

Apryl Parcher's 1-Minute-Biz-Tips e-newsletter: Timely tips on marketing and other tidbits to enhance your business.

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Your subscription brings you one regular monthly issue, usually at the beginning of the month, plus one or two periodic supplementary messages, usually recommendations for information products on marketing and related topics that I think might interest you.

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WARNING: If you've never optimized your website for search engines and are looking to do so, there are a few myths out there that you should be aware of.

I didn't really know what SEO was all about until a few weeks ago, when I interviewed an SEO expert, but here are a few things that came out of that interview that could help you:

#1: It's all about metatags? Not anymore...when search engines were new, making sure keywords were in your metatags (found in your website's source code) was all you needed to rank your page in search engines. Now, most search engines place more emphasis on overall content...the words in your website text...to index your site. Your content should have keywords sprinkled through it that your ideal clients might use to find you in search engines—don't depend on keyword lists and metatags alone.

#2: To Submit or Not Submit. You don't have to submit your website to search engines over and over again. Once is enough, unless you've made significant changes to the site to optimize it for search engines. Once overall content is indexed, it's there—resubmitting the same site won't help your placement.

#3: Top placement for a fee? Beware of online sales hype from people promising to give you "top placement" in search engines for a fee. There is no such thing as a guarantee! If they're offering you one, watch out! You should sit down with a specialist one-on-one for this service, and every business is different. There is no cookie-cutter approach to SEO.

#4: Do "Bad Links" hurt your rankings? Unless you use a "Link Farm," probably not. It has long been known that having outside links to your website is a good thing, especially if those links come from "related" sources. Link Farms, on the other hand, are to be avoided at all costs.

That's where someone will promise to give you a list of outside links to your website (there again, for a fee). Many times, these links are "farmed" in an attempt to fool search engines into thinking you have lots of active links to your site. Search Engines are most interested in keeping the internet as clean as possible, and frown on such measures. Many will even blacklist sites that use Link Farming.

For a more in-depth discussion on SEO, you can pre-order a copy of my interview with Jeff Harrison, and SEO expert with WSI. The audio is in production now and will be available soon...stay tuned for an announcement of the release.

Do you know enough about your customers?

How much info do you collect about your customers? If the answer is name, address and phone number, you're not collecting enough! Why? The more you know about your existing customer base, the better able you'll be to craft marketing messages that attract new customers that fit your ideal.

But how much information should you be getting? Start out with the housekeeping basics, but delve as deeply as you can to find out more about them. Get to know them as neighbors and friends. Are they married? Kids? Income range? What magazines and books do they read? Where do they shop? Ask as many questions as you can about their daily lives (without getting too personal, of course).

How do you go about collecting this? Use a customer survey, one you can mail to your existing customer list or include with a recent purchase. You can also call a few of your VERY BEST clients and ask. I find it's best to offer the customer something FREE or a special discount for taking the time to respond, and make answering ANY question completely optional.

Having this information helps you build an ideal customer profile—a WANTED poster of sorts—and helps you pinpoint what periodicals to advertise in, how to talk to those people when crafting an ad or a direct mail campaign or even your newsletter. What problems can you solve for them? What desires can you fulfill?

The more you know, the more conversational you can be in your marketing messages; like talking over the fence to a neighbor about what movies to watch or restaurants you recommend.

It also helps you avoid wasting money on trying to target people who don't have an interest in your product. And you'll be way ahead of your competition...90 percent of them don't do this!

Don't give your marketing plan away!

Do you get calls from non-profit organizations trying to sucker you into buying advertising in their booklet or calendar? "It's only

\$75 and would really help the school," "We could really use your help, Mr. Smith—and it's a write-off for your business!"

Unless you know for certain that the audience for their publication is your target audience, (or you've tracked it and you've definitely received business from it in the past) it may be better to give them a straight personal donation if you're so inclined.

It's hard to say no, sometimes, but you need to spend money with as many sure things as possible, and avoid guessing games and emotional pleas. Sure, our customers buy for emotional reasons, but don't let emotion rule in your marketing budget!

See you next time!

All the Best,
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