

Lesson 4: Avoid The Herd

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In a world full of computers and web sites, many people believe that the pinnacle of marketing success is a high ranking on the popular search engines. Without a doubt, there can be a value to this. However, this kind of thinking overlooks some fundamental problems.

To begin with, shocking though it may be, not everyone cares about the Internet, or even computers for that matter. Furthermore, the lines aren't always drawn in a precise manner.

Your local mechanic may be an absolute genius with an internal combustion engine and yet spend no time at all surfing the web. The repair shop down the street may be run by a guy who's the same age and similar in many other manners. He might be both a great mechanic and a complete computer geek.

If you want to market to auto mechanics and you focus exclusively on Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the process of optimizing your site for high search rankings, you're going to get one of these guys. The other one will never know you exist.

Standing In A Crowded Room

However, even if you only care about Internet customers, you still have a problem. The prevailing wisdom suggests that people hit the search engines when they're ready to buy. Therefore, that's when you want to get in front of them. While this may be true, it overlooks one pesky little detail. You may be on the first page of results but you're now standing in a room full of competitors. Not an ideal scenario for making the sale.

What you want is a private, high quality conversation between you and your potential customer. And you want this dialogue with all prospects, whether they use a computer or not.

The key to getting attention while avoiding the herd lies in making yourself special. In a perfect world, your customers would ignore your competitors and seek you out. As it turns out, that's not as unlikely as you might think.

In the old days of aerial combat and propeller driven fighter planes, the way you won a dogfight was to get close enough to the other guy to shoot him down with machine guns. Of course, if you're that close, it's important to remember that he gets to shoot back, which can prove a bit inconvenient.

Modern warfare takes a different approach. High tech, sophisticated attack planes can cloak themselves in stealth and shoot you down with a missile from miles away, long before you're close enough for them to even notice. In other words, you never want to give the other guy a chance to shoot at you.

Become Unique

The way you accomplish this in the business world is by developing your Unique Selling Proposition (USP). That's really just a fancy way of saying that you've taken the time to clarify, both in your mind and that of your customer, exactly what makes you special.

If there are a hundred other people who do the same thing as you, it's imperative that you find some way to stand apart from the herd. Do you sell t-shirts? So do a gazillion others. Even so, how many people specialize in t-shirts for lovers of potted plants?

To reach such an audience, you need to research the lives, passions and needs of plant lovers and be immersed enough in their culture to be credible in that field. Even if your competitors have ivy embellished attire for sale, you will nonetheless stand out as the preferred company. After all, you cater specifically to the needs of this customer. And who doesn't want to be catered to?

A Collection Of Specialties

Want to sell shirts to people who aren't plant lovers? No problem. Just pick a new target and repeat the process. There's no rule that says you can't have multiple USPs for a collection of markets.

The point is that for each and every market, you must find a way to stand out. Earn a reputation, develop a fan base and get the word out that you're not like all those generic t-shirt companies. When that happens, people won't be hitting the search engines looking for t-shirts. They'll actively seek you out. This works not just online but out here in the real world as well, putting you in front of computer geeks and mere mortals alike.

Conclusion

Suddenly, instead of standing in a crowded room full of screaming competitors, there's no one around but you and the customer you've worked so hard to please. Fortunately, that's exactly where you want to be.