Marketing in the Age of the Carefully Considered Decision

NEW MEDIA STRATEGIES TO GENERATE LEADS AND LOWER MARKETING COSTS

THREE DEEP

Contents

Marketing in the Age of the
Carefully Considered Decision

Presented by
Three Deep Marketing

Introduction:
The predictably unpredictable buyer

The customer's buying path is forever unpredictable. The only thing that is predictable is they will do their research.

You're doing research here and now. You might pull the trigger soon. You might not.

In a way, you're a lot like everyone else. The decision you'll make—in this case, about your company's marketing—will be an informed one. You'll put in the time, do your homework and make an informed decision.

And in a way, you're unlike anyone. You'll bounce around from source to source however you please. No one knows the path you'll take—including you.

Let's lay it on the line. Buyers command the buying process now. They absorb information like sponges, but don't stand in line to get it. They go online and get it entirely on their terms.

If you want them to consider buying from you, you have to buy into the realities of the new media landscape. You have to map your marketing to their journey. And again, the journey's wildly unpredictable.

Go ahead and gulp. In the 2010s decade, marketing and media has matured. Keeping up with the changes is priority, but a highly challenging ambition. Deny the dominance of digital marketing and you'll go down in defeat. Digitally savvy companies shall inherit the earth.

This eBook is a roadmap of sorts. Our hope is it will equip you with the insights you'll need to achieve success in the age of the carefully considered decision.

Shifting into digital gear
The tactics marketers use to accelerate lead generation

Buyers are commonly two-thirds (or more) of the way through their journey before they reach out to do business with a company.

In the age of the carefully considered decision, the most successful businesses are becoming customer-centric marketing machines. The winners are now able to:

- Define marketing strategy based on customer needs
- Understand the customers' behaviors
- Engage with customers based on their behaviors

Marketing's role has become enormously different.

- **Marketing is sales.** Marketing—not sales—guides buyers through the early stages of the buying process.

- **Touch points multiply.** Marketers need to engage customers across an expanding array of channels.

- **Timeliness is crucial.** Relevant marketing messages and content must be delivered fast and at every stage of the buyer's journey.

Good news: your company can revisit its marketing methods and shift into digital gear to become:

- More in touch with your customers' needs
- More responsive in delivering the content they seek when it matters most
- More effective and efficient

Content Marketing
Cashing In on the Power of Pull
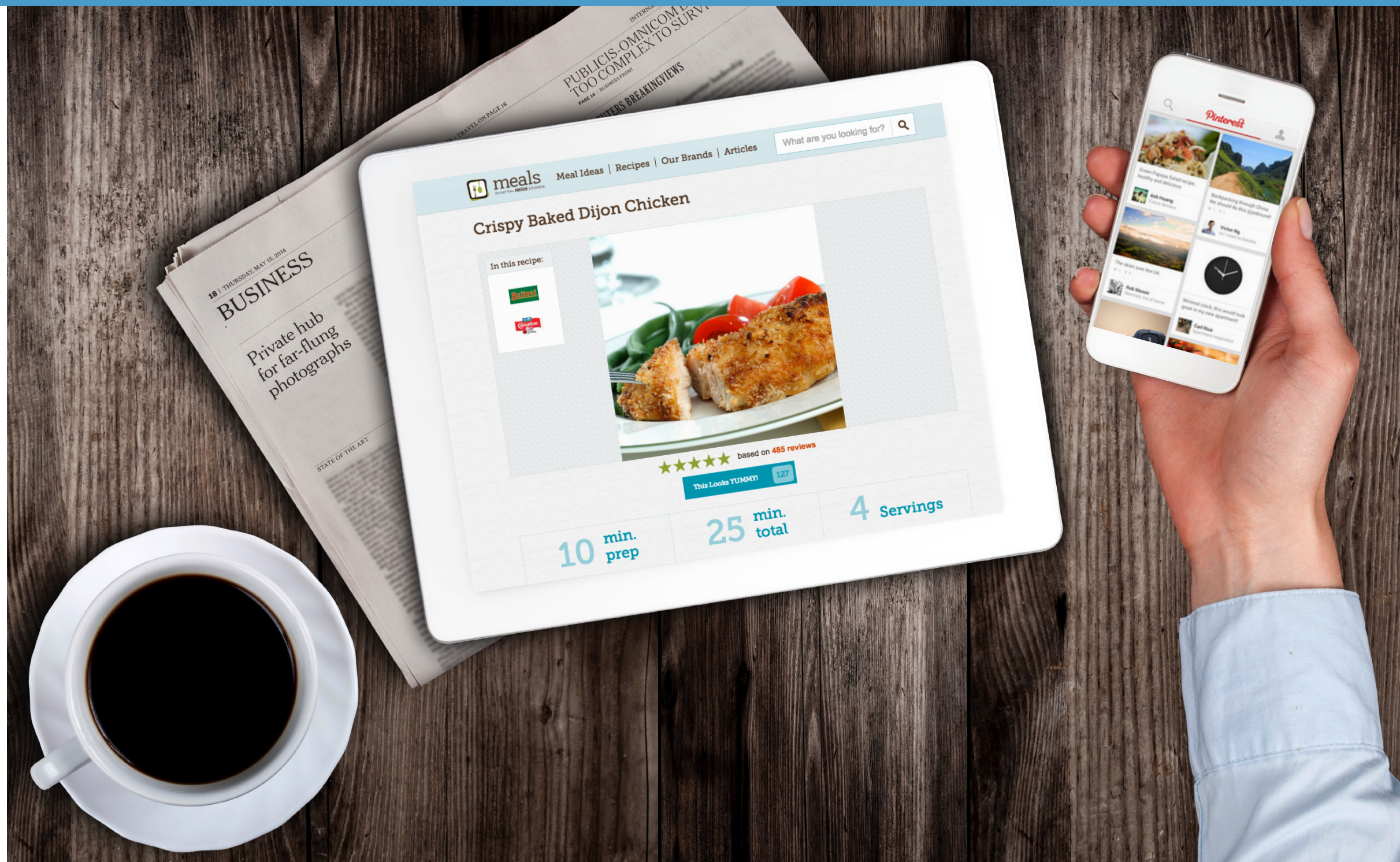
Content marketing
Cashing in on the power of pull

All day, every day, from wherever they happen to be, billions of people go online and summon the information they need to make decisions. Their requests are instantly fulfilled. The question that now begs to be asked is, whose information will be served and consumed?

For lack of a better name, the information, which takes many forms, has been dubbed "content." The practice of providing the content, when done by companies aiming to pull prospects toward their brand is content marketing.

Website conversion rates are nearly 6X higher for content marketing adopters.

Aberdeen Group 2014.

Defining content marketing. A variety of definitions of content marketing have surfaced. The common thread is the content has value, mostly of the educational variety. It's not advertising, which generally interrupts people as they attempt to consume media. Content is the media the prospect wants to consume. As a content marketer, you don't preach; you teach.

Though content can certainly be entertaining, it's helpful to understand content as marketing (a.k.a. content marketing) is aimed at targeted prospects for the purpose of driving action.

Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience – with the objective of driving profitable customer action.

Source: Content Marketing Institute

CONTENT MARKETING INSTITUTE

Back to the question, "Whose information will be served and consumed?" Companies that now consistently enjoy online marketing success are able to answer, "Our content satisfied the prospect's information needs."

These companies create content that engages prospects, earns their trust, and ultimately, wins their business. Let's examine how they do it.

The publishing paradigm

Effective content marketers are essentially publishers. They think of themselves this way and adopt the same practices that have served successful publishers well through the ages.

You can extract many lessons from this concept, the most important of them include:

Define a mission. Like publishers, content marketers must document whom they publish for and what purpose the content serves.

Establish an editorial calendar. Content marketers must, in advance, schedule content. The schedule should be populated with specifics including, topics, authors, audience personas, channels, and publication dates.

Maintain consistency. Content marketing is not a campaign. There is no end date. The program fails if and when the publication stalls or stops. It's imperative to perpetually develop and publish new content.

Collaborate to create. A common death trap in content marketing is the reliance on a single person or limited resources, usually from within a marketing department. The most successful content marketers gain universal (and top-down) buy-in from everyone in the company and rely on a rich variety of sources for content creation.

Various types of content marketing

*As a content marketer you can,
and should, create a variety of content types.*

Your company blog is a media you own—and you own everything about it: the space, voice, and point of view.

Your blog needs to be created with a content management system (CMS) and hosted on your domain to attract visitors. This approach enables you to quickly and easily update your content when you choose—without depending on support from IT or a web developer.

Additional content types to consider as you expand your program include:

- eNewsletters
- eBooks and white papers
- Research reports
- Case studies
- Webinars
- Video
- Infographics
- Slides
- Digital magazines
- Learning series
- Podcasts
- Apps

How might you prioritize? The answer should come from your market. In addition to understanding the needs and wants of your target market, you should conduct thorough research to draw conclusions about your prospects' and customers' media preferences.

Success on your content marketing journey

We cannot cover all the "need to know" material it takes to transform you into a successful content marketer in these pages. As helpful and as thorough as books such as *Content Rules* and *Epic Content Marketing* may be, none is so comprehensive as to explore all there is to know.

What's more, content marketing is forever dynamic. Every company will have different objectives, challenges, and approaches. No perfect formula exists.

However, as varied as content marketing programs may be, a commonality exists for every effective one. Focus on the final word: marketing.

Content marketing programs should grow your business. So before we turn the page to the all-important topic of search engine optimization, here are some ideas to behold along your content marketing journey.

Inspire conversation. Your company blog (and your content otherwise) should not only attract readers, but also engage them.

Qualify and disqualify. Though the content your audience will be most receptive to won't be explicitly promotional, consider how it frames your business. It should be relevant and attractive to the right audience and help others disqualify themselves when ill fitted for your products and services.

Nurture. Content should take prospects and customers on a journey.

- Content aimed at *first-timers* should move them to a more engaged stage of interest.
- *Interested prospects* should be nurtured to evaluate your solutions.
- *Evaluators* should be led to the checkout counter, so to speak.
- The goal is to use content to create more sales-ready leads.

Call for action. Smart marketing invokes action. Give your prospects specific directions. Every page or piece you publish should have an "ask."

Build advocates. Content marketing should extend beyond the sale. By continuously distributing useful content, you foster loyalty and strive to create a legion of brand advocates.

SEO
The Buyer's Journey Begins with Search

The champion of website traffic is organic search, driving 51% of all visitors for both B2B and B2C businesses.

BrightEdge, Cracking the Content Code 2014.

SEO
The buyer's journey begins with search

Carefully considered decisions begin with research. The actual percentages differ across industry types, but the take-away is the same: an overwhelming majority of buyers begin their journey by conducting an online search.

Buyers want tips, product information, comparisons, reviews, prices, etc. Essentially, they want answers. And they will find them. The question becomes: will the answers to their questions come from your company or its competitors?

The logic that follows is remarkably simple.

You need to appear on search engine results pages (SERPs), preferably on the first page, where upwards of 80% of the clicks come from.

How do you earn high rankings? At the most fundamental level, you need to understand and utilize search engine optimization (SEO) techniques. The page you want presented to a buyer performing a search via Google—or any search engine—has to be deemed relevant to the word or phrase the user types (or says). These words and phrases are called "keywords."

From here on out, very little is simple or cut and dried. Sophisticated mathematical algorithms determine search results. They're not only complex; they're well-guarded secrets. Also, the algorithms are perpetually re-examined and changed by those that create the search engines.

SEO never rests. The best you can do to succeed with your SEO efforts is to understand how search engines operate based on the insights of experts who practice the craft daily and apply the knowledge as you create and distribute your content.

Next, we'll unravel what we know to be truths about SEO today.

Effective SEO focuses on the factors that matter most

Wouldn't it be sweet if all you needed to do to achieve success with search was select the best keywords? It's true, you'll get nowhere without making smart decisions regarding your keywords. However, when Moz (a recognized leader in the field of SEO) last surveyed search experts in effort to compile a master list of ranking factors they compiled a list of 200 factors in 9 categories.

Following are the top four—with simple explanations—which amount to 65% of the equation.

- **Domain level authority**—The authority of a website determined by the number and quality of links to it.
- **Page level authority**— The authority of an individual web page determined by the number and quality of links to it.
- **Page content**—The keywords on the page (and where they are placed).
- **Page features**—Page elements outside of keywords, most notably, links, length and load time.

Other search engine ranking factors include:

- Domain level brand features
- Usage and traffic
- Social metrics
- Keywords on the page
- Anchor text
- Website features

Search engine practitioners sometimes torture themselves (and their clients) trying to make sense of it all. Ultimately, the most sensible approach is to abide by the advice offered from Google, which is to provide valuable content and format it correctly.

Despite the proliferation of search ranking factors (many of which come from speculation), the most important is still links. Quality links determine the authority of your pages. You earn quality links by publishing quality content.

How to optimize web pages
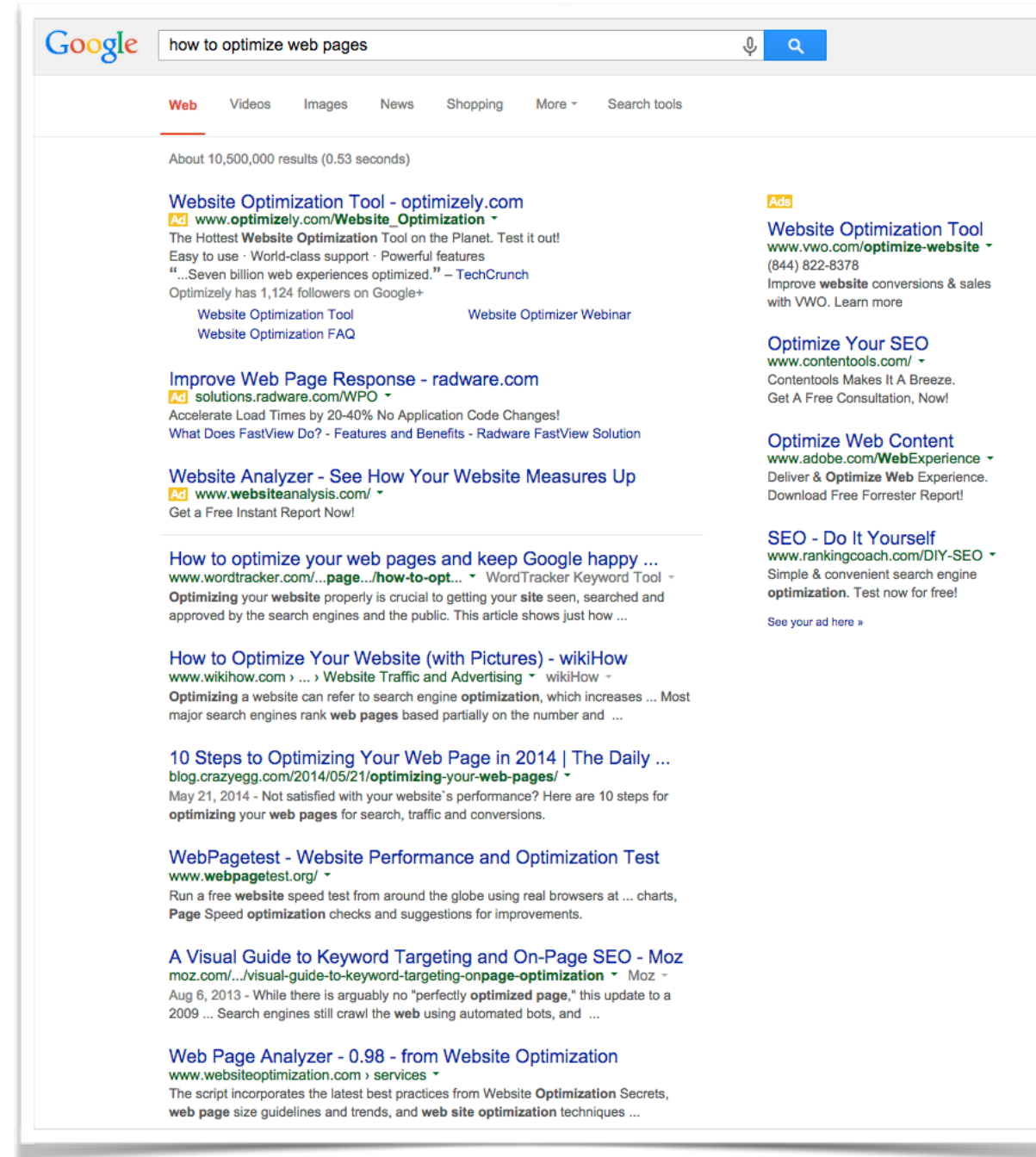
Understand this: search engines rank pages. One by one. To get your page ranked, you must optimize it per the standards of the search engine. You begin by using "tags" whose purpose is to signal relevance to the search engine.

Tagging a page correctly will call for the smart use of keywords. They should be used in specific places, however, it's vital to understand using keywords in excess (keyword stuffing) results in search ranking penalties. Your keywords should be used as naturally as possible.

The places your keywords should be placed include:

- **Title**—The title is what you hope will appear on the SERP. The limited space there suggests a maximum character count around 60.
- **Headers**—Pages can include headlines (tagged as h1) that can differ from the title, but should also feature your keywords. Subheads (tagged as h2) may also include keywords or close variants.
- **Body copy**—Your page should include keywords and variations of them naturally, but as often as possible.
- **Meta description**—SEO plugins remind you to craft short snippets to describe your page. Snippets are often displayed in search results. Meta descriptions do not affect rank, but do affect click through rates.
- **URL**—The page's URL should contain keywords. Make the URL concise by disposing of unnecessary words.
- **Image Name(s)** —File names of your images should include keywords so they appear under relevant "image" search.

Share this content

Drive traffic with off-site SEO

Off-page SEO encompasses the tactics used to increase the authority of your site, increase visibility via search engine rankings, and drive traffic. Much of the emphasis in off-page SEO is link acquisition, or, link building. By earning external links to your web pages you signal to the search engines the pages offer valuable content.

For years, optimizers used a variety of tactics that have been rendered worthless by a series of changes to the algorithms used by the search engines. Today, such tactics are dubbed "black hat" and are recognized by Google and other search engines. Besides being taboo, black hat SEO methods are actually detrimental to the cause.

Success in link building now comes from earning natural links from legitimate sites. While the quantity of links is a ranking factor, even more important is the quality of the links. A natural link means the website owner purposely included a link to your page, most likely because they like something written or published on it.

While there are a variety of ways you might earn backlinks, the two best ways are creating guest posts for respectable blogs and publishing great content on your website and blog. To succeed with SEO, you must focus on both on-page and off-page SEO.

It's important to understand, off-page SEO is an ongoing process and will seldom produce results quickly. Your efforts in content marketing and social media marketing must be ongoing to be productive for earning backlinks.

Local SEO
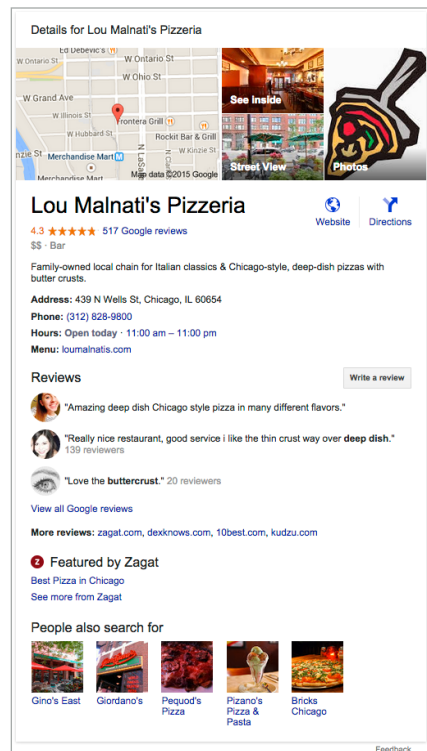
Local SEO is critical to companies doing business in specific geographic locations, but commonly ignored and largely misunderstood. Conversion rates tend to be high for companies who succeed with local SEO because the potential customer is likely to be looking to satisfy an immediate need.

For obvious reasons, the growth of local SEO is fueled by the immense popularity of mobile devices. Simply put, the smartphone search has replaced the yellow pages. When you make local SEO work for your business, you generate traffic online and physically. When you don't, you're essentially invisible to the online shopper.

Successfully integrating local SEO calls for numerous strategies including:

- An optimized listing on Google My Business (formerly Google Places)
- Website pages featuring geo-targeted titles and relevant content
- Submitting and verifying name, address and phone information to local business directories such as Yelp, Citysearch, MerchantCircle, etc.
- Getting reviews
- Citations in local directories
- Involvement on local blogs

Video SEO
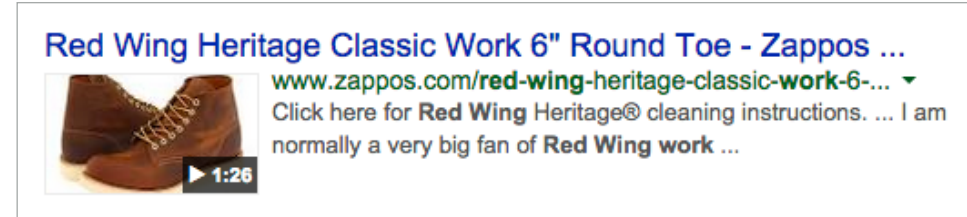
Google, which owns YouTube, loves video. Research by Forrester indicated you're 50 times more likely to appear on the first pages of search when your page features a video. Because videos are presented with "rich" snippets, that is, they include thumbnail images, they also command ultra-high click-through rates.

Clearly, your SEO efforts are amplified when you optimize your video pages. However, the search engine does NOT extract information from the video itself when it crawls and indexes a page. You need to optimize the page containing the video, which may include:

- The use of a video site map
- Populating the title tag properly
- Publishing a transcript of the video or listing its highlights
- Making your video embeddable on other sites

SEO reality checks

Before advancing to the next chapter covering the essentials of structuring your website, we'll highlight four important SEO principles.

SEO is a long-term strategy.
With a stellar keyword strategy, a great page and perfect execution, it's possible to enjoy fast results in search. It's rare though.

As explained earlier, high-ranked pages have earned great authority. The process involves promotion, sharing and other tactics aimed at earning links to the page. Earning links from other reputable websites requires time and persistence, so SEO should be thought of as a long-term marketing strategy.

SEO is highly competitive.
However special your company may be and specific the niche you've targeted, it's unlikely your strategy is 100% unique. Your competition also recognizes the importance search plays in online marketing. For this reason, targeting long tail keywords accelerates your success with search.

Long tail keywords tend to include three or more words. The idea is to be a big fish in a small pond.

Translated to search, this means research is conducted to arrive at longer phrases with less competition. While your search strategy may also include one or two word phrases that describe your area of specialization, individual pages (such as blog posts) are optimized to rank high for highly specific keywords.

Recency matters.
Surprisingly, "recency" did not appear as an important factor in the latest Moz study. However, the search engines are smart enough to crawl (or index) your website only as often as it's updated. Given this reality, it's crucial to publish new content on your website as often as you can create something of value. To a large extent, this explains the explosive growth of business blogging.

Not all traffic matters.
A website that earns massive traffic isn't necessarily tied to a company that earns great profits. To earn its keep, companies paid to help you optimize your ROI in online marketing must evaluate the value of ranking and traffic relative to leads and sales.

The process is complex, but not impossible. When your team and marketing partners are able to generate traffic that also generates sales, you realize the true benefits of SEO.

Your Website
Your Company's Lead Generation Center

Over 95% of your website visitors are not ready to buy.
As such, your goal is to convert a visitor into a lead. The challenge generally boils down to capturing the visitor's email address so you can nurture the relationship with subsequent communications

If you're a marketer who recognizes visitors are likely to be in the early stage of making carefully considered decisions, you'll treat your website as the hub of your company's lead generation efforts.

Let's look at how to generate leads on your website.

Your site must be sticky. Stickiness translates to "sticking around." The opposite is "bounce," that is, a visitor entered and left via the same page. The visitor wasn't compelled to click. That's a problem.

Simplicity is all-important. The problem behind a high bounce rate might be the website and the information it offers isn't a good fit for the people landing on it. However, it's far more likely the problem traces to the website's design.

Clutter and confusion are the archenemies of conversion. Your challenge, in the development of your website's landing pages, is to make it very simple for visitors to find what they seek. And fast.

Attention spans are short and getting shorter. In less than ten seconds, you need to convince the visitor they have come to the right place to solve their problem and present a clear path for their next step.

Your website
Your company's lead generation center

Traffic and leads are not the same thing. This eBook began with an overview of content marketing because your content gives prospects a reason to come to your website. Of course, they'll only do so if they discover the content, so we discussed the power of SEO next.

Let's say you have the dynamic duo of content marketing and SEO working for you. You're pulling people to your website.

Let's dive into the next steps of the customer's journey.

Developing the user experience

The science of capturing leads has come to be known as "conversion rate optimization (CRO)." Head down the CRO path and you'll uncover mountains of information, which introduce numerous themes including user experience, psychology and testing.

We'll examine some of the most important concepts at a high level.

Conversion path. The key to increasing conversion is to carefully plan conversion paths on your website. Each page should have a purpose and its measure of success will be the degree to which it has fulfilled the purpose.

With this strategy in mind, your pages should present a logical next step showcased by a "call to action" or CTA. Effective CTAs highlight a benefit (a persuasive reason to click) and are very easy to find because a colorful button is presented.

You need to develop different CTAs to appeal to prospects at various stages of the buying cycle. For instance:

- *"Join our email list"* targets new visitors.
- *"Download a free trial"* targets those aiming to evaluate a product.
- *"Buy now"* is clearly a bottom of the funnel or close-the-sale call to action.

Of course, companies offering more complex solutions (which often have a consultative approach to sales) need to include traditional CTAs including contact information such as a phone number, email address, live chat or contact us form.

User experience. How the visitor feels—how they respond emotionally—to your website's copy and design is all-important. Above all, your website must be easy to scan quickly. Important items must be easy to find. Some navigational conventions of website design should exist.

Busy, crowded pages make it difficult for visitors to find what they're looking and understand your message, so they leave. Your website's design should be clean and uncluttered. Messaging requiring longer copy to communicate should be made friendly on the eye with the use of subheads, images, bulleted lists and images with captions. Of course, when lengthy pages are needed, messages should be presented in order of priority.

Social proof. An increasingly important psychological trigger in the age of social media is social proof. Your website should seek to trigger trust and confidence in your brand through the use of customer testimonials, badges (certifications, accreditations, awards, etc.), solution scoring systems (reviews), and client logos.

Mobile-friendly. For a final word on usability, we have to mention mobility. With the proliferation of smart phones and tablets (and who knows what's to come), your website must be designed to deliver satisfying experiences on any and all devices.

Responsive design is today's most popular solution for dynamically and automatically presenting web content to conform to the screen size and orientation.

Lead Capture
Equipping Your Website with Automation
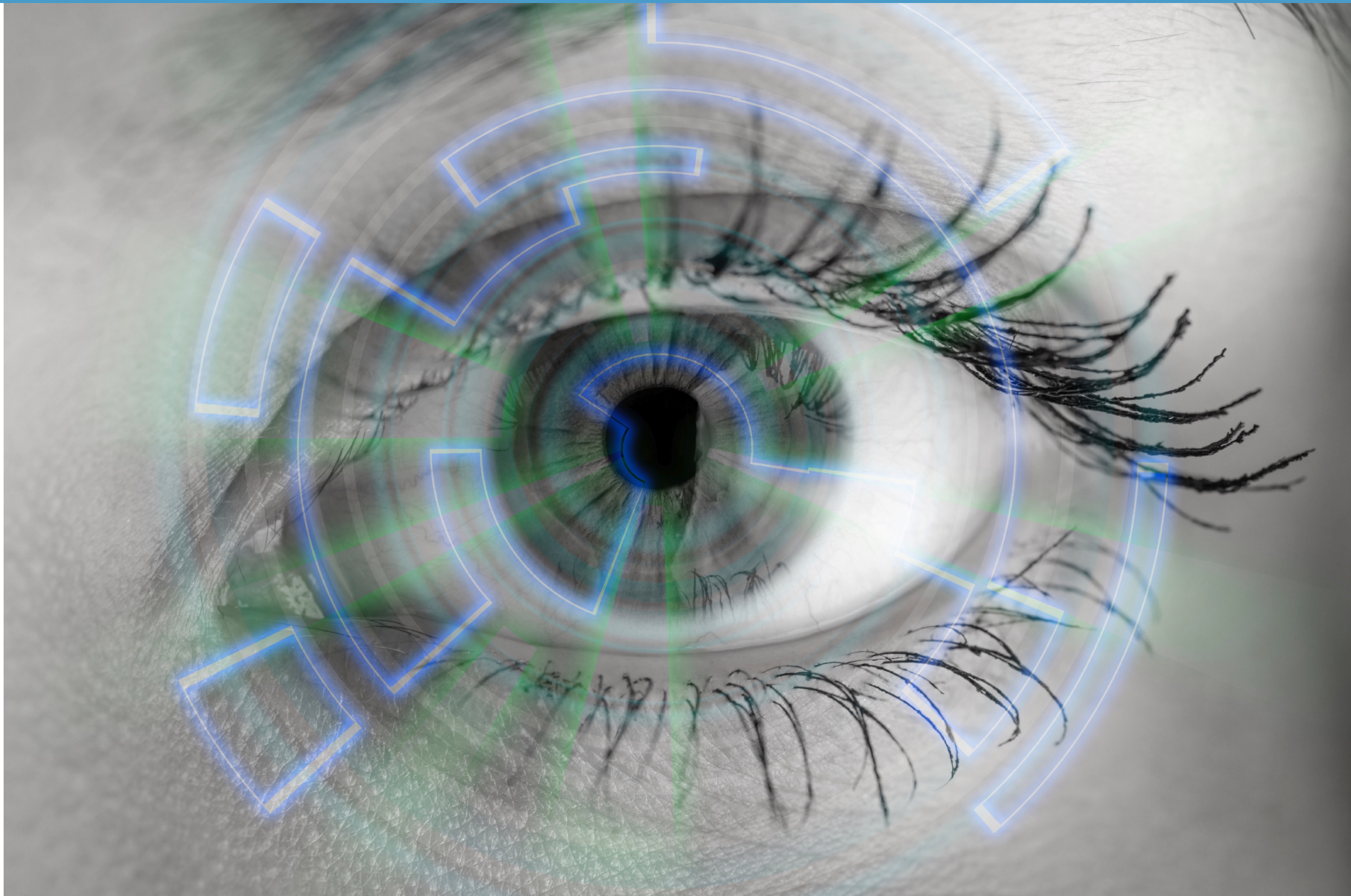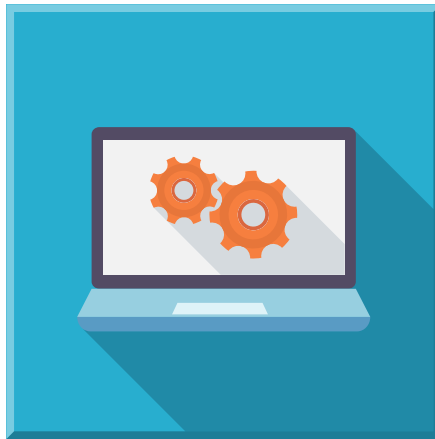
Lead capture
Equipping your website with automation

We're not going to wrap-up our discussion of your website just yet. Though we'll cover marketing automation solutions in a forthcoming chapter, in this section, we discuss basic automation requirements to fuel satisfying interactions for your website visitors.

Landing pages. "Landing" is the confusing (but commonly used) name for what should be called "offer pages" or "action pages." These dedicated pages are often the result of viewer clicking on a link or ad and are the visitor's first experience on your website. They should focus on moving the reader to take action in response to your offer.

To deliver optimal results, landing pages should:

- Feature a prominent headline tightly coupled to the content that led the reader there.
- Focus solely on the offer, efficiently communicating its value proposition.
- Not contain navigational elements found on your website (so as to not prompt readers to click to a new page).
- Direct the reader's eyes to the page's form.
- Collect information about the prospect's needs.

Lead capture forms. Landing pages feature interactive forms where the prospect is asked to provide an email address and other personal information in exchange for valuable content.

While you can elect to make any number of fields required, in order to extract more information from the prospect, making your form less demanding is key to increasing conversion rates. Long, detailed forms may repel prospects or encourage them to enter bogus information, so more often than not, online marketers settle for simply a name and email address.

Email subscriptions. Online marketers often define "lead" as an email subscriber. Effective methods to collect email addresses include:

- Making an opt-in form prominent on key pages of the website.
- Creating a dedicated page for new email subscription registration.
- Collecting email addresses via the lead capture forms used for offers.
- Invoking pop-up, slide-in, or exit-triggered windows with opt-in forms.

Autoresponders. An enormous variety of email types can be set-up for automatic delivery to help nurture leads. Popular autoresponders include:

- Thank you messages (which may feature links to additional assets).
- Transactional emails such as receipts, upsells, special offers.
- Educational series (mini-courses, excerpts from other content, etc.).
- Product announcements, sales, timely offers or greetings.

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) practices

The best online marketers allocate resources to continuously improve their conversion rates through testing and/or analytics.

CRO begins with looking at important metrics such as bounce rate, exit rate, time on site and page views. Next in the process is the forming of hypotheses, educated guesses at where improvements can be made. The subsequent step is testing. Then finally (there really is no end), optimizations are executed. The CRO process is perpetually repeated.

The CRO process. Although the list of potential targets for optimization is nearly infinite, the CRO process often focuses on:

- Website copy
- Offers and the call to action
- Page design
- Social proof and other credibility factors
- All elements of landing pages
- Website performance

CRO tools. Each website has its own challenges, so effective CRO efforts closely examine many facets of marketing programs and the buyer's journey.

Tools commonly used in the process of CRO include:

- Analytics
- User surveys
- User behavior tools such as heat mapping
- A/B split testing

Continuous improvement. It's important to recognize though drawing more prospects to your website is important, it ranks second to converting the ones you already have. This realization forms an argument in favor of developing CRO strategies and continuously implementing them.

Social media
Relationship Marketing, If You Dare
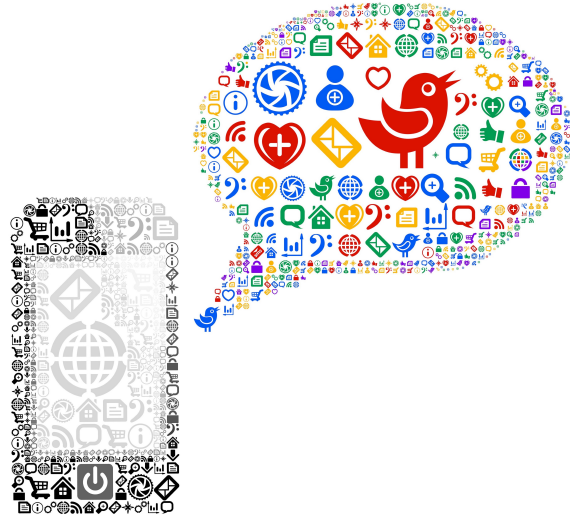
Social media
Relationship marketing, if you dare

No doubt you've discovered marketing has become a two-way conversation. Customers convene on social media to rave about brands, rail about them, and all points between.

Relationships are born. Relationships are built. Some crash and burn. It all depends on who joins the conversations and how those conversations go.

Hopefully, you join the conversation and make meaningful contributions to it. Remember, this eBook's about the carefully considered decision.

Of course, you'd like to have more prospects decide to do business with you, but the opposite will be the case if you treat social media strictly as a new set of channels for generating leads. It's not. Social media is for building relationships. You get out of it what you put into it.

Here are a number of ideas to help you get more from your social media endeavors.

Which networks are worth your time?
Should you focus first on Facebook because of its popularity? Does doing business in a B2B field suggest LinkedIn is your top priority? Is the explosive growth of Pinterest a good reason to start there?

Obviously, when selecting social networks to commit resources to, you have to make smart choices. Newcomers to social media are wise to get involved in just one or two to begin with so as to not be overwhelmed. So naturally, marketers often want to know which networks to choose.

A simple answer. Choose the networks your customers use. Look at your competition's social activity. Research the demographics of the top contenders. In B2B sectors, you should visit your clients' websites to see which icons they display and get a sense for where the conversations are taking place. And try this: ask them. You might conduct a survey, speak to them at events, or make a some phone calls.

Listen and learn. There has never been a better market research tool than social media. The key to taking advantage of the learning potential social media offers is to "listen," which really means "read."

As a "fly on the wall," you can gather what's on the minds of your audience. What topics resonate the most? What are the trends and changes you see? Who wields influence in your field?

Above all, listen for the questions people are asking. In addition to doing this via the top social media networks, plug into Q&A sites such as Quora. Join relevant LinkedIn Groups (where most discussion threads are prompted by questions). Monitor the conversations around topics with keyword searches and hashtags. Use tools such as Buzzsumo and Topsy to gauge interest as indicated by social sharing numbers. Finally, set up Google Alerts to email you notifications when specific terms appear in the headlines of blog posts.

Listening to conversations on social media will help you gather invaluable insights, which should, in turn, inform the content you publish and share, help build relationships, and ultimately bring potential customers to your website and social media pages.

Getting known, liked and trusted

For eons, marketers have espoused the notion that the successful growth of your brand comes from getting known, liked and trusted. Social media brings new meaning to it.

Thanks in large part to Facebook, "like" quickly became a commodity. And a "like" isn't all that meaningful. Trust is. Of course, trust is also harder to earn. Here are some valuable tips for earning trust with your social media activity.

- **Ditch the pitch**—In the course of your conversations, opportunities to sell may present themselves, however, resist the urge to pitch your products. If the majority of your social updates are promotional, you'll be rejected by the members.
- **Make yourself useful**—You want to adapt a content marketing mindset on social media. Invite people to see your blog posts and educational media. Answer questions when you can.
- **Be generous**—To help gain trust and credibility, commit to sharing content from others, often. Social media is highly reciprocal, so the more you refer readers to useful content (or curate), the more likely they'll return the favor.

- **Respond thoughtfully**—Social media users are apt to be forthright, honest, even negative. When you discover negative responses about something you've written or an experience someone had with your brand, avoid coming back with an abrasive response likely to create a PR headache. Be thankful for the input. Own the problem and respond in a positive way.
- **Be yourself**—Social media is a waste of time if you hide behind a logo and blather corporate speak relentlessly. While you should maintain professionalism, you'll be liked more when you're fun to interact with and earn greater trust by being honest and human.
- **Be consistent**—You'll be taken far more seriously if you're active on a daily basis. Yes, you can take breaks without threatening your good standing, but if you merely check in with a post now and then, you probably won't be taken seriously.
- **Interact with influencers**—You won't become a social star on your own. Identify leaders in your field and strive to build relationships with them. Share their work. Comment on their blog. Include them in your content. Forging meaningful relationships with influencers will expand your reach and accelerate your efforts to win the trust of the community.
- **Develop a sharing mindset**—Understand no marketing wields the power and trust of word of mouth. Recommendations from influencers, partners, customers or any type of advocate are gold, so make it "one-click" easy to share your content and thank people for doing so.
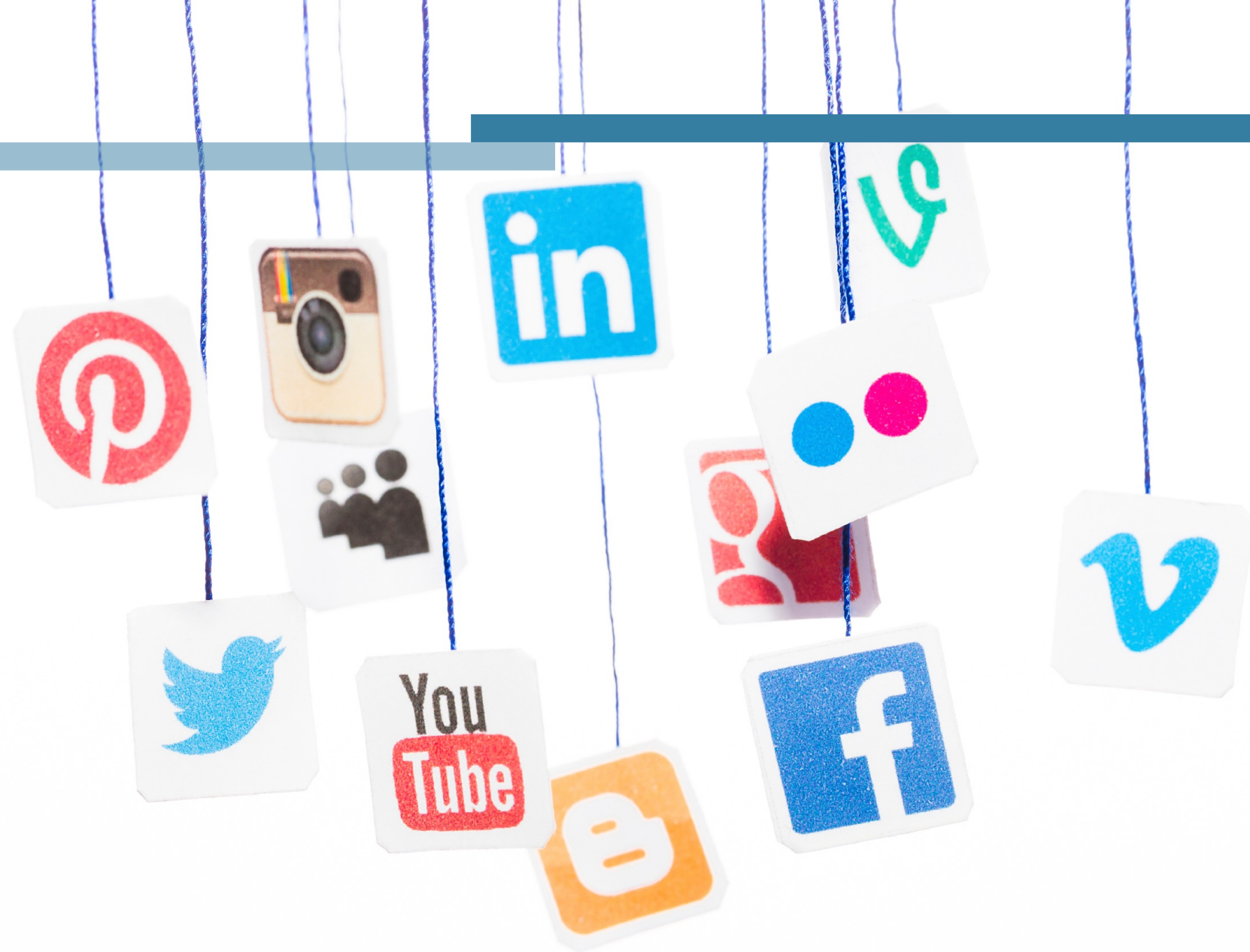
22.9k Shares

7.9k

3.7k

3.3k

1.6k

1.4k

822

Share this content

Buying attention

Yes, like traditional media, social media space and time can be bought. Some networks focus on building a large membership before they offer paid media options, but inevitably evolve to pay the bills with advertising revenues.

Social media advertising. Advertising on social media is not only acceptable, it can have a meaningful effect on your marketing efforts.

The interactive element of social media enables the network to gather deep insights into its audience's interests, behavioral patterns and of course, demographics. Therefore, your ads (promoted posts, sponsored content, and other variations) can be highly targeted, which ultimately can improve your return on investment.

Additionally, paid media such as the programs offered by social media networks, is often sold on a pay-per-click basis, thereby reducing the waste that was unavoidable in non-digital media. Conveniently, in the following chapter, we turn your attention to pay-per-click (PPC) advertising options.

Paid Media
Pay-Per-Click and Lead Generation in the Digital Age

PAY PER CLICK

Paid media
Pay-per-click and lead generation in the digital age

Over time, when led by accomplished, strategic digital marketers, you'll be rewarded for your efforts in owned and earned media. Traffic will come by way of organic search, social referrals, and subscriptions. However, smart marketers often turn to paid media programs to amplify their messages and accelerate success.

Businesses make and average of $2 revenue for every $1 spent on Google AdWords.

Wishpond

Your options for paid media are varied and might include native advertising (today's digital media euphemism for advertorial), sponsored events, YouTube ads, and more. Here, we'll focus on the popular programs primarily offered by Google and competing search engines.

Paid media is highly targeted. Ads usually includes a call to action to drive traffic to a dedicated landing page with a specific conversion goal, such as try, buy, subscribe, register, and opt-in.

Experienced online marketing professionals are apt to profess no other channel can match paid search for delivering the powerful combination of targeting, segmentation, and performance measurement. Pay-per-click enables precise measurability. You can easily test performance and campaigns can be perpetually adjusted to fine-tune performance.

The most popular form of pay-per-click advertising is the sponsored results served in response to a search. (In fact, PPC is often described as SEM, or search engine marketing).

Google, and its competitors including Microsoft Bing and Yahoo! (who operate a PPC network together), have experimented with minor variations of how PPC ads are displayed.

In 2015, on Google, a very small yellow chiclet shape marked "Ad" precedes the title. Generally, one to three ads appear atop the page. Additional ads land in the right sidebar and sometimes below the organic results. This explanation, of course, describes a browser viewed on a monitor.

For visibility, results are stacked only vertically (and therefore differently) on smaller devices and displays. Suffice to say, when search results feature PPC ads, they tend to garner more real estate than organic listings.

How do you buy, place and create ads?

- **Flexible spend**—Your budgeting options are immense, so you can establish a budget and allocate your spend as you choose. You can make changes to your campaign as often as you like.
- **Keywords rule**—Your campaigns are based on keywords you select. Generally, brands target far more keywords with paid search vs. organic. The search engines offer robust tools for researching and choosing keywords.
- **Get to the point**—PPC ads allow just 25-character headlines and an additional 70 for the lines below. Your ads should be clear and concise, feature your keywords, and have a call to action.

Controlling costs

- **Quality score**—With Google, your ads are given a quality score based on an estimate of the relevancy of your ads and landing pages as well as performance factors such as click-through rate (CTR). Your quality score also affects where your ads are positioned.
- **Cost-per-click (CPC)**—Above all, your quality score affects your costs, or CPC.
- **PPC management**—Understand PPC costs can be sizable and inefficient when managed incorrectly. Serious advertisers rely on a plethora of tools and often call on expert service providers to maximize ROI.
- **Negative keywords**—One of the best ways to control costs is by adding negative keywords that you do not wish to bid on.

Retargeting. Retargeting is an advertising technique that has proliferated fast in recent years. In its most popular form, site-based retargeting, ads are served to people who visited your site, but via sites they've gone to after. Your ads aim to remind people of your brand and entice them to return to your site to do business.

While retargeting is commonly used by e-commerce companies (for obvious reasons), B2B companies too are integrating it into their media mix in an effort to stay top of mind with prospects.

Mobile PPC. The amazing ascent of mobile connectivity has spawned mobile-specific advertising programs. Mobile PPC ads are quickly becoming part of the mobile experience and tend to be well accepted among users because the combination of geotargeting and local search often make the ads highly relevant and useful.

Google display network. The Google display network, composed of Google properties such as Gmail, Blogger, and YouTube, as well as millions of publisher websites, can be used to extend the reach of your Google PPC (AdWords) ads. The network includes mobile sites and apps.

Advertisers can exercise granular controls to choose specific sites, pages and audiences to target. Google reports the network reaches 90% of Internet users worldwide. Advertising options include text, image, rich media, and video ads.

YouTube ads. Advertisers can reach the massive YouTube audience with text, image and video ads. The program is managed via a Google AdWords account and affords targeting options by category, channels, and YouTube pages.

Email Marketing
The Most Versatile and Powerful Way to Reach Buyers

Email marketing
The most versatile and powerful way to reach buyers

Timing is undeniably important in the age of the carefully considered decision. The marketer capable of delivering personalized and relevant information to buyers in their time of need seize a great advantage.

89% of marketers said email was their primary channel for lead generation.

Forrester Research

As a consumer, when you opt-in to receive email from a brand, you grant the company permission to market to you. Provided the emails you receive are relevant and come from a brand you trust, it's fair to say the company's email serves as a relationship developer. "Lead nurturing" is another—and perhaps more sales-focused—way to describe email's value.

Indeed, the top of mind awareness email marketers gain serves to develop relationships and nurture leads. However, email marketing should also make the cash register ring. The secret to success is often timing.

Additional keys to achieve email marketing performance include:

- **Purpose**—Assess where email can impact your bottom line.
- **Integration**—Combine email with other tactics in your marketing mix.
- **Content creation**—Identify opportunities to help customers.
- **List growth and hygiene**—Build and maintain quality list with a mix of offline and online tactics.
- **Optimization**—Continuously test and optimize your email messages.

Aligning email marketing with your objectives

To be an effective email marketer, you must understand the many types of email and prepare to use a strategic mix to best support your objectives.

- **Welcome emails**—Automated responses to new subscribers deliver high open rates. In addition to making a positive first impression, welcome emails provide an ideal opportunity to up-sell and build credibility and trust.
- **Transaction emails**—Keep customers informed with order confirmations, shipment details or status, and receipts.
- **Shopping cart abandonment emails**—These emails are triggered by incomplete sales and have proven to increase sales.

- **Re-order emails**—Another proven tactic to increase sales is sending email for products and services that need to be re-ordered regularly.
- **Re-engagement emails**—Send these to inactive subscribers to maintain a clean list and encourage clients to come back and buy.
- **Special occasion emails**—Birthdays, holidays and even the anniversary of joining your email list present opportunities to build relationships and deliver special offers to boost sales.
- **Sales announcement emails**—Pique interest with promotions based on new or improved products.
- **Event emails**—Create campaigns to include invitations, follow-ups, and thank you messages around webinars, conferences or any special events.
- **Educational emails**—These emails should help solve customer problems and answer important questions. Educational emails often highlight new content on your website and blog.
- **Trigger emails**—Send emails with relevant content triggered by specific website activity.
- **Newsletter emails**—Send newsletters at regular intervals to reinforce industry expertise and build loyalty.
- **Digest emails**—Content marketers can send emails with a series of links and lists to notify subscribers of content they may have missed.
- **Sponsorship emails**—To reach a new audience and generate leads, you can pay to be included in another vendor's newsletter or various types of emails.

Creating emails that get opened and clicked

Email marketing comes with some serious challenges. A vast majority of the people on your list won't open your email and far fewer will respond. Your challenge, of course, is to understand what you're up against and strive to increase open and click-through rates.

Because it's a very mature medium, email marketers have tested various techniques and drawn conclusions regarding best practices, which, when applied, generally improve results.

Email writing tips

- Write short subject lines–under 40 characters—aiming to be ultra-clear about the nature of the email.
- Don't label your emails in the subject line with "news" or "newsletter."
- Ensure your offer and content closely match your subject line.
- Use action-oriented headlines that inspire a response.
- Be as brief as possible and break longer messages up with subheads and bulleted lists to enable high-speed skimming.
- Include links in the copy to increase click-through.
- If your email includes prices, be clear and deliberate in presenting them.
- Focus on one main message (or as few as possible).

Using images

- Most of your emails should feature relevant images, which are clickable.
- Images that invoke an emotional response will resonate with readers.
- Your call-to-actions should be presented as sizable, colored buttons that are easy to find.

Design

- Create elegant layouts with ample white space.
- Eliminate what's unnecessary and avoid bombarding the recipient with stimuli.
- Avoid excessive use of capitalized and bolded passages.
- Ensure your email design is responsive, meaning it will look polished on any size screen.
- Test your email design across all popular email client software and web-based systems.
- Use contrasting colors, but take care not to make the page busy.
- Include options that allow the reader to forward and share your email.
- Don't use flash, rich media, forms or attachments.

Building trust

- Decide if your email "from" line features a person's name, brand or both. Be consistent so recipients quickly recognize whom the email comes from.
- Feature your company logo atop the email.
- Always allow the recipient to opt-out of your list and change their preferences.
- Include your address, phone, URL, privacy policy and copyrights in the email's footer.

How to cash in on email marketing

The email marketers that enjoy high ROI perpetually build optimization into the email workflow. They ask, "how could we do email marketing better?" The answers they uncover come from experimenting, testing, and tracking results.

Make no mistake: optimizing your email marketing programs takes time and knowledge. You should begin by understanding how to assess your email marketing performance, establish the right metrics, and block-out time to do the work. We'll cover the essentials here, but keep in mind, when you get serious about email marketing, you'll want to enlist experts for guidance.

Ask good questions. There are a lot of questions you can ask. These should get you started.

Does your execution follow your strategy? Be sure your goals are well documented. Ask yourself if you're capturing the data needed to develop highly relevant and personalized email.

Examine your approaches to acquiring subscribers and question whether you can improve them. Are you leveraging automation to deliver "right-time" email? Do you have the right technology, data, creative and consulting resources?

Are your reports easy to generate, examine and act on? Have you succeeded in integrating departments, locations, and programs such that your brand has a consistent voice when speaking to prospects and customers?

Choose and use smart metrics. You'll want to use a select set of metrics, first to gauge your email marketing process.

- Open rate—Reflects on your subject line, but also the trust level of subscribers.
- Click-through rate—Clicks are all-important, so you should extract lessons (or at least hypotheses) when they jump up or down.
- Unsubscribe rate—Spikes in unsubscribes, or upward swings, could indicate your content isn't meeting expectations (or other issues).
- Bounce rate—High levels of emails rejected by the server suggests list hygiene is in order.
- Delivery rate—Problems here suggest faulty list-building practices.

Additional metrics, which may require more advanced data collection and reporting, measure your email marketing against your business goals. The boss is likely to favor these.

- Leads—Generated via email.
- Revenue—Revenues generated over a time period.
- Savings—Dollars saved by using email vs. higher cost channels.
- Share of wallet—Increases in customer spend.
- Retention—How email decreases customer attrition.

Marketing Automation
The Key to Bringing Your Digital Marketing Together

Marketing automation

The key to bringing your digital marketing together

We have a huge, complex and all-important subject to address here: the software platform you build effective digital marketing programs on in the age of the carefully considered decision. It begins with understanding the need for a centralized database, customer relationship management (CRM) and marketing automation.

Businesses that use marketing automation to nurture prospects experience a 451% increase in qualified leads.

The Annuities Group

Centralized marketing database.
Siloed data sabotages your success. So a vital step in your digital marketing endeavors is unifying your marketing database. The goal is to capture all the interactions prospects and customers have with your company across all key channels.

Your systems must be configured to capture data from web tracking, CRM, progressive forms, email analytics and more and feed a central database that connects a person with their behaviors and interests. A database capable of delivering profile data, relational data and behavioral data from online and offline channels will enable you to grow your business on the wings of behavioral marketing.

Customer relationship management (CRM).
A CRM tool allows sales teams to track leads, opportunities, deals, and customers. Salesforce.com and other CRM platforms are primarily used by salespeople and the customer service team. However, your company now needs to integrate it with your marketing automation platform to enable closed loop lead tracking and reporting.

Marketing automation platform (MAP).
Marketing automation allows you to streamline, automate, and measure marketing activities. It gives your marketing team the ability to create workflows, increase efficiencies and accelerate revenue growth.

Marketing automation is a ripe and fast-growing business, so your choices are many. Generally, the leading solutions will offer solutions for email marketing, landing pages, testing, campaign management, lead generation, lead scoring, lead nurturing, social marketing, marketing resource management, marketing analytics, and more.

Landing deals more efficiently with lead scoring

The bottom line for marketing automation and all the tactics presented in this eBook, is, well, your bottom line. At the end of the day, your investment in digital marketing and automation needs to increase sales and lower marketing costs.

As such, lead scoring is a critical element of your marketing automation process. Lead scoring boosts ROI. Your sales team spends less time selling.

With lead scoring, leads are scored according to the interest level prospects have demonstrated, which is based on how they have interacted with your site. The process of lead scoring helps determine the lead's place in the buying cycle and the demographic fit.

With an effective lead scoring system in place, you'll be equipped to determine whether prospects are ready to be handed off to sales or further nurtured. Powerful lead scoring systems use demographics, firmographics, and behavioral scoring (such as clicks, keywords, web visits, and social interactions).

Acing automation

The days of batch-and-blast messages are behind us. Thanks to the power of marketing automation, your company can now deliver personalized messages to individual customers. Those who connect with customers in their decision-making journeys through relevant, timely messages will increase conversion, and often, create lifelong customer relationships.

Relevant emails drive 18 times more revenue than broadcast emails.

Jupiter Research

Your automated email campaigns might include:

- Lead nurturing
- Welcomes
- Cross-sells
- Up-sells
- Abandoned cart
- Win-back

The power of segmentation, targeting and personalization.
The potential of marketing automation is further unleashed with segmentation, targeting, and personalization strategies.

- **Segmentation** is the process of dividing prospects and customers into distinct groups with needs that can be satisfied by delivering similar value propositions.
- **Targeting** is delivering relevant messages to segments that best matches your value propositions to a segment's unique needs.
- **Personalization** is the process of tailoring specific elements of targeted messages to individuals.

Your centralized marketing database, which we discussed a few pages back, enables the use of segmentation, targeting and personalization techniques to deliver optimum value to your customers—and profits to your ledger.

Analytics
Access and Refine Your Marketing

- **Establish goals**—Business goals are documented and expected. Outcomes are aligned with the goals and quantified.
- **Establish key performance indicators (KPIs)**—What will be measured? Google Analytics can be used to analyze an enormous array of metrics. Marketing automation platforms allow you to incorporate lead generation metrics such as:

  - ✓ Number of marketing qualified leads (MQL)
  - ✓ Cost per MQL
  - ✓ Cost per sales accepted opportunity
  - ✓ ROI by program (including first-touch and multi-touch data)

- **Quantifying investment**—Tools provided within MAPs enable you to plan investments, track marketing spend, and gather performance data aligned with costs to assess ROI.
- **Tracking**—MAPs remove much of the complexity from determining how marketing programs or elements of them influenced purchase decisions.
- **Attribution**—A powerful extension of tracking dials into gauging how a specific channel (e.g. website, PPC, email, webinar) performed in the sales cycle.
- **Marketing's contribution to revenue**—The key to funding digital marketing programs is to prove their worth. Your MAP will give you tools to determine how much pipeline marketing programs create and far more valuable insights to measure marketing's contribution to revenue.

Now back to the bottom line. You do analytics to improve marketing ROI. Working closely with a digital marketing expert, you'll create measurement systems capable of guiding you toward improved profitability.

Marketing automation will enable your company to evolve its mix of tactics based on actual performance. Each measurement will inform the refinements you'll make to marketing programs to help achieve business goals.

Analytics
Access and refine your marketing

A shocking percentage of modern marketers pay little or no attention to measuring performance. When you understand the potential to measure digital marketing—and understand the deep insights analytics provide (with both free tools and MAPs)—you realize failing to analyze results is sinful.

Analytics processes are sure to differ from company to company, but will often include the following:

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From consultation to implementation, our services focus on optimizing performance through the power of digital marketing and advanced automation.

1. Data is in our DNA. Every idea is data-driven.
2. Digital expertise runs deep and wide.
3. We're all about results, forever focused on the client's ROI.

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