

The Web Marketing Checklist: 29 Ways to Promote Your Website

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How can you get more visitors to your website? What can you do to stimulate traffic? Here's a checklist of 29 items you need to consider. Many of these you're probably doing already; others you meant to do and forgot about; still others you've never heard of. Of course, a great deal has been written about this. You'll find links to thousands of articles on site promotion in our Web Marketing Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket). While we're not breaking any new ground here, we've tried to summarize some of the most important techniques.

Search Engine Strategies

The most important strategy is to rank high for your preferred words on the main search engines. Search engines send robot "spiders" to index the content on your webpage, so let's begin with steps to prepare your webpages for optimal indexing.

1. Write a Page Title.

Write a descriptive title for each page of 5 to 8 words. Remove as many "filler" words from the title, such as "the," "and," etc. This page title will appear hyperlinked on the search engines when your page is found. Entice surfers to click on the title by making it a bit provocative. Place this at the top of the webpage between the <HEAD></HEAD> tags, in this format: <TITLE>Web Marketing Checklist -- 29 Ways to Promote Your Website</TITLE>. Plan to use some descriptive keywords along with your business name on your home page. If you specialize in silver bullets and that's what people will be searching for, don't just use your company name "Acme Ammunition, Inc." use "Silver Bullets -- Acme Ammunition, Inc." Words people are most likely to search on put first in the title (called "keyword prominence"). Remember, this title is your entire identity on the search engines. The more people see in the blue highlighted portion of the search engine that interests them, the more likely they are to click on the link.

2. Write a Description META Tag.

Some search engines include this description below your hyperlinked title, though many don't. This sentence should describe the contents of the body text of the webpage, using the main keywords and keyphrases used on this page. If you include keywords that aren't used on the webpage you could hurt yourself. Place those words at the top of the webpage, between the <HEAD></HEAD> tags, in a META tag in this format:

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<META NAME="DESCRIPTION" CONTENT="Increase visitor hits, attract traffic through submitting URLs, META tags, news releases, banner ads, and reciprocal links">
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When I prepare a webpage, I write the description first in a sentence or two, using each of the important keywords and phrases included in the article. Then for the keywords META tag, I strip out the common words, leaving just the meaty words and phrases. The keywords META tag is no longer used for ranking, but it is sometimes used for paid inclusion technologies. I'm leaving it in. Who knows when search engines will consider it important again?

3. Include Your Keywords in Header Tags H1, H2, H3.

Search engines consider words that appear in the page headline and sub heads to be important to the page, so make sure your desired keywords and phrase appear in one or two header tags.

4. Make Sure Your Keywords Are in the First Paragraph of Your Body Text.

Search engines expect that your first paragraph will contain the important keywords for the document. You don't want to stuff keywords here, however. Google expects a keyword density in the entire body text area of maybe 1.5% to 2% for a word that should rank high. Other places you might consider including keywords would be in ALT tags and perhaps COMMENT tags.

5. Make Your Navigation System Search Engine Friendly.

Some lazy webmasters use frames, but they can cause serious problems with search engines. Even if search engines can find your content pages, they'll be missing the key navigation to help visitors get to the rest of your site. JavaScript and Flash navigation buttons look great, but search engines can't follow them. Supplement them with regular HTML links at the bottom of the page, ensuring that a chain of hyperlinks exists that can get from the front page to every page in your site. A site map with links to all your pages can help, too. Be aware that some content management systems and e-commerce catalogs produce dynamic, made-on-the-fly webpages. You can recognize these with question marks in their URLs followed by numbers. Overworked search engines usually stop at the question mark and refuse to go farther. Some solutions might be URL rewriting, paid inclusion, and targeted content pages.

6. Develop Several Pages Focused on Particular Keywords.

SEO specialists don't recommend using doorway or gateway pages any more, since nearly duplicate webpages might penalize you. Rather, develop several webpages on your site, each of which is focused on a different keyword or keyphrase. For example, instead of listing all your services on a single webpage, try developing a separate webpage for each. These pages will rank higher for their keywords since they contain targeted rather than general content.

7. Submit Webpage URL to Search Engines.

Next, submit your page to the important Web search engines that robotically index the Web. Look for a link on the search engine for "Add Your URL." In the US, the most important are: Google, Inktomi, Alta Vista, and Teoma. They feed search content to the other main search engines and portal sites. For Europe and other areas you'll want to submit to regional search engines. It's a waste of money to pay someone to submit your site to hundreds of search engines. Avoid registering with FFA (Free For All pages) and other link farms. They don't work well, bring you lots of spam e-mails, and could cause you to be penalized by the search engines. We'll talk about submitting to directories under "Linking Strategies" below.

8. Fine-tune with search engine positioning.

Now fine-tune your focused content pages, and perhaps your home page, by making minor adjustments to help them rank high. Software such as WebPosition Gold (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/webposition.htm) allows you to check your current ranking and compare your webpages against your top keyword competitors and WebPosition's Page Critic analysis of a search engine's preferred statistics for each part of your webpage. You can do this yourself with WebPosition Gold, but many small businesses outsource search engine positioning because of the considerable time investment it requires. You can find links to hundreds of articles on search engine strategies in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mp_Search).

Linking Strategies

Links to your site bring additional traffic that is quite worth the effort. Since Google and other major search engines consider the number of incoming links to your website ("link popularity") as an important factor in ranking, more links will help you rank higher in the search engines, too. All links, however, are not created equal. Links from popular information hubs will help your site rank higher than those from low traffic sites. You'll find links to articles on link strategies in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mp_Linking).

9. Submit Your Site to Key Directories.

Be sure to list your site in the free Open Directory Project (www.dmoz.com), overseen by human editors. This hierarchical directory provides content feeds to all the major search engines. Plus it provides a link to your site from an information hub that Google deems important.

Yahoo! Directory is another important directory to be listed in, though their search results recently haven't been featuring their own directory as prominently. Real humans will read (and too often, pare down) your 200-character sentence, so be very careful and follow their instructions (<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/>). Hint: Use somewhat less than the maximum number of characters allowable, so you don't have wordy text that will tempt the Yahoo! editor to begin chopping. Business sites now require a \$299 annual recurring fee for Yahoo! Express to have your site considered for inclusion within seven business days (<http://docs.yahoo.com/info/suggest/busexpress.html>). Other directories to consider might be About.com and Business.com.

10. Submit Your Site to Industry Sites and Specialized Directories.

You may find some directories focused on particular industries, such as education or finance. Be sure to register with these. You probably belong to various trade associations that feature member sites. Ask for a link. Even if you have to pay something for a link, it may bring you the kind of targeted traffic from an info hub that you need. Beware of directories that solicit you for "upgraded listings." Unless a directory is widely used in your field, your premium ad won't help. Marginal directories come and go very quickly, making it hard to keep up. Don't spend time here trying to be exhaustive.

11. Request Reciprocal Links.

Find complementary websites and request a reciprocal link to your site (especially to your free service, if you offer one). Develop an out-of-the-way page where you put links to other sites - - so you don't send people out the back door as fast as you bring them in the front door. Your best results will be from sites that get a similar amount of traffic to your site. High-traffic site webmasters are too busy to answer your requests for a link, and don't have anything to gain. Look for smaller sites that may have linking pages.

Check out Ken Evoy's free SiteSell Value Exchange. It (1) registers your site as one that is willing to exchange links with other sites that have a similar theme/topic content and (2) searches for sites with similar topical content (<http://sales.sitesell.com/value-exchange/>). Two automated link building software programs stand out -- Zeus and Arelis. These search for complementary sites, help you maintain a link directory, and manage reciprocal links. But use these programs to identify the complementary sites, not to send impersonal automated e-mail spam to site owners. When you locate sites, send a personal e-mail to the administrative contact found in the Whois Directory (www.allwhois.com). If e-mail doesn't get a response, try a phone call.

12. Write Articles for Others to Use in their Newsletters.

You can dramatically increase your visibility when you write articles in your area of expertise and distribute them to editors as free content for their e-mail newsletters. Just ask that a link to your website and a one-line description of what you offer be included with the article. This is an effective "viral" approach that can produce hundreds of links to your site over time.

Traditional Strategies

Just because "old media" strategies aren't on the Internet doesn't mean they aren't effective. A mixed media approach can be very effective.

13. Include Your URL on Stationery, Cards, and Literature.

This is a no-brainer that's sometimes overlooked. Make sure that all reprints of cards, stationery, brochures, and literature contain your company's URL. And see that your printer gets the URL syntax correct. In print, I recommend leaving off the `http://` part and including only the `www.domain.com` portion.

14. Promote using traditional media.

Don't discontinue print advertising you've found effective. But be sure to include your URL in any display or classified ads you purchase in trade journals, newspapers, etc. View your website as an information adjunct to the ad. Use a two-step approach: (1) capture the readers' attention with the ad, (2) then refer them to a URL where they can obtain more information and perhaps place an order. Look carefully at small display or classified ads in the back of narrowly-targeted magazines or trade periodicals. Sometimes these ads are more targeted, more effective, and less expensive than online advertising. Consider other traditional media to drive people to your site, such as direct mail, classifieds, post cards, etc. Since 1999 we've seen TV used to promote sites, though it is probably too broad for all but the most general product sites.

15. Develop a Free Service.

It's boring to invite people, "Come to our site and learn about our business." It's quite another to say "Use the free kitchen remodeling calculator available exclusively on our site." Make no mistake, it's expensive in time and energy to develop free resources, such as our Web Marketing Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/webmarket), but it is very rewarding in increased traffic to your site. Make sure that your free service is closely related to what you are selling so the visitors you attract will be good prospects for your business. Give visitors multiple opportunities and links to cross over to the sales part of your site.

16. Issue News Releases.

Find newsworthy events (such as launching your free service), and send news releases to print and Web periodicals in your industry. However, opening or redesigning a website is seldom newsworthy these days. You may want to use a Web news release service such as XpressPress (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/xpresspress.htm) or the free PR Web (www.prweb.com). Placing your website URL in online copies of your press release may increase link popularity some. More info on PR. (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mp_PR)

E-Mail Strategies

Don't neglect e-mail as an important way to bring people to your website. Just don't spam. That is, don't send bulk unsolicited e-mails without permission to people with whom you have no relationship. You can find lots of details and tips in *The E-Mail Marketing Handbook*, an e-book by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson (www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/handbook.htm).

17. Install a "Signature" in your E-Mail Program to help potential customers get in touch with you.

Most e-mail programs such as AOL, Netscape, and Outlook allow you to designate a "signature" to appear at the end of each message you send. Limit it to 6 to 8 lines: Company name, address, phone number, URL, e-mail address, and a one-phrase description of your unique business offering. Look for examples on e-mail messages sent to you.

18. Publish an E-Mail Newsletter.

While it's a big commitment in time, publishing a monthly or bi-monthly e-mail newsletter ("ezine") is one of the very best ways to keep in touch with your prospects, generate trust, develop brand awareness, and build future business. It also helps you collect e-mail addresses from those who visit your site but aren't yet ready to make a purchase. Ask for e-mail address and their first name so you can personalize the newsletter. You can distribute your newsletter using listservers such as Gammadyne Mailer (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/gammadyne.htm), Infacta GroupMail (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/groupmail.htm), Topica Email Publisher (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/topica.htm), or Constant Contact (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/roving.htm). If you're just getting started you can use free advertising-supported programs, such as Yahoo! Groups (www.yahoogleroups.com) and Topica Exchange (www.topica.com). See articles on newsletter marketing in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=me_Newsletter).

19. Send Offers to Your Visitors and Customers.

Your own list of customers and site visitors who have given you permission to contact them will be your most productive list. Send offers, coupon specials, product updates, etc. Personalizing the subject line and the message will increase the results. You'll find scores of articles on general e-mail marketing in our Info Center .

20. Rent targeted e-mail lists.

We abhor "spam," bulk untargeted, unsolicited e-mail, and you'll pay a very stiff price in a ruined reputation and cancelled services if you yield to temptation here. But the direct marketing industry has developed targeted e-mail lists you can rent consisting of people who have agreed to receive commercial e-mail messages. These cost \$100 to \$300 per thousand, 10¢ to 30¢ per name. Do a smaller test first to determine the quality of the list. Your best bet is to find an e-mail list broker to help you with this project -- you'll save money and get experienced help for no additional cost (www.wilsonweb.com/contact/listbroker.htm).

Miscellaneous Strategies

21. Promote Your Site in Mailing Lists and News Groups.

The Internet offers thousands of very targeted e-mail based discussion lists and Usenet news groups made up of people with very specialized interests. Use Google Groups to find appropriate sources (<http://groups.google.com>). Don't bother with news groups consisting of pure "spam." Instead, find groups where a dialog is taking place. Don't use aggressive marketing and overtly plug your product or service. Rather, add to the discussion in a helpful way and let the "signature" at the end of your e-mail message do your marketing for you. People will gradually get to know and trust you, visit your site, and do business with you. You can learn more from articles in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mm_Newsgroups).

22. Announce a Contest.

People like getting something free. If you publicize a contest or drawing available on your site, you'll generate more traffic than normal. Make sure your sweepstakes rules are legal in all states and countries you are targeting. Prizes should be designed to attract individuals who fit a demographic profile describing your best customers. See dozens of articles on contests and incentives in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=ma_Incentives).

23. Ask Visitors to Bookmark Your Site.

It seems so simple, but make sure you ask visitors to bookmark your site (www.wilsonweb.com/wmta/bookmark.htm) We use a graphic on the main entry page to our site. Hey, why don't you bookmark the article you're reading right now? You know you'll want to find it again soon.

24. Exchange Ads with Complementary Businesses.

Banner exchange programs don't work well these days. But consider exchanging e-mail newsletter ads with complementary businesses to reach new audiences.

25. Devise Viral Marketing Promotion Techniques.

So-called viral marketing uses the communication networks (and preferably the resources) of your site visitors or customers to spread the word about your site exponentially. Word-of-mouth, PR, creating "buzz," and network marketing are offline models. #12 above, "Write Articles for Others to Use in their Newsletters" is a viral approach. The classic example is the free e-mail service, hotmail.com, that includes a tagline about their service at the end of every message sent out, so friends tell friends, who tell friends. You can learn more in my e-book Demystifying Viral Marketing (www.wilsonweb.com/ebooks/viral.htm), available for no cost when you subscribe to my free, weekly Doctor Ebiz newsletter (www.doctorebiz.com). You can find articles on viral marketing in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mm_Viral).

Paid Advertising Strategies

None of the approaches described above is "free," since each takes time and energy. But if you want to grow your business more rapidly, there comes a point when you need to pay for increased traffic. Advertising is sold in one of three ways: (1) traditional CPM (cost per thousand views), (2) pay per click (PPC), and (3) pay per action, otherwise known as an affiliate program or lead generation program. Do some small tests first to determine response, and then calculate your return on investment (ROI) before spending large amounts. Here are some methods:

26. Buy a Text Ad in an E-Mail Newsletter.

Some of the best buys are small text ads in e-mail newsletters targeted at audiences likely to be interested in your products or services. Many small publishers aren't sophisticated about advertising and offer attractive rates. For example, we offer low-priced 2-Line Ads in Doctor Ebiz each week (www.wilsonweb.com/ads/2-line-ad.htm). Banner ads get such a low click-through rate (0.2%) these days that I don't recommend paying much for them. Banner ads typically cost about 50¢ to \$1 per thousand page views.

27. Begin an Affiliate Program.

Essentially, a retailer's affiliate program pays a commission to other sites whose links to the retailer result in an actual sale. The goal is to build a network of affiliates who have a financial stake in promoting your site. If you're a merchant you, need to (1) determine the commission you are willing to pay (consider it your advertising cost), (2) select a company to set up the technical details of your program, and (3) promote your program to get the right kind of affiliates who will link to your site. Consider affiliate management software such as My Affiliate Program (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/myaffiliateprogram.htm) or Ultimate Affiliate Program (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/groundbreak.htm). More info in the E-Commerce Research Room (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=em_Associate).

28. Purchase Pay Per Click (PPC) ads on Overture.com (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/overture.htm) and Google AdWords (<https://adwords.google.com/select/>).

The top ads appear as featured links at the top of search engine results for your keywords in many search engines. Your ranking is determined by how much you've bid for a particular search word compared to other businesses. This can be a cost-effective way to get targeted traffic, since you only pay when someone actually clicks on the link. Lower cost PPC systems include FindWhat (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/findwhat.htm) and Kandoodle (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/kandoodle.htm). An excellent e-book on PPC strategies is Andrew Goodman's 21 Ways to Maximize Profits on Google AdWords Select (www.wilsonweb.com/afd/pagezero.htm). More information on PPC ads can be found in our Info Center (www.wilsonweb.com/cat/cat.cfm?page=1&subcat=mp_PPC).

29. List Your Products with Shopping Comparison Bots and Auction Sites.

Shopping bots compare your products and prices to others. Google's new Froogle (www.froogle.com) is currently free. Some work on a PPC basis: mySimon (www.mysimon.com), BizRate (www.bizrate.com), PriceGrabber (www.pricegrabber.com), and DealTime (www.dealtime.com). Others expect a commission on the sale and sometimes a listing fee, especially sales systems that host the merchant. These include eBay (www.ebay.com), Yahoo! Shopping Auctions (<http://auctions.shopping.yahoo.com>), Amazon zShops, Marketplace, and Auctions (<http://zshops.amazon.com>), and Yahoo! Shopping (<http://shopping.yahoo.com>). You pay to acquire first-time customers, but hopefully you can sell to them a second, third, and fourth time, too.

We certainly haven't exhausted ways to promote your site, but these will get you started. To effectively market your site, you need to spend some time adapting these strategies to your own market and capacity. Right now, why don't you make an appointment to go over this checklist with someone in your organization, and make it the basis for your new Web marketing strategy?