

*The Four Essentials of*

# **ONLINE MARKETING**



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Connect. Inform. Grow.



# THE FOUR ESSENTIALS OF ONLINE MARKETING

**In order to survive**, businesses and organizations need money; in order to thrive, they need to grow. Money comes from two sources: sales and fundraising. Growth comes from two ongoing activities:

1. Broadening your reach so that more and more people are aware of who you are and what you do
2. Deepening relationships with existing customers, clients, and members so that you are doing more and more with them.

Call these activities what you like — “lead generation,” “demand generation,” “community management,” etc. — they essentially boil down to the same thing: marketing.

So, if you want to grow, the challenge is figuring out how to develop a marketing capability that is sustainable and cost effective, especially when resources (not to mention support staff) may be scarce.

Thankfully, businesses and organizations of all sizes today have a variety of inexpensive tools at their disposal to provide them with the technical basis for robust and sustainable online marketing. When you combine such tools with the right tactics, you quickly have everything you need to pursue a successful online marketing strategy.

The tricky part is figuring out which tools and tactics will be best suited to your needs. To help you do that, we’ve put together this overview of the critical elements belonging to any sound online marketing framework. We also pay special attention to one particular tactic — email marketing — that can play a vital role in your marketing efforts.

Whatever your marketing message and regardless of your audience’s particular demographics (though we do assume that they have access to the Internet), your online marketing framework will consist of these four elements:



## 1. Your Web Presence

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## 2. Content

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## 3. Channels for Publication and Distribution of Content

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## 4. A List of Customers, Contacts, and Prospects

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In what follows you’ll find practical advice on putting the pieces of your online marketing framework in place as well as suggestions on what to do once everything’s set up. While marketing that makes an impact definitely calls for time and attention, attending to these basics will not only get you started, it can actually produce immediate results.

### 1. Your Web Presence

Up until three years ago, “Web presence” really meant one thing: your website. Today, the concept of Web presence goes beyond that to cover all the ways and places that your organization shows up on the Web, including the full spectrum of social media outlets from Facebook and Twitter to YouTube, LinkedIn, Flickr, and beyond.

That said, an organization's Website still acts as its central, online home to which all its other online outposts inevitably refer. Which means if you don't already have a website, you need one.

To get a sense of what's possible with free or inexpensive Web design solutions, check out these Wordpress-powered sites: Odd Web Things [<http://oddwebthings.com/>], Soap and Glory [<http://www.soapandglory.com/us>], or The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation [<http://finding-hope.cbcf.org/>].

While you can spend a lot of time deciding what specific content your website might feature (and we'll get to that next), the two most valuable pieces of information your website must contain are:

1. Location: Where can visitors find you and your products or services?
2. Contact Information: How can visitors get in touch with you?


Regarding contact information, recall that the primary aim of your marketing efforts is to establish and maintain relationships. Therefore, it is preferable to provide visitors with the ability to contact a real human being and not just to send messages to "info@yourbusiness.com."

In most cases, you'll want your site to contain more than just this undeniably practical data, so let's take a closer look at what other kinds of content you'll want to offer site visitors.

## 2. Content, Content, Content

When thinking about your online content, whether it sits on your website or gets pushed out via email and other channels, you can separate the content wheat from the content chaff by focusing on a single criterion: Relevance.

Bearing that in mind, the most basic content on your site should help people understand what you do and why

 When it comes to content, focus on a single criterion: relevance.

that's relevant to them. To convey this in the most compelling way, try describing your organization's capabilities by relating stories of what you've already done for others. The result should be that visitors to your site end up thinking less about what your products or services are, and more about what these products and services can do for them.

As necessary as it may be, however, promotional content is not always particularly engaging and people are rarely interested in passing it along. Thus, if you want to create content that catches readers' attention and inspires them to share it with others, you need to address practical issues of relevance to them such as how to make best use of your products or services, advice on your topical area of expertise, or ways that your organization supports a particular cause.

For example, if you are a wedding planner you could offer content focused on everything "wedding," from choosing a location to selecting the menu. If you provide accounting services to small businesses, you could address recent changes to tax code or tips on maximizing deductions. If you sell wine, provide recommendations on choosing the proper vintage to complement your favorite seasonal dishes. And so on.

If you are a non-profit, the question of appropriate content can be even easier to answer since you already know that your members, supporters, and donors care about your mission and want to know what you are doing, what's happening "out there," and how they can help.

Whatever you decide to write about, the main thing to remember is this: people are eager to learn from your expertise and want you to share it.

When it comes to sharing, there are more ways to do that now than ever before.

### 3. Channels for Publication and Distribution of Content

Every organization today, large or small, is a publisher. Thanks to a host of readily available Web-enabled technologies, anyone can produce content — from blog posts, podcasts and videos to apps, games, coupons, and contests — and make it available to anyone else who has access to the Internet. This has become so commonplace that we forget to marvel at the fact that less than 20 years ago none of this was even possible.

However, since so many enjoy this capability, you can't simply throw something up on a website and hope that the right person stumbles across it. To keep things in perspective, consider this: as of 2009 there were over 100 million websites with well over a trillion unique pages. That means if you want anyone to see your content in a timely fashion you have to actively make them aware of it.

There are several ways to do this and social media can play a big part in your efforts. When we talked about establishing your Web presence, the focus fell on the creation of a website unique to your organization. While this is a critical component in your online marketing framework, a fully developed Web presence needs to include much more.


The main reason for this stems from something user experience guru Jakob Nielsen pointed out well over a decade ago: people spend more time on other sites than they do on yours.

Nowadays, the specific site that people in the US visit more than any other is Facebook, but the point isn't that you need to have a Facebook page (though you might need one). Rather, the point is that you have to show up on the Web where your customers are. If they are on Facebook, you should be too.

Social sites often provide you with the means to stay in touch with your customers where they are most active. The beauty and power of these sites rests in the fact that they let you to listen in on public conversations pertaining to your products, services or area of interest, as well as allowing for more informal “real time” interactions with existing or potential contacts.

Of course, these sites also provide you with the means of distributing content either as links back to your site, or “in full.” Twitter is particularly well-suited for link sharing (as long as that's not all you do there), as is LinkedIn. Facebook and YouTube allow you to create dedicated pages or “channels” for your content (photos, videos, event listings, information, links, etc.) making them both alternative (or additional) publishing platforms for your organization.

Nevertheless, as alluring and promising as social media sites can be as content distribution channels, they still cannot compare in terms of targeted effectiveness with the original social medium: email.

 You have to show up on the Web where your customers are.



## Why Email Marketing Matters

Studies have repeatedly shown that people in all age ranges prefer email to any other method of communication coming from businesses and other organizations. It should come as no surprise to learn, then, that email is the most popular marketing tool for small businesses. There are several reasons for this.

### Email Marketing is Targeted

Unlike other forms of advertising and promotion (the yellow pages, for instance, or display ads), which have a “message in a bottle” quality to them, email can go directly to those people who have already expressed an interest in your organization.

### Email Marketing is Flexible

There is virtually no limit to the type of content that you can distribute via email, from coupons and special offers to newsletters, event announcements, and much more. You can use email to drive traffic to your website, your various social media outposts, or simply to engage in two-way conversations with people — something that is impossible to do with print advertising.

Moreover, you can always combine different types of content — news, offers, requests for feedback, etc. — in individual emails.

### Email Marketing Provides Data

People often talk about “closed-loop marketing,” referring to marketing that lets you track who got what message and what they did with it. Email marketing, particularly when it is designed to send traffic to your site, let’s you do this easily thanks to the campaign tracking powers of free tools like Google Analytics.

In addition to collecting data via your website you can utilize an email marketing application that enables you to collect granular data regarding which emails reached their

recipients, which were opened, and what content recipients actually clicked on. These applications also let you send different versions of your emails to different segments of your list allowing you to test what is actually effective and what isn’t.

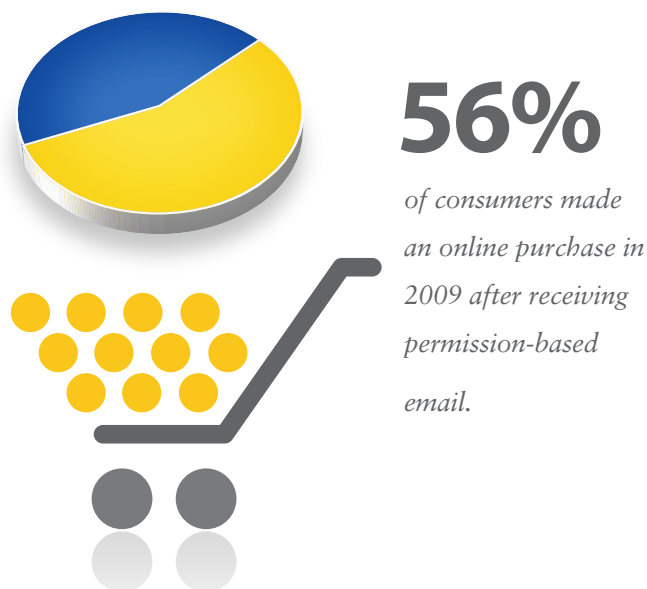
### Email Marketing Works!

First of all, 56% of consumers say they made an online purchase over the past year, specifically because of permission-based email.

Secondly, as MarketingProfs’ Wendy Lowe reminds us, research has shown that “email marketing generated a return on investment (ROI) of \$43.62 for every dollar spent on it in 2009,” a rate of return that most advertising alternatives would be hard-pressed to best (or even demonstrate).

Thirdly, 46% of those surveyed say they rely on email to share content with others, which is exactly what you want them to do.

All of which goes to show that in terms of effectiveness, ROI, and reach, email remains a valuable and viable online marketing tool.



#### **4. A List of Customers and Prospects**

The strength and reach of email marketing and other outbound, online promotional efforts depends, in the end, on the size and quality of your contact and distribution lists.

Indeed, compiling a list of those you've done business with and those you might do business with in the future will be one concrete outcome of your online marketing efforts. In the process of compiling and growing your list, there are three important things to keep in mind.

First, to build a list you are going to have to ask for contact information.

While you can and should include a contact form on your website in case people are so intrigued by what they find there that they willingly volunteer this information, it is generally more effective to ask for an email address after you have done something for them. In the brick and mortar world, for example, best practice suggests collecting email at the point of sale ("Would you like to receive news about upcoming events and in-store specials? Sign up for our mailing list!").

Aside from taking advantage of this auspicious instant, you can use content to motivate exchange of email information. For example, it is quite common to ask for contact information when visitors express an interest in downloading content from your site. If you don't want to put a contact form in front of your content (and there are reasonable arguments for and against doing so), you can invite readers to subscribe to your newsletter or simply ask them to provide an email address if they would like to "learn more."

Second, give people good reasons to give you their email address. Whether you establish a formal loyalty program or simply promise to send along coupons and special offers, there should be some concrete benefit to giving you an email address. (In other words, it should not feel like an invitation to receive spam.)

Along the same lines, you can use contests and promotions to encourage those already receiving your email messages to share them with friends, thus expanding your list by word-of-mouth.

Finally, get permission.

One thing that makes email marketing so effective is the fact that the people who receive messages from you should have already indicated that they want to receive messages from you. This means that asking for email addresses from contacts is not enough; you have to ask permission to use email addresses for the purpose of email marketing. If you haven't gotten permission to do so, don't.

This last point is particularly pertinent if you regularly do business or collect donations online. In these cases, people generally have to give you their email address to complete the transaction. However, doing so does not imply that they are willing to continue to receive information from you. You have to ask!

**//** Give people good reason to give you their email address ... there should be concrete benefits ...



## Conclusion: Use This Framework to Jumpstart Your Online Marketing


If you want your business or organization to grow, you need marketing, and in today's environment that means online marketing.

The four essential components of a sound online marketing framework are:

- 1. Your website**, which serves as your home base;
- 2. Your content**, which catches the interest of your customers or members and prompts them to action;
- 3. Your channels** for publishing and distribution of the above-mentioned content, among which email can often be the most effective; and,
- 4. Your list**, which allows you to keep track of and reach out to your ever-growing community of contacts.

Of course, this just gives you a framework. What you do with the framework is up to you, but if you focus on using it to give your customers content that they can use and share, you will achieve online marketing success.

**Good luck!**

 Give your customers content they can use and achieve online marketing success.



<sup>i</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Wide\\_Web#Statistics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Wide_Web#Statistics). Accessed, September 18, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Nielsen, Jakob, "Top 10 Mistakes in Web Design," <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9605.html>, accessed on September 18, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> McAtee, p. 76.

<sup>iv</sup> McAtee, p. 110

<sup>v</sup> McAtee, p.88

<sup>vi</sup> Lowe, Wendy, "Eight Reasons for Small Businesses to Dip Their Toes in the Email Marketing Pond," April 2010, accessed on September 19, 2010.

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## About Constant Contact, Inc.

Constant Contact's email marketing, social media marketing, event marketing, and online survey tools help small organizations grow their businesses by building stronger customer relationships. More than 350,000 small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and member associations worldwide rely on Constant Contact's easy-to-use; affordable online tools to create and deliver personalized, professional communications that engage casual customers, members, prospects, and passionate customers wherever they congregate online -- from their email inboxes to their social networks. All Constant Contact products come with unmatched education, training and personal coaching services, and award-winning technical support. Founded in 1995, Constant Contact is a publicly traded company (Nasdaq: CTCT) with offices in Waltham, Mass.; Loveland, Colo.; and Delray, Fla.; and a San Francisco office scheduled to open later this year.

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