

# Easing in to Online Marketing

4 Basic steps for overwhelmed business owners to market like a pro...even when you aren't sure what you're doing!



alfordcreative

# A Great Website is Just the Beginning

You know you need a website, but that's just one piece in an overall strategy to get your business noticed online. In this quick guide, you will get an overview of best practices for online and inbound marketing for 2016 so you can make good decisions from day one.





# PREFACE

## An Invitation to Remove the Guilt & Embrace Your Limits

If you are reading this, you likely own your own business or hope to start one soon, so we can safely assume that you've got some snap.

You are doing your due-diligence to learn all you can including taking full advantage of the abundance of free advice floating around. You are watching videos, listening to podcasts and downloading ebooks ;-)

But in your quiet moments, don't you feel a little overwhelmed?

As an entrepreneur, you must not only be an expert in your field, but you may also feel the pressure to be a marketing guru, a web designer, an expert copywriter, video personality and social media whiz. And things on the web are changing so fast that it's hard to keep up.

While the DIY culture on the internet can be empowering, it can also be guilt-producing. It puts a subtle pressure on us that suggests if we can learn to do a task, then we should.

It's insanity, really.

I want to invite you to let go of that guilt right now. As the owner of your business, you don't need to be a marketing expert. I wrote this simple guide to give you, the busy owner, a solid overview of the basics so you can make informed decisions about whether you will do it yourself, oversee an employee or hire a competent contractor.

**Get clear. Be strategic. Create customers.**



Image: © Udo Schotten

## STEP 1

# Slow Down, Breathe & Let's Think this Through

Getting your first website is such a great feeling. It can be a real milestone for a new entrepreneur - a bright and shiny declaration to the world that you are open for business! It legitimizes you.

So of course, you're excited.

You may dream of all the people who will make their way to your site to take advantage of the unique thing you offer. You spend your precious time and money to get it just right, and finally...tada!! You launch.

And then you wait. And wait. And wait some more.

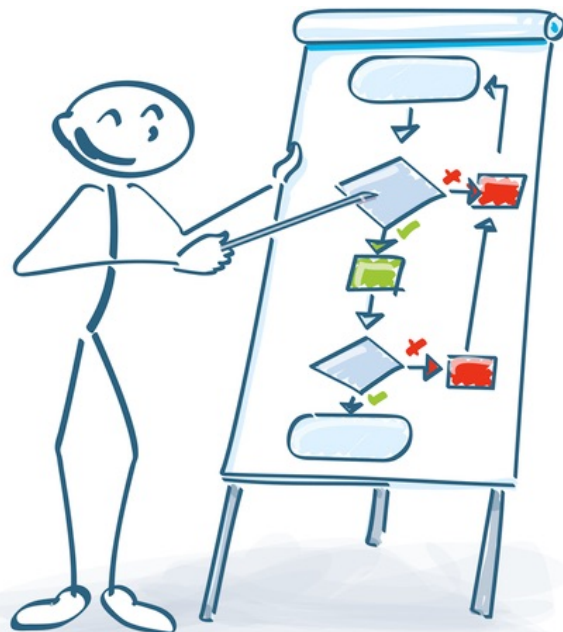


Image: © Udo Schotten

At some point you wonder why no one is coming and that original feeling of legitimacy and excitement can quickly morph into doubt, insecurity, and discouragement.

It's so easy to get the cart before the horse by throwing together a website and then

jumping to promotions. But it is vital to take the time to lay a good foundation in order to build a solid and thriving audience, which leads to customers. That means doing the work to gain clarity about your offering, your audience and your goals.

Following are three components that make up the big picture of your marketing efforts and give you a great start towards building a thriving audience.

## 1) Foundations: getting clear about your brand

Before you even think about creating a website, you want to gain clarity about why you even exist. The answers will inform how your site should look, feel and function.

**Why** will my website be important and to **whom**? What is the problem, need or desire that exists and what is my unique point of view/solution? This unique value proposition should be:

- ✓ The first thing you figure out before you create your site
- ✓ Articulated throughout the website
- ✓ The foundation for your content strategy



## 2) Content: building a strategy to add value

Your content should inspire, make people think, change their course of action or help them in a fundamental way. Taking the time to craft your core messaging and a cohesive content strategy will save you lots of wasted effort later and keep you from feeling like you are just throwing ideas to the wind, hoping something works.

What information and resources do/can I offer for free that deliver value and cause 'customer crave' for my product or service?

What is the one key thing I want visitors to know? How can I educate them about this?

## 3) Promotions: getting the word out

This is often where people want to start, but promoting your business is the last step you should take after you have developed a solid foundation for your brand. Once you know **why** you exist and **what** you want to say, then you are prepared to make good decisions about a promotions strategy.

Some clarifying questions for the promotion phase include: What kind of website do I need for my goals? How will my customers interact with my content and move through the buyer's funnel? What are the best channels for getting the word out about my site? Where are my future customers likely to hang out online? What makes sense for the content I want to create?

Shout out to [Fizzle.co](https://fizzle.co) for this Thriving Audience Framework.

"By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail."

Benjamin Franklin

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."

Alan Lakein

## STEP 2

# Create Your Website

A website is often the biggest, most important marketing asset a small business can have, so just like in the clarity phase, you will want to understand your options and take your time.

There are many ways to go when it comes to creating a website, ranging from total DIY to a fully customized solution created by a developer. Most business' needs fall somewhere in the middle.

When looking at these options you need to weigh your budget and time against your technical knowledge and/or willingness to learn more. Here are some things to think about:

## DIY (do-it-yourself)

Many people are deciding to go the DIY route with plug-n-play builders like Wix or Weebly. These can produce great results for the right kind of business and personality type, but is not a good fit for everyone. Here is a simple list of pros and cons if you are thinking about using some of the popular builder services:

✓ **Pro:** This is a fast option where you can have a basic and attractive site up in minutes.

✓ **Pro:** Hosting, domain registration, security and backups are usually included in one price.

✓ **Pro:** These sites offer beautifully designed templates that are easy to customize for color and general layout.

✗ **Con:** Your options will be limited. At some point, you may want a design element or additional functionality that is outside of what the builder can handle and then you are stuck with a product that no longer works for you.

✗ **Con:** Some companies offer lots of free stuff up front, which makes this look like a cheaper option, but future add-ons, hosting and maintenance can add up quickly.

✗ **Con:** The learning curve may be steep. Unless you are a designer OR you plan to use a template as-is, chances are your website won't be as awesome as you hoped. While drag and drop designing is easy, it is also easy to get yourself in a big mess when you try to change things and realize you just don't know what you're doing. Good design for both aesthetics and a great user experience is a craft.

- ✗ **Con:** You don't know what you don't know, so it's easy to get yourself locked into something before realizing it's too late and you're stuck. With these products, the company controls everything and can change their arrangement or pricing at anytime. In a worst case scenario, people have lost domain names, access to their sites, or realized too late that they don't own their content. Read the fine print.

## Hiring a Professional

If you decide to hire someone to create your site, where do you begin? Unless you are a very large and complex company, you likely won't need a full scale website developer. We suggest you hire someone who will create a site for you in Wordpress or SquareSpace, popular template-based solutions that can be customized with widgets, plugins and custom code. Here are some pros and cons for using this approach:

- ✓ **Pro:** These solutions are easy for the end user to maintain and edit if desired. A good pro will train you how to use the software to update or tweak your site and how to deal with common technical issues.
- ✓ **Pro:** A good pro will understand more than just visual design and will be able to construct a site that helps your company reach its goals through good navigation, content strategy and positive user experience.

- ✓ **Pro:** Flexibility. Wordpress is hugely popular and an industry standard in web design. So if you need help in the future for something that's beyond your skills, it's easy to find a pro who can work on your site.
- ✓ **Pro:** Highly customizable. You will be able to have most any functionality you will need, both now and in the future.
- ✗ **Con:** This will initially cost you more money than a DIY solution since you are paying for someone else's expertise. The final cost will depend on how many and what kinds of customizations you require. Since designer fees vary widely, it's good practice to get several quotes and ask for examples of the designer's work before you make a final decision.

"Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time."

Jim Rohn

## Questions to Ask Yourself

There are many things to consider when choosing the best approach to creating your website and unless you have unlimited resources, it will involve some compromise based on what's most important to you.

Here are some clarifying questions to help guide you:

Do I want to be able to update content myself (changing or adding pages or functionality)? How important is this to me?

How comfortable am I with technical tasks?

Do I realistically have the time/interest to learn the necessary skills to create a site myself? Designing a website can be exciting, fun and time consuming. Choosing the colors, images, videos and wonderfully unique effects that you can splash all over your front page can eat up hours and hours and hours of your life.

Am I willing to invest money on this project? How much?

Do I have an understanding about how visitors will interact with my site and content to become customers?

When choosing a designer: Do I like this person? Do I think I can work with them easily? Can I trust them to carry out my vision?

Time / Money / Control / Maintenance / Flexibility: What is the biggest factor in my decision-making process?

## Other Factors

Here are a few other details that need to be considered when choosing who will create your site.

**Web Copy:** This is not something to be overlooked or slapped together. Your website's words are more important than all of the imaging and special effects in the world. Why? Because a website is fundamentally about communication and meaningful words still win the day.

Make sure that the person who builds your site understands content strategy and possesses strong copywriting skills for clarity and conversions.

More on content in the next section.

**SEO:** Ahhh...Google search; that elusive place where all businesses have dreams that their website will rank on the top page, but so few ever realize it.

If you hire a professional to build your site, basic SEO should be included in the package. But beware: any web designer that promises to build your website and have it launch immediately to the top spots in Google is either a) lying or b) committing bad SEO practices that can have your website penalized or even blacklisted, where you will never, ever be seen.

We'll talk more about SEO in the next section.



**Maintenance:** Everything that is developed must be maintained, and you will need to think about your strategy for how you will handle it when something goes wrong on your site.



Image: © Udo Schotten

When you build a website you buy hosting space, which is essentially where your website 'lives'. And just like in real life where things break and houses flood, hosting/servers can go down and website crash for various reasons.

If you are going to DIY, be prepared for the extra time required for regular updating,

tweaking and dealing with technical problems. Make sure you choose a reputable hosting company with good customer service, lots of customer recommendations and responsive tech support.

Basic website maintenance will probably be covered for a certain time if you hire a professional and many will offer maintenance packages if you don't want the headache.

**Sales Funnel, CTA's & Conversions:** Ultimately, the reason your website exists is to gain more customers, so your site has been created with that in mind from the beginning.

Whether you are a DIY-er or hiring a pro, you need to make sure that attention is paid to how your site is prepared and how the functionality and content moves visitors through the marketing cycle and generates leads for future follow up:

- ✓ ATTRACT your target audience (content, SEO)
- ✓ CONVERT qualified leads (CTA's, landing pages)
- ✓ CLOSE new clients (Email campaigns)
- ✓ DELIGHT your customers (content, social monitoring)

So, there you have it. Your website is arguably your biggest marketing asset. Doesn't it make sense to take the time to do it right the first time?

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."

Steve Jobs

## STEP 3

# Drive Traffic to Your Site

“Build it and they will come” does **not** apply to web design!

Creating your website is just the first step to making a splash online. Once your site is ready, then you have to do the work that will allow people to find you.

There are many ways to drive traffic to your site, depending on your goals and content. The following is a brief summary of each:

## SEARCH TRAFFIC & SEO

Implementing basic search engine optimization (SEO) strategies is important if you want to be found online. There are a few key things you can learn to do to optimize your website, posts and images in order for potential customers to find your business.

The number one search engine in the world is Google and they offer tools to help you research keywords and stay on top of your audience behavior. Just remember that SEO is an ongoing process for your business and is not something that can be plugged in and forgotten. It will take time and commitment from to keep your site rising in the search engine rank. And while everyone should have basic SEO in place, focusing exclusively on search engines is not a well rounded strategy and has its

drawbacks. In addition to creating stilted, inauthentic copy, writing primarily for search engines is not smart because Google is constantly changing their search algorithms, which can be impossible to keep up with. We recommend spending time creating great content and your customers will find you.

## CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing is all about telling your unique story and becoming a go-to source of information that builds trust and converts customers. Everyone is looking for an expert and looking to connect around issues that are important to them. Your content can offer this to people. Here's how it works:

- ✓ Your content establishes **YOU** as someone worth listening to
- ✓ People will come back for more of **YOUR** wisdom & advice
- ✓ This process builds **TRUST**
- ✓ These people will eventually become your **CUSTOMERS**

Content is the material you post on your website including all text, images, videos, podcasts, pdf, and e-courses, to name a few. Search engines love to read new content, so when a website is posting frequently it helps you to rise in the search ranking!

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

It's no secret that the world of marketing is shifting. Not only is everything accessible online, but customers are becoming accustomed to having fresh news about their favorite brands right at their fingertips, through their favorite social media sites. Social media has become an effective way to distribute your content. More on Social Media in the next section.

## **BACKLINKS**

Links to your site from other sites are important for SEO and for gaining high quality traffic as you build real connections on other sites relevant to your topic. You can gain links by guest blogging, commenting on other blogs or reaching out to give a case study. This requires creativity, great content, research skills and tenacity!

## **CAPTURING VISITOR TRAFFIC**

As visitors come to your site from other sources, you give them a reason to subscribe to your list by offering a product or value proposition AND then you deliver value on a regular basis through email marketing. The idea is to nurture relationships with your

visitors so you can reach them in the future, which also reduces your reliance on outside traffic sources.

## **PAID TRAFFIC**

Paying for traffic such as google ads can work well but can take lots of money and time to optimize for a positive ROI. Google advertising is a good option if you already have products to sell and aren't interested in a content-based strategy. Another option is advertising on social media, which is more cost effective and a solid way to build your initial mailing list and gain exposure.

## **AFFILIATE TRAFFIC**

This strategy is when you offer a commission to others who refer customers who buy your product. You need good affiliates who have large audiences and email lists that will likely be interested in your product.

## **OTHER**

Other ways to distribute content is through content outposts (YouTube, Slideshare, iTunes), social bookmarking (DIGG, StumbleUpon, Pinterest), forums (Reddit, Quora), directories, local review sites (yelp), and the traditional press (helpareporter.com).



## STEP 4

# Nurture Relationships Online & Gain Customers

Once you have people's attention, the next step is to nurture those relationships so they become loyal, solid customers and advocates of your brand. Creating customers isn't a 'one and done' thing but involves an ongoing process that needs to be built into your planning.

Back in the day, businesses relied on cold calls or automated pre-recordings to reach out to leads. But today's smart entrepreneurs are spending their time and dollars to meet people where they are and show them the real person behind the logo.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

People want relationships and they are drawn to the communication and personal interaction they can achieve through social media. And it's not just for the big boys, a 2014 research study sponsored by LinkedIn shows that **81%** of small and medium-sized businesses use social media.



Image: © Udo Schotten

So, what does this mean for you? Well, it's quite simple really...get yourself on social media or get left behind! But like all other parts of your marketing, you need to be strategic in order to get a positive ROI, which means you must do more than just participate.

You need to show followers (potential clients) the human side of the business and that you actually care about them and their problems.

Customers are also using social media as a way to personally interact with a business. Having the ability to ask questions, give a review for the whole world to see and talk to people in all walks of life about a particular issue is something that has never before been seen in advertising, and can be a huge advantage.

## WHERE DO I START?

There are dozens of social media channels available to small businesses and all of them **can** work, but not all will be a good fit for your specific product or brand.

At the top of the social media food chain are Facebook and Twitter. Here are a few stats that show their popularity:

**Facebook:** With over one billion users worldwide, Facebook is still the number one place to be in 2016. Anyone who is anyone is on Facebook and even if **you** don't like looking at pictures of your aunt Edith's dog in 100 different poses all day, most of your customers are probably using it too.

**Twitter:** With a new record of over 307 million active users a month, Twitter can definitely help you build your brand. Space is limited on this social media platform, where they allow only 200 characters per post.

Other examples of social media channels are Google+, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Pinterest, which each have their unique type of audience.

The best course of action is to do a little research, pick one and then, just work it! Here are some tips:

- ✓ Pick a channel that you already use. If you are already a user, chances are you have a built-in network you can use for beginning promotions.
- ✓ Do some research to find out which one best fits your target. Just because you live in California where everyone uses Facebook, if your target audience is in Montana, their

favorite might be Instagram. All of the localized information about social media can be found online and is worth the small amount of time it takes to research.

- ✓ Use one that best fits the kinds of content you are most comfortable with and you can expand later. Is your style short and snappy? Try Twitter. Love images? Try Instagram.

## EMAIL MARKETING

Another fantastic way to nurture relationships is through email marketing. This is where you reach out in a strategic way to add additional value to your guests/customers/prospects through campaigns of various types. With the simple and sophisticated tools available today, even the tiniest business with few resources can market like the big boys.

A word of caution: You probably get way too much email...and so do your prospects. So, you want to craft a strategy that respects their time and gives them rock-solid content at decent intervals so they don't hit that 'unsubscribe button'!

## WHAT DO I SHARE?

Here is where the fun begins; talking, interacting, posting and sharing are some of the great little details it takes to run a successful social media and email marketing campaigns. Don't know where to start? Here are a few ideas of what to post:

**Images:** Whether cute, funny or serious, people love images. Current research states that content with relevant images get **94%** more clicks than content without a relevant image, which means a lot more engagement with you and your business!

**Blog Posts (and other site content):** Are you writing a blog? Well, you should. Blogs are still the best 'home' for your content, and when you share posts on all of your social media pages, it drives people back to your website. Blogs are a great way to nurture your relationships because you can take cues from your audience and craft pieces that speak to their unique needs.

Consider turning your blogs into a video or creating podcasts to up your game and connect more personally with your audience.

**Personal Content:** Your audience wants to hear from YOU, not some preprogrammed machine. The messages you are sending will depend on your product, but make it a practice to post a piece of content from you personally at least once a month (more if you have a very active page).

**Quizzes, Stats & Asking for opinions:** People like to be heard and they enjoy interacting with you and others that share their interests. Try posting a quiz related to your industry and starting a discussion about the results. Ask people to share their opinion about a certain trend or topic and see what they have to say. You might be surprised with the number of responses you get.

Whatever content you decide to post, remember:

- ✓ Keep it interesting.
- ✓ Try to keep the ratio to 60% content directly related to your business and 40% other people's opinions and stories.
- ✓ Share posts from others in your industry.
- ✓ Don't follow someone else's formula about posting (times, amounts etc). Just jump in and be yourself. If your goal is connecting you will find the method that works best for you.

## IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

The most important thing to remember is that all of this is about serving **THEM** (your guests) and not yourself. Shifting your focus will change how you write, how you interact and how you are perceived online.



Image: © Udo Schotten





# REQUEST A STRATEGIC CONSULTATION

**Need help getting off the ground? Contact us for a free consultation and learn how we can help you gain clarity, craft a strategy and get moving with your online presence.**

**281.660.3897**

**[hello@alfordcreative.com](mailto:hello@alfordcreative.com)**