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the Internet

Surf and Turf with Search and Social

How to Influence Your Online Audience to Stay Engaged With Your Brand

WSI White Paper

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Introduction

“Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half.” - John Wannamaker

John Wanamaker, a Philadelphia-born merchant and admired political leader, who some consider to be the founding father of modern advertising, asked a question that still resonates in the minds of business owners today. In fact, for many a sleepless night has resulted from the assumed answer to that infamous question.

In the midst of abnormal times, which undoubtedly we are living in, traditional methods of advertising and marketing are under constant scrutiny and inevitable decline. One can argue that “out-of-the-box” thinking or “abnormal thinking” during these times may be the only means of survival for today’s business owner. In essence, abnormal is the new normal - just as pink became the new black in men’s fashion.

When Larry and Sergey, the “Google Guys”, first came up with the billion-dollar idea, did they fathom that it would become a huge force in shaping the way businesses market online? Well it did! Moreover, it gave birth to a whole new industry of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising. Marketers flocked to these new measurable methods of marketing and much to the envy of our late John W. However, it didn’t stop there. The Internet took on a life of its own, and the innate nature of human beings to herd together got the better of us. The rising dawn of social networks and social media has blinded us.

Business owners now have more variables to consider than ever before. “To optimize or not to optimize” is a question of the past. In today’s day and age, the more frequently asked question has become “to socialize or not to socialize”.

The answer is elementary as Sherlock would say. But is it? Is the answer simply to optimize and socialize? In order to truly understand the opportunity presented by search and social media, we need to start with the decision makers. We are not speaking about business owners here, but rather it is consumers that rule these realms!

Visitors’ Choice – To Surf or Turf

Surf or turf through search and social speaks to why consumers choose to **surf** a site or social media profile of a business for more information or **turf** it because they are simply not interested or compelled enough to continue. Surfing by a user can take on many forms, such as clicking through the ad copy on your pay per click campaign or the tags on your SEO strategy. It also refers to taking a desired action after reading the content on the pages of your site and most certainly following your updates on the social media channels and engaging in conversation with your brand.

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A gross misunderstanding is to actually assume that most business owners are well positioned to capitalize on the opportunity presented by the increased eyeballs on their site or social media marketing campaigns. The ultimate question becomes, what must a business do to survive and thrive in this day and age?

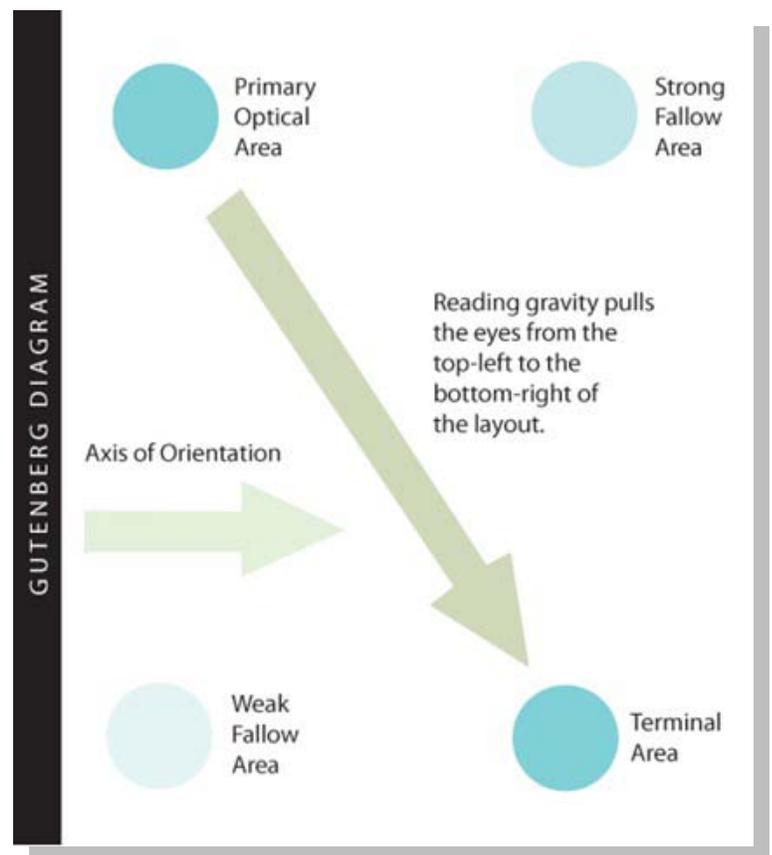
The answer lies in a holistic marketing approach combining best practices of conversion and an understanding of user behavior online. Ensure that your consumers can find you on any and all digital marketing channels, whether that is through a website on the search engines or through social networks and social media marketing channels.

At the elemental level, the aforementioned channels are used to syndicate content. All content regarding your business or about your business acts as a digital asset. The more digital assets a business owner can amass, the more likely it is for a consumer to come across them and follow them back to a designated area and take action.

Your primary digital asset is your website, however most websites don't work! Did you know you have less than 7 seconds to engage a visitor to your site, and that includes load time? The reasons are fairly simple, either they are constructed poorly and not friendly to the search engines, or they lack compelling call-to-actions or engaging content, and therefore are seldom *surf*ed, and often *turf*ed.

At a minimum, the website needs to be easily found by search engines and indexed. Load time of a site has an impact on SEO. The slower the site loads, the lower it will rank in the search engines. The basics to include are call-to-actions. A call-to-action can be described as a contact form, a lead generation form, a sale being made on an eCommerce shopping cart, or an inquiry phone call being made to your staff for your products or services. Furthermore, content that speaks to the specific services or products you offer increases the "stickiness" of a site, making it a conversion-focused website.

A general principle to consider in the overall design of the site is outlined via the Gutenberg Rule or Gutenberg Diagram. This rule refers to reading gravity, or the flow of the eye in the Western world, left to right, top down. To apply this to your site, simply avoid putting your call-to-action buttons or important



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information you want the user to read on the bottom left. Should you wish to further highlight certain items on the page, you can use high contrast and bold typography. Your website's primary focus should be selling your company's services 24 hours a day, and simply increasing traffic to your website is not enough. Increasing the traffic that converts into leads (conversion rate), allows you to get a bigger bang for your investment.

The idea that “if you build it they will come” only works in the field of dreams! Building a site is simply not enough. With rising competition, search engines are looking at presenting content that is most relevant to what the user is looking for, hence to stand a chance a site must be properly Search Engine Optimized. By helping search engines understand our pages and rank them, the overall searcher's experience is enhanced.

Secret Recipe to Get Surfed on SERPs

The algorithm that is beneath the hood of a search engine is as guarded a secret as the 11 herbs and spices that make up the secret recipe for Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and includes hundreds of variables. With that being said, there are ways in which you can maximize your efforts to get indexed and appear on the first page of the Search Engine Results Page (SERP).

To understand why you may get *surf*ed vs. *turf*ed on a SERP, we need to first understand the components of the SERP. A typical Search Engine Results Page is made up of the natural or organic listings that span the left side of the page. Across the top is a highlighted area called “Sponsored Links”, and along the right hand side are all the paid ads. The ongoing sibling rivalry between the organic results and paid results may never be settled. What is important to note is that each has its benefits and drawbacks.

PPC gets faster results and can be very precise to a specific geographic location. And you only pay when someone actually clicks on your advert. For example, you can set up your PPC ads to show only during the evening hours and limited to people that are within a 50-mile radius of your store location. The ads will show at the time and geography specified, and a business owner is charged only when someone actually clicks on the advertisement. However, you are stuck with paying a cost per click, which escalates as Google wishes and as the competition of the market dictates. After all, someone has to pay for Google's billion dollar image.

SEO can get results slower; however, heat mapping studies show that people are more likely to click on the organic listings to avoid the sponsored ads. In fact, 80% of the traffic clicks are on the organic listings, and the great thing is that there is no linear relationship between clicks and costs as with PPC.

What Can You Do To Get “Surfed” on the SERP?

Furthermore, the Click-through Rate (CTR) is higher when a business owner's site is listed in the organic

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section as well as the paid advertising section. In essence, the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. The theory being that the double exposure to your brand makes a user feel more confident in clicking through.

Drill baby drill! If we dig a little deeper into SEO and PPC, we can uncover some more tactics that increase the likelihood to get surfed. On the PPC side, the ad copy or what you chose to display on the ad can have a positive impact. On the SEO side, the most important item you can actually control is the “Title Tag”. This is the line of text that is underlined in blue, when a user conducts a search on the Search Engines. The keywords are bolded in the results listed on the SERP. It is also displayed across the top of a browser window when you actually open a page on the website.

Following are some suggestion when creating conversion-focused PPC ads to ensure that you are delivering what will compel a consumer to click through:

1. Include Strong Call-to-actions or Promotional Offers

- Use words like “save”, “order”, “buy” or “shop”. If there are no sales to be done on the site, then use words like “free shipping” or “browse” or “compare”.
- Similarly, when writing the “Title Tag” for SEO, there are some items to keep in mind that will not only help with the organic search engine placement, but also the CTR on the organic listing. Search engines will display a certain number of characters in the Title Tags, so ensure you keep the most important elements within the displayed area.

2. Ensure You Write Your Keywords in the Title Tag First

- Too often companies begin the Title Tag with their brand name. This hinders the SEO efforts, and does not provide instant gratification to the user. The user is looking for something specific, and the faster you can show them a match, the more likely they will click.
- Following the keywords, use action words in the Title Tag. Words like “learn”, “discover”, “find” and “read” are good examples of informational action words. Words such as “try”, “get”, “buy” and “download” are transactional action words.
- Finally, drop in variations, secondary keywords or geographies that your business services in the Title Tag.
- Last but not least, put the brand name of your company.

3. Go Social

- Social media is an umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos and audio.

According to an iProspect study, social networking users are growing at an accelerated rate. One in four Internet users visits a social site at least once a month, and that figure only looks to increase over the

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next several years. The Internet is shifting from a medium of information to one of participation, and iProspect suggests that marketers follow that trend and encourage consumer participation in their marketing efforts.

One of the most important things that businesses often forget when approaching social media is that it is about relationships. It is a 2-way conversation that will yield what you put into it. You not only need to be in the social network where people that may be interested in your topic, you have to become a resource. With hundreds of social networks on the web, let's look at some common best practices to ensure that visitors are interested in what you have to say in the social media conversation.

Social Media Pitfalls to Avoid

So you are ready to become a Social Butterfly! Before you create your user names and profiles on the Social Media Channels, ensure that you plan what you are going to do and pay attention to some key things to avoid on social media channels:

Don't Fake It Till You Make It

Learn from the mistakes of others, and you will float like a butterfly. A notable example, which received much publicity and went viral, unfortunately not to the design of the companies involved, was the situation that occurred with Walmart and Sony. These companies were called out by the social community, who was their target market, when someone pointed out that they had fake evangelists posting raving reviews on the company blog and appeared to be partial.

"Can You Hear Me Now?"

Listening is the most important first step, and more importantly it has to be done on an ongoing basis. Listen to conversations about your brand, your industry, your services/products, and identify influential people who have a mass following (web influencers) online that you can engage with about these things. There are plenty of tools online that will help you "listen" to the conversation. Some examples are Google Reader, Summize, Link Checker and Crazy Egg.

Don't Sell, Sell, Sell!

Overt sales messages are heavily frowned upon in many social media channels. Provide the kind of information that facilitates choices that lead to sales, and you'll go a lot further. So what should a business do in order to have surf-time? Consider if you would ever go to a social party and try to sell your wares before getting to know anyone there.

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Give a Little Will Ya'!

Active participation and showing interest in what other people are saying will get you more noticed than if you just push your own agenda. Participate by showing interest and commenting on what is important to the people with whom you are looking to build a relationship. Be an active member of the online social community, and not just a passing salesman.

Don't Have Hidden Agendas

If you are transparent with your intentions and clearly state the objective of a Facebook page, or the theme of a company blog, you will go further. People prefer to build relationships with other people, not brands. If you have a lot of personal items, build a personal profile on Facebook. If you have an interest that is shared by other people, form a group that is dedicated to that. If you would like to promote your company, build a Facebook Fan Page. Users are aware of the message they will get, and can choose to be a part of it.

Welcome Participation and Feedback

As comfort levels rise with social web participation, you will see an opportunity to solicit feedback and encourage participation from the audience. Developing relationships within social communities on the web can facilitate buy-in, provide invaluable feedback and crowd sourcing opportunities. The most important rule to remember is to “follow up” on the feedback received. Your consumers will see that you are listening and doing something to meet their needs.

Be Original and Consistent and Give the “Inside-Scoop”

Building trust from consumers takes time and depends on the perception of the organization and consistency over time. Social media content must be timely, relevant, exciting and unique. Insider-type content is highly desired. When posting new content, focus on activities, events and discounts, but have lots of relevant variety.

The first impression is a lasting impression, and this is even truer in social media where people can leave within seconds if they don't like what they see. Most social media platforms limit your design customization; however, there are areas you can customize. Don't neglect page design considerations and make the design consistent with your overall brand.

Conclusion

'Hanging Ten' and surfing the wave of digital marketing is the path to enlightenment. Gone are the days of working your marketing campaigns in silos. Businesses of today must have a consistent Digital Marketing Strategy, and it can't be limited to just having something online. To avoid having their digital

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media presence *turfed*, business owners need to understand that users on the web need instant gratification. So paying special attention to things like your ad copy on PPC ads, content on your site, search engine optimization elements, and taking part in the conversation on social media channels will put your business center stage. The alternative is a state of denial and pretending that people are not online, and the Internet thing is just a passing fad.

About the Author



Jamshaid (Jam) Hashmi is a WSI Social Media Strategist located in Toronto, Canada. Jam possesses strong expertise in search engine optimization and social media marketing. He regularly trains business owners and consultants on how to leverage search marketing, content marketing, social media, conversion architecture and ROI measurement to boost the performance of an online marketing strategy. He is a sought-after speaker who has presented at many digital marketing conventions and seminars around the world.

If you have any questions, please email education@wsicorporate.com.