

CREATING A PLAN: THE KEY TO SUCCEEDING WITH ONLINE MARKETING

Every business, no matter how unusual, can take advantage of the vast reach offered by the internet – it's simply a case of identifying where to put your time and energy.

When businesses fail to see results online, it's usually because they've tried a bunch of different tactics without having a proper strategy in place. Not every online channel suits every business, so it's crucial to analyse your business first and develop a cohesive strategy from there, rather than wasting time and money doing things 'ad hoc'.

With a proper strategy in place, you'll:

- Know which online marketing channels to focus on, so you can stop wasting money on things that don't work, and focus on the things that actually produce a good return on investment
- Free up your valuable time – by only doing the things that will actually make a difference, and reduce 'busy work'
- Be able to take advantage of synergies – so your efforts in one marketing channel can piggy-back off those in another
- Get peace of mind knowing that you're on the right track, and that everything has been properly thought through and mapped out in advance.

So what does an effective online marketing strategy actually look like?

HERE'S A STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR CREATING YOUR STRATEGY

1. Create Online Goals

The first step in any effective plan is to set measurable goals. It's important to know what you want to achieve, so you can measure your progress. Your online marketing goals should directly support your overall business goals.

2. Understand Your Target Market

Think carefully about your target market – their demographic traits, pain points and behavioural drivers. With a good understanding of what makes your customers tick, you'll be better placed to pick which online channels to use to reach them, and how to communicate with them persuasively on those channels.

3. Identify Your Key Messages

The next step is to lock down the key messages to include in your online marketing content, including your website and other marketing communications. Consistent communication of your strongest selling points – why your customers should choose you over your competitors – will be crucial for turning website visitors into actual sales and leads.

4. Assess Your Website

Achieving success in online marketing requires having a solid foundation upon which to conduct your promotional activity. Before doing anything further on the promotional front, have experts review your website from technical, usability and marketing points of view to identify any weaknesses. Fixing these will likely be the first steps in your Action Plan (below).

5. Create a Robust Analytics Setup

If you want to optimise the return on investment from your online channels, you need to know who's visiting your website, where they came from, and what they did once they got there. Make sure you have Google Analytics installed properly, and that you're tracking all the most important actions visitors might take on the site – e.g. bookings, contact form enquiries, newsletter signups. You'll also want to filter out your own internal traffic and spam traffic, so you're only seeing the real data.

6. Use Google's Tools To Ensure Search Visibility

A Google Search Console account will show you whether Google is having any problems with your website, and allows you to customise certain aspects of how your site appears in their search results.

A Google My Business account will determine how you appear on Google's map results. Get both of these up and running, filled out with all the required information (including photos and reviews for My Business) and keep them up to date.

7. Analyse Potential Channels & Choose Which To Focus On

Next, it's time to analyse each of your current and potential new online marketing channels and pick ones based on your target market assessment, suitability to your business niche, and how effective they have been to date. This should include an assessment of paid media (e.g. Google Adwords), earned media (e.g. partnerships with other websites, SEO) and owned media (e.g. blogs and social media accounts).

8. Create an Action Plan

Finally, write down all the action steps you'll need to take based on the completed sections above, put them in order of priority, and give each one a timeframe. This will then be the primary guide for the actions you take moving forward.

Carefully working through these phases and putting together a proper action plan before taking any major promotional actions will save you time and money, keep you and your team on track, and get you more bang for your marketing buck.

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