

Website Marketing - A Grassroots Approach

Everyone wants to see their sales suddenly spike through the roof. But so many people, in that adrenaline rush, think too big, listen to too many self-appointed gurus, and end up missing out on one of the best free marketing opportunities on the net: discussion forums. Instead of focusing on individual sales, they go for the ads and the emails that promise thousands upon thousands of visitors per day, possibly pay-per-click search engines that say they will expose them to billions, and worse badly-produced and sometimes fraudulent spam submission programs.

Although it is absolutely essential to increase your rating with some of the search engines, possibly to purchase pay-per-clicks, and of course writing and publishing articles, discussion forums can often provide an extra, non-conventional sales medium to your campaign that allows you to quickly pull in customers with personal contact and conversational presentations of your product.

You can find these boards by searching for the specific product you sell, then adding the word "messageboard", "forum", "discussion forum" or "discussion board" after it in quotes. As an example I review online marketing tools and online business-builders on one of my websites, so when I look for forums to talk about the products I've reviewed, I go to Google and type in "affiliate messageboard" or "internet business forum" or "marketing forum." Find as many of these highly-trafficked forums as you can and sign-up.

Before you begin actually posting on the boards, you need to lay down some general rules of approach. I would suggest the following methods, but you can decide for yourself what you think is appropriate for your business and situation.

These are my rules:

When I market on discussion forums, I always try to provide more for the board than I take away from it in potential sales. Not only is it ethical, but it's also good business. When people ask questions, I use the expertise I've gained from Internet business-building and marketing to legitimately answer their questions. If I signed up for every board I could find, and then slapped a boilerplate marketing pitch on every site, I'd just get ignored or banned.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to legitimately get involved with the forum community. It is definitely a goldmine for highly-targeted customers and it is possibly the fastest marketing medium on the Internet, but it is also very important to respect that it doesn't primarily serve as an ad host. If you stay low-key and helpful, people will respect your opinion more and will want to see what you have to offer. This is where your signature comes in...

When you create your account for most boards, they will give you the option of creating a signature, which they will attach to the bottom of every post you make. This is the best way to pull customers from messageboards--by alluring them with your signature. Write something catchy or intriguing and then slap a link to your site or email address on it. Remember: the more helpful you are (the more times you post advice/hints), the more times your signature appears... and the more potential hits you'll get to your site.

Next, you'll want to decide when it's appropriate to market outside of your signature. I personally only market in three situations outside of my signature in forum discussions. If a person asks a question about a specific product or service I market, then I'll respond because I'm qualified to do so and because I truly believe they should use my products to achieve the best possible results. If there's a discussion thread where everyone is marketing products and it is generally accepted, I will market my product if a) it is related and b) I have already posted several times on the messageboard. Also, I will market my product whenever there is a forum solely dedicated to marketing your products.

Last, you'll want to decide how much original content you want to post and how much you want to be boilerplate. You'll want to find a healthy combination of the two to avoid being called a spammer or wasting too much time marketing on forums. I personally have several boilerplate ads that I have saved for signature files, ad-only forums, and personal product marketing discussions. I keep them all saved on a word file and I pull them up to copy-and-paste when I'm spending a night of advertising on messageboards.

Discussion forums can drive buying customers to your site faster than any other marketing medium. Do not abuse them, establish a reputation in your forums, streamline the process. . . and your work will come back to you quickly in profit.

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