Links to other sites that are well-written and informative. Government resources, non-profits as well as other related communities are some examples.

Many of the successful sites contain a mixture of all the above. This appeals to more readers and adds breadth and depth to your site when new visitors come upon it.

My final advice – from time to time survey your members and prospects to see what they would like to see in their online communities.

How to Write It

People don't read online copy the same way they read books or print articles. The Internet offers a vast array of resources no matter where you are. To get noticed, your copy must be written so people quickly get a sense of whether or not the piece contains information they consider useful – or they will move on to the next site. Try to include some of the following tactics in your posts.

- ≈ **Be succinct** – Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, summarize what you told them, and then in closing remind them what you told them. These are the basic rules of journalism – and let's face it posting online is a form of journalism.
- ≈ **KISS – Keep it Simple Simon.** Write as if you were talking to your readers. Use words that sound intelligent but that are simple and will not require the reader to leave your post to look up words or phrases. If you find it necessary to use a “BIG” word, link to a definition that opens in a new window. This way, the reader will still be on your site when the new window is closed.
- ≈ **Lists** – people are much more likely to read and absorb bullet points than the entire text. One good thing about the Internet and many blogs is that you can embed links in key words to take the reader to a fuller explanation. This way they can dig into those topics that interest them.
- ≈ **Formatting** - Use **bold**, CAPITALS, *italics*, underlining, teletext, text boxes and **color** to draw your readers to your main point. Use headings and subheading as well.

- This makes it easier to set up a series of hyperlinks as mentioned above. Include lots of white space. The eye does not like too much content jammed into one space
- ≈ **Pictures** – Some people only want text, but research confirms that most readers are drawn to images. So mix it up, include some images, graphics, and charts where you can.
 - ≈ **Use anecdotes to make your point, but don't bury your point** – Nothing illustrates a point better than a well placed anecdotes, BUT make certain that the point (what you are going to tell them) is the opening of your post so that they will want to read on to enjoy your witty anecdotes.
 - ≈ **Use a series so as not to include too much information in one post** - If your topic is complex, consider breaking it in to easy to digest chunks of information. Then write an intro piece about what the series is going to tell them and include a link to the first post. End each post with a preview of what the next post will tell them. This is a great way to generate repeat visitors.
 - ≈ **Plan ahead** – consider developing an “Editorial Calendar” for the next several months. This way you can post a teaser at the end of each post enticing your readers and members back.

[How to Use and Create Titles – Your Basic Promotion Tool](#)

[ProBlogger.net](#) provides the following advice on titles. I am inserting their post here because it is truly outstanding and I can't think of anything that I would add or modify. (By the way, I am practicing what I preach – referencing other professionals is a good way to build credibility and convince the reader that you are interested in giving them the best information you can find, giving them another positive answer to the question “What's in it for me?”.)

Titles are mini ads for your message and will not only help to grab people's attention as they scan the web, but will also help you get picked up in RSS feeds and other search engines.

1. **Keep it Simple** - Most research I've seen into titles seems to argue that the most effective titles are short, simple and easy to understand. While breaking these rules can help grab attention (see below) they can also confuse, frustrate and put a glazed look in the eyes of potential readers. Shorter titles are also good for Search Engines - keep it under 40 or so characters and you'll ensure the whole title appears in search results.
2. **Grab Attention** - Good titles set your posts apart from the clutter around them and then draw readers into your post. Grabbing attention might happen using tactics of 'shock', 'big claims', 'controversy' or even 'confusion'. While these tactics do work at getting people in - it should also be said that they can do more damage than good if the rest of your post doesn't live up to the promises your title makes. By all means try to grab attention - just 'trick' your readers into thinking you'll provide them with something you can't give them.
3. **Meet a Need** - An effective title draws people into reading more because they feel you've got something to say that they NEED to hear. Indexes like [del.icio.us](#) illustrate just how effective this is. Quite often the articles that get to the top of the list are 'how to...' or 'tutorial' type articles that show readers that they will learn how to solve a problem or need that they might have.

4. **Describe** - Some readers will be drawn into a post by a cryptic title that doesn't tell them much about what they'll be reading - but the majority of readers need to know something about what they'll find if they read further. Titles should describe (in a word or few) what readers will get in the main post.
5. **Use Key Words** - As I mentioned above - titles are a powerful part of SEO. If you want to maximize their power you need to consider using the keywords that you want your post to be found within your title in some way. This of course is challenging when you are attempting to 'keep it simple' and to also 'grab attention and intrigue' - but it can be done. Words at the start of titles are thought to be more powerful than words at the end when it comes to SEO.
6. **One last tip on titles** - Take your time with your titles. Many bloggers pour a lot of effort into writing engaging and interesting posts - but then just slap any old title onto it without realizing that in doing so they might be ensuring that their post is never read."

How to Maintain a Professional Image

Remember why you are posting online and building a community of followers. Constantly work to ensure that the content you publish is as free of errors as is humanly possible. Make sure that it sets the right tone and promotes the image you want to promote both personally and professionally. Survey your readers/followers whenever possible to see what additional value you can deliver. This is the only way that you will sell yourself as an expert and by extension get a job or sell any products or services you want to market.

For example, a recruiter I know sells a book for job seekers. She knows that people are unlikely to buy her book just because of who she is. So she developed a series of tips for job seekers that are free based on her many years of experience in the market. Once people read these articles and see the type of insight into the job market her career can provide, they are much more likely to purchase her book and possibly the coaching services members of her team provide for a fee.

Likewise, if you are going to be engaged in a job search, you want to be quoted frequently in other peoples' posts as well as having your own posts. Comment on relevant discussion boards and at the end point people back to your site. Make it easy for them to see why they should interview you.

Finally, maintain an overall positive online presence. If you have something negative to say – DON'T. You never know whom it will offend.

Where to Go for More Writing Tips

Sources for this chapter can be found at: ProBlogger.net, Wikihow. However, much of what I've written is based on my own personal experience. Don't hesitate to seek input from others. This is where I have found my best suggestions that have helped me to improve my writing style. We all know someone who has a passion for writing and critiquing writing. Ask for their opinion and feedback. You'll be glad you did.

Google Conversion University: Google couldn't be more generous to SEOs and web marketers when it decided to launch Conversion University. Articles have been posted to provide more information than ever with such topics as Acquisition, Onsite Behavior Analysis, Outcomes, Videos and more. Here are links to several

articles on writing times. [Five Objectives of Website Copy](#), [Five Tips for Writing Effective Web Headlines](#) and [Design Your Website for Increased ROI](#).

Conclusion

Now that I have given you some sense of how to decide what to write, the way to write it, how to use titles to promote it, and how to use it to get the desired result from your labors, go to it! Remember, find a topic about which you are passionate, make your content relevant, write in a style that is friendly to the Internet, optimize your titles for maximum effect, and always be mindful of the image that your community presents to the world at large.

Appendices

Author: Milt Haynes

Appendix A - Useful Links

We're in the middle of writing a brief "how to guide" for starting and building an online community. Draft outline is attached. I am working with a few volunteer technical writers and business systems analysts to capture our lessons learned at Blacks Gone Geek. We are also doing research and interviewing subject matter experts in web development, graphic design, inbound/outbound online marketing.

As more and more people join our online community and use our techniques, we plan to train students and adult volunteers looking to retool and expand their skill sets to prepare for the jobs of the future.

Team Collaboration Links

[MS Office Live Workspace](#)

Online Community Start-up Guide Group on Groupsite.com

Research Material

[Internet Marketing at Blacks Gone Geek](#)

[Hubspot e-Book: Getting Found Online - Learn how to get found online in the search engines, blogosphere, and social media sites \(10 pages\)](#)

[Hubspot Video: Combine SEO, Blogging, Social Media for Marketing Results \(1 hour\)](#)

[Hubspot PDF: Combine SEO, Blogging, Social Media for Marketing Results](#)

[HubSpot PDF: Doing a Website Redesign for Marketing Results](#)

[Qinteractive: Converting Leads to Customers](#)

[Qinteractive: Creative Best Practices for Online Lead Generation](#)

[Blacks Gone Geek: The Story So Far-Thoughtworks_090206.pdf](#)

[SPIN Project: Strategic Communications Planning](#)

[SPIN Project: Online Communications](#)

[SPIN Project: Community Organizing and Strategic Communications](#)

[Eance | Connect with Qualified Professionals](#)

[7 pages every business Web site must have](#)

[Small World Labs: http://www.smallworldlabs.com/](#)

[Free Webinar: Top Social Solutions for Acquiring & Retaining Members in 2009 for Associations](#)
[Online Marketing. Master New Media. Dominate your market. Get paid. \(Jason VanOrden\)](#)
[SMUG - Social Media University, Global](#)
[Black Solutions Free Twitter Guide](#)

Appendix B - Acknowledgements

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<http://twitter.com/VEHLAN>
<http://blacksgonegeek.org/BasicWebsite.aspx>

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Yours Truly,
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