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- Optimizing your website for SEO
- Secret to paid search success
- Choosing a Marketing Platform

It's all about love

It's Cloudy. And it's going to stay that way for quite a while. The age of the Cloud is here for good and for marketers this means an opportunity to explore and embrace a wholesale change in marketing strategies and buying behavior. So what is different about online marketing for the cloud-savvy generation? One thing's for sure - it's no longer just about your products. It's about the entire engagement experience with your company. Your website may be the first interaction they have with you - or not. Social media permeates and is used more and more for early education. By the time your prospect arrives at your website they likely have specific questions they want answered fast. Then they want to be assured you'll take good care of them over the life of your relationship. You're a suitor. Make them fall in love with you. Fast.

Love your customer

To win your customers' and prospects' hearts, start with a little detective work - create a complete profile of your customer. Ask yourself the following questions:

Who?

In most cases there's a definite pattern. Run an industry/job title report from your CRM and analyze it.

Why?

Now that you have identified your customer, ask yourself what pain you're solving for that particular group. Why are they looking for a product such as yours?

This activity isn't new, marketers have been doing this for years, but the difference now is that you need to use this information more intelligently. In the online world, access to information is

so widely available, you have to be able to attract people to your company by understanding what information they are really looking for.

Love your Sales team

No one knows your customers better than the people who sold to them in the first place. Sales reps are out there every day on the front lines and often aren't known for comprehensive documentation. Therefore you need to gather this information proactively from them. Develop a list of key engagement triggers: the wows during the demos, profiles of the initial point of contact and decision maker, hot buttons for the technical team, key goals for the execs, etc. Then dig for what's worked - and hasn't - in the past with wins and losses. Collecting sales intelligence isn't new. What is new in the Cloud world is the need to assimilate the most powerful messages holistically into the complete customer engagement picture, from organic to paid search to social interactions and all the way through to in-product communications.

Love analytics

In the Cloud world you have access to data in higher volumes and greater granularity than ever before. Dig deeply into your web analytics tool. See what keywords are currently bringing traffic to your website. Analyze what keywords your competitors are using. Evaluate the search and competition values (using the Google Keyword Tool) then build a list of your core and long-tail keywords. Test keywords that emerged in your research with sales.

In the Cloud world, the ability to track from keyword all the way through to revenue is more of a reality than ever before. Through analytics, you can now decode the direct correlations between keywords and the prospects that actually make a purchase. The time you spend building this infrastructure by using complementary vendor technologies (it's still not easy) will pay off enormously in marketing effectiveness and ROI. Look at the progression of a lead through your sales cycle. Identify where the information handoffs exist and make them work from keyword > lead creation > opportunity > sale. This will allow you to focus spend on keywords that generate revenue.

Love content

Now that the prep work is done - you know your target audience and your keyword research is squared away, start crafting your content. Search engines love content. They feed on content and get especially happy if you throw something fresh at them often. Plug your keywords into engaging content. The challenge is balancing the keyword density needed for search engines with the engagement factor needed for humans. Build topics around your major keywords and themes that you've uncovered in your fact-finding. As you uncover more nuggets of effectiveness, hand them over to content to build on. If you don't have a content development

in house, get a contractor and set a goal of developing 5-10 unique articles/month around your main keywords.

Also, think of your own search habits for a moment. What percentage of your search behavior is research, and what percentage is shopping? 95%/5%? 99%/1%? Exactly. Ever notice that, regardless of what topic you're searching for, Wikipedia comes up on the first page? That's because Google knows that most users are in it for the research. Informative & educational - not marketing pitches is what works. That's what you want to see when you research, and that's what your customers want to see. Create a lot of relevant content. One company that does this especially well (and not surprisingly so) is HubSpot. Their extensive library of free tutorial/videos/how-to's is very useful for the online marketing crowd. It's full of keyword-reach, relevant and very useful and engaging content. And it builds their brand with their target audience.

Similarly, we at FinancialForce.com are in the process of developing a content rich section around our individual products. Articles, tutorials and educational content will sit in our Resources portal. Initially general in scope, these sections will evolve into vertically targeted content and address the most common questions for this audience. What's nice in the Cloud world is that the content investment is leveraged across lead generation, awareness, education, customer service and loyalty initiatives. As mentioned before, the Cloud is all about interconnected oneness. Your content team will become the best buddies with every department in the company, turning their day-to-day experiences into valuable information that engages and educates prospects and customers.

When developing your content, keep in mind that unique relevant content is what you want. Search Engines don't like to serve multiple results with identical articles. Instead they try hard to provide a diverse range of information and allow the audience to pick what they're interested in. You can take inspiration from other websites. If you choose to use articles from syndication websites (better than having no content) try to throw in a few paragraphs to make them appear a bit more unique.

Once you have content, optimize it. Very briefly but to the point - make sure Meta tags (especially Title tags) are present and focused on your main keywords. Your tags need to reflect content on the web page (don't plug in your main keywords blindly if they are not used on the page --- but they should be). Metas need to be unique. Make use of Google Webmaster Tools - it's free and very easy to configure. It's a good way to get a picture of what state your Meta tags are in, how 'crawlable' (search engine-accessible) your pages are, how many inbound links link to your website, etc.

I want to mention White Hat SEO (aka ethical SEO). When writing for your website - keep in mind that you're writing for humans first. Here's how Webopedia describes it: "White Hat SEO is the usage of SEO strategies, techniques and tactics that focus on a human audience opposed to search engines and completely follows search engine rules and policies." Whenever in doubt, imagine yourself in Google's shoes and ask "if I was working for Google - would I like people to do this?" If the answer is no -- don't do it. And if you're still not sure, address a resource such as Webmasterworld.com. Search or post away - you'll get good advice.

Love your Neighbors

Inbound links are essential. Although inbound links aren't easy to get, a very powerful way to improve your search engine popularity is to have other (relevant) websites link to you. Talk to your partners - ask them to add your link to their partner sections. Look at free or paid web directories and add listings that are rich with keywords. Create a Wikipedia page about your company (no guarantees that it will stay up, but definitely worth trying). Start syndicating your press releases (there's a handful of websites that will happily re-post them). Social bookmarking sites, on top of social media are very useful as well. Get more ideas for good link placements by searching for your main keywords and examining the websites that rank on top. Plug in link:www.websitenamegoeshere.com into Google and look at which sites link to these guys. Try to get listings from the same sites/directories.

Conclusion

There is no magic. Online marketing in the Cloud relies on the same tried and tested marketing strategies you've been using all along. What the Cloud does change is the ability to gain incredible insight into your prospects buying behavior and reach out to them with more relevant messages than ever before. Your job is no longer just a marketer pitching product, it's an educator, evangelist, analyst, curator, friend and member of a community. The challenge is in striking a balance and keeping everyone happy. - You need to appeal to prospects, customers, search engines, partners, investors all with content that resonates to their individual ears. It is work that involves lots of research and comprehensive analytics. It is work that is still undervalued at times and requires you to go out on a limb and push for change in priorities. But it's also work that's changing the way marketing is done. And that's a pretty fun place to be.

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