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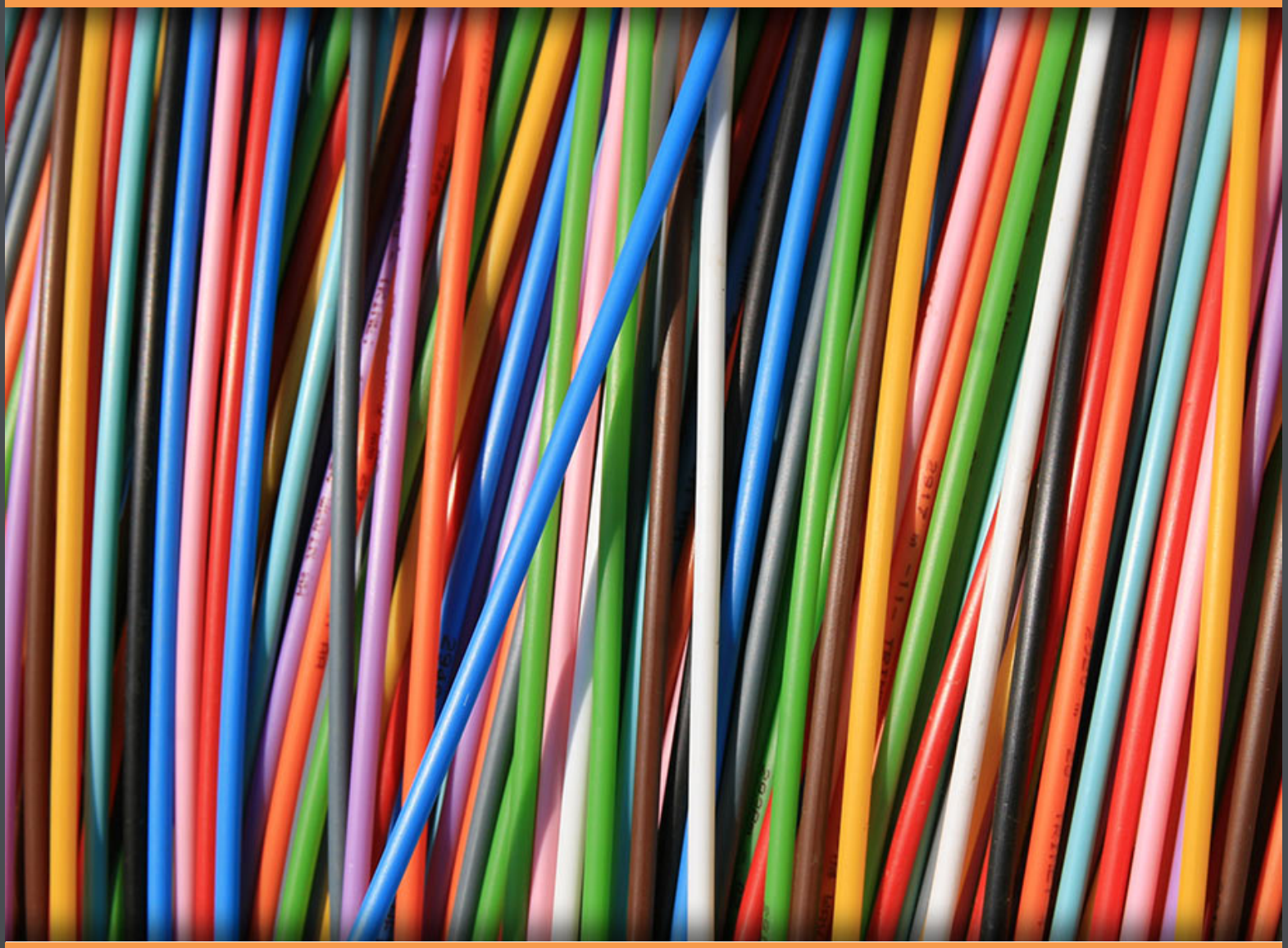
Inbound Marketing

Nick Pateman; Dan Holt



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Nick Pateman & Dan Holt

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Inbound Marketing
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Inbound Marketing

Just a Fad?

We are often asked if the core principles behind inbound marketing are a fad. Won't social media and search engine optimisation die out as new, more exciting developments take over? Surely businesses are better off sticking to traditional techniques; the methods that got them results decade after decade in the 20th century?

First, I correct them. Social media and search engine optimisation are not the core principles of inbound marketing. The core principles are; being in the right place at the right time, listening to your clients, engaging with your community and offering a *remarkable* user experience. These principles are not new. They have always been valued by the consumer. It's just that in days gone by the technology wasn't available to deliver them on a mass scale.

Well times have changed. Now the consumer can have all these things in an instant and they know it; a development that has left the slick but ultimately superficial advertising of the past looking rather frail. The organisations now capturing market share are those that push the bullshit to one side and concentrate on the needs rather than the weaknesses of the consumer. They position themselves in the most convenient places, engage rather than broadcast and over deliver at *every* opportunity. This is what the consumer has come to expect in 2011. And now that they have had a taste of how good things can be, they have no intention of taking a backward step.

So is inbound marketing a fad? Well, kind of. In ten years from now we'll just call it marketing.

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Why you really need to read this book

By the end of this short book you will be able to...

- Strategise a belter of an inbound marketing campaign.
- Have a website that costs peanuts, looks fantastic AND makes Google a very happy chappy.
- Understand how important the search engines are for your business and which phrases to target.
- Know the questions to ask a prospective internet marketing agency – know your cowboys and cowgirls from your experts!
- Structure your website in a way that offers a great user experience and gets visitors behaving the way YOU want them to!
- Identify the most relevant social media platforms and use your time selectively and effectively.
- Use Google Analytics to track your activity as it blossoms into the perfect inbound marketing campaign!

Stuff you need:

- A keen desire to learn.
- Basic understanding of the web in general
    - A reasonable amount of patience and tenacity (if this stuff was quick and easy then it wouldn't be an opportunity because everyone would already be doing it!)

Stuff that would help:

- Control of at least one major news network
- Partial ownership of Facebook.com
    - Intimate relations with a member of Google staff

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About The Authors

Nick Pateman – a nerd who has lived almost all of his life through a keyboard and began marketing online in his mid-teens. His responsibility is to ensure this guide is short but heavyweight. Full of substance and actionable steps that create real competitive advantage.

Dan Holt – a traditional marketer with a love for what the internet can do for business but zero interest in the technical nuts and bolts behind it. His responsibility is to ensure that the guide is digestible and comprehensible. In short, his role is to understand it. If he can, you can.

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1 An Introduction to Inbound Marketing

Web 2.0

Before we get to inbound marketing, I think it's important you have some understanding of the technical stuff that has led to this massive shift:

About 8 years ago the internet underwent a change that took it from:

> **Information based websites** - We searched, we found, we absorbed and we kept our opinions to ourselves. This is commonly referred to as web 1.0.
>
> To:
>
> **The social web** – the separation of code from content (in other words you no longer had to understand computer code to publish online content) meant that the previously silent masses were given a megaphone and told to shout. If you were capable of creating a word document then you were, in effect, an overnight web developer. This was the birth of web 2.0 and it changed everything!

And I really do mean everything. Not only are we as consumers now able to join in the conversation online, but that has itself helped to shift our expectations offline. We are tired of slick, inauthentic advertising. We want to see the real company, warts and all, and we know when we're being deceived!

We expect to have a voice and we expect to be heard. If our experience is good we will share it with our friends. If our experience is bad we will share it with the *world*!

Every company is now a media company

Every business in every industry now has the capability, albeit not necessarily the desire, to publish media online at virtually no financial cost (just time!). Consequently there are opportunities available that did not exist ten years ago, and as always it is the early adopters that snatch all the benefit. The Jonny come lately's will survive by the skin of their teeth while the hard headed luddites will, trust me, get left for dead!

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Outbound vs Inbound

- **Outbound** – those activities that involve pushing messages outwards at prospective customers. Also known as interruption based marketing. The logic is that if you shout at enough people that broadly fit into your target demographic, a few of these will listen and with a bit of luck become your customer. In the 20th century it was all the rage – cold calls, email databases, TV ads, billboards. By the turn of the millennium the average consumer was subjected to over 3000 advertisements a day!!!
    - **Inbound** – those activities that involve pulling your customers towards you by ensuring you are active where they are active and offer such a great experience that not only do they return time and time again, but they bring all their buddies and colleagues with them! Since the emergence of web 2.0 and the computer savvy consumer, this is fast replacing outbound as the dominant form of marketing.

Some fictional, real life examples (if that makes any sense)

Traditional Outbound Marketing

Physio Phil has just started out on his own (way to go Phil!) and wants to make a name for himself via traditional methods. First he buys an advert on local radio offering a heavily discounted rate and then purchases a data list for mass emails and cold calls. He even has some flyers printed and spends his Saturday afternoons starting awkward conversations with unfortunate passers-by.

It works but at a price - the discounts have reduced his margins, the data list costs a fortune and offers rapidly diminishing returns, and the hard sell seems to upset more people than it converts!

Traditional Inbound Marketing

Phil has a friend called Dennis. Dennis owns a dentist surgery that's sat in the middle of a busy high street. Lots of people walk past every day and see a huge sign marked "Dennis's Dentist" (try saying that when you've just had a filling!).

This is no ordinary dentist. When you register you receive a free electric toothbrush, and rather than an old Country Life magazine marked July 1999, the waiting room is packed with 3D TV's, massaging chairs and small robotic animals. As for the service – spot on. Dennis is charming, interesting, and, above all, a bloody good dentist!

Now in theory this all sounds great. Unfortunately, the prime location and memorable experience come at a price and only help on a very local scale. If only there was a way of doing this stuff virtually. Hmmm...

Online Inbound Marketing

Like his buddies Dennis and Phil, Chiro Chris wants to make it on his own but has almost no cash. He has read about online inbound marketing and decides to build himself a website. He immediately registers with Google places and the local enquiries start pouring in.

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Not satisfied with local business, Chris decides to add more quality content in the form of an FAQ section and professional blog. As his content grows so does his traffic and many of the users link to his site from their own (which he has just learnt Google absolutely loves!).

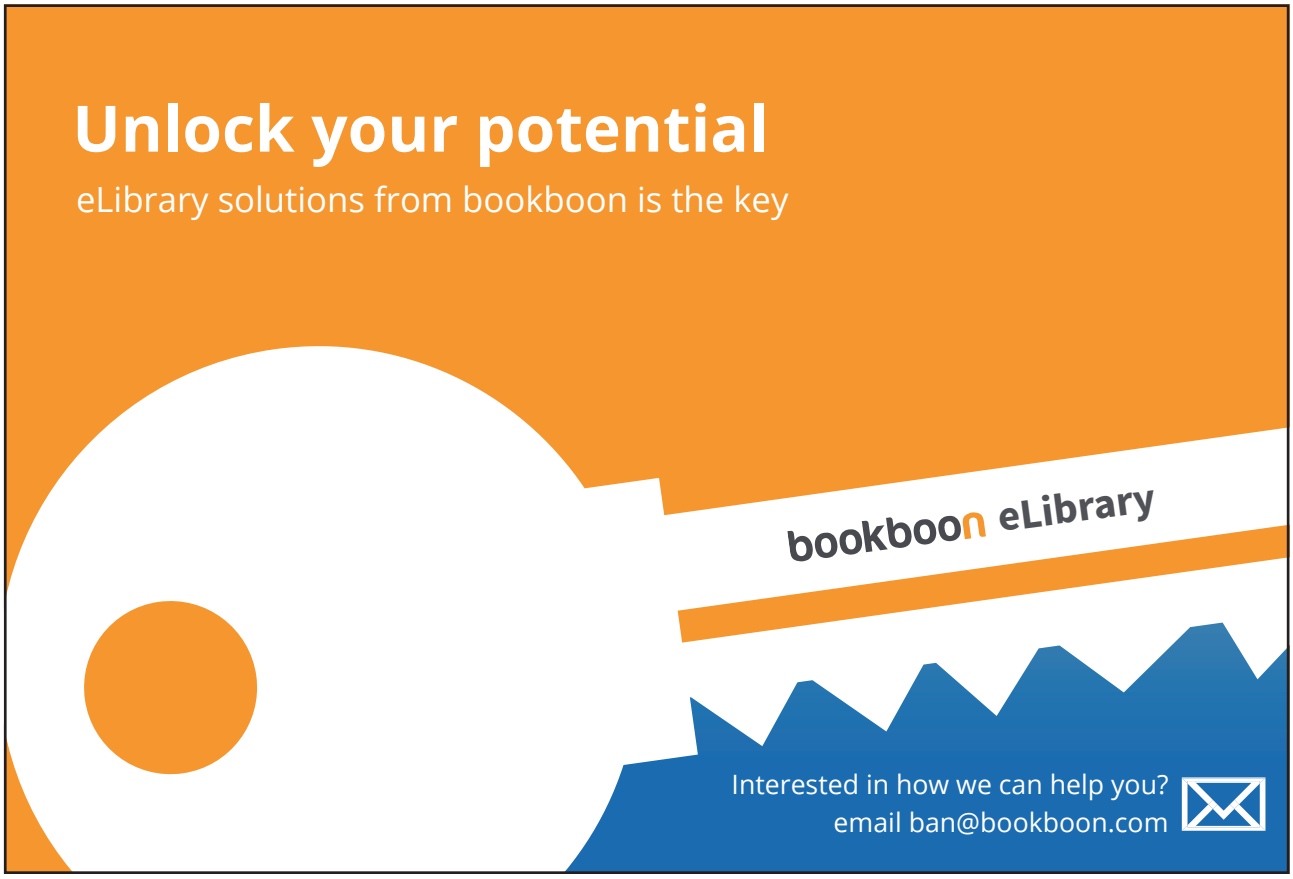
Six months later Chris has another lightbulb moment – many of his clients are young athletes and he has heard how much time youngsters now spend on social networking sites. He sets up a Facebook Fan Page and offers a one off discount to all his clients if they become a fan. Soon it's a vibrant community attracting clients' friends, friends of friends and even friends of friends of friends!

A year down the line Chris has so much traffic that he starts to sell his favourite products online to people all over the world! His business becomes bigger and more efficient than he ever imagined, and all thanks to **online inbound marketing**.

Online inbound marketing – A Quick Breakdown

Online inbound marketing online involves a range of techniques. The most important in 2011 are as follows:

- Branding
- Content Marketing
- Search Engine Optimisation
- Social Media Marketing
- Video Marketing
- Email marketing



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Which are going to be important to you? Probably the lot! They all overlap and it is almost impossible to make the most of one without the others.

Before we move into the detail of inbound marketing there is one final piece of the jigsaw that needs a mention. If inbound marketing is the process of bringing people through the shop door, then you still need a salesman to turn them into paying customers. This online salesman is something we refer to as "Website Conversion Optimisation", and will be our final chapter stage on our inbound marketing journey.

Important Terminology

To keep things simple, we're going to asterix any term that we think you might not be familiar with and then you can pop back here and check out the definition.

- Above the fold – that information that is immediately visible on your screen when you land on a website, without having to scroll down. This is the most important information on your page. Of course it will vary slightly with different size screens.
- Algorithm – the formula that a search engine uses in order to decide on the results it gives you for any search. There are literally hundreds of factors or "signals" that contribute to the formula as the search engine attempts to distinguish the high quality, relevant web pages, from the low quality, irrelevant web pages. Algorithms are updated regularly by search engines as users look for different things in their web experience.
- Anchor text – the text within a link. So if I link the words **click here**, then "click here" is the anchor text.
- Bounce rate – those people that only visit one page of your site. They don't go any deeper either because they found precisely what they were looking for or, more commonly, because what they found was so rubbish they couldn't get away from it quick enough!
- Call to Action (CTA) – a statement that attempts to get users performing a certain action, so "Buy Now!" or "Click here to download our latest brochure".
- CMS – Content Management System – A system that allows non techie's to change text, images, videos and even formatting within a website.
- Conversions – could be anything from a phone call to an email to a download to an online purchase. Whatever it is that you want your customers to do once they are on your site!
- Indexing – Google spends lots of time "crawling" the web trying to find new, useful content. When you add a new page to your site, it will take a bit of time before Google finds it. When that happens and it begins to feature in Google's results, we say that it has been "indexed".
- Infographic – an image designed to illustrate a particular concept or set of statistics. They are most usually included in blogs.
- Landing page – a page from your website that appears in the search engine results. View them as doors into your website; the more you have, the more visitors will come knocking!
- Link bait – content on your website that encourages people to link to it, such as a funny video, an educational info-graphic, a useful tool, etc.
- Link juice – the authority that is passed from one web page to another when a link is added.

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- Meta-descriptions – This is the bit of text that appears in the search engine results page alongside the link to the web page in question. Its purpose is to provide a brief summary of the contents of the page. It will often determine whether or not people click through, so choose your words carefully!
- Plug-ins – software that allows you to "plug-in" to large applications. Very common on websites to allow people to watch video, listen to music and use countless other tools.
- Sales copy – Marketing text written with strong sales language that encourages you to take action towards a purchase.
- Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs) – the page that gives you your results when you enter a search.
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) – the most important acronym on the web. Search Engine Optimisation is the process of ranking higher in the search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing) for the terms that are important for your business.
- URL – the address for a web page, such as www.mywebsite.com/contact-me. Stands for Unique Resource Locator.

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2 Branding

Now this may seem like an odd place to begin our online journey, as branding sounds dangerously like traditional marketing. However, branding (derived from the act of placing a red hot iron onto the backside of a poor cow) is *at least* as important online as it has ever been offline:

- Your website needs a distinctive brand that instantly connects with your target audience
- Your social media presence needs a consistent and transparent brand that allows people to see within the heart of the organisation.
- Even Search Engines recognise the importance of a strong brand. They would rather promote the results of a reputable and trustworthy brand than www.buy-service-online.com. Believe me, they are better at distinguishing the two than you might imagine!

What exactly defines a brand is hard to pin down. It is an abstract concept that means different things to different people. What's critical is that you develop a clear understanding within your organisation as to its personality and values, and then ensure these are apparent both visually (logo, twitter background, email template, etc), and in your actions as you establish your online reputation.

In short, know your business before you sell it!

Branding Actions

- Give your logo a web 2.0 update – you'll notice a lot of logos now have real depth and substance, like you could reach out and touch them. A decent designer should be able to give yours a quick makeover for a couple of hundred bucks. EXAMPLE OF A WEB 1.0 AND 2.0 LOGO.
  http://makrandmane.com/data/images/google-in-2001.png
  http://makrandmane.com/data/images/google-in-2001.png
- Authenticity is everything – One of the less positive results of web 2.0 is that traditional businesses seem intent on showing how wacky and hilarious they are. That's fine if it's real, but if not then it becomes embarrassing. Find your true personality and ensure it is projected across the site. You can't expect to appeal to everyone but visitors will sense it is the real deal and your core audience will respond positively.
    - If you're starting from scratch then get your colours right as they're gonna be everywhere and they mean more than you might think. Take a look for yourself - http://www.seosmarty.com/brand-color/

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3 The website

Since the likes of Facebook and Twitter have come onto the scene, people (including many self proclaimed experts) are now talking about the end of the humble website – it's nonsense. For the foreseeable future your website will continue to be the most valuable asset your business owns.

Think about that for a moment. Your website is the most **valuable** asset you have. I bet you've never thought about it in those terms before. But why not? You use it to sell your products and services. You probably send partners and suppliers there for information about your company. Perhaps you even use it as an online portal through which your staff can interact, store data and organise themselves. It is, in effect, your office and shop combined. It can be as vast as you want and contain just about anything, and yet you're telling me that you've never attached a monetary value to it?!

Well now is the time to start.

You can't polish a ...

If you're a new business then you obviously need to start afresh, but what if you have an existing site? Should you begin all over again or just accept its imperfections and tweak it into shape? Well that really depends on a couple of things:

- Design - how bad we are talking? Look at your competitors sites. I assume that the reason you are reading this is because you want the best online presence in your market. How does yours look compared to theirs? Be honest...
- What does it allow you to do? Nowadays every business needs a solid Content Management System (CMS*). As you will shortly learn, your website is a constant work in progress. You always need to be able to expand and enhance it. Can you add new pages? Can you add images and videos? If your system doesn't allow you to do these basic things yourself then it's time to start again.

Now the more SEO* savvy among you may be thinking "What about the search engines? My existing site has been around for years and developed a high level of authority in the eyes of Google." If so, nice spot! This is a really important point but never fear – a good SEO expert will know exactly what to do to retain as much of this authority as possible.

Bespoke or open source?

Right, I'm guessing there's a good chance these terms might require a little explanation:

- Bespoke websites – You pay a web developer to create your site from absolute scratch. Every last detail will be designed to suit your exact requirements.
- Open source websites – You pay a designer to take an existing CMS and (with a combination of templates and plug-ins*) design a custom skin that appears unique to your brand.

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Now before I begin attacking bespoke options I will concede that there is definitely a place for them. For those organisations that require complex e-commerce solutions, custom tools or high levels of security then unquestionably a bespoke website is appropriate. However, for every one appropriate bespoke website sold by an agency, there are five that are mis-sold. Most businesses get on absolutely fine with open source solutions.

Benefits of an open source website include:

- Cost – they are almost invariably a fraction of the cost of a bespoke site.
- Quality – there is a misconception that open source means you are compromising on quality. The whole point with open source is that communities of experts have collaborated on creating the best possible solutions to universal challenges.
- Plug-ins - as mentioned, your website should be constantly evolving. This means new tools, widgets, designs, etc. These open source communities are constantly releasing new plug-ins that will allow you to build on your website with the click of a button. Sometimes you have to pay a very small amount and other times they are free. To put that in perspective, if you were to have such tools created for you from scratch you could be looking at thousands.

A few open source options include Joomla, WordPress and Drupal. We ourselves use WordPress like it's going out of fashion. In fact 14% of all websites are now WordPress based and consequently the community is huge and full of kind hearted folk offering more support and plug-ins than ever!

That's all you need to know. You are probably never going to design a website yourself, but you need to know that if you have modest website requirements and your designer scoffs at the idea of an open source solution, it's either because he doesn't keep up to speed with online developments or he is trying to squeeze a few more quid out of you. Either way it's time to find a new designer.

Ecommerce

While ecommerce sites are often more complicated (and therefore frequently require a tailored approach), we would still always recommend considering an open source solution. There are some modest WordPress ecommerce plug-ins, but the Rolls Royce of the open source ecommerce world is Magento. The community edition is free of charge and an experienced developer will be able to do just about anything you want.

By using an open source model one of the biggest advantages is that you are not tied into that one developer. Anyone can access the code and make changes, which is critical with an ecommerce site that will continually need updating.

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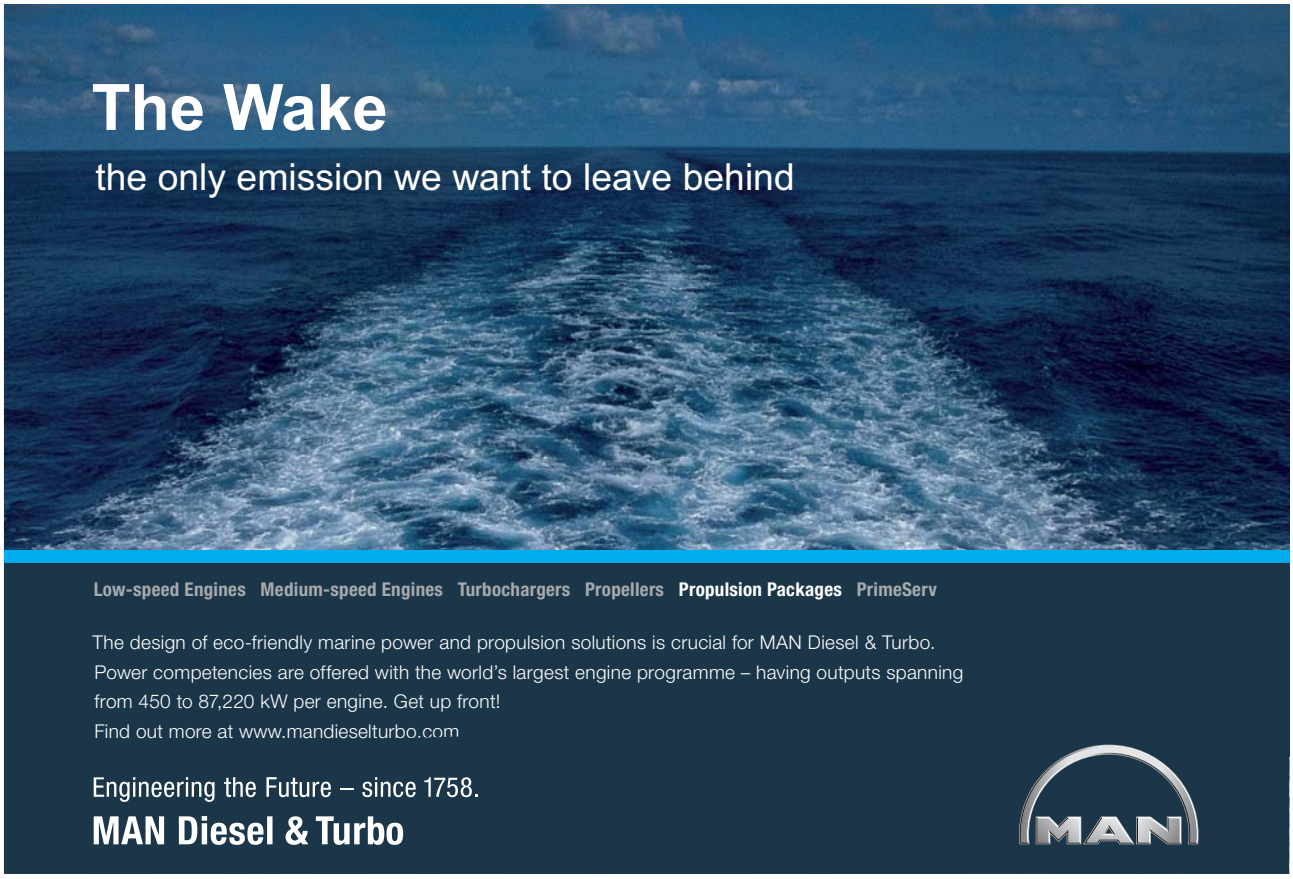
Website Actions

- Decide whether or not you need a new site or whether your existing one can simply be improved. It must have a solid CMS
- If you do decide to have a new site, then find a web designer that can show you examples of some nice, web 2.0 style CMS sites they have created. For a basic site using an open source platform you shouldn't be charged more than a couple of grand. For e-commerce it will probably be more like £3k-£7k. For completely bespoke solutions there is no limit so do your research and get a handful of quotes.

We will be coming back to web design later in the final chapter – Website Conversion Optimisation.



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4 Content Marketing

Content marketing is all about developing unbeatable resources so that people come back time and time again; a bit like Dennis the Dentist who crammed the waiting room with loads of funky stuff to make the visitor experience memorable. The same applies to your website.

Great content includes:

- Resources – high quality written material, useful tools or educational content, such as a video training series.
- Entertainment – funny, thought provoking, controversial – whatever gets people talking!

Why bother with great content?

Well that's easy:

- Happy visitors
- Higher conversion rates
- Lots of return visits
- Social recommendations
- BIG SEO benefits

Most of these speak for themselves, but let's just quickly explain why great content = great SEO:

1. Every new page of content you write can act as a new landing page* in the search engines. So if I have a website with 10 pages, I should theoretically get 10 times the amount of traffic as a site with just 1 page (all else being equal).
2. Happy visitors are likely to link to your resources from their blogs and websites. Google loves links – in fact, as you will see in the SEO chapter, this is one of the most important factors in determining your rankings!
3. Google is now taking into account those factors that it believes reflect a happy user experience – so high click through rates from the search engines, a long time on sie, low bounce rate, social mentions, etc. This is all Google gold.

So never stop creating great content. With every page that is added, your site will become a bigger player on Google and an increasingly valuable asset to your business.

Becoming an authority and going Viral

If you provide important, valuable and *free* resources to visitors on your website, you are likely to become a popular authority, even in very traditional fields. I was chatting to a tax advisor recently who was receiving huge volumes of traffic to his blog. At first he was confused as to the source of all these new visitors, but after conducting some quick research he discovered that a link to his blog had been placed on HMRC!

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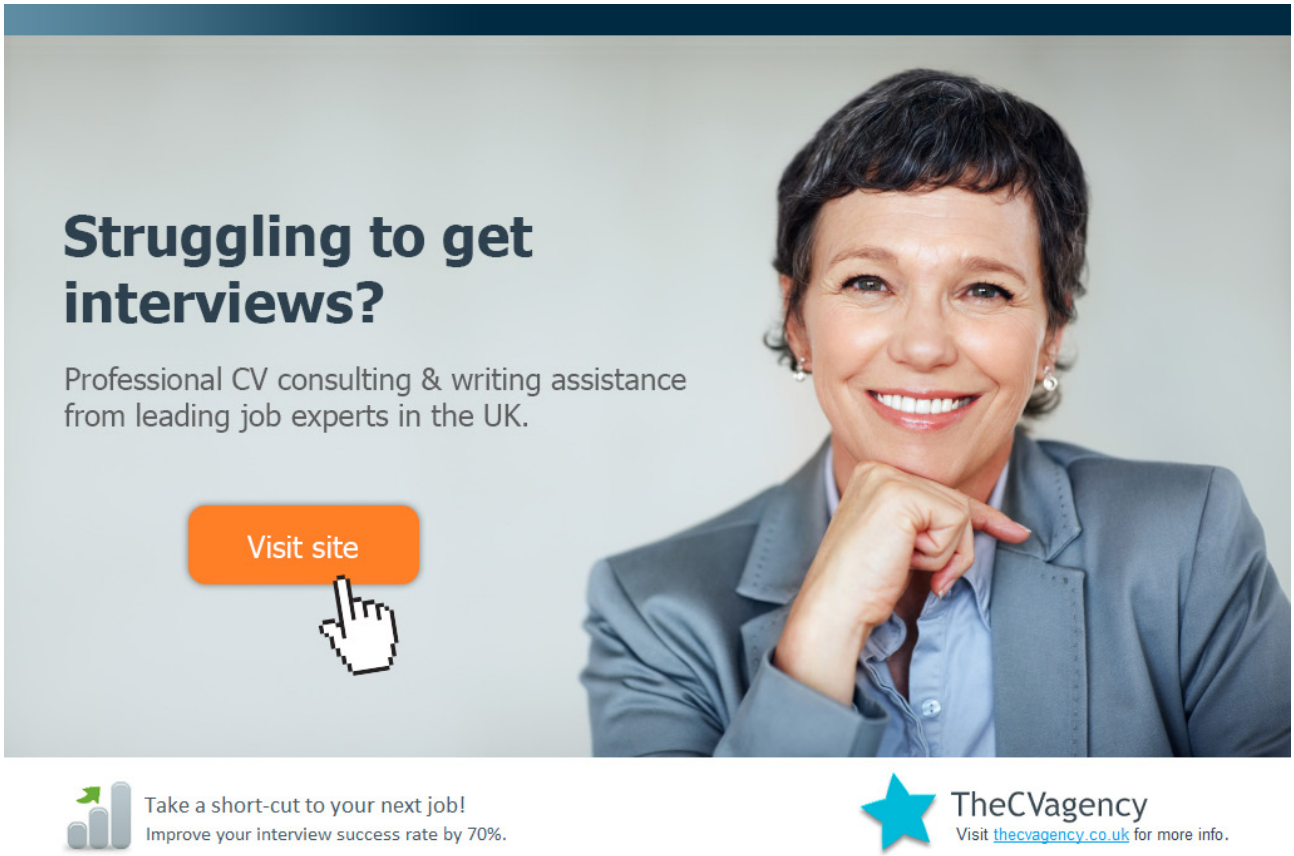
There are lots of things that go viral, most notably video and imagery, but some of the easier wins lie in:

- Guides - free, helpful resources are hugely popular, don't hold back with information
- Breaking news – if something new and exciting happens in your market then you can be damn sure people will soon be searching for it, so get in there early while the buzz is intense and the competition scarce.
- Interesting or funny statistics – why not put a new, quirky twist on some statistics in your industry. If you have any design skills then illustrate the stats in an infographic* to really bring it to life.

Content Marketing Action

- **Decide the best format to add new content to your website**. Should it be a blog, a resource section, FAQ pages, instructional videos? What have you got to offer your market?
- **Create a plan and be realistic**. If you think you can manage one new page a week, plan for one page every fortnight but NEVER miss it. This is all about momentum.
- **Quality not quantity**. Every page must offer something unique. This is NOT about creating content for the sake of content.
- **Write about stuff you enjoy**. It will show.
    - Don't **worry about going viral**. It cannot be forced but if you consistently produce high quality material then sooner or later something will take off.



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5 The Search Engines

I'm guessing there's a good chance you are familiar with SEO but just in case - Search Engine Optimisation is all about ranking at the top of Google, Yahoo, Bing, etc, for terms relating to your products and services.

It is the epitome of inbound marketing. It puts you right in the middle of your market and gives your potential customers an easy and natural way of finding your business. Google is the biggie with a fluctuating but massive market share so I'm afraid we do tend to use it when we actually just mean search engines in general.

Google (oops, just did it) has one priority and that's the user experience (oh, and making bucket loads of cash, obviously – $29,000,000,000 in 2010 to be exact). Their job is to ensure that whenever someone enters a search, the best and most relevant results are returned. Now, being a machine it inevitably has to employ some pretty blunt tools in making these calculations – your business may have the best customer service records in your industry but unfortunately that is not part of Google's algorithm* (yet!). Out of this imperfect scenario came the technique Search Engine Optimisation - the process of ticking the right boxes so that Google gives you the respect you deserve (and then maybe a fraction more!).

First of all, a quick apology – while this chapter is not technical it does get dangerously close. You don't need to understand it all (particularly if you are planning on outsourcing your SEO) so feel free to skim read if you prefer, but this stuff is, in our opinion, the most powerful form of marketing currently on offer, so do your best to get to grips with the basics.

The Benefits of SEO

- **Targeted traffic** – The people that SEO connects you with are those that are actively hunting out your products and services. You will never get hotter leads.
- **Free** – You may have heard of Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising on Google. These are the results that sit to the right and the top of the Search Engine Results Page (SERPs*). These businesses have paid for the privilege of being in that position, where as the organic results down the centre of the page are there purely based on merit and don't pay a penny. Where would you rather be?
- **Credibility** – Most consumers now understand the difference between the paid for listings and the organic results, and consequently they attach a heightened level of credibility to your website if you rank naturally. It's the online equivalent to having a big shiny shop in the centre of a busy high street, even though in reality you could just be one person working out of a bedroom!
- **Developing an asset** – This is the most important point of all. All the work you put into an organic SEO campaign builds and builds and builds. So where as a PPC campaign could one day be switched off and the business would have nothing more to show for it, SEO does not stop when you stop. On the contrary, the website retains its organic value and your business can continue to reap the benefits for years to come!

A game of two halves

SEO is a game – it has rules, competition, uncertainty, drama, winners and sadly, losers. And like most great games, it can be divided into two halves.

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1. **Relevance** – In order to rank for search terms relating to your business, Google needs to know what the hell your business actually does! Makes sense right? And most businesses don't just do one thing, they do lots. And those things are probably called slightly different things by different people, and perhaps you operate in more than one geographical area.... This is an awful lot of information and yet somehow you need the search engines to pick out your website every time someone enters a relevant search term. This relevance has to be built across the website – not just the home page. By adding the right content to each landing page, you can ensure your website is in with a fighting chance of ranking front page for all relevant terms, and there will probably be thousands!
2. **Authority –** Okay, so you've done the above and Google knows that you want to rank for a bunch of terms, but frankly it's not your opinion that matters. Google intends to give the user the BEST result, not YOUR result. You need to make Google believe they are the same thing, and that is achieved through developing authority* for your landing pages and the domain as a whole. Authority is developed through a large and expanding range of techniques, but basically it's all stuff that makes Google think your content is the nuts!

SEO = Relevance + Authority

The Easiest Market Research you ever Saw

The Google Keyword tool

SEO is almost certainly going to be an important part of your campaign, but how important? Are we talking a couple of hours a month or is this going to be your primary route to market? And where should your time be going? Are people searching for product A or are they searching for product B? Finding this all out is a simple process, and by simple I mean it will take you around 30 seconds!

Google has some incredible free online tools to help us uncover all sorts of information about our markets, and the Google 'Keyword Tool' is one of the very best. Even if you've already decided that the nuts and bolts of your SEO are going to be passed over to an SEO expert, you still absolutely need to familiarise yourself with this tool. It is far too important and far too straightforward to ignore – no excuses!

There is no sign up needed. Just go to https://adwords.google.co.uk/select/KeywordToolExternal, enter one or multiple keywords into the box and click search. When you've got your results you'll see a whole bunch of relevant keywords along with the one(s) you entered. Google should have detected your location for you, but if it hasn't click on 'advanced options' and you can change it there. Your results will be default listed as 'broad' searches; these are searches that have the keywords appear in any order. The broad results are fascinating as they give you an idea of the overall market size and include the many slight variations of the term that you entered, but practically speaking the data is of limited value. You want to uncheck 'broad' and check 'exact'.

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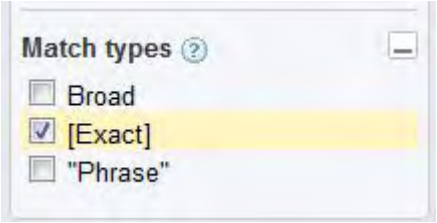

'Local Monthly Searches' are the number of searches made each month within the country you have listed. And 'Global Monthly Searches' are … yep, exactly that! Sometimes monthly searches can be misleading, for example a quick search for the keyword 'John Lewis Sale' tells me that there are 18,100 exact searches every month – a number which is drastically skewed by huge search volumes in the January sales as the monthly search volumes are calculated by Google based on a 12 month average.

Unfortunately and contrary to what you may have thought, we do not have all the answers. As we cannot jump out of this book and take a look at your business, we have no idea how much each potential visitor is worth. Search traffic is really interesting to know, but conversion rates and profit margins need to be taken into account. For example, 'buy diamond earrings' has 58 searches each month in the UK; if you were to rank #1 for that keyword, you can expect about 60%-80% of those searches to click on you depending on the quality of your meta description*. Each sale is probably worth a fair amount, and the keyword is high-value in that these searches are qualified visitors who are looking to *buy*. My point is that it is better to have 58 monthly searches that convert at 10% than 200 monthly searches that convert at 1%, especially if profit margins for the former are higher!

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Facebook Estimated Reach

Facebook Advertising isn't appropriate for everyone, but what *is* appropriate for everyone is the free 'estimated reach' tool. You don't have to create an advert or pay a penny. Just go to http://www.facebook.com/advertising/ and start 'setting up' an advert. Once you get to the second step, you can enter your target audience and 'hey presto!':

Search Trends

If you are concerned that perhaps your products or services might be on the way out, or perhaps you think you're tapping into something new that's about to explode, then check out Google Trends to see the search patterns for the last few years for any given search term.

http://www.google.com/trends

Competition Analysis

So you've checked your market and you can see that lots of people are searching for your products/services. Nice! But unfortunately you're probably not the first person that's ever thought of that. There is going to be an amount of competition, but how easy is it going to be to beat these chumps?! Well there is some serious manual research that the likes of Nicky P would do if he was at the helm, but for us non-techies we need some cheats...

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SEO Quake

If you go to http://www.seoquake.com/ you can install a toolbar for your browser that'll give you a bunch of useful stats. Just go to any web page with SEO Quake activated and it will bring up data for that page. A couple of interesting stats worth noting are the following (these are actually the first two working from the left of the toolbar):

- **PageRank** – PageRank is a concept that was introduced when Google first began ranking webpages. It is the number that Google places on any given webpage to roughly indicate how authoritative that page is. PageRank has a scale of 0 to 10 with 0 being the least authoritative and 10 being the highest. For instance, Facebook has a PageRank of 10 and bbc.co.uk has a PageRank of 9. There are billions of PageRank 0 webpages, yet a handful of PageRank 10. Generally speaking, the higher the PageRank the more value that website has in Google's eyes. Interestingly, PageRank was actually named after the cofounder of Google, Larry Page, and not 'webpage'. Although you'd be right to think that this is a pretty uncoincidental coincidence.
    - **Number of pages indexed by Google** – whether it's for your site or competitors', it's always interesting to know how many pages have been indexed*. As a general rule, a website that continually pushes out large numbers of high quality pages is going to get significantly more traffic than one that does not, so seeing how many pages a site has had indexed so far is a great insight into their strategy.

Mozbar

Earlier we mentioned the website seomoz.org. One of their most useful (and free!) tools is the Mozbar. You can download it from http://www.seomoz.org/seo-toolbar

Again, the Mozbar will give you a range of stats but the two particularly useful to non-techies are:

- **Page Authority** – this is Seomoz's analysis of the authority of a page based on a wide range of measurements. It will give you a good indication of how easily that page will rank for any term that it targets.
    - **Domain Authority** – this is their analysis for the authority of the domain as a whole. This is useful to know as it will give you a better picture of the overall strength of a website and how quickly new pages will rank (a website with high domain authority will find that its new pages quickly inherit high page authority and therefore rank well with minimal further optimisation).

A few manual checks

You also want to pay attention to the titles of the pages that appear in the results – do they exactly match the term you wish to target? If not then that would indicate they are not fully optimised for that term and could well be beaten. Also take a look at the content within the pages. Is it really good quality or are visitors likely to be disappointed and immediately retreat to the SERPs to check out the next result?

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They are the basics. For more thorough competitive analysis, I would recommend checking out - http://www.opensiteexplorer.org/ - another fantastic tool offered by seomoz.org.

SEO in 2011

So we've said that Google's primary concern is to provide the user with the best experience it can. Of course what constitutes "the best experience" and the way that Google calculates this will change from one year to the next. In 2011 you need to be addressing the following.....

On page optimisation

This is the most technical section of the book so let's hurry up and get it out of the way... On page optimisation is stuff that happens on the website itself (as opposed to off page which is doing stuff on other sites, blogs and social media platforms) to improve its rankings.

Domain – The search engines attach great value to the name of your domain, so if you own www.pinkfluffyslippers.com you are going to be at a massive advantage for ranking for the term "pink fluffy slippers". For this reason you often find people developing long ugly domains that match an important search term (www.cheap-widescreen-tv's-for-sale.org.uk). However, the value is slowly being eroded by Google so these exact match domains, particularly spammy domains that are riddled with hyphens, are no longer so powerful for SEO. You're far better off choosing something that you can imagine becoming a real online brand rather than worrying about keywords. After all, Facebook wasn't called social-network.com and Amazon wasn't called books.net. However, if you are looking to pick up a keyword rich domain then just be aware that the SEO value is predominantly in .com's, .co.uk's, .nets, .orgs and .org.uk's.

URL* structure – In the same way that the words in the domain are important for the search engines, so are the words in the URL. If you think people are looking for a certain keyphrase* then if possible ensure it is in the URL, so www.pinkfluffyslippers.com/keyword-keyword-keyword. Just don't make it too long as it ends up looking spammy,impossible for users to type and gets less clicks in the SERPs.

Keyword* density – So you need Google to realise your page is all about pink fluffy slippers, but does that mean you should shoe-horn it into every other sentence? Of course not – that would be horrible for the user and Google knows it. So what is the perfect density (as in the number of times the keywords should appear every hundred words)? Nobody knows the exact answer. In fact there's a strong argument to suggest it is relative to the rest of the market, so if the competition has an average of 2% and yours is 12%, then that probably looks mighty aggressive. In our opinion it's best not to even worry about it. Just write naturally and use lots of synonyms as this will provide a much nicer read for the user but still help build relevance for the target terms.

Tags, titles and elements –These are the things that the search engines read to interpret information on the page. If you are employing an outside SEO agency, you don't need to understand *how* it's done, but you do need to know **it is** being done. Otherwise Google will be staring at an awful lot of blank space!

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On the subject of titles, one thing that you can do yourself if you add content to your site (which you definitely should) is to try and match the titles to what you believe people are searching. This is why FAQ sections can be so powerful for generating traffic – people LOVE asking Google questions! So by having a page entitled "Why are pink fluffy slippers all the rage in 2011?" you will almost certainly rank number 1 for that term. Have a think about your market – are there questions that you think your prospective customers might be asking?

Great user experience – What other factors do you think Google might look for as a sign that visitors are happy? Time on site? Bounce rate*? Return visitor rate? All these are logical signals of the satisfaction of the visitor so think how they can be improved for your website.

Link building

The on page stuff is really useful to help Google understand what your website is all about but for Google to decide where you deserve to rank, it wants to be guided by independent, unbiased signals. The main signal it has traditionally used is links from other web pages and blogs that point to yours. It's a bit like a popularity contest - if lots of links from all over the web are pointing to a particular web page then Google thinks "Cor blimey! This stuff must be really worth seeing!!". The best links are of course those that are **a)** *relevant* and **b)** *authoritative*.

Now this poses something of a problem. We want to influence our authority but the whole reason why Google attaches so much value to links is precisely because they're independent! Nightmare. For nearly a decade the prevailing attitude in the SEO community was one of cynicism – "let's find ways of building dodgy links so that we trick Google into thinking the content is better than it actually is". So people would write huge volumes of long, boring articles that they would post all over the web that included links back to the pages they wanted to rank. Or they'd not even bother with that and simply *buy* links from people that owned large networks. Usually the links from these articles and networks were pretty low quality, so it became a numbers game - generating vast numbers of links in a continual effort to stay one step ahead of the competition.

In the early part of 2011, Google made some huge changes (known as Google Panda) to the algorithm that were aimed at devaluing these manipulative links. For the most part it worked pretty well and SEO experts were made to think again.

But actually, the best SEO experts had been thinking differently for a few years. After all, these cheap links were never going to offer any long term competitive advantage as it was an easy strategy that anyone could adopt. The real question to be asking was "how can we get hold of REALLY high quality links that other people could NOT acquire" – that's competitive advantage!

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Tip top tips for link building:

- **Guest blogging** – Find blogs relating to your market that have a "Guest blogging" section. Usually they will allow you to include a link back to your site if you write a really good quality post for them. We think this is a great tactic. Not only will you see an increase in rankings but if you get on a really nice blog then you may actually be able to generate some nice direct traffic too!
- **Leveraging relationships** – have a think about your market. Is there anyone you know that owns a website that may be able to give you a link? Really good SEO is all about relationships. Something we often do here is to offer our help to charities free of charge in return for a nice link. It's perfect – you're helping a great cause, getting some nice PR exposure, and getting a link from a highly reputable domain! Other easy wins include suppliers, customers and partners.
    - **Link bait** – This is my favourite form of link building as it requires great creativity and, whilst difficult, can attract link after link after link, long into the future. Link baiting is achieved by creating really cool unique content that people just have to share through their own sites and blogs.

So we've talked about the importance of links, but what should actually be contained within the link? This text is known as anchor text* and when it's natural people tend to use the URL or name of the company. However, Google has always used the anchor text as a key signal and therefore SEO's used to think that the best strategy was to always use the precise key phrase in question (known as "exact match anchor text"). So if I were to build a link for the website www.pinkfluffyslippers.com and I want to rank the term "purple comfy slippers" (we're diversifying) then I might have used the anchor text, purple comfy slippers.

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However, it doesn't take a genius to see that a campaign that exclusively attracts exact match anchor text links is unlikely to be natural. Google can see that this is just a crude attempt to game the system, so as with most things in SEO, it is all about mixing it up! So lots of links with the URL, lots with the name of the brand, some with your exact match key phrase and then finally a bunch of synonyms and related terms. Not only will this look natural and therefore avoid penalties, but you are also optimising for the market niche as a whole rather than just a couple of specific terms!

Internal linking

Often SEO experts become fixated on getting their mitts on external links, completely forgetting that the easiest win they will ever have is through linking intelligently within their site itself. After all, Google treats these links in just the same way as external links, so make sure you use them wisely! There are three aspects to this:

- Identify your primary landing pages and link to them from all other relevant pages (again thinking about anchor text). So if you are trying to rank a particular page for a certain term and that term is used on another page, then link through to the page you want to rank. Otherwise you are going to confuse the hell out of the search engines -which one should it be ranking?!
- Don't overdo other links that have no SEO value – of course you need to think about user experience but just be aware of the SEO implications. It always depresses me when I see a new site we've been asked to work on and there are over a hundred links on every page. Maybe it's useful for a user (although I would actually contest that too – users like simplicity) but all the link juice* on that page is being cut up so many times that each link becomes *a lot* less valuable.
    - Linking outwards to other content – A good website SHOULD link outwards. That's precisely what a good resource does and Google knows it! However, make sure the content is relevant and do it in moderation.

Social Media

In the last year or so it has become widely accepted that *social signals* are now an increasingly important part of SEO. In fact, the Google spokesperson, Matt Cutts, has openly admitted that Twitter links have been incorporated into the algorithm, and you can probably expect other social signals to follow suit very shortly (if they haven't already). So if you think that your business operates in a potentially social marketplace, then it's definitely time to introduce these tactics into your campaign.

Google Places

Google Places have taken a big old bite out of the SERPs space over the last couple of years. Of course they are not important for all search queries – just those where location is a factor. But for any small business that is looking for local custom, location is ALWAYS a factor, and therefore Google Places is a seriously big deal. In fact, I would go as far as to say that for a small business looking to tap into the local market, Google Places is probably the single biggest opportunity they have online in 2011.

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Why?

- It's completely free of charge
- It is very user friendly allowing non-techies to manage their places page for themselves
- You don't need a website to have a Places page
- The Places page can be customised to include pictures, video, details about your services and customer testimonials
- Often the conversion rates are fantastic as customers are looking for a local provider

There are certain measures that you can take in order to optimise your Places page for the search engines and ensure it gains maximum exposure. For a start you must ensure you fill in all your categories correctly and accurately (with priority categories featuring first) and Matt Cutts has also stated that positive reviews can boost rankings.

To sign up, go to http://www.google.com/places/

Video SEO

We are going to be talking a lot about the social and user experience benefits of video in the YouTube section later on. However, we want to give it a quick mention now as it is playing an increasingly important role in SEO.

There are two distinct SERPs (Search Engine Results Pages) we need to think about with video SEO. There are the usual SERPs that you see every time you enter a search into Google, Bing, etc, and then the SERPs of YouTube itself. However, the goal of both is the same – to provide the best, most relevant video content for any given search – so we can safely assume that a good practice for one will be a pretty good practice for the other (particularly as Google owns YouTube!).

Tip top tips for video SEO:

- **The title of the video** – in the same way that titles are so important for ranking pages. Think about what people are searching for!
- **Description** – gives you much more text than the title to describe the video in more detail. This is particularly important within the YouTube SERPs as there is so little other information for Google to read.
- **Engagement stats** – views, ratings (thumbs up or down) and comments. YouTube and the search engines use this human input as a signal that the video is worth seeing. It's questionable whether or not they identify certain positive and negative words, but certainly the sheer volume of comments is a good indicator. The number of embeds and social metrics such as tweets, diggs, etc, are all useful signs to both Google and Youtube.
- **Duration** – Neither Google or YouTube like extremes. A few seconds seems odd and too long will probably mean it's boring.
- **Video site maps** – by ensuring your web guy/girl adds a video sitemap to your website you can benefit from users clicking through to your website from Google SERPs. It also allows you to take up more space in the SERPs as your traditional text result is accompanied by a video thumbnail, making it far more prominent.

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- **Transcriptions** – by transcribing your video content onto the web page on which it is posted, you will increase the range of keywords for which you can be found. It is also useful for people with hearing difficulties and those for whom English is their second language. If you want to make it discrete them just stick it in a drop down section and/ below the fold. There are a number of automatic transcription services available but it is always worth editing them before they go live as the quality can be a little hit and miss.
    - **Hosting** - If you believe this video is likely to be so popular that lots of people will embed it into their sites and blogs, then it may be worth hosting it on your website. That way, when they do embed it, you can benefit from a link back to your site rather than to YouTube! The downside is that it will drastically increase your page load time which Google does not appreciate.

The other thing to say is that it is now widely believed within the SEO community that video actually benefits the rankings of web pages themselves. So whether it's a video hosted on your site, or even just a link from a YouTube channel to your website, this is all good news for Google!

Where to source your SEO?

Unless you consider your website your exclusive route to market and have a huge budget to throw at it, we would probably suggest outsourcing your SEO. According to a survey by seomoz.org back in 2010, the average salary for an in-house SEO expert in the UK lies between £23,000 and £32,500 ($37,000-$52,000), where as outsourcing could cost you as little as a few thousand pounds a year. Agencies also have the advantage of having teams of dedicated nerds with vastly ranging skill sets – programmers, designers, social media experts, copy writers, strategists – whatever your website needs to get results!

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Questions to ask an agency/consultant

SEO has made a bad name for itself over the past decade and not without good reason. There have long been an abundance of unscrupulous agencies that can talk a good game but fail to come up with the goods. Here are a few questions to ask in order to ensure you can identify the strong, creative and strategic SEO agencies from the 'black hat', spamming and downright hopeless ones.

1. **Are the search numbers quoted exact or broad?**

Agencies will often try to get clients excited by quoting broad rather than exact figures. As you now know there is a huge difference between the two. If they are sheepish when you ask this question then alarm bells should start to ring.

2. **How would your consultant measure SEO success?**

While keyword rankings are a key indicator of performance, they are more a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. Arguably more important metrics are search traffic numbers and conversions (easily measured on most websites with email submission or ecommerce). If their reporting process does not address these two metrics then I would want to know why.

3. **Does your consultant want *your opinion* on keywords?**

SEO experts are fantastic at generating traffic, but is it the right traffic? At the end of the day they will never understand your business like you do. Make sure your consultant is asking *you* important questions relating to *your* business. What products have converted best in the past? Which services provide the best mark up? Are you focusing on a local or national audience? What area of the market would you like to grow into?

4. **Are there any guarantees and do I have to sign a contract?**

There are perfectly legitimate reasons why you might be asked to sign a contract – often SEO campaigns can be very "front-heavy" and therefore an agency may want protection that you won't get them to do lots of work and then disappear having only paid for a fraction of it – fair enough. However, from your point of view it is always best to know you can walk away if circumstances demand it. As a way of giving you peace of mind some agencies will offer guarantees. If they are the right guarantees then there's nothing to worry about, such as minimum traffic levels or conversions. However, if you find they start to guarantee rankings then run a mile – NOBODY can guarantee rankings in competitive markets, which means they are probably referring to uncompetitive markets that offer no value. You're better off saying "you forget about the contracts and I'll forget about the guarantees. Just do a good honest job and the relationship will flourish!"

The head of Google's Web Spam team, Matt Cutts addresses the issue of 'guaranteed' rankings in this video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6zGjcf6Snw

Measuring SEO success

The facts are in the figures, and the figures are available for all to see – you just need to know where to look.

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Google Analytics

Forget about SEO for a second, Google Analytics is an absolute necessity for anyone with a website. It will provide you with all the information you need to understand not only the volumes and kind of people that are finding your website, but also what exactly they *think* of your website. How long do they stick around? What proportion immediately say "hell no!" and bounce back out to the SERPs. Where are these people coming from in terms of geography and how many are returning in the future and becoming loyal followers? With Google Analytics you can measure all this and, most importantly of all, the conversion rates.

Go to google.com/analytics if you haven't already got this set up. It's a quick process but does require some access to the backend of the website so have your techie look at it if necessary. We will come back to this in more detail in the conversion chapter.

SEO Action

- **The basics** - Familiarise yourself with the very basics of SEO (relevance and authority) and understand why new technologies such as social media and online video are playing an increasingly greater role.
- **Market research** - Identify the search volume in your market. How many people are searching for your products and services?
- **Delivery** - Decide who is going to be delivering the campaign. If you work with an agency or a free lancer then prepare some tough questions. If they come unstuck (and believe me, many will) then move on.
- **Develop an asset and future proofing** - Ensure whoever takes the reins is aware of both short term and long term goals. You should see some positive movement in traffic and rankings within 1-3 months but also signs that they are enhancing the quality of the site in a way that will set you apart from the competition in years to come.

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6 Social Media

Those websites that are full of user generated content, be it text, image, audio or video.

Social Media is one of the biggest things to hit business in the last ten years. Strictly speaking it had been around a lot longer than that, with non-technical users being able to contribute to all sorts of online forums in the 90's. However, it wasn't until web 2.0 enabled users to publish more exciting material, such as images, music and video, that it really took off with the masses. And *boy* did it take off with the masses!

It took businesses a little while to respond (and many still haven't) but in the last few years it has opened up a whole new area of marketing. Businesses of all shapes and sizes are using both these social platforms to engage with their audience in a totally different way to they ever did in the 20th century.

However, as with most new developments there is a down side. Social media is a GIANT black hole for time if managed carelessly. This chapter is designed to help you benefit from the many opportunities available in a targeted and strategic way so that you don't starve your business of resources in the process.

For each platform we will identify the benefits to be achieved, kind of business that should give it a go and the necessary steps to put the wheels in motion...

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Social Bookmarking Sites

Share the love

Social Bookmarking is the act of storing and organising online resources, such as web pages, blogs and videos, so they can be shared amongst an online community.

Examples

There are literally hundreds but here are a few of the biggies:

- Digg.com – popular web pages are "dugg" by approving viewers to increasing their rating and exposure in Digg.com. Those with the most diggs rank at the top for the category in question.
- Delicious.com – people store and share their tastiest web bookmarks.
- Alltop.com – headlines from the most popular blogs and websites on the net are sectioned into categories for easy retrieval by busy browsers.
- Stumbleupon.com – a "discovery engine" that allows you to stumble upon popular web content based on your search preferences.

For who

- Everyone

Benefits

- If you're going to publish great information online, then you need to know where to find the great information that already exists. Social bookmarking sites are designed for exactly that.
    - Once your blogging wheels are turning you may decide to use these social bookmarking sites as a powerful source of global viral traffic. However, don't try it every time. This needs to be saved for that extra special post – the one that contains that piece of information you know the web will go crazy for! Then encourage your colleagues and friends to get bookmarking, digging, stumbling, etc...

Social Bookmarking Action

- Spend five to ten minutes at the start of each day running through a couple of social bookmarking sites. Enter your preferences and see what exciting developments are happening in your industry. It will give you loads of great ammo for publishing later that day via Twitter and your blog.

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Blogging

Where it all begins

Blog is derived from the term "web log".

It is an online journal with a series of posts written in the style appropriate to the target audience.

According to Blogpulse.com, there are now over 166 million active blogs online. Many of these are authored by nutcases that feel compelled to share their every inane and disturbing thought with the world, but increasingly organisations (both profit and non-profit) are capitalising on blogs as a route to market.

For who

- Everyone

Benefits

Blogging, for me, is where your social media activity should begin. It is the most universally beneficial of all forms of social media, will provide you with a crash course in the fundamentals of internet marketing and impact the way you do just about everything else online. More specifically:

- **Content is king** – You've already learnt all about the importance of this in the Content Marketing and SEO sections. Well this all applies to the blog just as it does to the rest of the website. In fact, about 70% of our website traffic comes through our blogs!
- **Link bait** – Blogs are very linkable – they provide regularly updated content and combine information with personality. A cracking combo for attracting links.
- **Personality** – A blog is the perfect vehicle for conveying not only the personality of the business but also the personalities of the individuals that make up that business. If you check out www.smemarketing.com/blogs you will see how we've taken this to the extreme. Each blog has a design, style and tone that is unique to the person behind it.
- **Expertise** – this is kinda boring but soooo important! The process of sitting down, putting finger to keyboard and producing content that you are happy to have the world to see will force you to become more informed, more interesting, more expert!
    - **Other social media platforms** – there is an awful lot of empty noise on Twitter, Facebook, etc. If you consistently blog about the exciting, groundbreaking or just plain ridiculous things that are happening in your industry, you will become part of the minority that actually have something to say worth hearing!

WordPress blogs

WordPress is the most popular blogging software online (in addition to also accounting for 14% of all websites!) and for good reason. If you are getting started with your first WordPress blog then visit http://wordpress.org/download/ where you can find a full installation guide that will walk you through the process. Have a crack in order to familiarise yourself with the basics but at some point you'll probably have to pass it over to your web developer/designer to give it a polished and professional look.

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Tip top tips for blogging

Sorry, there are far too many pointers here, I know. We just really love our blogging!

- **Ensure your blog lives on your site** – By incorporating your blog into your site rather than using an external platform like tumblr, blogger or WordPress.com, you will not only benefit from the direct traffic but also any links pointing to the blog. To clarify, this means having your blog on mysite.com/blog rather than mysiteblog.com.
- **Unique** – When you blog about top stories, be aware that you are just one of thousands. You need to make yours stand out. Decide on a USP and play to it! If you check out mine (http://www.smemarketing.com/author/dan) you'll see mine is a traditional business take on internet marketing as I embrace my technical inadequacies.
- **Guest blogging** – If there is someone in your industry that is considered a bit of a guru, why not ask if they would like to post of your blog? It will flatter their ego, help develop a relationship and make your blog more interesting. Likewise ask other prominent bloggers in your market if they would like you to guest blog on theirs. Just make sure they agree to you sticking a link on the post back to yours for that magic link juice!
- **Use images and videos** – blogs are great for conveying personality but only if they *have* personality to convey! You need lots of stuff going on - links to external resources, funny images, thought provoking videos, strong Calls To Action*. There are tons of great images and videos (think Flickr and YouTube) in the public domain, so make full use of it!

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- **Keep it real** – talk using language the reader can understand and never over-sell yourself. Real experts don't have to.
- **Learn very basic HTML** – you don't need to understand HTML to blog but by getting to grips with the 10-20 most basic commands you will be able to really bring your posts to life. Seriously, it's well worth doing and easier than you think. Have a play with it here - http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_primary.asp
- **Speed** – When something big is going on in your industry, you need to get your piece of the action while it's hot. The days where our blogs have hit peak traffic has been when we've spotted an exciting development in internet marketing and thrown a blog post up within minutes to cater for the thousands of people that will be making related searches that day.
- **Internal linking** –when you blog you want to ensure there are links in your post that encourage people to navigate to other pages on your site so they don't just bounce back to the SERPs!
- **Measure, measure, measure** – as with your website, you need to keep an eye on your Google Analytics. How many new visitors are you getting each day? Which posts are attracting the most traffic? Why might that be and can you write more information around the subject? What is the bounce rate and what can you do to reduce it?
- **Comments** – when you first start it is probably best to disable the comments functionality, as blogs *with* comment boxes but *without* comments look a little sad. However, once your traffic is more respectable then definitely allow them. Just make sure you always respond. For quiet patches why not encourage friends and family to read your blog and comment. People hate being the first so this can really help build momentum.
    - **Write title tags with searchers in mind** – the single most important factor in determining the ability of your post to generate traffic from the Search Engines will be its title, so think about what your target audience is likely to be searching!

Each post you write may only get an average of 10 visitors a month, but if you write one a week then in one year your blog content will be bringing an additional (thinks for a moment) 520 unique visitors every month! Get a couple of colleagues on the case too and within a couple of years you're going to have more traffic than you know what to do with!!

Blogging Actions

- Set up a WordPress blog and incorporate it into your website. You can either have a blog specific style or keep it consistent with the rest of the site.
- Use the great instructional videos at WordPress TV to help you get to grips with the basics - http://wordpress.tv/category/how-to/
    - Be realistic with how often you think you will blog because this is all about momentum. If you go crazy for two months and then slow right down (as most do) it will look like you've lost interest. And if you're not interested then why should anyone else be?! If you think you can do it once a week, commit to once a fortnight and then never miss a date.

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YouTube and online video

The camera really is your friend

YouTube is the worlds' largest online video platform, through which users can view, upload and share video content, free of charge. It is owned by Google.

Whilst technically a search engine (the second largest after Google for that matter!), YouTube is usually referred to as part of the social spectrum, and yet it's most common benefit to business is the way it can breathe life into a website. In short, it just makes everything that little bit better.

For who

- Everyone

Benefits

- **Authenticity** - YouTube is all about real content from real people. This authenticity is critical to your social presence and these online videos will do a better job of communicating your personality than any written word or image.
- **Spread it far and wide** - When you've published the video on YouTube, why not incorporate it into your Facebook Fan Page, LinkedIn profile and blog? Embedding a YouTube video onto your website or blog is just a simple copy and paste.
    - **Video to enhance the website** - You will notice that often when you make searches on Google they show videos at the top of the results. The only reason Google and the other search engines give the videos such prominence is because they believe users value video content highly. They are not wrong. If you present someone with a block of text and a video, both with essentially the same content, the vast majority of users will opt for the video every time!

Tip Top Tips for creating video

- **Camera** – If you really want to keep costs down then you can begin with your webcam, but for just £100 you can pick up a Flip HD and for another £20 you can have a tripod. The other thing you may want to consider is screen capture. This allows you to record what is on your screen, similar to how 'print screen' takes a picture snapshot, screen capture takes a video! Camtasia is good but pricey. I'd suggest starting with a free trial on Jing at http://www.techsmith.com/download/jing/
- **Editing software** - There is a lot of great editing software out there but if you're counting the pennies I'd suggest starting with Windows Movie Maker.
- **Hosting** – We already mentioned the SEO benefits of hosting on your site. It can also look more professional than having a third party logo. The downside is that it takes up valuable space, can greatly increase the load time of the page (the time it takes for all the content to appear) and can be a little awkward depending on the structure of your website coding. Embedding from YouTube on the other hand is easy peasy, the load time of your web page is not affected and it won't cost you a penny!

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YouTube Actions

- Embedding – learn how to embed video from YouTube. This is going to be really important for your blog. Just click on the "Share" button under the video, then click the "embed" button and you'll see the embed code appear. Copy and paste this into the html box of your blog and you've just successfully published your first online video!
- Get kitted out – Buy a Flip HD and a tripod, and download Windows Movie Maker. The first shoot may take half a day's messing about but you might just surprise yourself with the end result!

LinkedIn

Facebook for Business

LinkedIn is a networking platform through which professionals can connect and collaborate.

Despite being the most obviously business orientated of all the social media platforms, LinkedIn is actually the least powerful in terms of its ability to nurture business relationships. Why? Because for the most part business ***isn't*** conducted in a board room. It's conducted down the pub over a beer or in the cafe over a latte. By pandering to the formal stereotypes of business, LinkedIn misses out on the true social dimension of business. In short, LinkedIn is social media at its *least* social.

Now I don't want you thinking I'm getting negative about LinkedIn. In fact I bloody love it, because let's be honest for a second – all this being social can get a bit much can't it? Endless status updates and tweeting and blog commenting and pretending to care..... I mean *genuinely* caring about what the other person has to say – being that nice is exhausting!

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And this is where, for me, LinkedIn is a bit special. While it's a full web 2.0 experience and almost entirely user generated, you don't feel like you constantly have to keep up appearances. You can simply set and forget. You spend a few hours populating it with content, get your numbers up past 100 so you feel all connected and important, add a few videos to stand out from the masses and then let it passively work its magic.

LinkedIn is a sleeper. I used to answer questions and be a bit of an all round try-hard but now I just let it be, and yet when I check my Google Analytics it is always up there as one of the top sources for referral traffic.

For who

- Business to Business professionals (so lawyers, accountants, marketing companies, HR, web developers, etc).

LinkedIn Personal Profiles

Your LinkedIn personal profile is the page dedicated to you, the professional.

Tip Top Tips for your personal profile

- **Less is more** - The less you write, the more it will be read. Think of your strongest points and leave it there.
- **Stand out from the crowd** - Very few people bother to use slideshows or video, despite the fact it'll make your profile sooooo much more interesting. The Behance video application is very easy to use and it really brings the page to life - http://learn.linkedin.com/apps/behance/
- **Let others do your selling for you** – As in the offline world, there is nothing more powerful than a strong recommendation from an objective third party. Recommend those you are connected to that you feel deserve it and more often than not they will return the favour.
- **Get your numbers up** – how aggressive you want to be is your call but ultimately the more contacts you have the more exposure you will gain. If you want to limit it to those that you know well offline that is fine (and personally my preference) but be sure to import your email contacts as well as add your details to both your email signature and your business cards. If you want to take it a step further, why not become a LION (LinkedIn Open Networker) and connect with other members of the pride.

LinkedIn Company Profiles

Admittedly the benefits from a sales and marketing perspective are currently very modest, but the CEO of LinkedIn, Jeff Weiner, has suggested that this will be changing in the near future, so it's worth being one of the early adopters now and getting ahead of the game.

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Tip Top Tips for your company profile

- **First things first** - ensure you and your team all have fully completed personal profiles.
- **Calls to action** –It's no use just having people idly browse your company profile – you need them to take action! Ensure there are strong CTA's throughout the services section.
- **Video and images** – the functionality is limited so make sure you use the small amount available. You can embed video in the services section (customer testimonials are generally best) and ensure each service has a nice unique image.

Look, let's be honest, this isn't about to make or break your business. The functionality is kinda lame but for that very reason there's really no excuse not to spend the 20 minutes required getting it right.

LinkedIn Groups

Much like traditional forums, LinkedIn groups are areas where people with similar interests can come together and discuss/share ideas. These are mini communities saturated with industry experts, so there are lots of valuable lessons to be learned and connections to be made!

Tip Top Tips for groups

- **Get help** – if there is a particular topic you would like expert opinion on, then why not start a new topic? You'll be amazed at just how keen other people are to show off their expertise and knowledge (and it's a lot cheaper than paying for it!).
- **Promote your blog** – if you write a blog you can actually promote it as a new topic via your group as a nice source of additional and very targeted traffic!
- **Network** – if you chat with someone via a group and think they could be a useful contact then connect up your personal profiles.
- **Post job vacancies** – if you have a job vacancy then why not post it up on the job board within your groups. It's likely to be the ideal target audience in terms of skill-set.
    - **Start a group of your own** – not only is ownership of a vibrant group a nice accolade but you can also email group members directly, which as the group expands can become an enormously valuable marketing tool! However, if you do start a group of your own just don't make the mistake of naming it after your company! It needs to be something neutral and descriptive.

LinkedIn Answers

LinkedIn Answers is a forum for asking questions on anything business related. The answers are provided by other members of LinkedIn that have expertise within the subject in question. There are two sides:

- **Help** – By answering questions you can make new connections and if you impress then you can be awarded with the "Best Answer" badge that'll show on your profile.
    - **Be helped** –Just ask a question and watch eager experts battle it out trying to get the best answer badge. Why wouldn't you use this?!

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LinkedIn Actions

- **Set and forget** - If you are a traditional B2B organisation then you definitely belong on LinkedIn, even if it is just a question of setting up a decent profile and letting others connect. It will take you about an hour to do a solid job.
    - **Additional source of leads** - To take full advantage of LinkedIn as a lead generator you'll need to be a bit more proactive, connecting with anyone whose business card you collect through offline networking and adding slideshows and video to your profile so that you really stand out.

Twitter

"Too many tweets make a twat" - David Cameron

Twitter is a microblogging service through which users can chat to any other user with short, SMS style messages

Twitter is probably the most social of the social networks. You are not limited to friends or connections; you can tweet to anyone. And good etiquette - helping others out and thanking those that help you - is the very foundation of Twitter. It is little surprise, therefore, that as a couple of social halfwits, we're bloody hopeless at it!

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Oh it isn't through lack of trying, but social media is as much about finding the right platform for your personality as it is about finding the right platform for your business, and in the real world we're that awkward bastard that walks into a networking event, heads straight for the food table and then stands in the corner staring at his blackberry pretending to send emails. So we keep up appearances (a bit) and have impressive looking backgrounds, but between you and me, we're a waste of Twitter space.

HOWEVER, "do as I say not as I do" as the saying goes. Twitter, honestly, is brilliant. We know more businesses, particularly SME's, that successfully drive business through Twitter than ANY other social media platform, and if you have even an ounce of social ability, then you can too!

For

Those that enjoy a good virtual chinwag with anyone and everyone

Benefits

- Develop new relationships
- Increase traffic to the website
    - Gain brand exposure amongst your target audience (Twitter is the second most populated social network after Facebook)

Twitter Tip Top Tips

Okay, following my intro we're probably the last people you feel you should be taking Twitter advice from, but we do understand this stuff and work with loads of people who live their lives (both personal and professional) through Twitter. Here are a few of the things that they do to make the most of it:

- **Keep it personal** – people want to connect with real people with real faces, so unless you're a charity or popular brand with an extremely loyal following then personalise your Twitter and deal with people authentically.
- **Branding** – I'm doing a very slight U-turn here. Do keep it personal but ultimately this is about you representing your business, so brand your background (including your other contact and social media details/icons) and make sure it looks professional.
- **Create a targeted following** – have a strategy. Who is your target audience within Twitter and are they following you? If they are then are you making an effort to forge a relationship with them?
- **Metrics** – Use bit.ly.com to measure the number of times links on your tweets are clicked. You also need a basic system for recording those relationships that started/developed on Twitter and went on to lead to cold, hard cash. Even a simple Excel spreadsheet will do it. Your time is a cost and you need some way of tracking the return.
- **Don't miss a day** – in the early stages it's all about building momentum. Don't slack.

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- **Third party applications** - Experiment with Tweetdeck and other apps. Believe me, they will make your Twitter life soooo much easier. For example, I have around 1000 followers (god knows how) and I'm following about the same. There is absolutely no way I can listen to all that noise, but by using Tweetdeck I can check it once a day and immediately see what my "primary tweeters" (in other words those people I actually know and care about) have been tweeting.
- **Tweet on the move!** – All smart phones have great applications now that make social media management more efficient than ever. Download a Twitter app and, as much as possible, try to restrict your tweeting to those occasions where you've nothing else to be getting on with.
    - **Combine with your blog** – the next time you find yourself about to send out a tweet with a link to an interesting article somewhere on the web, stop! For the 10 minutes it would take you to write a 100 word summary of the topic with your spin on things, wouldn't you rather your website got the traffic instead?

Twitter Action

- Twitter has the potential to benefit just about any business. It really just boils down to personality. So give it a go for a month (without missing a day!) and if you don't enjoy it then you never will, so stop. You're time will be better spent elsewhere.

Flickr

Helping you look good online

A free image hosting service owned by Yahoo.

Flickr is a bit like YouTube but for photos. Happy snappers everywhere use it to store their images before sharing them with the world.

Benefits

- While Flickr links are no-follow* you can ask that people who use your images credit you with a link. Okay, it's going to be impossible to enforce, but generally people are pretty happy to give credit where it's due so if you put images up frequently it could end up having a really nice impact on your SEO!
- Arguably even the no-follow links can have a positive SEO benefit as they act as a social signal to Google that your site is busy offering great content to the web.
    - There are so many images floating around online that it can be tempting to just copy and paste without a moments' thought for the legal implications. In the long term it is worth erring on the side of caution and acquiring images from legitimate sources, of which Flickr is probably the biggest!

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Flickr Action

- **Social** - If you have a very photo heavy web presence then you can definitely make use of Flickr as an additional arm to your social media activity.
- **Free images** - If, like the vast majority, you are more concerned with finding great photos than supplying them, use it for adding a bit of colour to your blog and website – just remember to give credit!

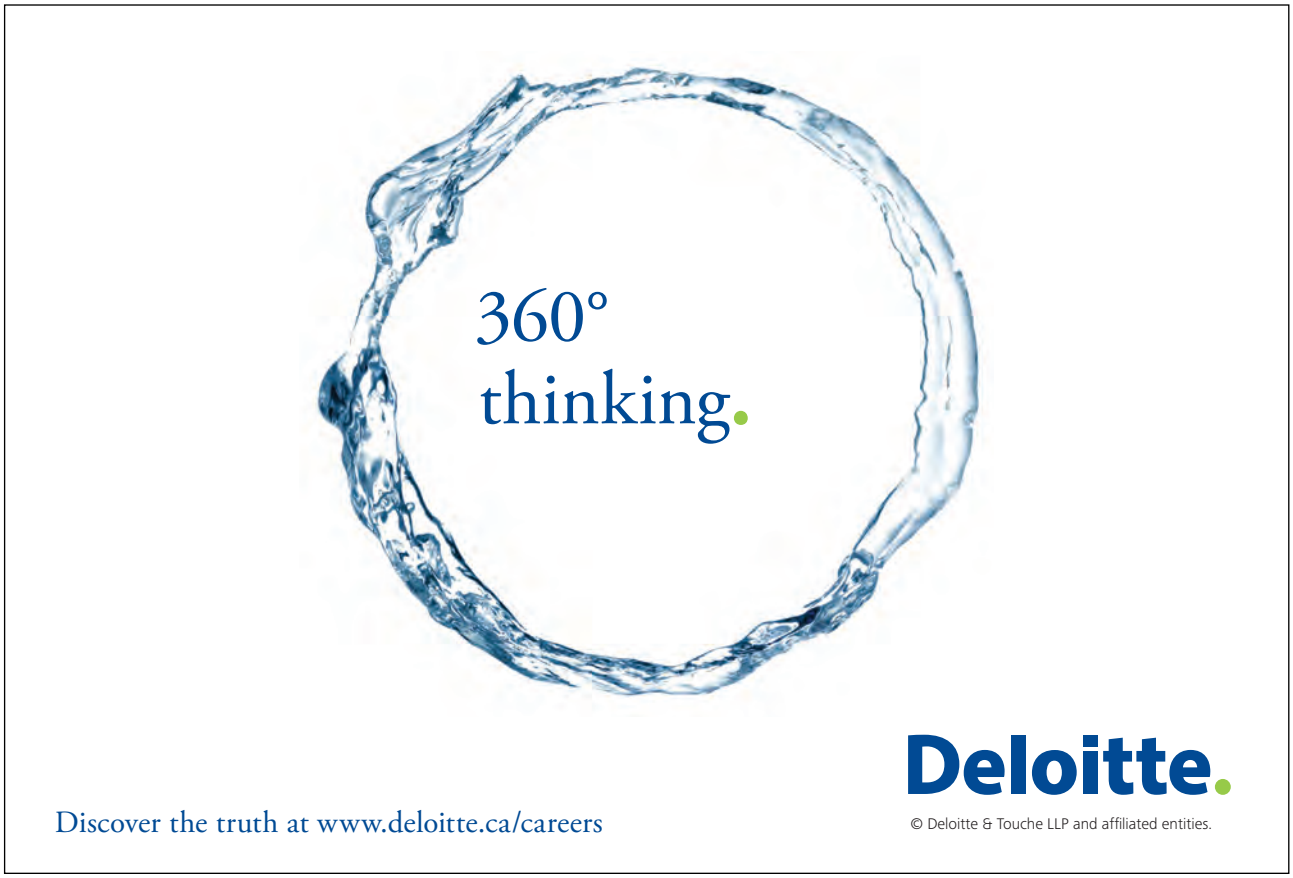
Facebook

I'm kind of a big deal...

Facebook is the worlds' largest social network where friends hang out, share images and videos, discuss their interests and organise their social lives.

Facebook is a funny one. It's the first thing people think of when they hear the words "social media", and yet for business it's the last thing I usually recommend. Here's why:

- Most businesses exploring social media tend to be B2B (business to business) rather than B2C (business to consumer). Facebook is full of consumers but not many businesses.
- Facebook is where people go to be entertained and socialise. Fail to fit into either of these categories and you won't fit in at all!
- Even if you are able to engage with people successfully on Facebook by being both social and entertaining, how do you then turn them into customers? After all, they're not there to shop!



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But, in the interest of presenting a balanced argument, here are a few reasons why you DEFINITELY shouldn't dismiss it:

- There are about 750 million active Facebook users, 50% of whom log onto Facebook on any given day.
- Through their targeted PPC* advertising, you are able to home in on your perfect demographic in incredible detail. If your target audience is single women between 25-30 that live in Hull and harbour an interest in medieval jousting, Facebook PPC was made for you!
- If you are B2C and able to entertain and socialise *whilst* building commercial relationships with new clients, then you have probably found your most powerful route to market EVER! Seriously, we've worked with several lucky companies that fall into this category, and it soon becomes absolutely integral to their business (one even abandoned their website!).

For who

Facebook is a big deal for those organisations that tick the right boxes. The trouble is that these box tickers are few and very far between. Here are a few examples:

- **Large B2C brands with strong consumer loyalty** – companies like Coke, Red Bull, MTV, Disney, Starbucks and many other large B2C brands that have traditionally benefitted from strong relationships with their clients. These represent the largest fan bases on Facebook.
- **Charities** – People connect emotionally with charitable organisations and are often very keen to broadcast their belief in a particular cause. The Breast Cancer Awareness and The Breast Cancer Site fan pages, for example, have over 4 million fans between them.
    - **Small B2C companies with a strong front-man/woman** – sure, they may not have the deep pockets of the big brands, but what they do have is remarkably close personal relationships with their Facebook network. As long as the individual representing the brand is able to approach it with a commercial mindset whilst maintaining these personal relationships, then it's a dynamite formula.

So if you feel you could fall into one of the above then read on....

Personal Profiles, Groups or Fan Pages?

- **Personal profile** – the page dedicated to you, the individual. This is where 95% of activity takes place.
- **Group** – an area for members to share ideas and thoughts on a particular topic/interest.
- **Fan Page** – a page dedicated to the fans of a particular cause/organisation/brand.

So which should you choose? Well they each have their pros and cons but in almost all circumstances I would suggest a Fan Page. It is the only one actually designed with marketing in mind. The others are for more personal, intimate purposes, which does offer the advantage of being able to message people directly into their inboxes, but this is quite a spammy technique and far outweighed (in my opinion) by the superior functionality offered by a Fan Page - videos, email capture, music, games - even shops!

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Tip top tips for Facebook Fan Pages

This is the important bit. You've decided you need a Fan Page, but just having one isn't going to help your business. You need a clear strategy for both engagement with fans and then turning that engagement into cash. Here are some tips:

- **Incentivise likes** – by hiding content to non-fans you can twist peoples' arms into hitting the "like" button. This could be a discount voucher, entry into a prize-draw or practical/instructional content of some sort.
- **Be creative** - If you do offer prizes or discounts then why not request that people claim these via the wall? It will encourage conversation and expose the wall to their friends. On a landing page that we recently created for a fashion company, they advertised a competition but you had to click "like" before you could enter. After that they would announce the winner via the wall giving people a reason to come back time and time again to see if they were the lucky winner. Worked a treat!
- **Use status updates sparingly** – unlike the world of Twitter where it often seems the more inane and frequent your comments the more powerful you become, Facebook fans will not be so tolerant. Every time you update your status you are invading their personal space. Pointless, boring updates will soon result in "unlikes". The best updates are short, interesting (funny, emotional or a bit controversial) and encourage user participation.
- **Spread the like button far and wide** – the more exposure your "like" button gets, the more fans you will attract. Blog pages are particularly effective.
    - **Learn from the stats** – Facebook Insights is like a watered down version of Google Analytics. It will tell you the number of views, new fans, unlikes, etc. When you get up to decent numbers this information is fascinating. We started a fan page for Christmas Carols in December and hit 20,000 in three weeks. Every time we posted an update the activity would surge. We would see lots of comments, new likes and even images posted (particularly when we started "the best Christmas tree" competition!).Then Christmas passed and the fan base more or less plateaued out. At Easter Nick, being the friendly chap that he is, posted a "Happy Easter" message in five different languages. It bombed - 200 "unlikes" in 30 minutes! Painful but valuable data.

Facebook Actions

- **B2C or B2B**? - Decide if it is appropriate for your business.
- **Choose your weapon** – Select a Fan Page, group or personal profile depending on your objectives. 90% of the time a fan page is best.
- **Customise** - Design a bespoke tab for your fan page that offers something unique and incentivises people to become fans through hidden content.
    - **Quality not quantity** – you need a steady flow of updates (at least one a week) but the message has to be spot on. You won't get second chances.

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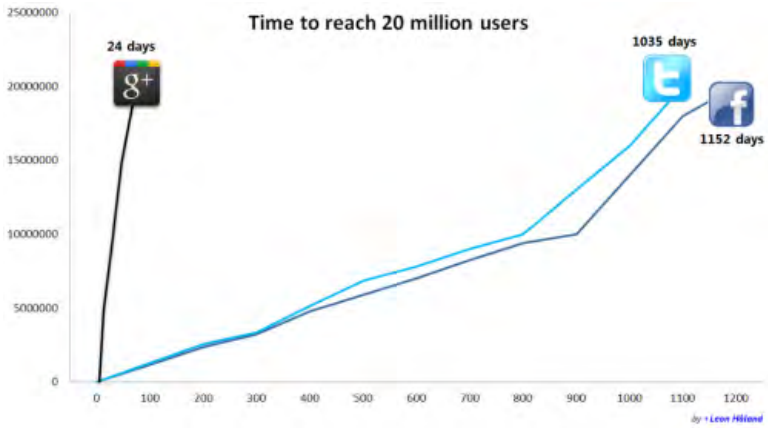
A few smaller ones worth a mention

Google+

Google plus Facebook plus Twitter

The most interesting development of 2011 has definitely got a lot to offer. After inviting only a select group of people (10,000,000!), Google+ has become the fastest growing network of all time (however that growth was definitely aided by Facebook and Twitter).



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But what is Google+, where is it going, and how can it help your business, if at all?

Google+ has cleverly combined the two most popular social networks, Twitter and Facebook into a tool that brings sharing, following and discussing content together seamlessly. Unlike Facebook, you can follow other users without needing to be friends. And unlike Twitter you can share content without getting lost in the abyss (thanks to a sophisticated filtering system).

If you are blogging (which you should be after this!), Google+ is a great tool to add weight to your search results. For all the posts that you write, you can display your profile alongside your search result. This increases the likelihood of click throughs but more importantly, your face will pop up whenever your search result does – a great way to strengthen your online reputation in the industry!

These new areas are just the beginning of a very exciting development. Google+ is likely to impact social, search and just about everything else that you do on the web in a way that only Google can.

FourSquare

Not for squares

FourSquare is one of the newest and most exciting forms of social media - Location Based Social Networking. Don't worry, it's less confusing than it sounds. Basically it's a network through which users "check in" to physical locations (restaurants, shops, museums, cinemas) in order to let their friends know where they are. They can also be eligible for a Foursquare promotion from the venue. So if I'm popping into a Nick's Massage Parlour and I "check in" using Foursquare then I may be eligible for 20% off his world famous "Nude Massage" (I never understood why he insists on taking his clothes off).

So what's in it for the businesses? Well every time someone "checks in" to Nick's parlour, all their friends on foursquare are given an update. That' gives Nick some great exposure, so to speak, and by offering his special deals at specific times he can ensure his quiet hours pick up some decent trade!

Groupon

Proudly mugging grateful business owners since 2010

Groupon, funkily derived from the term Group Coupon, is all about collective buying power. They advertise a small number of daily deals in every city, often up to 60%-70% discount. The deals are so good that they tend to go like really cheap hot cakes, guaranteeing high sales for the retailer and Groupon take about half the money paid for the coupon.

It's a great way for businesses to gain a bit of extra business and some exposure. The trouble is that once they allowed for the huge discount and then given half of the amount paid to Groupon, they are left with almost nothing! For new businesses just keen for trade at any cost, this is a price well worth paying. But for established businesses the sums don't tend to stack up.

Recently Google Offers has come into the market and hopefully this new competition will help retailers get a better deal.

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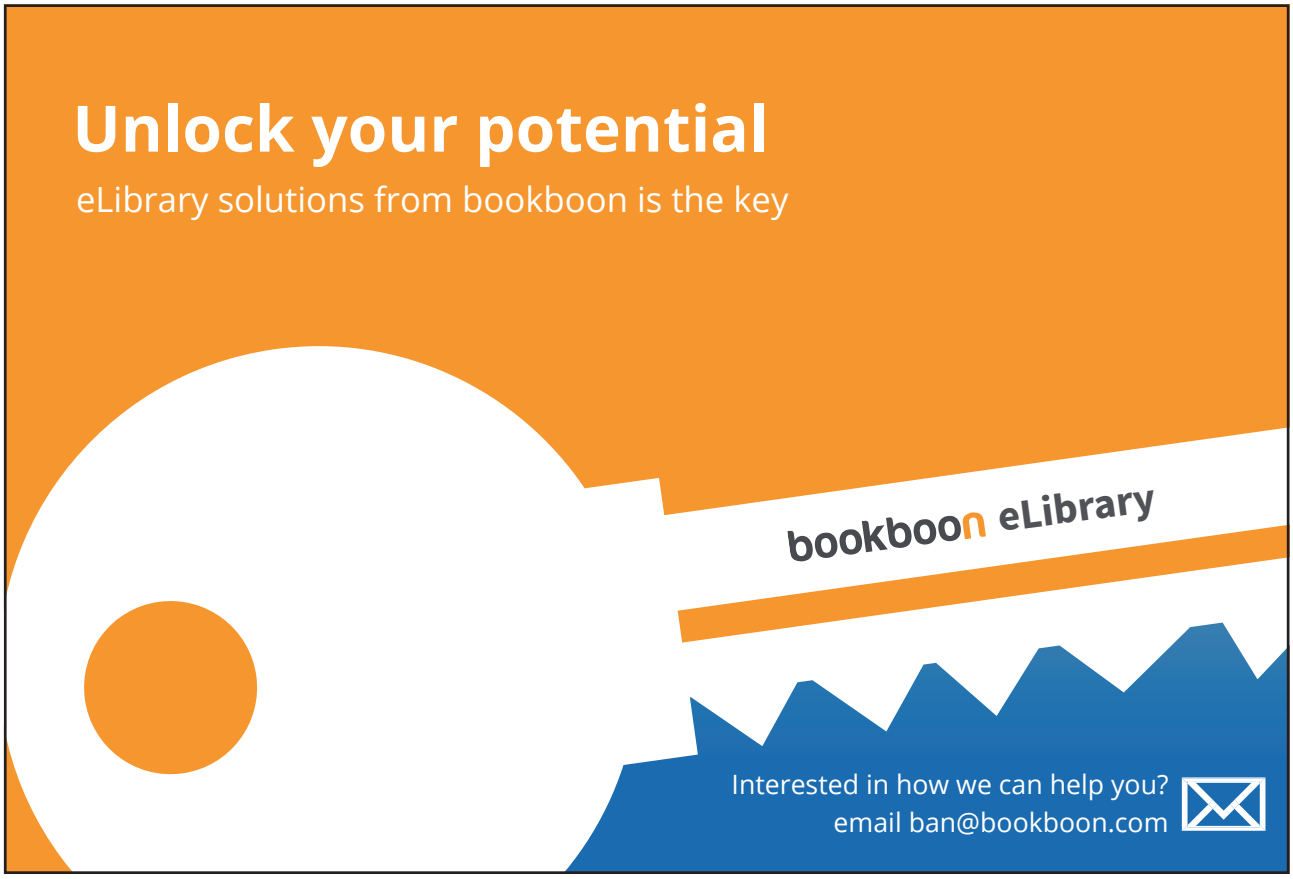
MySpace

You're welcome to it!

Back in 2006 MySpace was what Facebook is now – no, not managed by stinking rich, power-hungry toddler. I mean it was the biggest, most dominant player in the social media market. Then, as the aforementioned ankle biter gained momentum, the once omnipresent monster shrunk into an ever more targeted niche, until now, when it is little more than a place for emerging bands to gain exposure.

After another failed re-brand at the end of 2010 then you can safely assume your time is better spent elsewhere (unless you work in music of course!).



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7 Email Marketing

Email marketing is traditionally considered very outbound. Makes sense right? You buy your long list of email addresses, fire out ten thousand messages packed with wild claims and promises, and through sheer weight of numbers of couple of people cave in and make a one off purchase. Well that's one extreme and, yes; in that form it's *extremely* outbound.

As you should have grasped by now, inbound marketing is really just a frame of mind - doing things on the customers' terms rather than your own in an attempt to naturally draw them into your conversion funnel. When you think about it like that there's really no reason why email marketing can't also fall into this category. Here's how:

- **Buy relationships rather than databases** – instead of purchasing your data from a third party, enter into a transaction directly with the client. Of course this isn't a monetary transaction. Instead you're going to offer something of practical value that demonstrates your expertise and builds trust. One example is to offer a video tutorial series that users must receive via email. These videos must contain actionable steps – they are not just a pre-sell!
- **Qualify your leads** – if you offer a range of products/services then you can offer a few different options. For example, if you're a business coach then you could offer a video series on public speaking, one on team building and one on strategy. Not only are you making it a more attractive and focused offering, but you now know what it is that they are interested in!
- **Automate the process** – you're a busy person. This process needs to be managed by an auto-responder system. In the first automatically generated email you are going to tell the recipient when the can expect the second, third, etc. We generally use AWeber but there are plenty of others.
- **Keep it personal** – the language in the email capture, the format of your video and the wording of your emails must all be at a level they can understand and in a style that connects them to you, the person. Consumers buy into people and stories much faster than they buy into facts and figures.
    - **Strike while the iron's hot** - In the final email (we'd usually recommend sending at least three but probably no more than six) you need to have a strong call to action. What do you want them to do next? Is there a webinar they should attend? Will you be giving them a call to discuss how they found the video? Does the final email contain a questionnaire that they need to complete? You've worked really hard to get this far. You will never have a better opportunity to move them into a commercial relationship – don't waste it!

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Actions for Inbound Email Marketing

- **Prioritise** - this is all about relationships, trust and credibility, so if these things are important to your business then there is definitely room for an inbound email marketing campaign in your strategy. However, keep in mind that this will bring people back and aid the conversion process but it will NOT help them find you in the first place. Address your SEO and Social Media first.
- **Choose your offering** – what are you going to offer them of practical value, in what format and in how many parts?
    - **Begin at the end** – before you start constructing your giveaway, know precisely what the call to action is going to be at the end, as that will affect how you shape the giveaway itself.

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8 Conversion rate Optimisation

Inbound marketing will bring in the punters, but what is the point of that if they then get bored at the counter and leave the shop without buying so much as a stick of gum?!

Whilst not strictly part of inbound marketing, Conversion Rate Optimisation is an essential bolt-on if you actually want all the SEO, Content Marketing and Social Media to be worthwhile. This chapter is going to help you turn all that attention into £££.

What is a conversion?

Unfortunately, business is rarely as simple as finding a potential client and then taking the contents of their wallets. Often there are gaps between being found and the final transaction that must first be bridged. As essential parts of the process we still these critical steps to be conversions, such as:

- - Email enquiries
- - Telephone calls
- -Online quotes
    - -Data capture

-Secondary objectives – Facebook "likes", Twitter followers, blog post comments, and anything else that you feel adds value to your online presence

The Conversion funnel

A conversion funnel is an abstract funnel that a visitor passes through on the way to converting. A visitor enters the funnel at the top, passes through a couple of levels (pages) and then leaves the other side as a happily converted customer!

Two ideas that you need to consider when considering the conversion funnel of your website are:

1. **How wide is the top of your funnel**? Are visitors able to enter the conversion funnel from anywhere on your website? The smaller the top, the fewer visitors will enter and therefore the less will fall out the bottom as paying customers. Wide funnels mean more opportunities. Building lots of content on your site is great, but ideally every page should have a call to action that places them at the top of one conversion funnel or another.
2. **How long is your conversion funnel**? Are visitors going to get bored because the funnel is too long? Are you missing valuable information that could persuade a conversion because the funnel is too short? The conversion funnel needs to be 'just right' to enable a visitor to collect all of the necessary information but without having to travel a long distance to get it.

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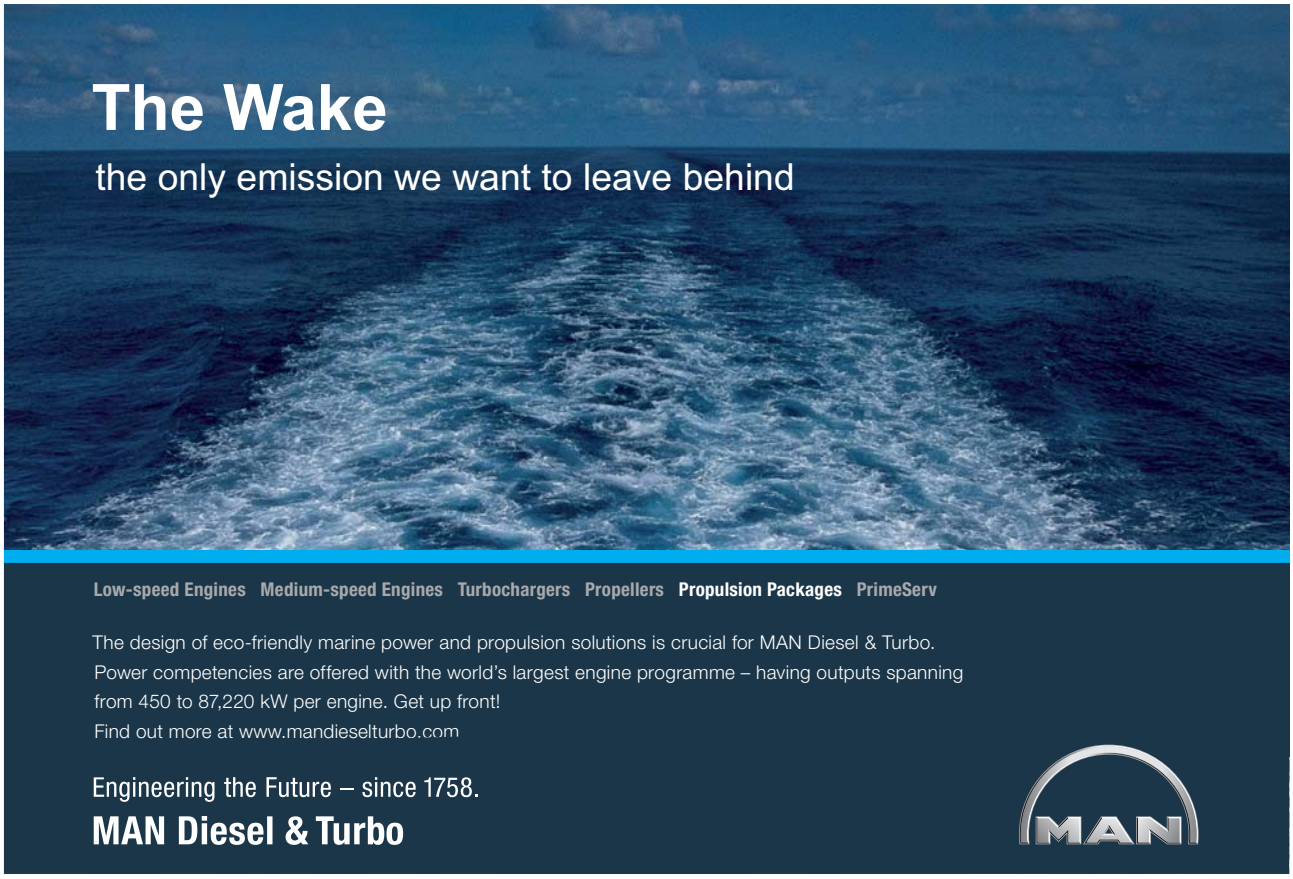
The factors that will determine your conversion rate

- **Establish what your goals are for each page** – you must establish your primary and secondary objectives. They will no doubt vary on different pages, so while your goal on your sales page might be to encourage them to request an online quote, on the home page you may be trying to push them through to that sales page. Meanwhile your primary objective on the blog page may be to get them to submit their email address, and a secondary objective may be to encourage them to write a comment on the blog post.
- **Powerful Calls to Action* (CTA's)** - CTA's are short phrases (calls) with a sole purpose of moving your visitor further along the conversion funnel (action!). CTAs are most often found at the middle or bottom of a website's sales copy* and placed in positions where users are most likely to click through to purchase. CTAs range from huge banners that cross the length of the page to small buttons or even just text links. The strength of your CTA is important; a link that says "Click here for more information" is weak. Use powerful statements like "Buy online and save 10%" or "See the impact service X had on businesses like yours".
- **Less is more** - If you want users to make one or two specific actions on a page, then don't distract them with too many other options. Every time you add a secondary CTA you are reducing the likelihood of them choosing the primary CTA.
- **Site wide CTA's** - There are some Calls to Action that should be present on every page. These are usually the telephone number and email address. The reason you want these site-wide is because ultimately you don't know when the visitor may choose to make contact, and you need to make their life as easy as possible. The best place is usually in nice big font in the header.



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- **Use of video** - Depending on what you are offering the user, you may need to convey the benefits before they are willing to take the next step. Video is second to none when it comes to getting across substantial amounts of information in a concise and digestible way. Of course if they already fully understand your offering and you are simply competing on price or another specific USP, then this is probably an unnecessary distraction from their journey.
- **Remove leaks and tighten up your sales funnel** - Are people clicking off to your Facebook page and not returning? Is your T's & C's page a bit too prominent, and getting more clicks than you would like? Use Google Analytics to monitor user behaviour and spot opportunities to tighten up the funnel. PDFs, for example, are notoriously bad at keeping people onsite because they lack the proper navigation.
- **Navigation** - Most modern websites have site-wide navigation that allows users to navigate *to* any page *from* any page. Navigation serves two major functions: To provide accessibility and prioritise key services. A huge number of websites are lacking in one of these areas. Either their navigation is too thin and doesn't allow users to explore deeper into their website (i.e. a user may be able to go to the services page in 1 click, but to get to the pricing page for a particular service it takes 3 or 4!). The other issue is that there's little or no priority in the navigation – nearly every page is listed and users just get confused. Confusion leads to exits and exits lead to no sales! Make sure that key services are clear and there is as little 'noise' surrounding them as possible.
    - **Split Testing Sales Pages** - In the website conversion world we like to be as scientific as possible. Changes based on instinct are fine initially, but if you have no way of measuring the impact then you cannot see if you've gained or lost. A split test is the process of creating two different options and allowing data to gather to see beyond doubt which performs better. This could be two different quote processes, two different sales paragraphs, two different CTA buttons, two different videos, etc. You can set up split tests with Google's Website Optimizer - www.google.com/websiteoptimizer.

Online Quote Forms and Ecommerce

If you have an online quote process then there are probably several different bits of information you are trying to extract from the customer:

- The product they are interested in
- Details of the product – size, shape, colour, etc
- Quantity
- Their address details

Two really powerful tips to bear in mind when structuring this process:

- It is better to break it up into several pages rather than requesting all info on one page
    - Leave the boring address and personal information to the final page

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By following the two simple tips above, you are making the process so much simpler for the user. Secondly, by keeping the first two or three pages focused on the product information, you make the first 75% of the journey easy and fun (people generally enjoy selecting product details). By the time they get to the boring last page where they have to enter their address and possibly card details, they are already too committed to back out.

Going from a one page quote process that's congested with information, to a much simpler 3 or 4 page process with nice big buttons and easy instructions, could have a massive impact on your conversion rates.

For ecommerce check-outs the principles are very similar. Separate the information into a number of short, bite-size pages. Keep the boring stuff at the end. Include nice big buttons and simple instructions. A couple of other things to bear in mind:

- Offer them the option of signing up so that you can store all their details for future purchases.
    - If they are likely to not recognise your brand then also give them a quick checkout option. However, if you do this then you need to really stress the benefits of signing up (clearly for you it's two fold – they have strengthened their relationship with the website and you have their email details to use in your email marketing). Their benefits could be that it enables faster checkout in the future (as their details are on the system), entry into a monthly prize draw, exclusive member only offers, etc.

Probably the single best piece of advice I can give for ecommerce (but it applies to all sorts of other aspects of conversion rate optimisation (CRO) too) is to see what the big boys are doing. Amazon for example – these guys have more experience of ecommerce than anyone! Go through their checkout process. See what information they request at each stage and what other options and recommended products appear in the side bar at each stage of the user journey. How can you apply these lessons to your site?

Measuring your Conversions with Google Analytics

We have already spoken about the use of Google Analytics for SEO, but it will also give lots of great information about the users once they are on your site. You can see which pages are the most popular, how much time they spend on the site, which pages cause them to leave, whether they were using an iPhone or a Blackberry, etc. Perhaps most importantly of all, you can set up "goals" and track the number of times a day they are achieved.

Have your techies set up a Thank You page on the site that users will be sent to after they have left the conversion funnel. The number of times the URL for this Thank You page is reached each month will tell you how many conversions have been achieved

We don't want to get too technical but just in case you want to give it a go yourself:

1. Create an account at Google analytics
2. Install the tracking code to your website
3. Create a goal funnel - go to Overview > 'Account' > Edit (next to the profile you want to measure).

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Now you just have to tell Google what page 'counts' as a conversion and even go as far as placing a value on that conversion. For instance, your contact form will probably take the user to somewhere like http://www.yourdomain.com/thankyou when people submit an enquiry – simply enter this URL as the conversion page and Google will begin tracking!

If you want to take it a step further and track each STAGE of the conversion funnel to see where people are exiting, set this up on the same page as above but instead specify the exact URLs of the funnel:

Step 1. http://www.domain.com/product

Step 2. http://www.domain.com/basket

Step 3. http://www.domain.com/checkout

Step 4. http://www.domain.com/thankyou

We can't overstate the importance of this stuff! You are working so bloody hard to get people onto these pages that you need to be doing all you can to maximise the rate at which they convert. There is no easier way to win (or lose!!) new prospective clients.

Conversion Actions

- Identify your primary conversion goal(s) for the site. These will almost always be either an ecommerce sale, online quote or email/telephone enquiry.
- All your main pages should feature a CTA beginning their journey at the top of a primary conversion funnel.
- Ensure each stage of your primary conversion funnel has a unique URL so that you can track it with Google Analytics. This is particularly important for ecommerce sites and those with online quote forms.
- Draw up a plan for all future pages. If you write useful resources or a blog, what will the goals be and what CTA's will you use to point them down the funnel? You never want to find yourself writing content for the sake of it – there always needs to be a goal!

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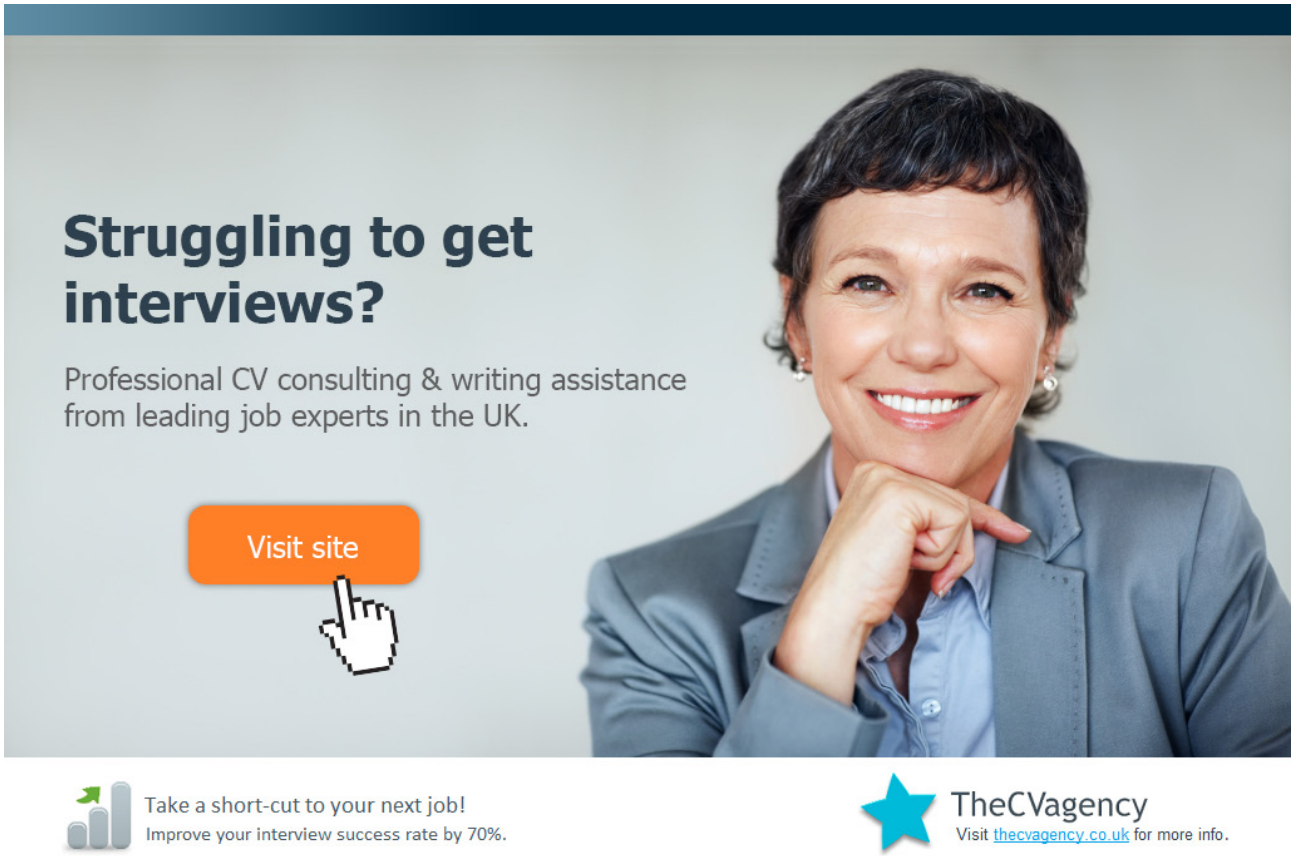
9 Final Checklist

In three months time you should be able to put a tick next to each of the points below. Your inbound marketing campaign will then be truly underway....

- Is your brand visually reflecting your personality and values?
- Does your website allow you to easily add content and make changes to existing content?
- Have you got a plan for adding useful content on an ongoing basis?
- Have you identified your search market and decided whether you're going to manage your SEO directly or hire a 3rd party?
- Have you identified those social media platforms that are appropriate to your business?
    - Does every page on your website have the appropriate primary and secondary conversion goals and are they trackable using Google Analytics?



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10 Where Next?

As with any form of marketing, inbound methods present the best opportunity to the early adopters. Here are a few really interesting developments taking place today that you may want to keep an eye on...

The game layer

There is a school of thought that believes that following this social layer there will be a game layer. While the social layer was all about establishing online connections and relationships, the game layer is about influence. Offering points, prizes, badges and other motivational tools to shape the way that consumers behave. Competition is a deep rooted part of human nature. The game layer is all about leveraging these characteristics to the advantage of your business. Foursquare is packed with competitions. If you arrive at bar x at a certain time with a certain number of friends then you receive half price cocktails. How might you then be able to use the game layer for your business?

HTML5

You may have heard about the frustration with Flash over the last few years. It requires a plug-in to be installed which for many businesses presents security concerns, and isn't compatible with Apple devices, meaning that you'll often see empty boxes on iPads, Macbooks and iPhones where you should be seeing video or animation. Most frustratingly of all for marketers is that it is undetectable for the search engines, which means that flash websites are usually hopeless at generating traffic. HTML5 is expected to eradicate the need for Flash as it enables developers to do everything that Flash can do (possibly more) in HTML. There's a few cool examples here of the things that could soon be possible - http://www.apple.com/html5/

Web 3.0 – the semantic web

There are trillions of pages on the internet and the rate at which they are being added is accelerating. Every time you so much as tweet you are creating a new page. Search engines do their best to interpret these web pages and provide you, the searcher, with the information it believes you will value most. Only the trouble is that most searches made online are very generic, while the information we want returned is very specific. Consequently even now in 2011, we still often find ourselves trawling through page after page, attempting to find something of sufficient relevance.

So this is where it is hoped the semantic web will take over. Semantics is the study of meaning, and the semantic web is the vision that machines will one day be able to use the information surrounding our searches to provide a much more intelligent set of results. So if I search for "Apple" and my previous search was for "computers", it knows not to return a web page dedicated to granny smiths (appallingly simple example but you get the idea).

The sceptics argue that the theory is fundamentally flawed by its reliance on ontology. In other words, it depends on us, as humans, agreeing that certain things mean specific things.

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Perhaps one way of avoiding this issue is to use our past individual behavioural patterns online to interpret context and meaning in a way that is unique to each of us. The truth is, however, that we still have no way of knowing how exactly this will all take shape. Not even the creator of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners Lee, would dare to predict that. In answer to the question "how did he see the future of the semantic web", he remarked "If we end up building all the things that I imagine today, we will have failed."

The mobile Web

People talk about the mobile web as being the next big thing online. Two points:

1. It's already here
2. It's probably not as bigger deal as people made you think

Don't get me wrong, it is absolutely essential that you are on top of your mobile web presence, but for most businesses the percentage is not that huge. Across the websites that we work with, 90% of sites have between 3%-11% of their visitors coming through mobile devices. Furthermore, in order to have a solid mobile presence you do NOT need to fork out thousands of pounds on customised mobile web app. Just make sure you get the following right:

- Most people visit websites via their mobiles in order to find basic contact info, opening hours, etc. Not to read about your company history or point 4 of your terms and conditions. Get your home page and contact page right, and forget about the rest. Test on a Blackberry, iPhone, android and iPad. If these two pages are readable then you can relax.
- Ensure your telephone number is text so that users can click to dial.
- If you have issues with your contact page then link through to Google Maps. They will be able to see all your info, dial your telephone number and even get directions.

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11 Conclusion

Gone are the days of throwing your logo and telephone number up on a web page and calling it an online presence. The web, for most markets, is at least as important as the offline world, and you need to approach it with the same level of care and attention as you have ever approached any other aspect of your business.

I firmly believe that the web has irreversibly pushed inbound marketing techniques to the foreground. There is nothing new about customers wanting transparency, relationships, quality, recommendations, communities – it is just that it took the internet age to facilitate it on such a scale that would force businesses to take it seriously.

Be active where your clients are active, both in terms of search and social and whatever else emerges in the years to come (could the game layer affect your market?). And be sure to offer such a remarkable experience that your little space on the web becomes a magnet for the very people you want to connect with.

How you should achieve these things is something that only you can discover (unless you have very deep pockets that is). But if you action the steps at the end of each chapter, then in 6 months from now you will know precisely what your perfect online presence should look like, and in 24 you will be there.

Good luck. You're already a step ahead of your competition.

Nick and Dan

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