



New Marketing Strategy for E-Commerce Launch

By Jean Van Rensselar

The Strategy

There are many theories out there about the best way to market e-commerce sites. But here, I'm going to stick with practical advice. It's called a launch because the most critical aspect is getting the e-commerce site off the ground. Once it's safely in orbit, you'll have other priorities. So leave the door open for mid and long-term strategies, but focus on the immediate and short term.

Your online marketing plan should cover at least the following five areas:

1. A comprehensive short-term strategy
2. A rough long-term strategy
3. A plan for creating obvious consumer value
4. A plan for creating viral-level interest
5. A plan for integration with existing offline marketing

I'm assuming your online store is newly opened (within the last year) and you're looking for ways to bump up sales, so I'm not going to get into pre-launch activities here. But much of what follows can be accomplished pre-launch.

You should have started on keyword optimization 60 days before you publicized the site. If you haven't done this, do it immediately. This means choose your keywords and place them strategically into every online and offline piece of marketing material. If you don't know how to do this gracefully, ask your web designer or – if you're desperate - send me an email and I'll return a sheet with the basics.

For now, here's where you need to expend your energy:

3 Basic Objectives

1. Create awareness
2. Drive traffic to the site
3. Create conversions

Create Awareness

Your target market needs to know that they can buy from you online. Don't assume that your loyal brick and mortar customers will magically figure this out. And don't assume that prospects will just bump into you online – if your site doesn't rank in the top 20 search results for important keywords and phrases, how would they?

If you already have a physical store, you have a tremendous awareness advantage. After all, your prime demographic is coming into your store everyday. It's a perfect place to advertise your new online sales offering.

A very basic, but effective strategy is to put a sign that's visible from the street in the front window, a banner in the store, and have cashiers put coupon-bearing fliers announcing the site into every bag.

If you don't have a physical store, the best way to create awareness quickly – and quick is the operative word – is to bite the bullet and pay for search engine ads and Adwords – it's only temporary – not more than six months or so.

Other methods for creating awareness include:

- Send out announcement releases via Twitter, email, and direct mail.
- Partner with affiliates – especially suppliers – and ask them to post announcements on their websites. They should be more than willing to do this.
- Print a sentence about the site on a small neon sticker and add it to all existing marketing materials.
- Send out online and print media releases

Drive Traffic to the Website

Once people know your site exists, you want them to visit it and you must give them a compelling reason to do so. In fact, you want them to do more than just visit it - you want them to stay there for as long as possible. So you promise them it will be worth their while. The promise you make is essentially this:

If you visit my site, I won't waste your time.

Since you can never be sure which of your site pages search engines will rank highest, you need to make every page interesting, compelling, and easy to navigate. Every page needs to be no more than one click away from your online store.

Include something noteworthy on every page – even if it’s just a tidbit of information that will make the visitor’s life a little easier. For example, a pet supply site might advise, *Did you know that a \$15 matt comb will remove most matts from your dog’s coat easily and painlessly?* If I had a longhaired pet and was really frustrated by all the matts, this would be welcome news.

If your web pages are nothing but self-serving spin, people won’t come back. And it’s not just that they won’t come back for a week or two, they won’t come back EVER – this is pretty dire when you really think about it.

Other online and offline methods for driving traffic include:

- Site content enhancements – specifically creating a separate page that focuses on educating visitors for every product category
- Features that will entice visitors to stay on the site longer, such as an informative forum
- Keyword-enhanced educational articles for distribution to publications and online article distributors - these will increase search rank and can also become copy for Web pages, marketing materials, and email distribution.
- Opt-in Twitter marketing – send sale announcements and coupon codes
- Print and broadcast media placement
- Online versions of successful brick and mortar promotions

Create Conversions

Although there’s an altruistic benefit to educating consumers on your website, you’d like a portion of those visitors to buy something. Basically, in order to continue educating consumers you need to make money. We all understand this.

After prospects have browsed through your site, you want them to think:

I can see that you know what you’re doing and I trust you. In addition, I really appreciate your help. It would feel good to buy something from you right now.

Make it easy for them to do that. Make the product selection easy, make the checkout process seamless, be upfront with the shipping costs – show them where they can save money. One online seller came up with a great way to nudge reluctant buyers over the edge. The store sent an automatic email response to everyone who started, but didn’t complete a purchase (probably because of shipping costs). The email had a promotional code for an additional 20 percent off the order. Also, don’t forget to use transactional emails for further promotion.

Don’t waste time trying to figure out how to *make* visitors buy; give visitors a smart reason to buy, instead.

Many traditional marketing strategies translate well into e-commerce – such as promoting where the demographic congregates. If you have a physical store, review what’s worked well there and morph those activities into your online campaign.

One of the biggest hurdles in online marketing is finding a way to keep visitors on your site long enough to convince them to buy. When people visit your store, they’ve already made a time investment and are unlikely to walk in and walk out. Online visitors have no such investment – it doesn’t take much effort to click in and click out. The quality of your site will make or break your online business (your competition isn’t other companies - it’s the mouse).

For more information related to Online/Digital Marketing read:

B2B? Skip the Social Media

http://www.smartprcommunications.com/files/B2B_Social_Media_Tools2.pdf

Meaningful Differentiation

http://www.smartprcommunications.com/files/Meaningful_Differentiation_-_Online-Handout3.pdf

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