

Going from Good to Great

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– **Sam Saltis**

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Introduction

A great website is not a function of circumstance. It is largely dependent on website strategy, and the investment of time and energy into continuous improvement.

This whitepaper aims to provide advice for organisations seeking to push their websites from good to great.

1. Search Engine Marketing

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a particularly useful technique for building brand awareness and driving site traffic.

SEM seeks to promote websites by increasing their visibility in search engine result pages (SERPs) through search engine optimisation (SEO) and the use of paid placement, contextual advertising, and paid inclusion.

Google Adwords is a popular form of SEM, used by small and large businesses alike. The scheme is not restricted by budget size, and users only pay per click within the parameters set (eg. budget of x dollars per day, paying no more than x dollars/cents per click). Advertisements are placed contextually in order to reach the specific target audience.

2. Search Engine Optimisation

Search engines generate a huge proportion of site traffic. As such, it is essential that businesses engage in search engine optimisation (SEO) in order to boost search engine rankings and increase site traffic.

SEO is a continuous process, and professional services will generate optimum results, however there are some basic skills businesses can learn to maximise efforts.

Using Meta Tags to title web pages and ensuring content and keywords within web page are relevant to title tags are surefire ways to increase SEO. Using relevant links wherever possible to refer visitors to other sections of the

website will reinforce this technique.

Updating and editing site content regularly will further enhance efforts as search engines will re-index changing content.

Marketing communications should follow the same rules. For example, e-newsletters should contain content relevant to the title tag, and content within sections should contain relevant links wherever possible to refer the reader to appropriate sections of the website.

3. Maximise Lead Generation

There are a variety of techniques organisations can use to maximise lead generation. These include:

- Ensuring the user interface intuitively motivate call to action. A website should tell a story that is conducive to the purchase process, and ends by providing users with the option to request more information or purchase a product or service.
- Providing visitor registration options such as subscription to newsletters or personalised pages which help build prospect databases.
- Encouraging users to engage with the business by providing interactive applications such as forums where appropriate. Engaging your target audience by encouraging customers and prospects to seek further clarification on issues of concern is a means through which to establish that first crucial point of contact. This may also provide a means through which you can build the foundations of an online community, increasing brand awareness and providing a valuable feedback mechanism.
- Where possible, tailoring communications to boost brand relevance and inform prospects why your product or service is relevant to them specifically and what unique needs you can satisfy.
- Providing free tools which users can turn to for information specific to the product or service you offer. Whether or not they are willing to purchase, this will build credibility and encourage repeat visits. These tools often motivate call to action as they are aimed at validating the need for a product or service.

4. Increase Conversions

A conversion can be anything that you feel helps execute business strategy- from a click to a particular page, an email, or even the action of commenting on a blog. Whatever you feel helps your organisation meet its goals and objectives.

Web analytics such as Google Analytics, coreDNA Statistics or Omniture are the best place to start to help you increase your conversion rate.

These tools can help you understand how your customers enter, navigate and eventually leave your site, providing valuable feedback which can then be used to make customer-focused improvements to your website that increase your conversion rate.

Identifying how and from where people are arriving at your website allows you to target communications and make navigation clearer and more efficient, increasing the opportunity for conversion. Your statistics may highlight a particular search term as the most popular lead to your website. In which case you may decide to integrate that search term into content and meta data for a relevant call-to-action page, in order to improve SEO and increase relevance for arriving visitors, thereby increasing likelihood of conversion. Alternatively, your statistics might highlight a particular website as your best referrer. In which case you may choose to edit the link on that website so that visitors arrive on a unique landing page with targeted messages and especially relevant links, quickly directing these visitors to the areas of your website with calls-to-action you believe they will find most valuable.

Identifying where visitors are getting lost allows you to make the path to call-to-action clearer and more intuitive. For example, if you find that your bounce rate is particularly high, you're missing out on conversions. Your visitors are looking around on the entry page and either cannot find the call-to-action, or are finding calls-to-action irrelevant. In which case, you may choose to tinker with the layout to make navigation clearer, or revise content to increase relevance of calls-to-action to your target audience.

Identifying the average time visitors spend on your site, the mean number of pages per visit viewed and the most popular areas of each particular page can help you identify whether or not you have appropriately placed your calls to action. For example, if your site is fairly complex and the average time spent on your site is particularly low, this would be a fair indication that visitors are not getting what they need before they leave, and could be affecting conversion negatively. In which case, you may wish to simplify the information presented, and offer calls-to-action which then provide more detail. Pages per visit and heat maps can also help you track whether or not visitors are making it to calls to action. Heat maps are particularly useful, as they highlight "hot spots" of popularity. For example, if you know that a particular area of your home page is a "hot spot", you can create and test hypotheses based around that "hot spot", helping you make valid decisions about layout.

Interestingly, web analytics can also provide valuable information on the demographics and geographics of your visitors, as well as areas of interest, helping you target communications more efficiently and effectively, thereby increasing relevance, and the likelihood of conversion.

5. Improve Customer Service

Assessing whether there is a gap between your online and offline customer service levels is a good first step towards improving customer service. When you're trying to push your website from good to great, think about what your customers would expect from you offline, and try and recreate that as best as possible online.

Consistency in communications helps customers and prospects develop a perception of brand identity, which helps develop the brand relationship. This brand relationship is built to some degree on expectations, which, once set, we must make our best attempts to meet and exceed.

To cover some of the basics, secure payment gateways, a place to turn for additional information or help should it be required, and clear communication regarding policies are standard customer service essentials for online retailers.

In addition:

- Supply a wider range of payment gateways (credit cards/ BPAY/PayPal/invoicing for regular clients)
- Offer payment via mobile devices like smartphones (added value for the increasing number of smart-phone users out there)
- Offer tracking capabilities on products ordered, including estimated time of arrival (tracking capability offers users extra peace of mind, while guaranteed delivery times and express delivery options can provide that added point of differentiation that seals the deal for time-poor consumers shopping online)
- Regularly update help sections to cater for emerging customer segments/evolving products and services (consider what "offline" questions apply to the online environment)
- Offer increased interactivity through forums or VoIP where customers can seek further information (we can't always predict what information our customers will want or need)
- Provide virtual tours or augmented reality demos (to reduce the

ambiguity (perceived risk) involved in purchasing online and increase probability of purchase)

- flag important policies, insert prompts and offer dedicated tool tips (to increase customer awareness and ensure the buyer is fully aware of all terms and conditions)

6. Engage Your Target Audience

Finally, regularly interacting with your customers is the best way to develop the relationship you have with them. Opening up communication and encouraging our customers to engage in two-way dialogue with us helps boost brand loyalty and increase customer retention.

Feedback links are just the beginning. Online, there are a multitude of channels at our fingertips which are massively underutilised.

“Traditional” online mediums like polls and surveys are still popular. [Midas](#) offers a great example of how these feedback mechanisms work. Midas created a simple poll which asked over 1800 visitors over several weeks were asked; “would you book your car in for a service online?”. When over 80% of their visitors voted “Yes” they rolled out the service, which now generates over 100 bookings Australia-wide.

Forums and blogs offer allow for even more interactivity, allowing businesses to regularly interact with customers and prospects and foster the online community surrounding their brand.

Increasingly popular mediums include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Many businesses have experienced positive results with social media; however its practicality is highly dependent on your product/service. Social media is not for everyone. It might not be right for your target audience or you may not have the resources to manage it appropriately. However it offers a cheap, effective means of developing brand relationships. Mediacasts have grown in popularity since the advent of YouTube, and multi-format sharing applications like coreDNA’s Mediacast Manager are other great ways to increase interactivity and offer visitors an alternative means of getting to know you and your company.

7. Conclusion

The online environment is dynamic- and the expectation is that retailers will stay up to the minute with the latest and greatest technology- or consumers will go elsewhere.

Utilising SEM and SEO, maximising lead generation, increasing conversions, improving customer service and engaging target audiences are some of the techniques organisations can use to push a website from good to great; and maximise return on investment online.

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