

Organic growth on the internet

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My business needs to grow faster, and my gut feeling is that we need to use the internet more to help that happen. We have the basics, a good looking website, a good reputation and lots to say about what we do. How do we reach more of our target market and draw them in?

Growing organically on the Internet is an important strategy to have in your marketing toolkit. Level the playing field with competitors big and small. Get enough of the right people to open up what you send out and your business will grow. Capitalize on the power of geometric progressions. Be everywhere.

Info USA, which also operates under the brand, Sales Genie, is promoting the advantage of using e-mails instead of snail mail as the price of postage goes up once more. Hopefully by now you've been collecting e-mail addresses as you network. If you have name records, but don't have individuals' e-mails, you can use tools on the Internet to look e-mail addresses up, just like you look up phone numbers.

Jigsaw allows you to trade e-mail addresses. It's an open source database, built by members. You add to the list and earn credits to draw other addresses from the list. Assign someone the job of regularly working Jigsaw to get maximum value.

Constant Contact has a good description of how to avoid being a spammer. Keep in mind that bulk purchases of e-mail addresses can look like spam. For example, addresses can be bogus or reference general information mailboxes. Spam can get you in deep trouble, and limit your marketing abilities going forward, so be careful.

You can also get e-mail addresses from friends. Build a "co-op pool" with businesses who sell to the same target market but don't necessarily compete. Each co-op member puts a specific number of e-mail addresses into the pool. That becomes a common database any member of the co-op can use.

Ask friends to send out a promotion about your company to their list. This solution is particularly good if the friend isn't so comfortable sharing their list, or if you want to test interest in what your company does. Make sure the promotion has a clear and compelling offer on it - something that will motivate a target buyer to contact you or take a look at what you're offering. Test the offer on your existing database first, to be sure it works.

What kinds of offers work? Try a free hour of what ever it is that you do, or a product sample, or a giveaway that gets someone's attention. Remember that in down economies, target buyers don't want anything frivolous.

Try offering a series of books, articles or coupons to local stores. Negotiate with the firms that sell you books or coupons. You'll be promoting them, so ask them to cut you a break on the price of whatever you buy to give away. Be creative.

Once you get the e-mail up and running, closely monitor who opens up the information you send out. Follow up with people who regularly click on what you send out. You can also test offers, to see what people are most interested in, by tracking the percent of the list that responds by clicking through.

Periodically clean your list of contacts, by letting go of people who never seem interested and trying new contacts to see if they might be more interested. Cleaning the list is more of an issue when you get to 5,000 to 10,000 e-mails. Up until then, it's generally better to keep everyone and try to figure out how to get them to forward you additional contacts.

The Internet is a powerful tool, if you can get people to engage with you. Ask one person to forward a piece to five people. Get some or all of those five people to sign up, then get those five people to forward to another five, and so on. Soon the word is spreading across the Internet about what you do.

Six degrees of separation happens in a heartbeat on the internet, if you can get people to pay attention. Ask people to think about your offer and let you know who else might be interested. Add those people to your list and send out more information. Suddenly you're connected with your next ideal buyer, because someone who didn't necessarily want what you have, referred you to someone, who knew someone else, and that person is interested.

Use the Internet to be everywhere. Build a community. Nurture it with information and offers. Pay attention to people who respond.

Looking for a good book? Try, *How To Say It: Marketing with New Media: A Guide to Promoting Your Small Business Using Websites, E-zines, Blogs and Podcasts*, by Lena Claxton and Alison Woo.

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