

ExpertAnswers: Grow Your Business with Content and Search Engine Marketing



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Having an online presence is an absolute must for today's small business. But once you have that presence, what is the best way to attract customers to your site? How do you differentiate your business from the others that are competing for the same customers? The answer lies in content marketing and search engine marketing.

Develop your content marketing strategy with tips from Jeremy Durant. Jeremy is the Business Principal of [Bop Design](#), a business-to-business (B2B) marketing and web design & development firm. He builds relationships with B2B businesses and entrepreneurs in need of a marketing and branding strategy, helping them to develop their unique value proposition and ideal customer profile. In this interview, Jeremy will help you understand the content and search engine marketing strategies that will drive traffic to your site and grow your business.



I've heard a lot about Content Marketing, but what is it exactly?

[According to the Content Marketing Institute](#), content marketing is a marketing technique of creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience—with the objective of driving profitable customer action. For marketers, it's the tactic that combines all tactics. Marketing tools such as social media, blogging, multimedia, email marketing, SEO and more all play a role in (or are influenced by) content marketing.

What is SEO? What is SEM? How are they different? Why are they important?

The difference between search engine optimization (SEO) and search engine marketing (SEM) is that SEM encompasses many tactics, with SEO being one of them.

SEM is the act of utilizing paid (e.g. pay per click ads) and unpaid tactics to improve your visibility in search page results. SEO is an organic tactic that utilizes keyword rich content on a website.

Both are important for an overall Internet marketing strategy in order to attract new customers, qualify leads and outrank your competition.

There have been a lot of changes lately in search engine algorithms and best practices. What strategies can I employ to get my site to the top of search engine rankings?

For a small business, it's critical you have a [search-friendly website](#). Even a local accounting firm or consultant should put aside marketing dollars to ensure their website is up to date. Without a professional, well developed website, not only will it be neglected by search engine algorithms, but visitors to your site won't think of you as a credible business.

I'm a solopreneur (1-person business) with limited time and resources. What type of content marketing strategies would you recommend? What type of content should I generate for my small business?

The simplest way for small businesses to start out in content marketing is either through blogging or social media. Start examining your current industry landscape and see what people are talking about. Another great content generator is listening to frequent questions about your business and focusing on answering them with original, owned content. Keep in mind that while both are cost effective for small marketing budgets, it can require a lot of employee time. Setting [realistic expectations](#) when starting out will greatly impact the tactic's growth.

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How do I use content marketing or online marketing strategies to convert prospects to paying customers?

This is the whole point of content marketing—making the sale. It may take time, as different content can introduce individuals during different part of the sales funnel. A blog, for example, is a great way to drive traffic to your website. Think of the reader’s journey to that blog post and what website tools you can enable to keep them interested and browsing your pages. It may be internal linking in the blog post to your services page. Even better, featuring at the end of the blog post a sign up for a free offer (such as a coupon, free trial or tip sheet) not only captures the lead for follow up but also keeps your brand name top of mind with the customer.

What is the best way to measure the effectiveness of my online marketing efforts?

[Google Analytics](#) is a great free tool to implement on a website and track your visitors. Creating goals and campaign URLs for every new strategy you implement provides realistic data on the success of an online marketing project. Remember that goals vary based on the project, so what type of data you pull from Google Analytics should also be modified to meet those goals.

What are some of the newest best practices I should consider when advertising online?

“Native advertising” is a growing trend among marketers and large publishers, but it’s starting to roll over into B2B and small business marketing plans. Native advertising is a broad umbrella term that means paying for placement of your business’s content within the context of a digital platform (e.g. a publication, social media channel). It’s a great way to target audiences with unique content, but most importantly a marketer needs to remember the quality of content will greatly impact the success of the investment.

A SCORE client asks: “I have been trying Affiliate Marketing for two years but it seems to be unproductive. Could it be that this online venture is not worth it, or am I doing something wrong? Could you give me an idea of how to go about setting up an Affiliate website and how to get traffic to the site?”

I would first [review Google Analytics](#) and determine if any of the affiliate websites are actually driving quality traffic. There could be a few existing affiliate partners that are helping your business. It all depends on the type of business. I would immediately look at your competition and market leaders and see if they are using affiliate marketing. Determine affiliate marketing best practices—which vary from product to product, industry to industry. You don’t always want to follow the leader, but in this case you can learn from more established companies.

How do I determine how much money to spend on search engine marketing?

A great thing about SEM is campaigns such as pay per click ads can be relatively low in cost. There are two main factors to determine how much to invest in SEM:

- The current amount of traffic you draw in and how much you’d like for it to increase.
- The industry you are in. A super niche business (such as a recruiting firm for the chemicals industry) will find it easier to penetrate their ad market over a more competitive industry (such as health & fitness).

Many of our clients experiencing 1,000 web visits per month or less invest \$100 per month on a preliminary SEM strategy and scale up from there based on returns.

Is online marketing (SEM, social media, local search, etc.) a replacement or complement to traditional advertising strategies (broadcast, print, direct mail, etc.)? When setting my annual marketing budget, what provides the best bang for my buck?

Online marketing should always be viewed as a complement to traditional advertising—never a replacement. It should be part of the marketing mix. In terms of providing the most “bang for the buck,” where are your ideal customers congregating? If ideal prospective customers are more likely to be on the web and social media then most of the money should be allocated there. However, if your ideal customer is not web savvy, web platforms are not recommended. More traditional channels such as broadcast, print and direct mail are optimal tactics.

Why is working with a mentor important when developing my online marketing strategies?

Mentors are a critical component to the growth of a company. It’s important to recognize when you need to outsource certain services. For example, we’re a boutique marketing agency with less than 10 employees. Without in-house HR or Legal department, we decide to outsource those specialties so we can focus on the core of our business. You should be considering the same and, as time continues, hire the in-house specialties that will contribute to your growth.

How do I choose a vendor to help with my online marketing strategies?

We receive the bulk of our new business through search engine marketing—not word of mouth. With this in mind, an online marketer should be employing the same tactics they’re recommending to their clients. If you’re looking for a marketing agency, see what pulls up in a simple Google search. Browse their website and portfolio (if applicable, which one should be) and make a judgment call from there. Online marketers pride themselves in helping brands speak to their audience, so their online presence should be doing the same for you.

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