



SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

October 2011





Online Marketing

How To Take Your Message Beyond Your Website

By Don Sadler

Ten years ago a discussion of online marketing probably started with “So, do you have a website?”

Today, having a website is a given even for the smallest micro-businesses and solo entrepreneurs. But having a website is just the start.

Progressive small-business owners and entrepreneurs are incorporating a number of different Web 2.0 elements into their websites, including search engine optimization (or SEO), pay-per-click (or PPC) advertising, social media, blogs and e-newsletters.

By adding such techniques to their online marketing arsenal, owners enhance their online presence and make their websites true marketing tools.

You can do the same for your micro-business by following these guidelines.

SEO will help get your website listed high in the main section of a search engine's results page.



Develop A Strategy

One of the keys to online marketing success is creating a cohesive strategy. But, how do you decide which elements to focus on first?

"Taking things one step at a time is the best way to prioritize tasks and not get overwhelmed," says Stacy Williams, president and founder of Prominent Placement, a search engine marketing company in Atlanta, Ga.

She identifies three distinct steps in an integrated online marketing strategy.

1. The first step is to make sure your target customers are aware that they have a problem to be solved, and that your category of products or services can solve it.

"Online display advertising on sites that the target audience is visiting is great for this kind of general branding and awareness," says Williams.

2. The second step is to make sure your website can be found easily when prospects go to a search engine to look for service providers in your category. This is where SEO and PPC advertising come into play.

"They help ensure that your site is highly visible so prospects can start considering your brand," Williams explains.

SEO involves determining which keywords your prospects are likely to type into a search engine when looking for businesses like yours, and then working those words into the copy on your website pages, as well as your site's title tags and description tags. When done properly, SEO will help get your website listed high in the main section of a search engine's results page.

PPC advertising is a little different.

Here, you also try to determine which keywords your prospects will use. Then you bid with the search engines to essentially buy these keywords, so that links to your website will come up in the paid section of the results page (either on the right-hand side or at the top of the page). You pay the search engine each time someone clicks on your link.

Jason Morrison, vice president of sales and marketing for Capitol Media Solutions, a media strategy, buying and sales agency headquartered in Washington, D.C., says there are two main PPC advertising providers: Google AdWords, which has about 70 percent of the PPC market, and Microsoft adCenter, which is newer and has the remaining 30 percent.

Google AdWords was the original, Morrison notes, "and it's very user-friendly. I usually recommend it to businesses that are just starting out with PPC advertising."

To get started, simply visit [Google AdWords](#) or [Microsoft adCenter](#).

3. The final step in Williams' three-step integrated marketing strategy is to engage prospects on your website by offering some sort of valuable content.

"You want to either entice them to make a purchase or to give you their contact information so you can follow up," she explains. "This is where a lead-nurturing campaign, perhaps via email marketing, can be valuable."

The consumer's searching and buying process is not always this linear, of course.

Adds Williams: "The bottom line is that businesses should try to be visible online everywhere their target audience is, throughout the entire buying cycle, and have a cohesive campaign offering a consistent message."



E-Newsletter Success Tips

Here are three top e-newsletter success tips from Michael Katz, founder of Blue Penguin Development, a consulting firm that specializes in the development of e-newsletters.

1. Publish regularly

"The biggest reason e-newsletters fail is that companies stop publishing them after just a few issues," says Katz.

2. Share a point of view

"If you want to stand out, you need to say something noteworthy," Katz adds. He urges clients to avoid the temptation to stay in the middle of the road.

3. Write in a natural voice

Email and now social media have made casual, first-person writing the voice of business, Katz points out. "Write in a way that reflects your authentic voice."

“E-newsletters are a great way to stay in front of your customers.”



E-Newsletters, Blogs And Social Media

E-newsletters are an increasingly popular tool used by businesses of all shapes and sizes to enhance their online presence. E-newsletters are especially useful for nurturing and staying in touch with prospects and leads.

“When done properly, e-newsletters accomplish three critical things all at once,” says Michael Katz, founder of Blue Penguin Development, a consulting firm in Hopkinton, Mass., that specializes in the development of e-newsletters. “They position you as an expert. They leverage your existing relationships. And they provide a means for revealing the true voice of your company.”

Media strategist Morrison concurs: “E-newsletters are a great way to stay in front of your customers and prospects week after week, month after month, when you might otherwise fall off their radar.”

Katz stresses that e-newsletters must be more than simply poorly disguised sales pitches.

“You need to provide value if you want people to give you permission to keep coming back to their inbox,” says Katz.

Blogging and being active on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are other ways many businesses are beefing up their online presence. Blogs, Facebook fan pages, Twitter feeds and LinkedIn profiles should all be integrated together and easily accessible from your website’s home page.

Do It Yourself—Or Hire A Pro?

While all of these techniques may sound relatively simple, success hinges on expertise, consistency and execution.

“There are a lot of nuances to SEO and PPC advertising that do-it-yourselfers should be aware of if they want to get the best results,” says Williams.

She says whether to hire a pro or do it yourself depends primarily on the competitiveness of your market.

“If you’re selling books online and want to compete with Amazon and Barnes & Noble, then plan to set aside a big budget and hire an expert. But if you’re selling blue widgets in Montana, you can probably read some basic information online and optimize your site and set up PPC yourself.”

Similarly, social media efforts and blogging are only as good as the time and effort you put into them, Morrison adds.

“They’re very labor intensive, and you really have to stay on top of things. Most of the businesses that do social media and blogging well have staff members who are devoted to keeping them going.”

If you don’t have the time or inclination to do all of this yourself, but don’t have a big budget either, Morrison suggests hiring an intern to help out.

“Many colleges and universities are now offering courses in all of this. An intern cannot only help you implement these strategies very cost-effectively, but can also teach you the techniques so you’re better able to do it yourself in the future.”

Whatever you decide to do, don’t do it halfway.

“If you can’t put 100-percent effort into an initiative, then hold off until you can,” advises Morrison. “The biggest mistake I see is business owners getting three or four of these platforms going but not concentrating on doing any of them well. Focus on perfecting one platform at a time.” ■

Don Sadler is a freelance writer who specializes in topics that are relevant to small-business owners. He’s currently working on enhancing his website, donsadlerwriter.com, with some Web 2.0 elements.

Two Ways The NASE Can Help

Get the one-on-one help you need to develop an online marketing strategy. The NASE’s micro-business specialists offer personalized, confidential answers to all of your questions. Plus unlimited access to the business experts is included in the cost of your NASE Membership.

Be sure your online marketing tools adhere to laws regarding copyrights, trademarks and other legal issues. The NASE business law specialists can help with straightforward answers to your questions—at no additional cost to you.

BEN SEIDEL

Receives The 2011 NASE Future Entrepreneur Scholarship

By Jan Norman

With a little help from family and friends, Ben Seidel is fast becoming a serial entrepreneur.

Ben was just 13 when he built his first website to share information and showcase personal photos. His uncle, Mark Beall, shared his Web skills with Ben. He also provided guidance and encouragement.

Then, the teenager built a company website for BioDiverse Energies LLC, an environmental consulting firm in which Ben's father was involved.

The experience was an eye-opener for Ben.

"I saw a real need for affordable websites for companies in my hometown of Columbia, Mo.," Ben says. "I saw one business get ripped off paying a huge price for a site and I thought, 'I could do it so much better and cheaper.' That's when it clicked. I could make money doing this."



Ben is a great example of the type of young entrepreneur that the NASE Scholarship Program is designed to help.

It was the challenge rather than a desire for money that prompted Ben to launch **SRADCO Web Design** with his father's help in the summer of 2007. The umbrella company, Seidel Research and Development Co., was started by his father, Dave Seidel, an engineer and inventor, in 1991—"the year I was born," Ben says.

As Ben built websites for everyone from plumbers to real estate agents to engineering firms, he added website hosting, search engine optimization and other services that clients requested.

By 2009, he realized businesses and their customers could benefit from a community resource website, so he launched a second company, Central Missouri Online LLC (**CentralMO.com**). The website provides an events calendar, business directory, free classified ads and links to other resources for the region. The business makes money through banner advertising and premium listings.

"There weren't a lot of those [community resource websites] at the time, and I set it up so that one registration would allow users to do everything on the site."

Ben runs **CentralMO.com** and SRADCO Web Design while working on a double major in

economics and finance at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Mo., where he's a junior.

This year, Ben started yet another business, Magnetic Advertising LLC, to make vinyl vehicle decals for companies.

"I started that because we needed a vinyl sign to promote **CentralMO.com**, and it cost so much to get one and slap it on the back of a car," Ben says. "I asked a friend who was in graphic design, and he said it could be done a lot cheaper, so I said, 'Do you want to run it?'"

Typically, sign companies make the vinyl decals, and the client provides the vehicles on which the signs are mounted. Ben capitalized on his presence at the University of Missouri by paying students to place his signs on their cars, which broadly expands the advertisement's geographic reach.

Dedicated College Student

Ben's energetic pursuit of building three companies with four employees, while maintaining a 3.84 GPA in college, contributed to his selection as the NASE Future Entrepreneur for 2011.



NASE Future Entrepreneur for 2011, Ben Seidel, is joined by his proud parents, Dave and BJ, as he accepts the \$12,000 NASE scholarship check.

With this year's award, the NASE program hit the \$1.9 million mark in scholarships.

The scholarship competition, which started in 1989 for dependents of NASE Members, will award Ben up to \$24,000 toward his education. It is the largest scholarship of its kind in the U.S. and the only one that promotes the entrepreneurial philosophy. With this year's award, the NASE program hit the \$1.9 million mark in scholarships.

"Ben Seidel is a passionate entrepreneur," says Gregory Bier, an associate professor of management and adviser to a group of students in the University of Missouri's Trulaske College of Business. "Ben works projects start to finish. He is not just an idea generator. He nurtures the idea until it is ready for implementation. Then he implements it from start to success."

Dave Seidel, an NASE Member, says that his son has always been a great organizer and motivator.

"He has an older brother for whom Ben would organize all his activities. Ben is very dedicated and quality-minded," his father says. "It comes from the fact that he was given opportunities through being home-schooled until fifth grade to excel at whatever he did."

Ben says he has to work constantly at being organized so that he can balance school and business and still enjoy a social life.

"I have a huge color-coded whiteboard in my bedroom," says Ben. "I have business tasks that I need to get done, but I need to focus on school at the same time, and planning this way helps."

Savvy Business Owner

When Ben launched SRADCO Web Design, he set his prices significantly lower than the prices competitors charged.

"I didn't want someone to be scared off by my being a kid," he says. "It was obvious with the first few clients that they expected some big firm, and in walks a teenager. They were asking how old I was.

At times I think respect is associated with age. But now I use my age as a benefit. I'm high energy. I show clients that regardless of my age, I know what I'm talking about."

Clients apparently agree.

They refer him to friends who need a business website. They also ask Ben about other aspects of running their businesses such as offline marketing and how to handle sales representatives.

One of the most valuable and surprising lessons Ben has learned while building three companies is that it takes time—lots of time—to handle the people side of the work.

"If I have to deal with three or more people to get a project done, I add additional time [to the contract]. They want multiple renditions," he explains. "The contracts have to be specific so they don't keep making changes forever."

He now describes his pricing as competitive, but with more services than other Web design firms provide. In fact, Ben is studying whether to separate his business from the SRADCO umbrella and is considering changing the name to emphasize that his business is a comprehensive marketing and technology company.

He expects to be running the company in a more expansive form long after he graduates from college in 2013.

"Ben is a great example of the type of young entrepreneur that the NASE Scholarship Program is designed to help," says NASE President Kristie L. Arslan. "He excels as a student and as a business owner. We're proud to be part of his success by presenting him with the 2011 NASE Future Entrepreneur Scholarship." ■

Jan Norman is a freelance writer who covers entrepreneurship—at any age. Read her blog at jan.ocregister.com.

Learn More About NASE Scholarships

The award-winning NASE Scholarship Program is open to legal dependents of NASE Members, ages 16–24. To apply, students must be high school students or college undergraduates planning to enroll in college for the upcoming fall semester.

Get all of the details about the [NASE Scholarship Program](#) today. Just click [here](#).

And mark your calendar! **Applications** for scholarships for the 2012–2013 academic year will be available on Jan. 1, 2012.



NASE Gives \$40,000 In College Scholarships

This year the NASE awarded a \$4,000 scholarship to 10 deserving dependents of NASE Members. These students can use their scholarships to study any subject at the college of their choice.

“I know that families are struggling and making sacrifices so they can send their kids to college,” says NASE President Kristie L. Arslan. “I’m proud that the NASE can help these students pursue their dreams of a higher education. Congratulations to all of our scholarship recipients!”

2011 NASE Scholarship Recipients



Aaron Burns
Fredericksburg, Va.
*Dependent of NASE Member
Linda Burns*



Kelly Gwiner
Fostoria, Ohio
*Dependent of NASE Member
John Gwiner*



Andrea Hansen
Allison Park, Pa.
*Dependent of NASE Member
Debra Skurski*



Brendan Langford
San Antonio, Texas
*Dependent of NASE Member
Anthony Langford*



Michael Langford
San Antonio, Texas
*Dependent of NASE Member
Anthony Langford*



Lindsey Maxon
Arlington, Texas
*Dependent of NASE Member
Jannett Maxon*



Russell Stockman
Weatherford, Texas
*Dependent of NASE Member
David Stockman*



Diana Thomson
Talladega, Ala.
*Dependent of NASE Member
Pamela Thomson*

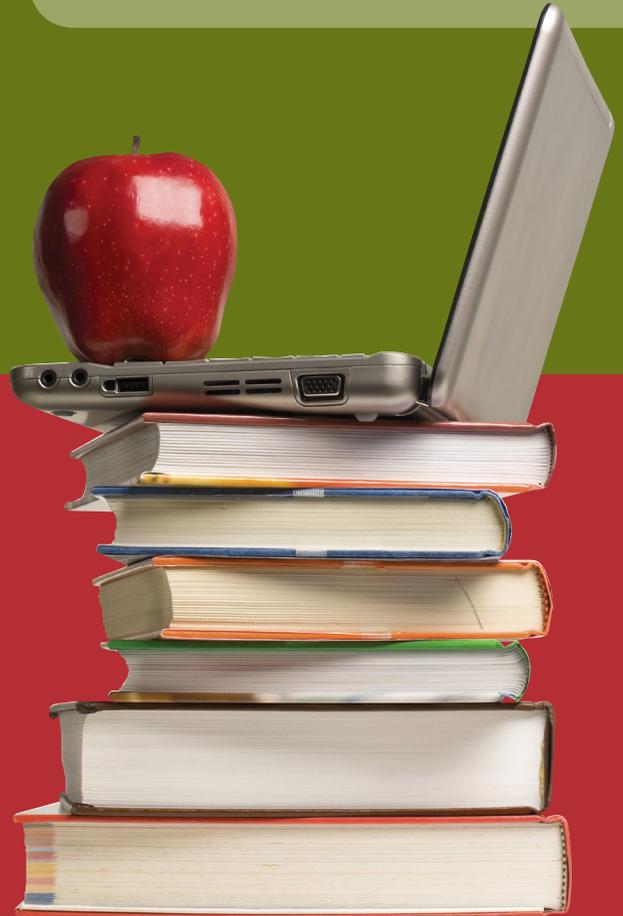


Alexander Vining
Poulsbo, Wash.
*Dependent of NASE Member
Jodie Bryant*

Not Pictured:

Taylor Demeter
Falls Church, Va.
*Dependent of NASE Member
Christian Demeter*

NASE Launches Continuing Education Scholarship Program



9 NASE Members Receive Scholarship Funds During Inaugural Year

By Molly Nelson

Although it may not be with pencils, crayons and textbooks, the NASE is helping its members go back to school. In 2011, the NASE launched its new Succeed Scholarship™ Program to help members obtain the knowledge they need to succeed.

Members applied for scholarships of up to \$4,000 to be used toward university or college courses, training courses for business licensing and certification, or participation in conferences and seminars that support business survival and growth.

Nine NASE Members were awarded a scholarship to pursue continuing education and training in the program's first year, with the association awarding a total of \$27,727 in scholarship funds.

“Continuing education and training can help reduce the risk of starting and running a business, but many small-business owners simply don't have the funds available to further their own education,” says NASE President Kristie L. Arslan. “We're proud to be helping our members expand their skill sets and knowledge base with our new Succeed Scholarship Program.”

These NASE Members were awarded Succeed Scholarships in 2011:

Josephine Abrigo

Josephine's Janitorial & House Cleaning Services
Fremont, Calif.

Mary Miles

MG Accounting & Tax Services, LLC
Johns Creek, Ga.

Davina Fankhauser

Fertility Within Reach
Newton Highlands, Mass.

Sharon Pikul

8th Day Consulting, Training & Software
Oak Forest, Ill.

Matt Hiltibran

Aspira Continuing Education
Camarillo, Calif.

Theresa Quinlan

TK's Tots
Coppell, Texas

Robert Marx

Marx Parts LLC
Arpin, Wis.

Tasha Wells

Integrated Medical Service
Charlotte, N.C.

Jannett Maxon

Maxon HR Consulting
Arlington, Texas

Molly Nelson is the NASE's Member Communications Manager. She thinks one of the best parts of her job is speaking with members like Succeed Scholarship recipients.

Apply For A \$4,000 NASE Succeed Scholarship

The NASE created the Succeed Scholarship Program to help those considering self-employment gain knowledge and skills they need.

With the Succeed Scholarship Program, NASE Members can apply for a scholarship of up to \$4,000 to help pay for continuing education through university or college courses, attend training courses for business licensing and certification, or attend conferences and seminars that will help you grow your business.

You could be the recipient of a Succeed Scholarship. To be eligible for an NASE Succeed Scholarship, you must:

- Be an NASE Member in good standing
- Document the potential of the scholarship to satisfy a business need
- Demonstrate the potential impact of the course on overall business growth and success
- Offer supporting documentation such as a résumé and business plan

Succeed Scholarships are awarded at the sole discretion of the NASE. Unfortunately, not everyone who applies will receive a scholarship. The NASE has the discretion to make no awards or present a higher or lower amount than requested. Decisions of the selection committees are final and are not subject to appeal. No application feedback will be given.



An Open Letter

To The President And Congress

By Kristie L. Arslan

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) issued its grim prediction that unemployment will remain above 8 percent until 2014. The CBO isn't limiting its bad news to unemployment—it also predicts our budget deficit will be bleak at \$1.3 trillion for fiscal 2011.

As Congress debates President Obama's job proposal and the Congressional Super Committee works on its own proposals to address our nation's fiscal woes, *America's smallest businesses would like to offer some advice.* They also ask that our political leaders keep the nation's 22 million self-employed and micro-businesses in mind as the work begins.

Businesses with 10 or fewer employees directly contribute \$1 trillion to the economy every year.

Help the small-business community fuel the economy with long-term policies, not just short-term fixes.

Those who pursue self-employment are doing their part to stimulate the economy and reduce the debt. Frankly, if those unemployed Americans were given some incentive to join the ranks of the self-employed, the debt would be decreasing a lot faster.

What can be done for the small-business community? The president and Congress can start by making the tough decisions.

The tax code is a good place to start. Self-employed business owners need to be CEO, COO and head of sales as well as their own accountants. They don't have the luxury of big business accounting departments that can manage the complicated and ever-changing tax system.

Undertake meaningful reform of the tax code by moving towards a simpler and more equitable system, giving all businesses, regardless of size, the same tax benefits so there is a level playing field.

Furthermore, reform should also enable America's businesses—big and small—to compete in the global economy.

Protect programs that incentivize entrepreneurship to boost our economy. Remember, today's small business could be tomorrow's major employer.

And even if they choose to stay small, increased entrepreneurship will help foster innovation, create jobs and bring in additional revenue to our federal coffers. Help the small-business community fuel the economy with long-term policies, not just short-term fixes.

America's smallest businesses know that no single fix will turn the economy around. But they do ask that the president and Congress keep two simple questions in mind when considering solutions: will the change help small-business owners keep their doors open and grow? Will it encourage others to go after their American dream?

If our political leaders believe their own mantra that *small businesses are the engine of the economy*, then the answer to these questions had better be yes.

(This article has been excerpted and adapted from a recent NASE op-ed in Roll Call.) ■

Kristie L. Arslan is president and CEO of the NASE and provides critical insight to policymakers on issues affecting our nation's self-employed. You can contact her at advocacy@NASE.org.