


JANUARY '11 NEWSWIRE

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Welcome to our monthly newswire designed to provide you with some marketing tips for your business.

We hope you enjoy reading it and remember, we are here to help you so please contact us if you need further information on any of the topics covered.

UPGRADING TO WINDOWS 7 FROM XP – SHOULD YOUR BUSINESS MAKE THE SWITCH?

Most offices today are running Windows XP on their computers. This software is familiar to most of us. It's stable and reliable and with the right anti-virus software, it is quite secure. Most of us also know that Windows 7 was launched in October 2009 as XP's eventual replacement. The new version of windows is actually designed to replace Windows Vista - launched in 2007 but many businesses failed to adopt it because it was unstable, tended to crash and simply didn't work as well as XP.

Another reason many offices still use XP and Office 2003 and have skipped Vista and Office 2007 is due to the fact that in most businesses, the replacement cycle dictates that computer hardware and software is fully replaced every 5 or 6 years. So the big question that many businesses are now asking is "should we make the switch from XP to Windows 7?"

Security is probably the most important issue for businesses today. XP is now quite old and computer "hackers" are familiar with its weaknesses. Due to the fact that Windows 7 is quite new, malicious programmers haven't had enough time to truly "crack" the system. As Microsoft is now plugging Windows 7, there will be less and less attention paid to security updates to Windows XP, thereby leaving businesses potentially vulnerable to viruses and hackers.

The other compelling reason to make the switch to Windows 7 is that most new software is being written to take advantage of the superior capabilities of the new system. Over time, less and less new software will work as well on windows XP as it does on Windows 7.

There are a couple of downsides to making the switch though. Firstly there is cost. If you are upgrading to Windows 7 you will have to purchase the necessary licenses and may also consider upgrading to the newer version of Microsoft Office in order to take advantage of the capabilities of Windows 7. Newer versions of software often require more horsepower in order to run effectively. To run Windows 7 properly, your firm's PC's will need up to date dual core CPUs with lots of memory and fast graphics cards. Perhaps the best solution is a gradual, phased introduction of the new system and as each individual computer in your firm needs to be replaced you could put a Windows 7 machine in its place.

MARKETING ONLINE

Having an Internet Marketing Strategy in today's super competitive market environment is a must. One of the most important and common ways is using the world's most popular search engine – Google. There are three basic methods to market your business on Google.

- ◆ Organic Listings
- ◆ Local Listings
- ◆ Pay-per-click Listing.

Organic Listings: These are the search results that Google returns when you search for a keyword or a key phrase. To rank high in Google organic search, you have to use SEO or Search Engine Optimization techniques. The advantage of listing high on page one of Google is that a big percentage of online traffic is converted in the top 7 or 8 positions of page one of Google. If your site is listed in page 2 or beyond, your chances of getting any traffic is almost nil. This is why it is imperative that you take the time to implement an Internet Marketing Strategy in your business.

Local Listings: Google Maps or maps.Google.com is the local search arm of Google. This is the map that shows up at the top of the page with pins and flags. To get your business in Google Maps, go to Google's Local Business Centre located at Google.com/places follow the instructions and enter your business information. If you have moved office you should search your old office address. Google will give you the option to update or delete previous office addresses so that clients will have an up to date location for your firm.

Pay-per-click Listings: PPC is Google's paid advertisement service. You have to bid to be able to position your ad at the top of page one of Google. Paying for the ad is just part of it, you also have to have relevance, in other words if your ad is not relevant to the keyword being searched, no matter how much you want to pay, Google will simply not show your ad. The great thing about PPC advertisement is that you drive highly targeted traffic to your site. You can also put a limit on your daily budget so you don't overspend. If you don't have the expertise to put together an effective PPC strategy in-house, it may be a worthwhile investment to get an expert to set this up for you and train your staff on how to maintain an effective PPC campaign.

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THE NEW TRENDS IN DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

Your firm's online marketing strategy may have centred on email marketing, search marketing, pay-per-click, Web 2.0, or any of the many other online marketing approaches. These techniques still work today, and they will continue to work for some time yet. However, the question is – what is the next “big thing” in online marketing and how can businesses get on top of it today?

By the “next big thing” I mean “app marketing” to mobile users. It is crucial that you understand what is happening in terms of app marketing as a marketing strategy. Numbers of smartphone users are increasing rapidly as more and more people switch to using Blackberrys, iPhones and Android devices. These users have adopted the idea of downloading “apps” or applications for their phone which can do anything from tell you what time the next bus arrives to forecast the weather and even let you buy stocks and shares!

“Mobile app marketing,” does not mean making money selling apps on iTunes or similar web services. It refers instead to smartphone functionality via apps that lead strongly back to a business. For example, you can currently follow PGA standings and scores on an iPhone app (a free one), and football scores and rankings on another. More and more retailers, media outlets, service providers, and other vendors are giving away smartphone apps that give a prospect very appealing functionality, but are closed-ended - they lead the user to only one place, the sponsor's offers.

These mobile apps capture emails to build lists in exchange for social interaction features. They link to websites. They pitch special offers. They sell downloads and services directly. They gather user data so offers can be targeted. They basically do everything websites can do, but they are with the person 100% of the time, totally convenient, and require no decision or action - the approach is included with the app the user already chose to download and use – therefore the user has bought into the idea and there is no issue with say opt-in and opt-out, unlike direct mail or email marketing.

The convenience and near-permanent presence is a huge improvement on the old marketing strategy of search engine optimization. There is no competing for a number one position. If your app is fun, functional, and emotionally appealing, your message will be seen, and unlike pay-per-click or cost-per-thousand advertising, it is seen by the prospect without any charge to you.

The marketing strategy of the future is already here, the trends in traffic are unmistakable, and the top firms of tomorrow are building this into their strategy today.

CRM SYSTEMS

In order to make the best use of customer relationship management (CRM) software, it is necessary to understand why it is important to use these CRM tools in the first place. The idea of CRM is simply to enable your firm to understand (and identify) who the firm's target customers are and how best to market to them. A properly developed CRM system will allow your firm to analyse marketing activity and its impact on sales. CRM systems create that vital link between marketing putting the ball on the tee and sales taking out a 9 iron and hitting a hole in one.

A good CRM system allows for goal setting throughout the firm and allows marketing to monitor how well a campaign is translating into sales. CRM is often the key to success for many major businesses and is a great way to transform a small or medium sized business into something bigger and more successful.

Some of the best and most popular CRM software packages include Goldmine, Sugar CRM and for larger corporations, customized systems from Siebel or Oracle. Your CRM system will also facilitate reporting as it will allow you to pull information such as “who received the marketing mail shot” and compare this with “who actually bought the product”.

Before deciding on which CRM system is best for your firm, you should create a complete list of your company's needs, requirements and expectations when implementing a CRM solution. Think about what you want to achieve with the CRM system in place and how you plan on measuring it.

It will be necessary to allocate internal resources to a CRM function so budget for this and schedule staff time specifically for CRM. Make sure every department is involved and has full buy-in and support for a CRM system – this is probably best achieved by your firm's marketing manager.

It's worth consulting with a variety of CRM resources and publications that provide user reviews, screenshots and product overviews of the various packages and solutions that are out there. You can then decide on which system best complements the needs of your firm.

