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## How to Make Internet Marketing Simple

By Maria Duggan and John Deveney, ABC

*Your web site made it through Y2K. It was built on solid strategy and flawlessly designed with the latest technology. It is a source of invaluable information tailored to your target audiences, available globally 24/7. Its graphics are sharp, its links are current and its layout is easily navigated by a five-year-old. You've registered it with search engines and added it to your letterhead... Let the World Wide Wait begin.*

Less than a year ago, there were 6,598,697 sites on the World Wide Web, and that number is increasing constantly. The competition for attention to your site is fierce. Internet marketing and e-commerce are the buzzwords of the wired world, and everyone is jumping on the online bandwagon. Like it or not, the Internet is swiftly becoming the global medium of choice for news, entertainment and business.

The number of Internet users worldwide is expected to grow to 300 million by 2005, from roughly 150 million currently. There are 259 million Internet users worldwide, with more than 43 percent in the United States. About 80 percent of the 110 million Americans who use the Internet go online for government, business, health or education information, as well as e-mail. Close behind are news, weather and sports, followed by checking schedules, buying tickets or making reservations.

Furthermore, when surfing for specific information, most people look at only the first 20 listings returned by a search engine. And even the most advanced search engine can profile only a fraction of the Internet.

A web site offers tremendous potential to an organization, but with so many sites, so many users and so many choices, how do you drive traffic to yours?

Our experiences launching [www.vitarx.com](http://www.vitarx.com), a national mail service pharmacy, and [www.savelawetlands.org](http://www.savelawetlands.org), the web site for the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, taught us that public relations for an online client is not unlike PR for bricks-and-mortar organizations. For both, we integrated community relations, strategic alliances and partnerships, media relations and special events into a single, powerful Internet marketing campaign.

Those projects gave us the insight we needed to create and implement a strategic Internet marketing campaign for the launch of [www.mardigras.com](http://www.mardigras.com), an online Mardi Gras guide featuring live streaming video of the parades and partying from hot spots around New Orleans. Our mission was to drive traffic to the site, securing its reputation as a high-volume site and paving the way for future revenue opportunities.

Through the campaign—a blend of traditional media relations, promotions and special events—the site garnered more than 28 million page views during the one-month campaign—surpassing the goal of 5 million by 560 percent. (Mardigras.com set this goal, but believed it to be outrageous because it was greater than the number of page views CNN received in a month at the height of the Gulf War, the standard they and many in the industry chose for highly accessed sites.)

Currently, we are implementing a campaign to increase awareness of, and drive traffic to, [www.lsba.org](http://www.lsba.org), the web site for the Louisiana State Bar Association, Louisiana's organization of some 18,000 attorneys, judges and members of the legal profession.

All of these projects have confirmed again and again the elements of a successful Internet marketing plan. Case studies from these successful Internet marketing campaigns show how Internet marketing employs the same methods and theory as traditional public relations and integrated marketing—the basic tools for any campaign:

- Identification
- Strategy Development
- Strategy Presentation
- Implementation
- Evaluation

#### **Identification**

A strong Internet marketing campaign requires the same groundwork as any successful

marketing plan. SWOT analyses, brand essence, market research and audience definition start the list of essential elements of the identification process.

When working with an Internet client, keep the competition in mind, as well as non-competitors with similar domain names. Our experience with mardigras.com taught us just how many cyber competitors were cashing in on Carnival season on the web. With sites such as www.mardigrasday.com, www.mardi.gras.com and www.mardigrasneworleans.com already up and running, working to single out our client was challenging.

But you must differentiate your site from the millions of others floating through cyberspace. Those sites depend on hits-yours must depend on targets. Target audiences, that is. Ask yourself, "Who needs to visit this site?" "Where are they?" and "How do I reach them?"

When choosing your audiences, bear in mind that the web is global and although your campaign may target mountain bike users in Banff, your site is accessible worldwide. This does not mean that you must have your web site available in Welsh and Mandarin. It does mean that you may receive queries from around the world and should be prepared to answer them.

But if your web site focuses on global commerce, you should consider translating it into other languages. In the words of Willy Brandt, the former German chancellor, "If I'm selling to you, I speak your language. If I'm buying, dann mÿssen Sie Deutsch sprechen." ("...then you must speak German.")

Be sure to take advantage of the multitude of Information Age tools at your disposal, and incorporate them into the planning stage as well as throughout the marketing effort. Keep an eye on competing web sites in your industry-and the online media who cover them. Electronic monitoring services can keep tabs on chat rooms, newsgroups and other sites meeting your search criteria.

Check out competing sites often to stay abreast of their updates, and conduct searches on words and phrases key to your industry to see who has joined the fray since your last surfing session. Also search for your own site frequently, to see where it shows up on search engine indexes. And submit your query to several search engines-because search engines rank results differently, always try more than one. Five search engines will produce triple the results of one.

### **Strategy Development**

Goals and objectives are the building blocks of any effort, communication or otherwise. What is the campaign trying to accomplish? A website launch? Traffic to the site? Media coverage? An increase in online sales?

Be specific and ensure that your goals are concrete, measurable and lofty enough to make your efforts worthwhile. Think about your campaign's duration, but stay flexible and allow enough time to build site loyalty, particularly if the effort centers on a web site launch. Be realistic. No site becomes Yahoo! overnight, not even Yahoo!

When planning the strategy, consider possible tie-ins and partnerships, both off-and online. How can you integrate your web campaign with your organization's traditional public relations effort? How can you incorporate current events and trends into the campaign to give the effort additional timeliness, currency and relevance-all keys if media relations are to be a tactic. For example, we are working to integrate a pre-April 15 online chat with a tax attorney into our Internet campaign for the Louisiana State Bar Association, capitalizing on the buzz generated by the U.S. tax season.

Consider traditional tactics such as media and community relations and integrated marketing during the strategy development phase-and spend some time identifying possible exposure issues to minimize the potential for a crisis, be it a server meltdown or a culture clash.

This is also the time to consider technical issues that may affect your strategy, as well as to conduct a "reality check." (Is a virtual web cast feasible? Should the site be equipped for secure transactions? Will selected graphics and pictures load smoothly?) With these issues settled, you are ready to present the strategy.

### **Strategy Presentation**

You're in a room full of suits ready to present the Internet marketing campaign that will hurtle the company well into the new millennium. They're hesitant about embarking on this journey into cyberspace and are depending on your knowledge and expertise.

You need to generate buy-in and commitment from the powers-that-be to ensure a successful campaign. They may think, "The site's on the letterhead. What more do we need? or-worse-"Why do we need a web site anyway?"

Be prepared to respond to their concerns with credible, current statistics. Show them who's online and why. Share the research and demographics of your proposed target audiences. Clue them in to the goals and objectives of the campaign. And most important, let them know that commerce is quickly dividing into the haves and have-nots-those who have effectively promoted their web site, and those who haven't.

Consider the corporate culture before presenting, and reinforce the fact that Internet marketing incorporates the communication strategy and tactics they are used to. Guide them through the marketing plan and be prepared to explain technical jargon, such as hits and page views. Develop a timeline and budget as you would for a traditional campaign, and point out the cost-efficiency of the web-minimal postage, long distance, and paper and

production costs, and a global audience without expanding the office.

### **Implementation**

Hard drives are whirring and motherboards are humming. The campaign has launched. Let your plan be the road map that steers you through the Information Superhighway, but be sure to manage flexibly, and allow for side trips and opportunities that will arise along the way.

Remember, your tactics will be familiar, but you will have to tweak them for the wired media world. Take media relations, for example. The usual print and broadcast immediately spring to mind, but don't neglect the plethora of e-zines and online publications. Many are highly targeted and have extremely loyal readerships.

Electronic media relations has its own set of challenges, the greatest being the lack of face or even phone time with the journalist. When you contact an online journalist from a web-based publication, sometimes you won't know if you're dealing with a sir or a madam, much less the journalist's name. It may seem strange to send an e-mail pitch to a journalist known to you only as "tjones@online magazine.com," but this is what the world is coming to.

Although a good pitch is always the key to media placement, you can tailor the same techniques you would use in a traditional media drop to fit your web campaign. For example, because mardigras.com provided Mardi Gras e-cards on their site, we sent one to our complete e-mail list of online writers, including the news release as the card's message. Killing two birds with one mouse click—we presented information about the site directly to our media list and generated traffic to the site, as the reporters logged on to retrieve their cards.

Online promotions are another simple way to drive traffic to the site and increase site loyalty. Our campaign for the Louisiana State Bar Association includes promotional discounts to members who register for Bar programs online, as well as offers other incentives for members to use the site, such as drawings for free attendance to Bar seminars and continuing legal education workshops. Although elementary in design, these promotions support the campaign's objective to increase site usage by members. Once members visit the site to register for the programs, chances are, they'll stick around and check out the other services offered by the Bar.

### **Evaluation**

Although evaluation is listed last, it is by no means the least of the steps. In fact, evaluation is most effective if it transcends the entire campaign and is integrated into each of the steps.

Frequently ask yourself: "What's working?", "What's not?", "What should we be doing next?" and "What should we stop doing?" Your results will be more credible if they are both quantitative and qualitative. Conduct an analysis of site traffic before and after the campaign, and keep track of media placements with a monitoring service that specializes in online media and newsgroups.

Like the other campaign elements, evaluation of a web marketing campaign uses traditional methods, but also brings its own challenges. Qualitative analysis, gauging online story angles and placement, can be easily determined, but there is a certain anonymity to the web, and although counters can measure your site traffic, simply counting visits is imperfect at revealing who's on your site and what they think of it. A survey on your web site can be helpful, but it will represent only the visitors who took the time to fill it out.

### **Conclusion**

The Internet has already changed the face of communication in the most dramatic way since the invention of moveable type. No previous technology has expanded as quickly or as globally as the Internet, and this unparalleled growth is predicted to continue to increase, with the number of users multiplying by 61 percent in the United States, by 88 percent in Europe and by 400 percent in the rest of the world over the next five years.

The global village is rapidly becoming the global metropolis-e-commerce transcends the image of the big city as the place to do business. Whether you are a farmer in a German village, a jewelry designer in South Africa or a microbiologist in Peru, if you're online, the time to leverage your Internet presence is now.

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