

Advertising in the Digital Age, Part 2

Search, socialize and connect!



Douglas Knorr, known as a "retail marketing activist," is president of Knorr Marketing (www.knorrmarketing.com), a full-service marketing and advertising agency specializing in the home furnishings industry. The agency provides strategic planning, creative production, public relations, sales promotions, website development and media buying services. Headquartered in Traverse City, Mich., the firm serves clients throughout the United States.

Phil Callighan is senior account executive at Knorr Marketing and a member of the Public Relations Society of America. He focuses on strategic planning and branding as well as providing Internet and public relations leadership for Knorr Marketing clients.



by: Douglas Knorr and Phil Callighan

Not long ago we were telling clients, "If someone has a good shopping experience at your store, statistics say they'll tell three other people. If they have a bad experience, they'll tell eleven people."

Today that sounds almost prehistoric.

Largely due to websites, social media and blogs, good or bad word-of-mouth (WOM) can now travel at the speed of light to dozens, hundreds or thousands of people.

That's a chief reason your store brand can no longer compete by relying just on "outbound" traditional ad media such as circulars, broadcast commercials and direct mail. These media are proclamation-based (with them, you "proclaim" special sales events and incentives to attract shoppers).

These traditional media are still vital, but you must also consider "inbound," conversation-based media such as search engines, social media and blogs whose online formats foster WOM (word of mouth). These media are popular with consumers aged 45 and under — your current or future customers!

You can use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) tactics you apply to your own website to ensure high rankings when local consumers search "furniture" or other key words online. You also can communicate with many other consumers online using Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising models offered by search engines, social media, and blogs.

In this second of our series on "Advertising in the Digital Age," we'll look at each of these strategic opportunities more closely and give you some recommendations about each.

The Pay-Per-Click advertising model lets you bid on keywords to have your PPC text ad appear adjacent to organic (natural) search results when your ad is relevant to a consumer's search. With Google, you can conduct this activity while limiting your monthly investment.

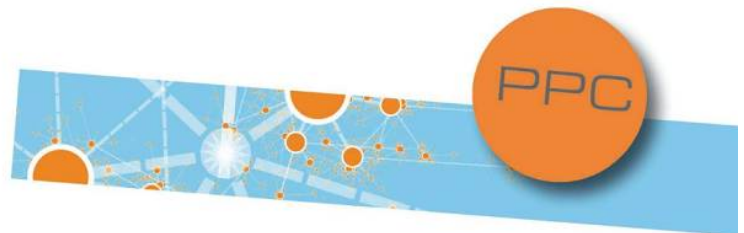
To be most effective, make sure your PPC ad links to a page that mirrors the message contained in the ad. Custom "landing pages" with specific "call to actions" are far better than leading a person to the home page of your website, from where they'll have to navigate to find what they want.

Here are other tactics that will help attract consumers to your website:

- **List your website on low-cost or no-cost local search opportunities.** You can add your listing (usually at no charge) to Google Maps, Yahoo Local, MSN Live, SuperPages, Yellow Pages and other local sites such as the Chamber of Commerce, Visitors Bureau, etc. covering the geographic location where you operate or have a mailbox. Since Google, Yahoo, and MSN often include local businesses above other listings in their search results, you can often leverage your geographic edge to get top listings. Online phone book sites offer paid options that are worth exploring, too.
- **Link your site with local bloggers and partner with non-competing local websites to exchange links.** Whenever possible, request the link back to your site to include one of the key phrases you are targeting. According to the Google® Webmaster Guidelines, "Your site's ranking in Google® search results is partly based on analysis of those sites that link to you. The quantity, quality, and relevance of links count towards your rating. The sites that link to you can provide context about the subject matter of your site, and can indicate its quality and popularity."
- **Generate backlinks to your website** with online news releases, articles, forums, blogs and social bookmarks.
- **Ramp up your public relations.** While PPC and SEO dominate most discussions about methods for driving website visits and transactions, a 2009 national survey

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conducted by Opinion Research Corporation indicates that public relations may play a much stronger role. Credibility is often much higher with publicity that appears in editorial content than with paid advertising, because people recognize that advertising space or sponsored links have been purchased and the message is not objective.

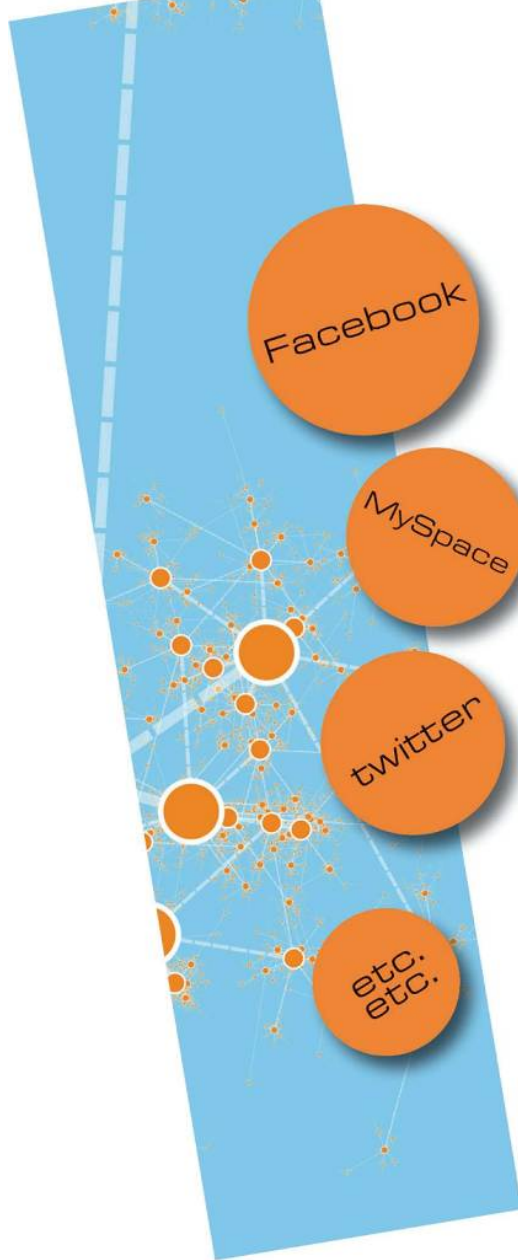
- **Participate in selective social communities and blogs,** featuring back links on your community page(s) to relevant pages on your website.

Social media: More interaction with customers

According to the "Consumer Internet Barometer" report from TNS Media Intelligence and The Conference Board:

- 43 percent of US Internet users visited social networking sites in the second quarter of 2009.
- Nearly 50 percent of females and 37.6 percent of males visited social networking sites.
- More than 70 percent of Internet users under age 35 browsed social networks.

Social media communities like Facebook, YouTube and MySpace are primarily listening



Today's consumer wants to be part of the branding process, suggesting ideas or venturing opinions about what appeals, what works and what doesn't.

media. They let you listen to your customer and respond to her in real time. Advertising is secondary and is not the purpose of the community.

We recommend you create both a Facebook presence and a Twitter presence for your company to reach the Gen X (age 30 – 45) and Gen Y (age 19 – 29) female shoppers. Why Facebook in particular? That's where the fish are biting.

- From January to March 2009, people ages 26 to 44 made up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. Facebook population.
- Facebook added its 200 millionth user last April. To mark the occasion, the *Silicon Alley Insider* noted that if Facebook were a country, it would be the fifth-largest in the world after China, India, the U.S. and Indonesia.
- The U.S. had more Facebook users than any other country.
- As of July this year, Facebook was the top-ranked social media community in terms of visits, with a 36.62 percent market share (reported by Hitwise). MySpace was second with 25.83 percent and YouTube was third with a 13.15 percent market share.

Clearly, Facebook should not be ignored. So, here's how you can add it to your marketing mix.

1. Create and promote a specific Facebook page for your business through the "Facebook Pages" application. Use this page to post alerts when you have news or articles to share. Facebook members can then become fans of your page and receive these updates on their newsfeed as you post them.
2. Promote your Facebook page in offline and online media. Add a "Company X on Facebook" link to your website, your email signatures, traditional advertising, email newsletters, etc. Ask your Facebook friends and fans to spread the word. If you're already on LinkedIn and Twitter, promote it there.


While Facebook offers PPC advertising, the only "relevance" Facebook can provide is to have your ad appear on individual pages where the keywords you have chosen are found within each individual's profile information. For this reason, Facebook results have been mixed in terms of how much traffic you will gain.

Still, given the relative low cost and the nature of pay-per-click, you could use Facebook to generate online "impressions" that will help build brand recognition for other traffic-building tools in the mix, like your website URL. Set a daily "not to exceed" budget to keep your spend at an amount you can afford.

Of course Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are not the only social media communities you might wish to explore. You

might also find it helpful to investigate Mixx, Kirtsy, Linkswarm, Showhype and others.

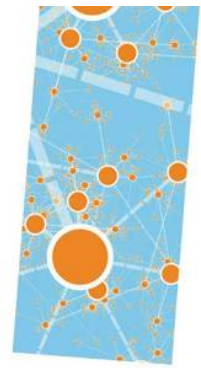
IMPORTANT: participating in social media communities takes significant time and discipline to view consumer comments and reply to them. Don't start participating in one unless you know you will sustain your participation — and do it in a way that benefits your company!

Social media enables communicating directly with current and future customers, so it's not an activity to assign to an intern or a part-time young person who may seem more comfortable online but probably won't have the experience and expertise to make it a PR win for your store. Top management and department heads should be the ones who handle the communication. 

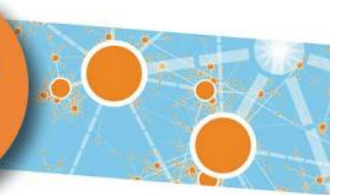
Remember:

participating in social media takes significant time and discipline to successfully maintain.

Make sure you can sustain your participation.



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