

# **Internet Advertising & Promotion: *Free or Almost Free* Strategies for Small, Local Businesses**

**By Jerry Graham & Lynne Lee**



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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to our respective spouses, who so faithfully cheer us on in our quest to provide value to small businesses.



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## **1 Why Internet Marketing?**



Over the last 10 years or so, the Internet has become more and more ingrained in our daily lives. People use the Internet to search for almost everything, including local businesses and other local information.

And with the explosive growth of smartphones like Blackberries, Android, and the iPhone, this move to searching for everything online is just going to accelerate.

If you're not reaching your customers (and potential customers) in the places they're searching for information, you're going to get left behind by your competition that is making the transition.

In this book, we're going to look at some of the things that you need to be aware of when marketing on the web, as well as some of the ways that you can not only reach new customers, but get your existing customers to spend more money with you, and do it more often.

## **The Move to Online Search**

According to Google, 20 percent of all searches are related to location. And comScore reports that Google served up 10.7 billion searches in April, 2011. That means that approximately 2.14 billion searches were related to location – in other words, local search.

These numbers have been increasing every year over the last several years. Compare them to April, 2008 when Google served up 6.5 billion searches, which means roughly 1.3 billion local searches.

The bottom line is that more and more people are using the Internet to search for local information, including businesses like yours.

And one of the advertising mediums that is being hit the hardest by this move online is Yellow Pages directories. Traditionally, the Yellow Pages has been the "go to" source for local businesses, and as a result if your business wasn't listed in the Yellow Pages, you would be missing out on a lot of potential customers.

But with the transition to Internet-based local search,

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those searchers are becoming less and less likely to use the Yellow Pages. And not only because of the convenience and speed of the Internet – they're also looking for reliable sources for reviews and other information about the companies they're considering which isn't possible with print advertising.

### **The Yellow Pages Dilemma**

Yellow page providers realize that they need to do something to keep from becoming extinct in a few more years. One of the solutions they've attempted is Internet-based Yellow Page be directories.

These directories work much like the printed version. Your ad gets placed in whatever business category is applicable, on the assumption that people will use those directories to find local businesses. But the reality is that those sites have very little traffic – Google, Bing and Yahoo are the places that people turn to when they're looking for local businesses.

This is good for you for several reasons:

1. You have much more flexibility in how you present

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your business through the search engines than you do with online Yellow Page directories.

2. Your costs will be much less than what you would pay for an ad in the print version of the Yellow Pages, particularly compared to larger ads.
3. With local search marketing, you can update or make changes to your ads as often as you want. Compare that to a print ad that can only be changed annually.

And on top of all those things, the Internet gives you a much larger reach. Yellow Pages directories generally get distributed once a year, and only to households that have landline phones.

According to a study that the Department of Health and Human Services at the National Center for Health Statistics ran from January to June, 2010, approximately 24.9% of all adults live in households with only wireless phones. They have given up landlines completely.

That means nearly 25% of your target market may not even receive a Yellow Pages directory. They rely on the Internet for virtually 100% of their searches.

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And interestingly, even more children (29%) live in households with no landline phone. So as those children become adults and move out on their own, these numbers are expected to grow.

## **2 Connecting With Your Customers**



There are a number of ways you can connect with your customers online, and if you want to get the best results you need to take advantage of as many as possible. Because the Internet makes it so easy for people to find the solutions they're looking for, you can't afford to hope they come to you – you need to meet them wherever they might be searching.

The most important place you need to establish a presence is in the search engines – specifically Google, Yahoo and Bing. Of the three, Google gets the largest percentage of searches (roughly 65% in April 2011, according to comScore) so it is the first place you should focus your efforts.

There are several aspects to having a presence in Google:

- The search results
- Google Places
- Sponsored ads

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- Google Images
- Google News
- Google Video

These are all part of Google, but in many ways they are independent of each other. We're going to cover them all in detail in this book, but it's important to remember that each of them works separately from the others so you want to show up in as many as possible when your customers are searching for you. If you show up in most or all of them, it's going to create a strong impression with your customers, and make them much more likely to choose you over another business.

And keep in mind that the other search engines have many of these same features. We're going to talk about Google in most parts of this book because they are the largest, but virtually everything we cover translates over to Bing and Yahoo as well.

### 3 Google Places



Google has a service for local businesses called Google Places. This service lets you set up a profile for your business where you can showcase various things, such as:

- Special promotions
- Offers
- Photos and videos

Google Places also lets your customers post reviews about your business and you can respond to those reviews, creating a dialog with those people.

Your Google Places listing will show up when someone searches for the products or services you offer in your area, along with other companies offering the same things.

Now imagine how this process is going to work for a moment. When someone goes online to search for a company that provides the solutions you can, they're going to see several results in Google Places. What is going to

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make them choose one over another?

One aspect will be the ranking in Google Places. The top 3 results get the majority of their attention, with the first one getting more than the rest. So you want to be sure your listing is at or near the top of those results. (We'll look at some strategies for accomplishing this shortly.)

Another aspect is how much information is shared. If your company has a full profile with pictures, reviews, special offers and other information, it's a lot more likely to get the searcher's attention than another listing that just has the bare minimum information showing.

If this is a potential customer's first impression of your business, you need to be sure you're putting your best foot forward.

There are other important ways to connect with your customers beyond Google Places, however. Some we already mentioned – other Google properties – which we will cover in more detail shortly. But first, let's look at a relatively new way to reach your customers – social media.

## **4 Social Media Sites**



One of the fastest growing segments of the Internet over the last few years is what's known as Social Media. Facebook and Twitter are the two most well-known examples of social media sites.

Having a Facebook page is becoming more and more important, because people have come to expect it. There are over 600 million users on Facebook, and if you don't have a presence there you're missing out on a lot of potential business.

Plus, for many people Facebook has become synonymous with the Internet. A lot of people spend most of their time online using Facebook, so if you aren't reaching them there, you may not have a chance to reach them at all.

Facebook started out as a way to connect on a personal level, but over the last couple of years they have added a lot of features that are targeted at businesses. You've probably already started to notice a lot of big companies adding "Find us on Facebook" to their websites, advertising

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and other places.

It can work just as well for local businesses, in fact it can work even better. Because Facebook is by nature a place to be "social" a local business fits in much better than a big, faceless corporation.

Setting up a Facebook Page for your business gives you a way to connect with your customers "virtually" and it can help to create a real sense of community.

Twitter is another social media site where you should definitely have a presence. It's a little different beast, because the whole point is to post short updates (up to 140 characters at a time) so you can only share so much information.

It can be useful for sending out messages about special offers and other news, but more importantly it's another way for your customers and potential customers to contact you.

Your customers can send you messages, called "Tweets", via Twitter so it is similar to email in some ways. But because the messages are so short, it can be an effective way for them to ask quick questions or give you quick

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feedback, without having to invest a lot of time to do it.

Aside from reaching potential customers, there's another reason you should have a presence in these places – managing your brand. People will talk about their experiences with your company on the Internet whether you're part of it or not. It's important that you are.

## 5 Managing Your Brand



One of the biggest hurdles for a lot of business owners to leap when it comes to the Internet is realizing that people will be talking about your company whether you like it or not.

And that includes good AND bad. Mistakes are bound to happen in any business, but when they do it's quite possible that the story will wind up on the Internet where anyone searching for your business can find it.

If you're not maintaining an effective presence on the web, you're going to have two problems if this happens.

1. The negative review could wind up ranking high in the search results, so whenever somebody searches for your business, this could be one of the first things they see. The review might be accurate if a mistake really was made, or it might be completely inaccurate, but that potential customer has no way of knowing for sure (and is more than likely going to accept it as fact).

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2. You won't have a chance to explain the situation and fix it.

The solution here is to be a part of the conversation. In other words, engage your customers where these kinds of things might appear so you can try to correct any mistakes that were actually made, or explain your side if it's completely inaccurate.

We've already discussed two of the places that these kinds of discussions can happen — Facebook and Twitter. It's important that you have a presence on both, if only as a point of contact for your customers who are already in those places.

Imagine this scenario...

One of your employees has been dealing with a customer, and the customer is unhappy with the service they received. But instead of coming to you and giving you the opportunity to fix the problem, they go to these websites and post about the problem and how unhappy they were with your company.

If you don't have a presence on Twitter or Facebook,

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you might never know about it. But people who are looking for information about your company online could quite likely find that information whenever they search for you.

Now think about this...

If you are active on those sites, on the other hand, you can jump in and try to correct the situation. This is not only going to give you a chance to turn an unhappy customer into a happy one (who might also become one of your biggest supporters at that point) it's also going to add your side of things to the "record" of the situation on the Internet.

Now when someone searching for you finds that review/complaint, they're also going to see your response, and the fact that you tried to correct the situation for that unhappy customer.

Which scenario would you prefer?