Marketing Myth Shakedown

By Bryan Trilli

A look at the most common online marketing misconceptions

Whether it is search engine marketing (SEM), search engine optimization (SEO) or website design, there are many myths about Internet marketing that just do not hold up to testing. Let's tackle the top 18.

Keep in mind these myths are for service-based small businesses with the primary goal of generating leads.

Myth #1: You need to be No. 1 on Google. In reality, the cost per click to be No. 1 in paid advertising for all pertinent keywords is generally not cost-effective.

Myth #2: The goal of a website is to get people to spend time on it. For a service business, the goal is to generate leads.

Myth #3: You can save money by putting a phone number in your Google ad. Google only makes money when someone clicks on an ad, so letting companies put phone numbers in ads could cause it to lose money. Google does not allow this—it tests these things.

Myth #4: Google AdWords and pay per click (PPC) marketing are easy. Of every topic in this article, Google AdWords marketing is the most complicated and time consuming. Not only do you have to choose five different keywords and four different ad types, you have to choose where to market and to whom, on which sites to market, and which problem a prospect is actually trying to solve by searching online. Dr. Glenn Livingston, a marketing expert who has worked with a variety of Fortune 500 companies, did studies showing that people searching for "guinea pig," "guinea pigs" and "guinea pig care" are all looking for vastly different things and are at different levels in the buying cycle. Then, of course, you have to understand how to set up scientifically sound tests to determine what is working and what is not.

Myth #5: You need to invest in more traffic (SEO and PPC). For most websites, you first need to invest in converting more visitors to leads. For instance, if your current website converts 3% and you bump that up to 4.5%, that is the equivalent of getting 50% more traffic at no extra cost. (We have seen water treatment company websites consistently convert more than 8%.)

Myth #6: The best way to increase conversion is with a better offer. Our testing indicates that this is rarely the case. When we create a site with multiple calls to action, such as "contact us," "schedule an appointment" and "special offers," usually the "special offers" get the least traffic.

Myth #7: A video on your website will increase conversion. Generally this is true. However, a company that helps people organize their closet space performed tests on lead-capture pages with and without videos and found a significant increase in conversion on the page without a video. This does not mean video is bad—it just means that there are many other factors to consider.

Myth #8: I need to let my Web designer know what to update. That is like your accountant saying, "Just let me know how much you have to pay in taxes this year, and then I'll fill out the forms." Your Web designer should be saying, "We just found out that *this* performs better than *that*, so add *this* to your next postcard campaign."

Myth #9: You need to follow best practices to get the highest conversion. There is no such thing. We have used the same website in the same industry in multiple areas in the U.S. and have seen vastly different results. Sure, there are things you absolutely do not want to do (like riddle your page with typos), but overall, you cannot know until you test.

Myth #10: A great website is all about great content. If you are Wikipedia, of course this is true. If you are Bob's Water Conditioning, then a great website is about giving the customers what they want: reliable water

treatment at a fair price. They do not usually need a step-by-step video tutorial about how you are going to achieve that.

Myth #11: A website is going to cost a lot of money up front. This is an idea with which I strongly disagree. Because great websites have to be tested, what are you paying for up front would be like relying on a designer's guess at what your visitors might want to see.

Myth #12: What works in one market will work in another. In other words, buying a pre-made website for your business does not guarantee the best performance. Every market is unique, because you have different water quality, income levels, education levels and competition.

Myth #13: My website will someday be done. Unless you want to see its performance decrease, you should never stop improving your webside. Your website it is about as "done" as regular maintenance on your service trucks. Stop servicing your trucks and they stop working. The same goes for your website.

Myth #14: Testing and optimizing for a small business is just too costly. If you work with a company that focuses on your industry, it can leverage what it learns from similar businesses to more cheaply and efficiently help you.

Myth #15: You will never be able to fully track or understand how your marketing generates leads. This is what I like to call the "we don't want to be held accountable" sales pitch. For the first time in the history of marketing, we can track just about everything online. With numerous click tracking and analytics tools, you can know exactly what is in the mind of your prospect and use that data in online and offline marketing.

Myth #16: My business needs to be on Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin and Pinterest. It only needs to be on social media if your customers are there and you know how to engage them regularly and professionally. It is not easy. If you think your business could benefit from social media, hire a professional.

Myth #17: My Web designer should be able to understand what I want. Do you have a well-thought-out marketing road map, including a clear understanding of your target customers, their problems and your solutions? If so, then your Web designer should get it. If not, create a marketing road map first.

Myth #18: A website will grow your business faster than any other type of marketing. This is true; however, all types of marketing work, and what works best for your business in your market will require some testing and measurement. A study by Marketing Sherpa revealed that up to 67% of a website's traffic can be driven from TV. A well-laid-out marketing plan, with your website at the core, is often your most powerful approach to lead generation.

As a final thought: If you are working with a Web designer, print this out and use it as a cheat sheet when you interview him or her. *wqp*

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