Marketing Wisdom for 2006:
110 Marketers & Agencies
Share Real-Life Tips

by The Readers of MarketingSherpa

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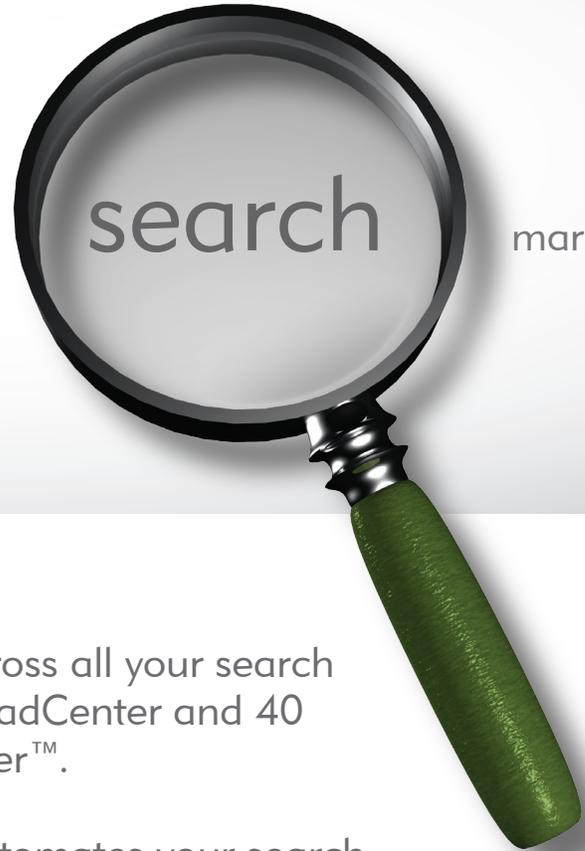
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A Letter from MarketingSherpa's Publisher

Welcome to the fourth annual edition of our "Wisdom" report, featuring more than 100 stories and lessons learned from MarketingSherpa's readers.

Once again I have been completely humbled while reviewing these reader-contributed stories. Every year, over the course of overseeing our 100+ new Case Studies and accompanying Benchmark guides, I tend to build myself up in my own mind into some kind of marketing "Expert." And then I read these stories from the field and I remember that I don't know diddly-squat… except for one thing. Test everything. Measure results. Then tweak and test again.

The truth is absolutely no amount of research, experience, or gut instinct can ever compensate for testing an idea to see if it's a winner or not. As a reader from Travelzoo wrote in after discovering their winning banner creative was the color no one in the office liked much, "Don't try to guess, just test!"

"We are testaholics," admitted reader Alin Jacobs of DME. "Test or die!" wrote in Rob Stokes of Quirk Marketing. "You can either split test, or be mediocre like the rest," said Marc Folch. Next Juston Brommel of INBOX Marketing upped the ante, "If you still do A/B testing, you're stuck in the dark ages. Turn on multivariable testing and turn on the revenues."

To inspire you, this year's Wisdom report features dozens of real-life test campaign lessons and tips. In addition, I noticed three more trends:

Trend #1. Broader copy kills results

Many contributors described testing copy changes on websites, emails, search campaigns, and other marketing vehicles. Although the particulars of each campaign varied widely, the end result was the same. The more broad the copy was, in a misguided effort to appeal to more people, the less it appealed to anyone.

It's a lesson any professional copywriter has learned a hundred times or more… but still one that's easy to forget. Of course to write great targeted copy, you need a pile of market research to base wording and focus on. And, in trying to get campaigns off the ground quickly, we all sometimes skip that essential step.

Trend #2. Segmenting email campaigns is worth the work

I was startled this past fall when data in our *Email Marketing Benchmark Guide* showed if you segment a list as small as 5,000 names into even smaller chunks, the segments were ten times more likely to open and five times more likely to click through than they would have been in a generic campaign to the whole list.

The data seemed too dramatic to me. Yes, segmentation works, but that much? Well, real-life stories submitted by MarketingSherpa readers in the email chapter of this Wisdom report bear out the data. Segmenting even for fairly niche lists can work wonders. And it seems to work no matter what

industry you're in… up to a certain point. As one reader pointed out, once you get close to one-to-one messaging it can be more work than the campaign results are worth. Never fear, I don't think many marketers are anywhere close to reaching that point of diminishing returns yet!

Trend #3. Buy paid search ads when you have great organic listings

If you've got a top listing in organic results for your website, you still should invest in PPC ads against the exact same search terms. As many readers pointed out, their test results indicate if you dominate the search results page with multiple listings (especially a mixture of SEO and PPC listings) you'll get far better results.

Fascinatingly, the best results from mixing PPC and organic seem to be for trademark terms and brand names. Most marketers don't bother investing in their own trademarks because, hey, they usually have first place in organic and if they do a thorough job of policing and complaining, no one else is able to put competing organic ads up.

Now, it appears it's worth running PPC ads against your own trademarks and brand names, even when you have great organic listings. (Or perhaps I should say "especially when you have great organic listings.")

One last thing… as you're reviewing these stories, start thinking about your own campaigns and test results. Do you have a story other marketers could learn from? Let us know. We're always looking for marketers to interview and test campaigns to cover.

Thanks to all of this year's contributors. Your stories will serve as inspiration to tens of thousands of your peers.

Anne Holland
President, MarketingSherpa

Part #1: General Marketing & Advertising

1 With our newsletter and email open rates dropping, we decided to try a mailing campaign to re-sell current customers on additional products. We created a fancy little postcard and presented a fantastic offer for one of our best products. We were confident in the card and in our offer and decided to send it out to the entire list we were targeting of 4,000 customers. Well, the offer flopped. Conversion rate was .04%. We were expecting the rate to be more up towards 4-10%. So, why did the offer flop? Because we did not take the time to test! Looking at the postcard, there were a number of things that could have made a difference in increasing sales, such as adding an end date, changing the graphics, changing word order and changing landing pages. We can't fully know which of these changes would have made a difference until we send out more postcards. So after sending out 4,000 postcards, not only did we fail to generate a significant number of sales, we also failed to discover what postcard design is most successful for the offer. If we had taken an extra week to send out some test postcards, we would have come up with a more effective card. This would have generated more sales and given us something to work with in the future.

Brock Hadley, Visual Link Spanish, www.learnspanishtoday.com

2 The setup is that I was working as a consultant for a start up company, launching a new beauty-treatment product line at the end of 2005. We were careful to review previous communication strategy used in Chile for this same product line. We detected that their biggest flaw in Chile's launch was over-promising the product's benefits at a point were initial sales were incredible, but so were the product's returns. When the Chilean female consumer failed to see immediate results (as was announced), the Chilean subsidiary received as much as 25% of unit sales in returns. The lesson learned was obvious, but it deserves constant attention when launching a new or improved product or service: DO NOT OVERPROMISE. It will come back to haunt you.

Fernando S. Hernandez, ABC Consultores, S.A., www.abc-consultores.com.mx

3 We were conducting a colored-background banner test in which we tested three banner versions with very light colored backgrounds — blue, yellow and red — against our standard white background. All other elements were held in control. Prior to launching the test, I asked my associates, one by one, to come by my office, and I showed them each of the colors we were testing versus control. All of them preferred either light blue (reminded them of the sky and/or the sea) or light yellow (felt sunny and bright to them). None of them liked the red version the best. So we launched our test, and ... well, you can guess what happened next. In four days of tests on our top placement, the red version showed a +22% lift versus the white, while the blue was +2% and yellow was +7%. The moral of the story: don't even try to guess what's going to do best. Just test it!

Chuck Hildebrandt, Travelzoo

4 Great execution of a good idea is far better than poor execution of a stellar concept.

Mike Kennedy, NavPress Publishing, www.navpress.com

8

5 What does it take to successfully launch a media campaign in the public sector? I believe it boils down to three factors:

1. Making use of the media buzz — In this case the newspapers were already running stories on motor vehicle dealers selling cars and not meeting their tax obligations. We capitalised on this (free) publicity by buying advertisements in the major newspapers running stories on this sort of egregious behaviour. The client themselves were sold on the idea of getting more bang for the buck with the opportunity of continuing to raise awareness without having to spend big dollars.

2. Value for money — While AUD$100K may not seem to be a huge budget, the alignment of the media campaign supported with posters, direct mail, media releases and media stories all add up. Simply put, the client themselves were aware that the return on investment could be anywhere from five to ten times the actual outlay (who knows!)

3. Organisational capability — Not to forget that the media campaign needed the collaboration of people expertise and capability, common sharing and understanding of the marketing objective and the collective will of key organisational players to make it happen.

Chan Foo, ATO, chan.foo@ato.gov.au

6 Ever wonder why all car dealer ads look so much alike? It's because their external marketing and advertising is driven by in-house sales teams that want ads like everybody else is running. In my previous job, I worked for an in-house agency owned by a holding company of 11 auto dealerships. I was asked to create a television campaign for their largest dealership, around a rodeo theme. Their standard ads featured their general manager and a few of the sales managers in a hard-sell 'hype' kind of spot, shot on the dealer's lot. These spots really didn't do much for their sales, but it's what every other dealer did, so they were comfortable with them. I wrote and directed a spot that took the GM and a sales manager off-site to a horse barn. The script involved a pickup truck practicing for a barrel race. There was physical comedy (the GM got sprayed with a rooster tail of dirt) one really bad pun, and an actual storyline. We shot the spot like a sitcom, with multiple camera angles, reaction shots, and close-ups. The result was a spot that pulled in dramatically more people onto the dealer's lot than ever before. Some six months after the spot had run, people were still talking about it, and insisting that they'd just seen it. The GM was delighted and their sales showed a dramatic increase. The lesson here is not that 'comedy sells.' I think the spot worked because it was both better than what they'd run before, but it was DIFFERENT. When everyone else runs spots that feature on-screen talent and lots of dialog, try creating a spot that relies on a music bed and CG text. If everyone else runs spots that scream at the buyer, write one that uses a soft-sell approach. When everyone else is using flashy, 3-D graphics, try simple, 2-D graphics. The key is to avoid running with the herd. But it's not enough to be different. You have to better. In my experience, it takes just as long to do it wrong (or to do it sloppy) as it does to try to do it better than you did last time. Little things can make a big difference in the quality of any ad. I've found that improving the quality of the production/script/actors/editing can make a dramatic difference in the impact of a spot.

Brad Kozak, Novel Idea, www.novelidea.com

7 This is a simple story of how viral marketing performed against more traditional forms of advertising. The industry is health and fitness. The Objective: Acquire 10,000 new leads for the manufacturer's E-commerce website. The Strategy: Use Print Advertising and Viral Marketing Online acquisition that could later be used for 1-to-1 sales initiatives through email and web. The Tactics: For print, have a back cover of a national fitness magazine that had a call-to-action and a vanity URL to subscribe to win a collectors edition poster (1 of 15) autographed by the stars of the industry. Circulation was estimated at 300,000 including pass-along rate. For web, we used a viral marketing tactic that included an email blast to the 60,000 current subscribers, home page links, and several other links to the contest site throughout parent website. We set-up the contest to allow one ballot for every entry. Each contestant entered their information onto the form and received one ballot. They then had the opportunity to refer up to 10 of their friends via an email invite to receive up to 10 more ballot entries, for a maximum of 11 ballots. Contestants could login anytime to see how many ballots they had. The result: The print ad gave us only 2 new acquisitions at a cost of almost $10,000. That's a whopping $5,000 acquisition cost. The web viral marketing gave us over 8,500 new acquisitions at a cost of $6,500. The cost was due to the outsourced viral technology engine. This CPA was much lower at just $0.76. Overall, the key learning here is that print to web on almost every occasion performs so poorly, it's really not worth the investment. Why? I believe that it's only a brand builder that establishes a promise and unless you're giving away a million bucks or a chance of a lifetime, forget it. People have too many other distractions by the time they get to their computer to remember to put the exact vanity URL into their browser. BUT, if you use the same medium as we did for the viral component, then the barriers are down and there is ultimately less friction. By the way, the E-commerce store experienced a sales lift of over 20% since then and continues to climb. In fact, we also started to use the viral component on a full-time basis with coupons and are experiencing an astounding 83% redemption rate!

Darren Contardo, darrencontardo.typepad.com

8 It's easy to fall into the trap of decision making based solely on models rather than on testing. Models are only as good as the inputs (if you put garbage in, you get garbage out). You need to take the time to test the validity of each metric in the model. Two of our email capture initiatives this year were originally disapproved by senior management because the model used response metrics from external vendors. Consequently, Management's rationale was that we'd need our results to be 10x to make the economics work and that that was unachievable. We (secretly) tested the metrics anyway and proved that our internal metrics were substantially better and even exceeded the 10x differential senior management thought we couldn't hit.

Anonymous

9 Since I started podcasting the Tim 'Gonzo' Gordon Show in April, I've seen traffic to my website double, then triple, and finally quadruple, without my doing anything else! I think podcasting is an incredible tool to help promote and brand that's currently being under-utilized. And I'm barely scratching the surface of what I PLAN to do with the podcast.

Tim 'Gonzo' Gordon, Gonzodex, www.digitalaudioworld.com

10 I learned to expect the unexpected. Preparation and adaptability were key for 2005. I never would have imagined that only three months after opening a new store in New Orleans, our resale clothing chain would have to deal with the effects of a disaster like Hurricane Katrina. I'm happy to report that all our New Orleans employees were safely evacuated and offered relocation packages to Buffalo Exchange stores in other cities. The New Orleans store was spared flood damage and sustained only minor ceiling and roof leaks. Buffalo Exchange didn't know the status of the store until management was finally able to visit New Orleans on October 6. Even though our hands were full with the chaos of the situation I was able to keep our customers informed online, as our Web site is designed for easy and immediate news updates. We were concerned about our advertising representatives at Gambit Weekly, Tulane's Hullabaloo, and Where Y'At, but we eventually reconnected with everyone. I had to re-evaluate our advertising budget and options (Where Y'At is not currently publishing). I soon realized the need for coaching my department on details such as holding advertising payments until we could confirm where to send them, and how to appropriately convey understanding for our New Orleans contacts via email. In a press release announcing the reopening of our store in October, I noted that Buffalo Exchange had been voted a 'Best of' in the Best of New Orleans readers' poll that Gambit Weekly was to publish on August 30. Sending the release to New Orleans media was a challenge because many of the pre-Katrina email addresses and fax numbers were no longer in service. But our media research was worth the trouble: State of Louisiana Representative Emile 'Peppi' Bruneau included us in a 'Hurricane Katrina/Rita Recovery Update,' Signs of Recovery section, on October 18. New Orleans City Business and Biz New Orleans Magazine profiled us. And we received a lot of media coverage in Tucson, Arizona, where the company headquarters are located. I was glad that our PR system was well in place when Katrina hit. We keep track of the latest company facts and vigilantly update our media list, so that we're always ready to tell our story to the press. The New Orleans store is doing well and Buffalo Exchange is proud to be a part of the city's rebuilding. Gambit Weekly published an abbreviated Best of New Orleans issue on November 15, awarding Buffalo Exchange Best Place to Buy Vintage Clothing Runner-Up. Our department designed a company holiday card commemorating New Orleans, showing a vignette of our storefront before the Hurricane.

Michelle Livingston, Marketing Director, Buffalo Exchange,
www.buffaloexchange.com

11 The valuable lessons I learned in 2005 are: be aware of the various definitions of success, don't be so fast to call a trial a failure, and talk to your customers and know what they are expecting from you and your products. Don't project your expectations onto your customers. What you are offering, no matter how different it looks from the way you imagined it, might be exactly what your customer is waiting or looking for.

Anonymous

12 Companies are missing the boat by not using Incentive for Inquiry in direct mail. In a recent consumer campaign, we saw in-bound call volume increase 300%.

Pamela Lockard, Direct Marketing Network, www.directmarketingnet.com

13 I own a marble and granite fabrication and installation company located in Orange County, CA. The latest in market growth trends reflects a growing number of consumers utilizing stone in kitchen and bathroom remodel projects as well as in new homes. After a market segment study along with gathered consumer research and psychographics, we decided to seek a higher market share level, in spite of being aware of so many smaller competitors popping up over last year. How could we gain competitive advantage in an industry where price wars were all too common and often seen as the norm for the industry?

Consumers these days are very smart and will often wait for companies to kill each other with price slashing. However, psychographics show consumers still want value and will not sacrifice quality. Especially when a high end product is being considered for years of enjoyment in their own home. Our strategy: We would acquire competitive intelligence, use that intelligence along with our consumer research to mesh and develop differentiation and value based products to our offerings, add additional line extension products, outdo the competition with un-matched service and throw convenience into the melting pot and bam! I like to think of it as a business cake analogy. No one particular ingredient is good alone; only when all are mixed together do they work! Still, consumer research is key; find out what your customer wants and give it to him/her. Too many companies just don't get it. That is why most will fail in 5 years or less. Your business/marketing models must be adaptive to quick change. Market fluctuations can happen over night. You must be able to react accordingly. I used to think the bigger the company was, the better it was. Now I know the bigger guys aren't very adept at quick change. Governed by corporate politics and bureaucracy the bigger guys move too slowly. Personalization and adaptation are the smaller companies' advantage, we will exploit these anomalies to outdo the industry!

Ronald Montoya, stonewurkz, www.stonewurkz.com

14 The lesson learned for me in 2005 was a reminder of how important it is to occasionally 'take the brand out for a walk' and get some real feedback, from lots of people, that hasn't been condensed into a brand study or extrapolated from a focus group. We were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to partner with Cabot Creamery on the 'Best of Vermont Showcase' at the World Financial Center in Manhattan this summer. We had a chance to speak to literally thousands of people over the course of the two-day event and ask them simply, "so why do you like Vermont?" The answers, while 'unscientific,' were absolutely invaluable in helping us calibrate the messages we are putting out there, both in terms of PR and ad campaigns. Everyone who is involved with using, managing or developing a brand should do at least one event like this every year to see if what the consultant is telling them is really true and if their brand research is still valid. We also heard loud and clear that marketing is still very much about personal relationships and credibility. One of the first questions we were invariably asked was "are you from Vermont?" A good reminder that while it is fine to have a sales/marketing person repping a company at a show or other external event, it adds enormous value to have someone there who is directly connected with the product.

Jason Aldous, Vermont Department of Tourism & Marketing,
www.VermontVacation.com

15 Lesson learned: ALWAYS run your creative copy by both male and female readers before submitting to client. I run a small marketing firm. I had just landed a new client who sold industrial equipment to steel mills. They wanted to create an email campaign to move prospects to upgrade or replace existing equipment. The client believed many of their prospects had equipment that had fallen out of code or was simply getting old. I created a mock-up for the email with the subject line "Is your equipment letting you down?" and sent it on to my male client. Unfortunately he didn't see the mock-up because he deleted the email, thinking he had received an offer for a different kind of 'up' grade.

Anonymous

16 Sometimes the smallest thing can really hurt your campaign. A client had sent out a postcard that looked great, had good headlines and copy, but had a fatal flaw: the headline, along the bottom of the postcard, was covered by the post office's destination coding. When you received a copy, you got this great, attractive postcard, but the line that actually told you what the postcard was about was blocked out. Needless to say, the campaign returned zero results.

Sadie Peterson, Sadie Designs & Marketing Consulting, www.sadiedesigns.com

17 We are a university-affiliated golf course with a small marketing budget in a very overbuilt, competitive market. Last year we decided to focus on identifying partners who would benefit from promoting rounds of golf and tournaments at our course. Our partner list has grown extensively and with it our rounds of golf. We have partnered with travel groups who want to bring clients to our course, hotels that have special stay and play packages, local alumni groups from other schools who want to hold events for their alumni, online golf sites that auction last minute tee times, and deals with affinity groups whose members get an extra discount when they play. Lesson Learned: Make partnering opportunities an active part of your business plan.

Jim Fortson, The Claw at USF Golf Course, www.theclawatusf.org

18 I had been using PPC as the primary marketing strategy for driving traffic to my website. Although PPC worked very well in generating traffic, I wanted another strategy that was less costly but had a higher ROI. I'd been reading a lot about Blog advertising, but was still a little skeptical. I quickly found out that blog advertising offers a lot of 'bang for the buck'; and will continue to be a major component of my online marketing strategy. I'm glad that I wasn't afraid to try something new!

Patricia Joseph, She-Tech.com, www.she-tech.com

19 From the process of fine tuning and focusing on Internet advertising, we learned that 'More is not always better' when it comes to large companies with huge customer mailing li1sts and splashy eye candy sites. Big price tag, not always better. Big mailing lists not always better. Additionally, this year we have focused on smaller more specialized markets and venues for advertising. The results? Astounding. For a small inexpensive ad and email blast, tons of orders and repeat loyal customers. Not with just one company but many. Our company vision for 2006 is to keep it fine tuned, smaller and more efficient in the year.

Rachel Johnston, ScentbySpirit.com, www.ScentbySpirit.com

20 Biggest lesson of 2005 for me was the importance of overcoming marketing complexity and delivering a clear and compelling customer message. If you manage multiple channels, have a complex product offering or an extended sales cycle, it's easy to get overwhelmed. It's your job to filter out the noise and ensure that only relevant, understandable messages reach your customers. Some tactics that seem to help:

• Unify your message internally and make it consistent across customer touch points. Don't write a book. Simplify it down to a few important customer benefits.

• Minimize information overload. Detailed information such as tables or product matrixes probably is not the first thing your site visitors should see. Present numbers in context and let visitors know before they click that they are about to view detailed charts or information.

• Invest in 'infographics' to appeal to visual learners. Top consumer business and finance magazines have excellent examples of how to explain complex concepts using complementary text and visual content.

• Use familiar examples to bridge the gap between the known and unknown. For instance, we compare our real estate site's undervalued property search feature to online tools investors use to pick winning stocks.

• Learn from other marketers who have learned to explain complex products in accessible ways. For additional insights, listen to how your loyal customers describe your products and their benefits to others, and tap into word-of-mouth.

• Stay vigilant for signs that your audience is not getting it. Excessive bounce rates, short page visits and high instances of "browse and bail" behavior may indicate that you're putting too much cognitive load on site visitors. Always provide friendly alternatives such as FAQs, toll-free numbers and mailto links for customer care. Stay tuned to support channels for clues on what customers understand, don't understand and what you can do to keep them coming back!

Charles Warnock, Marketing-Interactive, www.marketing-interactive.net

21 We are a pan-European credit card issuer with our head office in the Netherlands and we have launched our products in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany (other European countries will follow). In 2005 I experienced a change in steering online campaign efficiency: When we started in 2003 we were steering our online campaigns mainly on CPO, but as a result of gaining more customer insight information by conducting both qualitative and quantitative research and technical adjustments in 2005, we changed towards steering mainly on NPV (Net Present Value). Thanks to Chaffey's "five diagnostic categories for e-marketing measurement," (Chaffey, 2000) I made a hierarchy in Key Performance Indicators:

1. Business contribution NPV of our internet channel compared to other channels.

2. Marketing outcomes Sales (in volume and Euro's). 3. Customer satisfaction Website performance and inbound E-mail response times.

4. Customer behaviour Website conversion ratios, funnel marketing outcomes.

5. Site promotion Cost Per Click, CPM.

All data gathered gives a detailed overview of the success of the Internet channel and how to improve online campaign efficiency.

Stephan Schroeders, ING Card (the Netherlands), www.ingcard.nl

Part #2: Search Marketing

22 One of the insights I gained from you this year started out as disappointing news. You noted that press releases on online news portals are no longer a good way to reach the media. They have become so commonplace that reporters' interest in them has plummeted. But the good news is that optimized releases are a better tool for reaching the searching public. Soon after I put an optimized release on a news distribution portal, I was happily surprised to see it landing on the top 5 organic search listings for some of my chosen keywords. Reaching reporters is good … but reaching potential customers is better.

Leon Altman, Founder, InvestingIN Enterprises, www.InvestingIN.com

23 Late this year, with the help of a new partner, we launched ratings and review functionality on our site. This feature looks very promising and there's one measurable impact I can share now. Our partner implemented a search marketing capability, which allowed Google and other search engines to easily find these reviews. The reviews provided relevant content for natural search results, and equally relevant content to shoppers, and they linked into our product pages. Within the first month the search results from these reviews drove tens of thousands of new visitors to our site. More importantly, these visitors had a 50% higher average order value and 60% higher conversion than the average site visitor. They had 82% more page views per session and 94% more repeat site visits in the time period. We believe customers who came in through these review pages were customers searching for more considered purchases — customers more likely to buy higher margin products. We're measuring other benefits of ratings and reviews on our site (conversion, AOV, repeat traffic, etc.) in the coming months. So far this strategy is paying off.

Steve Fernandez, CompUSA.com, www.compusa.com

24 We were aggressively optimizing our Paid Inclusion program on Yahoo, and could not improve it past a 'mid performing' program. We even hired an agency to help optimize content, but that didn't do the trick. Then one day, there was a problem with our data feed and our listings were temporarily removed. I noticed a jump in natural search revenue immediately, and couldn't believe that I had never calculated the up-side of the natural search revenue when determining ROI for the program. Working this information in, it was clear that Paid Inclusion was one of the worst performing programs from an ROI perspective, and we could get most (70-90%) of the PI revenue from natural search. It was an easy decision for us to terminate PI and focus on SEO.

Adam Silverman, babystyle, www.babystyle.com

25 I learned 2 very important SEO lessons in 2005.
1. There is nothing that an SEO company can do for you that you can't do yourself if you are willing to immerse yourself in the available knowledge that exists on the Internet.

2. Keep on top of best practices. Matt Cutts is really very funny, and really very nice, but that doesn't mean that he won't enjoy banning your website from Google for having hidden content.

Bob Rains

26 I added dynamic text on my landing pages specific to the keywords used in the PPC campaign and now conversion rates average over 4% across all dynamically generated landing pages!

<div align="right">Chad Barczak, Palo Alto Software, www.paloalto.com</div>

27 I wanted to boost the traffic of the company's 23 B-to-B websites, covering the food, pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries. Only 12% of the traffic was coming from the search engines. The rest was mostly coming from the daily newsletters received by subscribers. In search engine optimization 'Content is King,' so for a business publisher it was abnormal to have such low traffic from the search engines.

Tip #1. 301 Redirection. The company used to have many domains for the same website. For example: www.nutraingredients.com and www.nutra-ingredients.com In this case www.nutra-ingredients.com must redirect to www.nutraingredients.com There are several ways to redirect domains, however, I knew from experience that most of them will get you in trouble with the search engines. The company used the 302 redirect (temporary) which was a disaster. It was then changed to the search engine-friendly way to redirect URLs using 301 redirect (permanent redirect).

Tip #2. Link all the websites together. Some websites had a good page rank (6/10 for Google) others not (only 3/10), especially the newest ones. The low page rank for some was due to a low number of incoming links. By connecting all the websites, in only two month the page rank of all the website was an average of 6 out off 10.

Tip #3. Optimize the titles automatically. All the pages had exactly the same title. The title with the page rank is the most important thing to optimize for a search engine: it has to explain what the page is about. So, for each page (consequently each article), I included the title of the article in the Meta Tag Title

Tip #4. Optimize the description automatically. I took the first two lines of each article as a description on each page for the Meta Tag Description.

Tip #5. Optimize the URL. The URL did not make sense, either for the search engines or the readers (www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news.asp?id=5584695&userid=2355). So when an editor writes an article they were asked to choose the best keywords to describe the article and those keywords are automatically included in the url:

http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news/ng.asp?n=64664-taste-temperature-bitter

The results: Once those small changes were online, we had to clean the cache from our server, where the pages were stored in order to update all our improvements. The results have been far beyond our expectations. From September to October the sessions rose by 36.95 %, and from October to November they rose by 38.06 %. As a result of this the traffic grew by 89 % in only two month, from 453,222 to 680,501 sessions). We had to buy a new server in order to support the higher volume of traffic.

<div align="right">Julien Letellier, Decision News Media,
www.decisionnewsmedia.com/Targeted/Web/Sites/novispage-8.htm</div>

28 I thought that you had to submit your new site to a search engine, and then wait sometimes weeks or even months for them to list it. That is if they decided to list it at all. In fact, as it turns out spending your time submitting your site to the search engines is a complete waste of time. I quickly began to realize that getting a new website listed in the search engines is much more about knowing how the search engines work than anything else. You see, search engines seek fresh, frequently updated content. When they visit these 'fresh' sites, they follow links from these sites. Once they follow a link, if it is a link they've not followed before, they index that new site. Once you're indexed, you're listed! So a far more effective, faster, and reliable way to get a new site listed in the search engines is to get links to your new site from these 'fresh' sites. Two hints:

1. Press Release sites are constantly updated with new releases. Some of them allow anyone to submit a press release for free. Find these, write a release that includes a link to your site, and you're on your way.

2. Blogging sites are also very frequently updated, and the search engines love them. So, start a blog, find a good blogging directory, and submit your blog to that directory. Then write about and link to your new site. Using these and other techniques I can now consistently get new web sites listed in the major search engines in under a week. That's about as good as it gets!

Ryan M. BeMiller, PushCode, Inc., www.pushcode.com

29 We have been in the web templates market for four years already and managed to get the top organic positions in our niche. CPC advertising had never been our prime marketing strategy. After considering all the pros and cons we decided to add to our marketing team a new professional who will lead the PPC project. His tasks are setting up the landing pages, keywords lists optimization, monitoring the prices and profitability. The sales generated through these precise CPC campaigns not only covered the salary of a new professional but increased our profits by 75%.

James Berg, Template Monster, www.templatemonster.com

30 Numerous times we have heard from clients, the only thing that works is search. More than a handful of times this year, we were able to determine that newsletter sponsorships, graphical banner sponsorships work great as well — if you measure viewthrough. For a consumer electronics client, we were able to determine that there were more viewthrough conversions than direct click conversions — a real eye opener.

William Gaultier, e-Storm International, www.e-storm.com

31 In 2005, our marketing department was able to establish the value of the monthly expenditure on Search Engine Optimization by optimizing each press release and the results were demonstrated immediately in news searches and the growing traffic on our blog. We were able to successfully redirect the focus on content creation using predictive keyword reports to unravel the mystery of self-selective content. It was a valuable demonstration in determining exactly what our potential subscriber base was searching for and then integrating the keyword results into the text and tags of our content. We also used these same keywords to optimize all press releases, landing pages, paid search campaigns, etc.

John Ross, WorkshopLive, www.workshoplive.com

32 We started with a release every 2-3 weeks, and over the summer finally reached a point where we felt comfortable creating one every week. Because we could track pickups, RSS distribution and views in our press management console, we could pretty quickly get an idea of what was working and what wasn't.

But what happened was very unexpected: As the press releases were being broadcast via the PRWeb platform (as well as the pickups that happen from keyword searches), we began to experience a sharp increase in Page Rank (the value of a page on Google or Yahoo based on inbound links and traffic). We were also seeing long-term sales ramp-up we could track back to the PR (click-tracking on our client web sites). By December we had 65,000 inbound links, and a PR7-rated web site on our hands. But the best part was watching sales ramp with the increased traffic, and being able to reduce our other online budgets to increase overall ROI by much higher margins. Since January of 2005 we've created a predictable PR program: if we place 4 press releases, spaced roughly one week apart; well written and with good, relevant links and attachments, we typically receive 1,500-1,900 SERP's for a given site within 6 weeks. When we do this consistently for 12-16 weeks, we can predictably generate enough new traffic, sales and media write-ups to snowball for many months following. We think of it as Persistent Pay Per Click, but with a Pay-Once, Results Forever sort of twist (yes, we're still getting clicks on our 2003 releases).

Mark Alan Effinger, RichContent, www.richcontent.com

Part #3: Email Marketing

33 Lesson learned: RSS has yet to take hold as an alternate channel to email. That's the message I got loud and clear from readers of my e-newsletter which goes out to a mix of 17,500 small business and Fortune 1000 marketers. — 65.2% said they were not using RSS to subscribe to blogs. — 54% said they had not yet downloaded an RSS newsreader (or subscribed to a Web-based RSS service).

Debbie Weil, Author, www.TheCorporateBloggingBook.com

34 We were unfortunate enough this fall to experience what most companies fear: spending money for a marketing campaign that was never run. We unwisely contracted with a group to run an email campaign. They were extremely helpful in the preliminary stages of the campaign. BUT once the money was wired, they disappeared and communications with them became impossible. They never provided a single report and we received ZERO hits to the landing page designed for this campaign. The lesson learned — be careful in dealing with businesses in this unregulated industry. Many are simply third-party brokers. It is difficult to distinguish the scammers from the legitimate businesses.

Anonymous

35 We have found that our annual last minute 'holiday gifts' email campaign can double the ROI by adding one simple option: gift certificates. We all know that the gift card market is huge and growing. But for those true procrastinators, nothing solves their last minute panic like an instantaneous emailed gift certificate. Last year we sent an email campaign 4 days before Xmas. Half of our customers got an email featuring our best selling, well stocked gift items. The other half got the same email along with the heading "procrastinators unite." Our first offering was emailed gift certificates. This email resulted in double the sales of the other email campaign. We will continue to remind online shoppers of the gift certificate option in all future 'holiday' emails.

Jean Wnuk, All Things Jeep, www.allthingsjeep.com

36 The best advice is sometimes the most obvious. After participating on some level in various email campaigns for various organizations...the most important thing I can suggest is to be sure several people proof your email before sending it out. Tiny little oversights such as a broken link, or a phrase that may be innocent in context, may be spam filtered out, for example we used the common nickname of our event speaker 'Richard _____'. The entire email was blocked because the subject's first name violated spam terms.

Jackie, www.thirdcoastmarketing.com

37 Some insights from our 1-to-1 program to increase customer relationship value for a leading bank in India. The more engaged the customer, the higher the open rates. But the relationship value does not necessarily increase. Less engaged, the open rate is less, but it's easier to increase relationship value. Insight: Engaged customer is more responsive to 1-to-1, but more demanding, needs more unique offers/products. Opposite is true of the less engaged customer. He is easier to engage.

V. Sankaran, urja, www.urja.com

38 Increasing newsletter click through by remailing non-opens. We were able to increase the clickthrough for one of our clients to their monthly e-mail newsletter by resending it one week later to those who didn't open it the first time around. Our actual results showed an increase in click through of 40% without any real impact to opt-out rate due to the second send. The key to this was being able to create a file of those addresses that had opened the first newsletter to use as a suppression file so that we were able to avoid resending to those customers and only send to those addresses that hadn't opened the first time around. We use the WhatCounts permission e-mail platform to deliver our newsletter and it makes it quite easy to support this as well as to determine the results.

Terry Miller, CRM Group LLC, www.crmgroupusa.com

39 We've been able to continue getting excellent email results by keeping it simple. While many of our colleagues spent this year catching up on the latest rich-media technology, we were going strong with well-written text ads in permission-based email newsletters. We educated a couple of targeted nonprofits on the benefits of having our clients sponsor their emails. As a result, our clients became the first to do so with continued great results. The clients we work with are all socially- and environmentally-responsible organizations, and try to reach likeminded consumers. Our experience this year shows that a great way to reach these niche consumers is simply by having text ads with excellent copy, placed in targeted newsletters. Plus, our clients appreciate that they don't need to use more disruptive media outlets to get their message through.

Perry Goldschein, SRB Marketing, Inc., www.SRBMarketing.com

40 The Importance of From Lines and Subject Lines. Digital Impact conducted a user study to determine how people interact with their inbox. We found 80% of those tested opened their inbox, read "from" the line and then subject line and then hit delete. They then opened the emails that were left in their box. No matter how much you spend on the email creative, if you don't have a professional From Line and clear Subject Line customers will never see it.

Geene Rees, Digital Impact

41 Permission marketing using a mix of mail, mobile and email scores 7 times higher than traditional methods. In one of the biggest direct marketing campaigns done for a leading automobile company in India — a plan that included testing media and lists — we pulled together some fantastic results. But the old home truths and fundamentals still do not change!

1. Customer lists are most responsive (even if you're plagued with perception problems).

2. House lists will outpull cold lists—even if your choice of variables is bang-on.

3. Outbound SMS (after you've got the permission to message) followed by outbound telecalling outpulls the next best method by over 10 times!

4. SMS and emails turn out best numbers in terms of response and qualification.

5. Short code responses (four digit response numbers for SMS) outpull complete number response 10 to 1.

Ajit Narayan

42 I will always remember 2005 as the year that email authentication moved from a concept to widespread marketplace adoption. Spurred on by a massive education effort, now more than 1.6 million domains have published SPF records and Yahoo receives more than 350 million messages signed with DomainKeys each day. Authentication with all of the major solutions requires the ability to publish text records into the DNS. However, unfortunately, not all domain hosting providers and registrars offer this capability to their customers. In addition, more advanced solutions like DomainKeys require advanced message-signing capabilities to be integrated into marketers' outbound Mail Transfer Agents (MTAs).Also, authentication compliance isn't a one time deal. Marketers that published their SPF records once two years ago run into trouble. Marketers need to ensure that communication with their IT team and 3rd parties is rock-solid. Things like adding or discontinuing the use of IP addresses to send marketing email, or switching email service providers demands updating your authentication compliance records — or else!

Jordan Cohen, Director of ISP & Government Relations, Epsilon Interactive, www.epsiloninteractive.com

43 1. Subject line testing works. Once you see your results, you'll kick yourself for not doing it sooner.

2. Landing page testing can boost conversion from 5%-25%. Key driver: make the call to action consistent and prominent.

3. Most offer testing programs with our clients brought us to some segmentation strategy. Broad tests to the overall database mask the real drivers of response because the diversity of the audience dilutes the impact of any one response driver.

4. Testing is equally important on acquisition email as it is for retention. Every list rental campaign should include pre-testing of subject lines, offer and target selects. Even if you just separate prospects from customers on your house file, you can learn a lot by testing offers and timing for prospects.

Stephanie Miller, Return Path, www.returnpath.biz

44 Wow, we didn't realize how many email clients do not display images by default. Because of your well constructed discussion on this topic, we now ensure that all of our email messages render correctly and are consumable with and without images. This is a simple task, but one that is easily overlooked.

Mike Pav, Powered, www.powered.com

45 Actively preventing and managing unsubscribes is an increasingly important competence within the field of email marketing. Especially in a B2B context where subscribers typically have a high customer value, and winning back a subscriber (second sampling) is almost impossible. Using advances analytical techniques we have been able to quantify the general relationship between email contact frequency and unsubscribes. Although the acceptance of email marketing messages varies based on individual preferences, season, content, incentive etc. we found that the number of unsubscribes is rising slowest if the email volume is evenly distributed. Email clusters during a short period of time, however, have the worst effect.

Anonymous, XQueue GmbH, www.xqueue.com

B-to-B Email Marketing

46 TTPCom sells intellectual property to both semiconductor companies and handset/device manufacturers in the cellular/mobile business. Our customers tend to be large, diverse, global entities, and email marketing is a big part of our mix. We send a quarterly newsletter with industry opinion, topical issues and analyst views. Last year we experimented very successfully with adding Chinese and Japanese language capability to increase downloads. This year we dramatically increased the number of subscribers and for the first three issues we steadily improved our download statistics, and nearly 20% of recipients successfully downloaded material. In the last issue our stats dropped despite a small increase in subscribers. Although initially dismayed with the statistics, we were happy enough when we realized what had happened: we had cleaned the list of all our competitors, and not unreasonably, these competitors were avid downloaders of our information. In this case, lower download statistics meant less ammunition in the hands of our competitors — a satisfactory result!

Peter Davies, TTPCom, www.ttpcom.com

47 One of our successes in the past year has been using the PowerPoint pps format to send e-mail quotations to clients. Our products at times can be somewhat complicated and confusing to clients, yet we often have to work through a recommender instead of being able to present to the final decision maker. Naturally, this can be a handicap to closing deals and to ensuring that the right information is supplied at the time of decision. We have found that developing our presentations as a short, logically flowing Power Point and supplying that tool by e-mail to our clients, the full report often gets forwarded as part of the recommendation to the decision maker. This has helped us anticipate and answer questions and close several sales faster and with less problem. We know it presents our material in a way that is significantly different than our competitors provide. While not being able to deal directly with the decision maker is always a handicap, in situations where we just can't move to this level we have found the strategy above helps significantly.

Lee Kirkby, Leppert Business Systems Inc., www.leppert.com

48 We work with a variety of businesses selling mid- to high-priced products and services that require a substantial resource commitment by the buyer. For this type of buyer, we have found that shorter, text-based emails are much more effective than heavily formatted marketing emails and newsletters. The reason is that these buyers are more responsive to emails that appear to be personal communication attempts instead of a mass-marketing campaign. The differences we have seen are dramatic and our clients have benefited from this approach.

Greg Cory, eMaximation, www.eMaximation.com

49 Having run email newsletters with and without proper tracking packages, our conclusion is that measurement is crucial. Otherwise how would we know whether to repeat something or cull it?! For email marketing this is particularly important and in a B2B environment it's essential. Measure results right down to individual 'opens' and make sure the sales force have this information at their finger tips. This way they can call people who have recently clicked through a particular link with a clear idea of what that person is interested in. Experiences in 2005 showed that the more effort the marketer put into involving the sales force from start to finish, the more likely the resulting stats would be used and leveraged to the company's advantage. — We found that many companies serve broad markets such as 'marketing for SMEs' or 'HR for blue chips,' but our newsletters received much higher click through and pass on rates if they provided niche information that recipients couldn't get anywhere else, e.g., 'Talent Management for Law Firms' or 'Marketing for small consultancies breaking into Fortune 500 companies'. Sometimes we segmented a list and sent as many as 14 targeted newsletters, from one small company, to appeal very specifically to each niche. So the three lessons were: balance facts and entertainment, measure and be niche.

Carrie Bedingfield, Onefish Twofish, www.onefishtwofish.co.uk

50 We produce a small daily industry-targeted newsletter that is sent out via e-mail to our opt-in readership. Using TMS's readership statistics regarding time spent actually reading an e-mail newsletter, we reduced the number of articles in our e-mail newsletter to just two and reduced our sponsors to just one per issue and noticed a 35% increase in open and click through rates this past 12 months.

Bill Kahlert, Anywhere Communications Inc., www.mortgagepronews.com

51 Our market is corporate and medium sized businesses. I have a list of a few hundred business people that we have spoken to over the phone and keep in contact with via email. We tested a new email system the other day that sends us a silent email notification from everyone we send to. The recipient does not know we are monitoring them. To our amazement we found a very slow readership of email. About 20% read the email the same day we sent it; the majority (70%) took over a week to read it, and the remaining 10% have been swallowed up in cyberspace! We were mistakenly under the impression that everyone reads email at least once every day. Not so. This has caused us to conclude that if your job involves the Internet then, like us, email is a major communication medium. If your job does not use the Internet as an important part of your business then email has a low rating of importance. Maybe the old tried and tested telephone is still the best method if you want instant response to your communication.

Gordon Barker, EPNET, www.epnetwork.co.za

Part #4: Business-to-Business

52 As I look back on 2005, one particular campaign yielded a number of surprises — both positive and negative. The purpose of the campaign was to generate qualified leads through a webinar. The target: early adopter middle and senior managers with heightened needs for team communication and collaboration. The risk associated with this campaign was high given that:

- Only prospects were targeted (no customers)

- The technology was early stage and complex

- The previous lead generation campaign generated an inadequate number of hot leads

The agreed upon campaign helped to diminish these risks through combining lead generation and event recruitment tactics: Prospects were to be engaged in a consultative dialog regarding needs in communication and collaboration. High skill-set telemarketers with lead generation capabilities were to be deployed rather than 'bums-in-seats' event recruitment telemarketers. The prospect was invited to the webinar only when a pain point or need was identified. Any prospects not able to attend the webinar were then to be run through a lead qualification process; Multiple touches, via email and telephone, were planned for registrants; Post-webinar, registrants were to be further qualified and profiled before released as sales-ready leads.

The results were very interesting: Webinar Attendee Goal—26% Attainment and Lead Generation Goal—144% Attainment

The campaign metrics reflected the unique nature of the solution and the audience:

- Only 12% of registrants attended the webinar, far below the average of 25% (MarketingSherpa IT Metrics 2005). This was surprising given the qualified nature of registrants. However, it is self-selecting: those who would be most likely to need this solution would be least likely to afford the time to attend a one-hour webinar.

- The pre-webinar qualification allowed the lead generation team to develop rapport and account intelligence which facilitated re-engagement after the webinar.

- Almost all webinar no-shows were unable to attend the webinar due to a schedule conflict rather than a lack of interest in the webinar. The conversion of no-shows to leads was high with 40% of no-shows converting to qualified leads. For early stage technologies, we recommend considering integrating event recruitment and lead generation. If the end goal is a sales-ready lead, as it probably is, ensure that the inability to attend a webinar is not the end of the demand generation process but a door opener for the lead qualification process.

Robert Lesser, Direct Impact Marketing Inc., www.DirectImpactNow.com

53 It's so easy to get stuck in the day-to-day grind — you have to take time weekly if not daily to strategize and come up with creative solutions for big results. If you do not, you will end up being just like everyone else. Our best campaign this year was an integrated cross-channel branding campaign to generate awareness for some newly launched product categories and some spill-over lead gen. In addition to typical email and print, we wanted to do something to stand out and grab the market's attention. We worked with a vendor to develop a great diagram, which clearly and simply articulated our value proposition in these new categories. Instead of your typical uses we decided to make it into a huge poster. We had 400,000 printed and folded to approximately a one-page size. Although they had never done anything like this before, we were able to negotiate with our leading trade rag and have them bind them poster in the middle of the biggest issue of the year (the 'event issue' of our largest trade show). Rocket Science? No. But it had never been done before in out space. Did it grab attention? Absolutely. You couldn't open the magazine without it going to that bound page. The day the issue dropped we had customers calling in their account executives asking us to send more to their office. Prospects stopped by our booth at forthcoming events saying "we didn't know you guys offered this too." The icing on the cake: the 'spill-over' leads that went to the dedicated landing web-page touched over $2 million dollars in new business... so far. So, go big or go home.

<div align="right">Kevin Marasco, Recruitmax</div>

54 After conducting over 25 tests for 6 different B-to-B and B-to-C clients focused on customer acquisition, we found that the less said on the surface of a direct mail envelope the better the campaign results. In reviewing the A/B test results of highly creative and conceptual packages against traditional 'old school' letter packages, the finding showed that in most cases, when a reader can't determine what the offer is inside the package, and they feel they might be missing out on something great, especially when the sender is a well know brand, the reader is compelled to pick up the direct mail package and open it before making the decision to disregard the message. Thus, a less is more creative approach on the outer envelope surface, can improve opening rates, which leads to more readership, which in turns leads to more response, which leads to happy marketers.

<div align="right">Russell Kern, The Kern Organization, www.thekernorg.com</div>

55 This past year, we conducted a thought-leadership study. The title was "Define What's Valued Online." Everyone involved in the survey's creation, development and implementation thought it was a great title, capturing and describing the essence of what we were trying to discover. What we found out was that the title was too vague and actually didn't inspire understanding of what the report was about. The lesson we learned was that because we were too close to the project, we weren't able to really understand all of the implications of our title choice. Next time, we will consider pre-launching the study to a select group of trusted marketers in the industry to gain their input and thoughts before we publish it.

<div align="right">Amber Reed, KnowledgeStorm, www.knowledgestorm.com</div>

56 One thing I learned, or rather had reinforced this year, was the importance of a PR strategy — and in particular, press releases — as a means to drive prospects to the web site for deeper engagement. Not surprisingly, tracking found that unique visits to the site increased in the 1-2 days following a posted press release versus the 2 days prior. What was surprising was seeing gains ranging from a 41% increase to a whopping 540% increase. The biggest gains were found with 'material' press releases (those with a financial impact on the company's bottom line). We also found that these types of releases drove the biggest gains two days after the release date and dropped back to normal levels after that. Non-material releases drove traffic that peaked on the first day after the release and declined more gradually afterwards. Press releases have proven to be a great tool at getting traffic to the site. Then, our 'value-added content' strategy takes over to keep them on the site with podcasts, streaming video and case studies. We got podcasting and streaming video religion in a big way in 2005, building an online library for customers and prospects on a predictable release schedule. The numbers seem to show a huge untapped interest in these message delivery media in the pharmaceutical b2b services marketplace: total views of our video files increased 1325% since launching (a 3 month period) and podcast downloads increased 650% after one month of adding a new podcast each week. For the time being, I can't say a new contract is directly linked to someone viewing a video clip or listening to a podcast, but with case study downloads increasing and overall site traffic growing during the same period, I believe we're being successful at starting the ball rolling on a typically long sales cycle.

Joseph Mann, MannPower Design, www.mannpowerdesign.com

57 In the early days at our startup, we had all kinds of ideas about delivering lots of flexibility with our products, so that our customers could configure them to best suit their needs. (Of course, our engineering staff was particularly keen to move in this direction. After all, they seemed to say, why not make most everything customizable?) Luckily, we never did implement that flexibility because we quickly discovered two things:

1. Everyone's always busy, including our customers, and no one was going to make the time to learn how to use that flexibility.

2. Our customers were counting on using our products 'right out of the box.' That meant they were counting on us to pre-configure our offerings in an optimal way. Of course, 'pre-configured optimal' can never be as good as 'customer-configured optimal' but it quickly became clear that 'pre-configured optimal' was going to be good enough.

Paul Freedman

58 Respond to e-mails, voicemails and other inquiries quickly. This applies to all departments of your business. Customers use response time as a measure of your competence.

Morgan Cloward, Office Zone, www.officezone.com

59 This year, we learned an important lesson in the realm of B2B marketing... You can't count on a business to start a dialogue on its own. Sometimes, it has to be encouraged. In 2005, XMPie launched its first-ever direct marketing campaign to boost 3rd & 4th Quarter sales. The objective was to raise awareness of the software's capabilities and have an effect on the actions of the recipients (digital print providers) to demo, and purchase XMPie. The XMPie suite of products is a large investment for any company to undertake. Our campaign needed to reflect as many of the platform's capabilities as possible without overwhelming the audience to the point of confusion. This was when we realized the importance of the decision-maker receiving influence from within. If we invited more people from within the targeted organization into our campaign strategy, the larger the potential that the decision maker would fully grasp what a tool like XMPie can add to a digital print company's capabilities.

Our team created a highly personalized cross-media campaign that had many components, some timed for certain intervals in order to give it some 'Stickiness.' The most important piece was a 6'x9', two-signature mini-booklet with eye-catching variables placed on curves, woven through graphics and presented with gradient tones. This went to the #1 decision-maker at each company. It covered all of XMPie's requirements and offered the most information. At the same time, a 6'x20' tri-fold mailer, with similar graphics, catchy variables and a brief overview of the XMPie suite, went to employees identified as possible/potential XMPie users within the same company as the main recipient. We used our database to cross-reference every recipient on both pieces. That way, the decision maker knew who else had received a similar mail piece and the influencers knew that the decision maker had received even more information on the product. Since each piece cross-referenced the names of all recipients in the call-to-action, it served to create dialogue between employees about XMPie. This tactic also served to demonstrate further how the variables from the same database could be applied to two completely different mail pieces.

In addition to the mail pieces, we continued to highlight XMPie's possibilities through a corresponding personalized web page (Personalized URL) that contained demos, links, a data-gathering survey that automatically sent 'hot links' of the most interested responders directly to the XMPie sales-staff. Another tool added to the P-URL was the 'Refer-a-Colleague' feature. This allowed interested decision makers and/or influencers to send a P-URL to anyone else within the company who should be in on the dialogue, thus creating powerful 'word-of-mouth' references. The result not only increased communication from within, but expanded our database as well. All web activity was followed up with automatically generated eMails.

Again, by combining XMPie's capabilities the automatic emails were highly personalized to reflect specific answers from the survey and sent with a slight delay to convey the notion that each response was crafted in person. In addition, separate emails were sent to every referral along with a P-URL containing the same information sent in the tri-fold mailer. These actions gave us the stickiness we desired and enforced the fact that all cross-media applications were still derived from the same database. On the day of the mail drop, the personalized web site started showing traffic by 11 am. The results were fantastic; we experienced a 5.89% response to the P-URL within the first week with over 60% of those that visited the P-URL taking the survey.

Alin Jacobs, DME, www.dmenet.com

60 We have known for some time that maintaining close relationships with our existing customers is a good method of attracting new customers. Quite simply, people talk to other people in their industry (i.e., Networking) and if they believe you have a good product and provide good service, they are more inclined to mention it to a colleague. We received an amazing validation of this concept, this year.

Our document control product, as has become the sobering norm for many software packages, has been burdened with a sales-cycle that continues to grow in length. From demand generation to purchase, our sales-cycle is anywhere from 6-12 months on average.

Earlier this year, we received a lead referral from a customer of about 1 year. The prospect was a friend of our main contact and was in need of a document control solution. The customer had not only mentioned our product to her friend, she had proceeded to speak to its many benefits and give real-life examples of how it had helped transform her organization. After a brief conversation with the prospect about their specific needs, the prospect was provided a proposal upon request. 3 HOURS later, a signed purchase order was in-house and the order was being processed. The system was even installed in less than a month. Due to the referral of a relatively new customer, our sales-cycle was reduced from a 6-month minimum to only 3 hours!!

The lesson learned? Treat your customers right and don't be pushy when it comes to referrals. If you treat them well, they will become true Customer Evangelists (a concept explored in a great read entitled "Creating Customer Evangelists" by Ben McConnell and Jacki Huba)

<div align="right">Jason Cook, CCS-Inc., www.ccs-inc.com</div>

61 Personal relationships mean everything. Go to the trade shows not to close business but to establish personal relationships — business will follow. It makes a difference in your approach to the show and the vibe that you put out. You will be amazed how many people you will meet and actually have a conversation with (vs. simply collecting business cards) and how much more you will learn. Tradeshows are great learning experiences — places to share ideas, learn new skills, and meet new people. Don't discount someone because you can't do business with them today. Things change and there may be other opportunities. Always bring plenty of business cards and a pen!!!

<div align="right">Melissa Davies-Voitenko, USADATA, mailinglists.usadata.com</div>

62 An area that is often overlooked, and one that may be the easiest for marketers to control, is supplier relationships. The cookie-cutter formula applied in the past by many suppliers is not sufficient in today's relationship building environment. Most suppliers would love to build on existing relationships and sincerely want to know how they can serve you better. Don't be shy about asking for more assistance in the areas of marketing support, expense tracking, year-over-year comparison of expenses, industry trend analysis, and additional support in the area of channel distribution. You may be pleasantly surprised by your supplier's response.

<div align="right">Rod Balson, TD Mutual Funds, www.td.com</div>

63 We got budget approval to participate in a trade show at the last minute. There were very limited opportunities left for sponsorship beyond the typical exhibitor display, and these were only available in undesirable booth locations. We took a chance at sponsoring a relaxation area for the higher level (certified) attendees, plus added on our own intimate evening event for our target contacts. We were shocked at how well our sponsorship was received by the audience.

Although we were sharing the sponsorship with one other firm, our signage and number of staff were so dominant, most attendees thought we provided the entire venue for them. We weren't sure we should talk business in a relaxation area, but we found that when we sat next to people on the couches and at the tables, they were much more open about true issues and needs. We were seen as a peer instead of a vendor. One key contact commented on how "This environment is ideal for DBM, because it brings you out of the vendor mode and presents you as a peer and partner with the Human Resource community." We advertised the area during the conference and people were clamoring to get in (certified or not). We ended up getting more visibility than our competitors and better positioning with our target contacts. It was like having a 60' x 70' booth with food and masseuses and secret agents milling among the crowd — for a fraction of the expense of an exhibit booth — and with better results. Obviously, we've signed up to sponsor it again next year!

<div align="right">Christi Karvasek, DBM, www.dbm.com</div>

64 Admit it; you've strayed from doing work occasionally and surfed the Web while on the clock. Hostway, a leading provider of Web hosting and managed services, believes we've all been guilty of this once or twice in our careers and decided to bring a little entertainment to cubicles nationwide with their viral marketing campaign, www.bobscube.com. Bobscube.com was launched in April 2005 and gives the visitor the key to explore a typical employee's cubicle: doodle pad, computer games, family pictures, voicemails, etc. The campaign was developed with two goals in mind — to drive viral traffic to www.bobscube.com and build brand awareness among Web designers and developers, one of Hostway's key customer segments. The campaign exceeded these goals while adding a third result that Hostway marketing executives had hoped for, but weren't expecting — sales conversions. Not only has Bob's Cube received more than 1 million visits, it has also generated more than 200 Web hosting plan sales. The resulting revenue from these sales has helped Bob's virtual life more than cover its cost to the tune of a 120% ROI. In addition to this increase in sales, the site has also generated significant buzz and attention validated by the traffic numbers to the site. On average, bobscube.com receives 6,000-8,000 unique visitors a day. During the months following the launch of Bob's Cube, the site received 20,000 daily unique visitors and even today it still boasts 2,500 daily unique visitors. The best thing about Bob's Cube and the nature of a true viral marketing campaign is that the campaign wasn't supported by any paid media. All of the traffic and sales were exclusively a result of word-of-mouth advertising and positive mentions in marketing and Web design publications.

<div align="right">Jennifer Mussman, Hostway Corporation, www.hostway.com</div>

Part #5: Websites

65 Sometimes you need to follow your gut. Testing is very important, but it has to start with knowledge of your audience and a gut feeling for what they want. I have websites over a number of niches, and I offer coaching in a handful of fields (mostly women's health and small business). I consulted with two small business coaches in 2005 to make sure I was not missing anything on my websites. One well-known coach recommended that I change the headline on my book sales page. She thought it made no sense because it doesn't make sense to anyone outside of my intended audience. My gut told me it was the right headline (well, one of many possible right headlines). However, I tested her suggested headline. Sales dropped. A second coach offered to review my site. Her suggestion was to change the headline to an even less specialized wording. Sales dropped even further. I finally put back my headline with only a few small changes. Sales climbed back above their previous high water mark. My lesson from all this? No matter how well intentioned or experienced your advisors sometimes you must know your audience and then test, test, and test again.

Julie Renee Callaway, Compose Your Life Professional Coaching,
www.composeyourlife.com

66 Software engineers are not marketers. For two years, we've been struggling to find an affiliate system with integrated shopping cart that allows different discounts at different purchase levels, automatic downloads on e-products, and also allows different commissions for different types of product—and also allows a choice of shipping options. Sounds simple, no? But we looked at dozens of options with fees up to $70 per month and couldn't find anything that worked. We even installed two different systems that we had to yank because of various incompatibilities. Finally, just this month, we've kludged together a 'system' consisting of two entirely separate copies of Mal's free cart – one for printed books, with 25 percent commissions, and one for auto-download e-books, with 50 percent commissions. For the third level of commission, 10 percent on speeches and consulting, we'll have to process it manually, as we've been doing right along. The volume on those is quite manageable, but still, it would be nicer if there were a better way. In early tests, it seems to be working, although customers who order both kinds of products have to fill in the order twice. I'd rather not put them through the extra hassle, but we offer a free report to make up for it.

Shel Horowitz, AWM Books, www.frugalmarketing.com

67 One of our newer clients, a multi-national e-commerce software provider, came to us with an extremely high site abandonment rate. Once we had identified their IT target audiences, it became very clear that their site had been dumbed-down to appeal to a wide audience, and as a result was not appealing to the right audience.

Another smaller website client, whose target audience was identified as 90% female — had been inadvertently writing to appeal to men. It pays to remember the basics of Search Engine Marketing: Get the Right Message, to the Right People, at the Right Time, in the Right Place — and then to provide the Right Website Experience, all of which pivots on knowing who the target audience is.

Brenda Wright, Enquiro Search Solutions, Inc., www.enquiro.com

68 Our Baltimore area hospital faces stiff competition from Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland, and even from NIH. The webmaster position was new for me in 2005, but previous experience taught me that an online form provides a great way for prospective customers to give very detailed descriptions of their needs. And, if you can meet them halfway, with links to a form such as "Interested in this Product? Click here to contact a Sales Rep," or "Sign Up for an inhouse Demo," it can provide even more feedback. One of the first things I did after arriving was to build an 'online appointment' form. The scope of our hospital is big, and it's not possible to dynamically link each doctor's appointment registry online. However, we have a call center that receives these requests, and is able to contact the registrant and assist them in getting in to see a professional of their choice. After a few months, we've settled into an average of +/- 50 referral requests per month, which to me is an impressive figure. It still surprises me that people think of a hospital website as a tool for taking action, but it's providing a wellspring of ideas of how we can further engage our web customers.

Michael Kinstlinger, Union Memorial Hospital, www.unionmemorial.org

69 Never underestimate the value of testing each element of your web site. I came up with what I thought was a great new homepage design but before I replaced my old one, I tested it to see how it compared in terms of prompting visitors to sign up for my free marketing ezine. After all the new design was easier on the eyes I thought it should work better. Right? Instead what I found was that my old homepage was converting at 16% and my new 'better' design only converted at 9%. When it comes to marketing, the only way to determine which copy and which design works is to test each variable. Do this and even your home page can convert at 15 to 20%.

Charlie Cook, MarketingForSuccess.com, www.marketingforsuccess.com

70 I sell a guide to help people start and market their own lawn care business. After testing many different techniques on the site, I hit on one that yielded a 200% increase in sales: adding a bonus offer. I put a limit on the number of bonuses I was offering, and as orders came in, I would change the number of bonuses left, to create a sense of urgency. This simple technique has resulted in sales more than doubling since I started using this technique.

Adam White, Lawn Care Directory, www.lawncaredirectory.com

71 One test of note we ran this year was on payment options. A while back, the ability to join our site using an electronic check payment was added as an option. This was never tested to see if we were gaining new subscribers or just stealing from a potentially more profitable payment method (credit card). We completed a 50/50 test where half the traffic to our website could pay by credit/debit card or check, and the other half just credit/debit card. The results indicated that although the control group with both options had 6% pay by check, overall the test group was only down 2%. At this point we are keeping both payment options on our site.

Mike

72 Web analytics rock! We are now seeing customers waking up to the fact that measurable is better. We also learned that Alexa data can occasionally be useful. We had a potential new customer who had been running an e-commerce site, for a very large company, with no analytics. Despite their lack of software, we compared their Alexa data to Alexa numbers from a group of our other customers, whose traffic we really do know, and triangulated to create a Unique Visitors count. Using the e-commerce company's actual sales and average order size, we computed a conversion rate of only .3%. When we finally convinced their new webmaster to install an analytics package, the company found that our guesstimate was within 10% of actual. Not only did we close the deal, but their CEO is now a data head. They are finally making decisions based on questions like, 'If someone touches the `About Us' page, how much more likely are they to convert?'

Robbin Steif, LunaMetrics, www.LunaMetrics.com

73 In mid-2005, I conducted over 300 website evaluations for a cross-section of small businesses. I also spoke with over 100 of the site owners in an extended evaluation/interview that lasted anywhere from 20 to 60 minutes each. All participants were asked what single most important website problem they wanted to solve. The top two answers were: (a) get visitors to buy my stuff, and (b) get more visitors to my site. As I conducted the evaluations, several common realities became crystal clear:

• If a site isn't effective at turning their existing traffic into buyers, then, generating more traffic alone isn't going to turn that site into a highly effective selling machine...more traffic will only result in more visitors that didn't buy.

• Most site owners were ignoring that visitors arrive at a website seeking something and not in an immediate buying mood. 'Just browsing' is the rule unless the site can satisfy a critical buying need in a timely manner, i.e., 'a visitor in need of a new laptop battery delivered the next morning — guaranteed' is a visitor in a critical buying mood. A visitor collecting information would be in a 'just browsing' mood.

• Most small business site owners are too focused on what they want the visitor to do and ignore why the visitor should do what the site owner wants the visitor to do. This is the classic features vs. benefits mistake. The kinks in the garden hose that many sites experience can be un-kinked by leading the visitor down the 'what's in it for you' path rather than the 'why my product is great' path. Accepting the reality that the visitor is in control and that a site can only guide the visitors is the first step in systematically improving performance.

• Over 95% of the sites evaluated did not track their visitors' steps effectively. Site owners either had too much information (and acted on none) or did not have actionable information about their visitors' critical steps. Site owners need to determine what steps on a visitor's path are essential to track so that the site can be tweaked for ongoing improvement and better performance.

• Site owners were too focused on tactics, technology and trends and tended to ignore the most fundamental concepts of improving their websites and Internet marketing: target, test, track and tweak.

John Lawlor, JohnLawlor.com

74 Never underestimate the 'conversion boosting power' of a simpler registration form, and a very visible link to your privacy policy.

Heidi Sturrock, Transparent Language, www.transparent.com

75 What could be more attractive to the readers of a local health care system's community newsletter than a free heart-shaped clip-on strobe light? Maybe offering it as a gift to joggers as an adjunct to article about cardiac services? How about offering that premium during a period that includes the middle of February; say, the 14th? Demand was indeed up from prior premium offers, and we were delighted. Then form submissions jumped. And jumped. In a period of 36 hours, we received 300% more requests than we'd anticipated for the entire 6-week run. A little research provided surprising results: nearly all the unexpected requests were from out of state.

What we'd expected was that readers who received our newsletter might visit our website and sign up for the premium and learn more about our coronary health services. What we didn't expect was that readers who received our newsletter would post the special-access URL on a plethora of 'freebie' websites (online communities in which people share discount codes and special offers for free merchandise), inviting everybody to share the wealth of a free, plastic flashing strobe light. Once we blocked orders to out of state addresses, we started receiving email requests. ('It would make a great nightlight in my little daughter's room!' chirped one dangerously confused mother.) Fortunately most were good natured about the situation, as we presumed they'd been thwarted in the past on other pilfered 'freebie' offers. Our disclaimer language at the time had covered quantity per household, effective dates, time for shipment, and the standard limitation on quantities. What the editor didn't do was state a geographic boundary in print. Lesson Learned: The Internet is an international community. If you plan to offer anything free on your website, define your geographic boundaries.

Judith Singer, Resurrection Health Care, www.reshealth.org

76 Our biggest discovery was the tremendous power of audio/visual marketing on conversion among website visitors and e-newsletter subscribers. We added a step-by-step, Q&A educational Flash "infomercial" (http://tinyurl.com/d2n4j) to our website. It included an entertaining excerpt from our courseware to market the ease and appeal of our product. We added the "movie" promo on the home page, and a few days later followed with an e-newsletter promotion. The result? A whopping 800% increase in sales. Overall, we found a 5% to 6% conversion rate among prospects that viewed a Flash movie versus our previous average conversion on the site of .05%. The discovery was happenstance. Since our primary audience is the adult learner, largely uneducated or undereducated, the audience needed an appealing Q&A to simply explain complicated state and federal educational requirements. Building on the success of our cinematic production, we're developing new Flash infomercials, and will alternate them on the website and continue e-newsletter promotions. For us, production is cost-effective since our courseware gives us lots of genuine footage to educate our audience and market our product. More wisdom realized a fantastic branding message; it's a real story to tell that absolutely reflects what we do: "Taking one of our courses isn't like going to class, it's like going to the movies!"

Michael Ormsby, e-learn, Inc., www.passged.com

77 Lesson learned: Don't overlook the low-hanging fruit. You can even turn a 'please wait' message into a conversion tool. If you're going to force your customers to wait online while something happens in the background, make use of that time to prepare them for what's going to happen next. In 2005, I tested various 'please wait' messaging and display options for an auto insurance agency I was working for at the time. The 30-second, 'please wait' messaging appears between completing the application and the return of the rates online. Usability testing and real time split testing was conducted to determine the best version. The winning option resulted in a substantial increase in conversion. From this testing, we learned that it's critical to let the customer know what's happening and how long their wait is going to be. To keep their interest, the copy needs to be short, easy to read, and it needs to explain what the customer will get in return for having to wait. Lastly, and most importantly, you can use this opportunity to prepare the customer for the next step(s) to help them convert. By explaining what's going to happen and appear on the next page, you are essentially using this time and real estate to your (and the user's) best advantage. In this case, we explained to the customer what they will need to click on to buy an auto insurance policy, and where they should click. We even showed an animation to illustrate what the button looks like and its location on the next page. This was one of the easiest changes we made all year, and surprisingly, one with the most impact. It helped us remember that even the small changes, or the 'low-hanging fruit,' can have an extraordinary impact.

Cathleen Zapata, eMergent Marketing, www.emergentmarketing.com

Part #6: On the Job

78 I learned an important lesson while hiring for a Director of Marketing position this year when two candidates showed me the exact same ad campaign in their portfolios. Turns out one worked for the ad agency that worked on the campaign and the other was the client, but both took credit for the work as their own. Even though I loved the campaign, it didn't end up helping either candidate when I questioned what role either had in it. In a profession where many hands touch the same project, it's difficult to sort out who did what. I learned to ask more specific questions of candidates in the future about what they personally did, and I learned to communicate the same about myself when I interview for my next job.

Jennifer Keirn, Roscoe Medical, Inc., www.roscoemedical.com

79 As a marketing headhunter, many candidates ask me if having a blog will help them land a better job. My answer: Sure, but you need to know exactly who your target reader is, and then you need to develop an editorial platform for it. Think of your blog as a cookie jar: All the busy reader wants is a tasty little diversion that is a little nutritious. Tell them something they didn't already know. Or give them a new way to apply something they already know. And ideally, keep each post to less than 100 words. If you want to add family photos or podcasts or video-on-demand, that's fine — as long as it's professionally done and does not detract from the relevance of the blog. Also, understand that getting 'Googled' is a normal part of the client's due diligence process these days. A blog post today about last night's drunken bender might well get thrown in your lap in a job interview two years from now. So my advice is: Be authentic AND professional.

Harry Joiner, Marketing Headhunter.com, www.marketingheadhunter.com

80 With age I have determined that what I want is to love what I do in life and in work. I recently decided to take a chance on a start-up company — I left a stable, very reputable company to do so — was it the right decision? A year ago I would have said no — today I think it was the best decision I have made in a while — not because the company I left was a bad one but because I took a chance and am a better person for it today. Ironically, while my hours are similar — my outlook in and out of the office is 100% different. So I encourage everyone to sit down and think, "Begin with the End in Mind." You may be surprised if you dig deep enough what you might discover about yourself.

Sarah Saxman, ManiaTV, www.ManiaTV.com

81 My lesson this year is that we are all in this together! I have learned to come to my projects, my clients, my colleagues, my suppliers — to life itself — with gratitude and compassion. It makes EVERYTHING easier!

Anonymous

82 Sometimes you have to let a creative director be a creative director. And when the 'big test' of fancy graphics falls flat, you have to be darn gracious when you say, "It was good to test, now lets get back to writing content."

Anonymous

83 This year I learned, again, the hard way that you must always, always, always get it in writing. I put together a marketing campaign with a local restaurant group (that I will not disparage here) to donate a portion of their proceeds to cancer research at our institution. We got great PR for the event with our director appearing on the weekend news. The restaurant also took out advertising that included our logo and the promise to donate a portion of proceeds to the cancer center. We had a handshake agreement because we were working through the group's PR agency and their rep could not sign an agreement as to the specifics on behalf of the restaurants and did not want to ask each restaurant manager to sign. Because we'd worked with this person for some time we decided to go ahead without a formal agreement or even a specific commitment as to the percentage of sales they would donate. We advertised the event to our staff and donors and sent a few our executive management team to various restaurants to thank the manager for hosting this event.

Problem #1 occurred when our VIPs called for reservations and the maitre d's answering the reservation line didn't know anything about the promotion.

Problem #2 was that our donation was to come from a 'special health menu' and the waiter at the location we visited recommended everything but the special health menu to us.

As we all know, the marketing of a promotion like this needs to extend beyond the press and mass media to the person answering the phone, the cooks, the waiters, etc. While the restaurant I visited on that day was quite full, the group told us, through their rep, that there was no sales increase that day over the year before — one of our measures of success. One restaurant mailed us a check for $350, but I did not hear from the rest. When I followed up with the PR contact she said that she could not enforce the agreement and that it was up to the individual managers to determine if they'd make a contribution.

Needless to say, we never saw another dime from any of the other locations and did not even cover our costs from printing table tents on behalf of the restaurant or a mailing to our donors. While I say 'shame on them' for not at least making a token contribution after we lent our name and reputation to their promotion, I more so say 'shame on me' for failing to explicitly detail what both parties would deliver in our materials. I further shame myself for not working directly with each of the individual managers to get them excited about the promotion and our work so that their staff would have a vested interest in promoting our program. I could have come up with spiffs or some other prize for waiters who had the best results. It just goes to show that when it comes to cause related marketing, non-profits must religiously guard their name and reputation and only agree to a deal with a commercial enterprise if they are willing to commit to a written contract and minimum donation.

In the future, I will not hesitate to drop a potential partner that will not spell out details of a promotion in writing or guarantee to 'sell' the concept throughout their organization. Working with an outside PR agency is fine, so long as you also have a direct line to and commitment of the marketing team at the corporate entity.

<div align="right">Anne Haack Sullivan, Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center,
lombardi.georgetown.edu</div>

84 My most surprising lesson from the last year was a 'campaign' of finding the new job. In the middle of October I lost the job I loved. Without much interviewing experience (I worked for one company for several years in several positions) and a foreign accent, I needed some practice. I also had a 'portfolio' of projects organized neatly in a folder that allowed me to emphasize easily different parts of my experience. I applied almost everywhere in the US (I was willing to move for a right opportunity) and wanted to show this 'portfolio' to my 'long distance' interviewers. Posting my projects on the Internet or sending a PowerPoint to prospective employers would not be a good option, so a better channel had to be found. Digging into many marketing newsletters that I was too busy to read when I had a job, I found a solution for my long distance interviewing: a free trial of online meeting software! I used wonderfully simple GoToMeeting software for several 'long-distance' interviews and it was very effective and impressive! After two months I discovered that I loved interviews, I had two offers and will start my new job on the first business day of the 2006!

Anonymous

85 At our small Red Cross Chapter in semi-rural Sonoma County (north of San Francisco), we have only 11 paid staff. So when I wanted to bounce ideas off other marketing and PR professionals, I started an informal organization with my counterpart at another non-profit, Catholic Charities. Now called Communications from the Heart, the group meets every other month at a brown-bag lunch. We pick a topic, and then talk about successes, challenges, and techniques. Participants include beginners and senior marketers, and every possible type of non-profit. We know we're competitors in some ways, yet there are always loads of solutions to share, so everyone leaves meetings impressed and motivated. No one takes notes so it doesn't add to anyone's workload, and word of mouth is keeping it growing each time. Starting an informal group is a great, low-effort, high-results way to self-mentor, as well as contribute to others' successes.

Ellen Maremont Silver, American Red Cross, Sonoma County Chapter

86 We marketers may think we know everything, but in reality we can learn and improve a heck of a lot by simply empowering those around us. By sharing ownership of a marketing initiative or conversion page redo with colleagues across an organization, you capture diverse ideas and opinions from the likes of technology, product, sales, etc. Ultimately, the marketer is responsible for performance, but that doesn't mean we have a stranglehold on all the good ideas out there. As long as best practices and your 'secret sauce' are consistently applied, there's much to be gained from assembling a cross-functional team to execute your marketing campaigns.

Greg Martz, The Motley Fool, www.fool.com

87 Go on, admit it, we've all written campaign objectives and outcomes *after* the campaign has been executed!

Anonymous

88 I've learned this year that when one company buys another one out, your fate can be decided by how you handle the transition. My best advice to anyone going through a merger/acquisition on the side being bought is that whenever you get the chance to meet the people buying you out, ALWAYS be positive and put your best foot forward. Offer help in all areas, even those outside your comfort zone. Instead of taking the purchase personally, take it as an opportunity to show the new company just what a fabulous asset you'll be to their company. This is what will help you land on your feet — whether you stay with the new company or not. You just never know who someone else might know or how they might respond. THINK-ING POSITIVE WORKS! :-)

Julie A.

89 From Shakespeare's *Hamlet* comes the lesson "to thine own self be true." But where does that lesson play out in a tradeoff between being an adept office politician vs. making good marketing decisions? I learned my lesson the hard way this year by sticking to the 'policy of truth' (ala Depeche Mode) and trying to push my company's thinking forward, even when my boss would not. I was advised that many people at our company were unhappy with the direction but kept silent, focusing on small [meaningless] victories, and I should do the same. I didn't and was eventually shown the door. It opened my eyes to the fact that there are many marketers/managers out there who settle for less than they really want and rationalize their situation away. It also made me commit to never doing the same with my career, because life is too short to be unhappy. There's no reason that you can't have integrity, fun, and success as a marketer.

Anonymous

90 I've learned that, to have a true team effort, the team has to meet regularly. But how do you do this and still keep schedules tight? This year we instituted 'The 5.' For about 5 to 10 minutes each morning, all staff members gather in the outer office to update one another on the day's priorities. Individuals ask for assistance or provide it to one another in order to expedite deliverables or problem-solve. The result has been more personal responsibility, initiative, teamwork — and, most importantly, optimum service for the client.

Susan O'Neil,@Web Site Publicity, Inc., www.websitepublicity.com

91 Take your time. Better a good decision delayed than a bad decision reached in haste. Taking your time allows you listen to others' ideas and gather their feedback on yours. That helps increase their buy-in, commitment, participation, enthusiasm, and passion when the decision is reached. The people you should listen to are the ones affected by your idea. That means customers AND employees. Taking time also helps minimize errors of omission. It communicates respect for others' time and priorities. It creates a calming influence in the office. That builds a foundation for greater communication and cooperation, harmony and trust. Take your time. If it's a good idea, one more day won't hurt. And if it's not, one more day may help you see the mistake you're about to make.

Zane Safrit, Conference Calls Unlimited, www.conferencecallsunlimited.com

92 Our lesson to share is for those of you who've recently installed a new Marketing System, or are planning to do this in the near future: make sure you plan and budget for a 'burn-in' period following the 'go-live' date. Depending on various factors (including the cyclical nature of your campaigns, the size/volume/complexity of your campaigns), this initial learning curve phase may last from 3 months to a year or more. Our Lesson Learned is that the training and knowledge transfer that is provided by suppliers' SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) will not be enough to fuel your success if you try to go solo on day 1, or on day 60 for that matter. Adopting and learning new technology and processes takes time and experience. Your ROI will be higher if you invest more in continued knowledge transfer and training during this burn-in period. Don't fret, as you can certainly scale down your need for help as the burn-in period progresses. In fact, that is the goal (to become self sufficient as fast as possible). Yet the key is to be sufficient, and not to suddenly have a gap created. Instead, the tendency for most projects of this nature is to scale back very quickly on the use of these experts, since they are an additional cost. Manage the use of these resources carefully (for instance make sure they are coaching and not just doing the work), and continue to insist upon a knowledge transfer plan and monitor the execution of that plan. If you get signals that you are progressing faster than expected, you may scale back the length of your burn-in period. If you do this, the additional investment during burn-in will pay dividends in the form of your staff becoming more efficient and effective in the use of the new tools and processes, which will produce better campaigns sooner and for a longer period of time.

Vince Jeffs, Unica, www.unica.com

93 My lesson learned last year was not to deliver 100% of an initial project brief — better to deliver an achievable part 100%! On a particular e-marketing campaign to our customers, the requirements from the business were to measure the success of the campaign across a whole range of factors. This included elements that the company's systems could not track easily. Rather than agreeing to something that would be difficult to deliver, I managed to reduce the scope so that what I delivered was 100% accurate and meaningful.

Sanjay Morzaria, Deloitte and Touche

94 My passion was to start a dropshipping web site associated with camping. I built the site myself with help, and learned that it wasn't my passion after all. In the next 10 months of subscribing to over 50 ebusiness newsletters, reading every article and ebook I could find, and neglecting my wife, I learned that my passion was for writing, authoring, and helping others. All that knowledge definitely resulted in a focus on a talent that I never knew I had — and which allows me the opportunity to succeed in a field doing something I love and enjoy, as well as helping other people at the same time.

Curt, L & C Internet Enterprises, Inc., www.ebusinesshelpfirm.com

95 Because so many outside events or conditions can influence a campaign, it is important to have metrics set for each step and to constantly measure against those metrics. By setting expectations and determining success rates, you can modify campaigns on the fly and ensure higher success rates. For AVIcode, the key metric is quality leads generated. Measurements are in place to determine a quality lead. I set expectations based on my previous history with other companies and monitored every activity. To my surprise, what worked well in the past was not as successful for me (Google paid search did not perform nearly as well as I hoped), however a white paper posting online performed exceptionally (we surpassed our quarterly goal within 30 days, greatly reducing the expected cost/lead). My CEO was initially concerned that some of the activities weren't performing as expected, but I was able to alleviate his concerns by showing metrics and how the campaigns were adjusted. This provided peace of mind that someone was looking out for his dollars.

Marty Brandwin, AVIcode, www.avicode.com

96 I always knew that starting my own consultancy would be difficult. In fact, I always said I never would. I teach marketing classes. I know the statistics, the costs, the effort involved. But, circumstances forced my hand and I was off on my own. And…it was even more difficult than I had imagined! The hours were longer. The costs were higher. The effort was enormous. For the first time I had to be everything to everyone. Before I got started, I was scouting around for a good partner. None came forward. Not many people are intrepid or financially secure enough to want to get on board with a start-up, particularly one working out of a home and with no visible means of major incoming green backs. I made my way by networking with other agencies, large and small. I was really more of a freelancer at times than an independent consultant. Fortunately, the call finally came that I had been hoping for. A couple of co-workers from my past life at another agency got in touch. They too had gone off on their own and started an agency, Full Spectrum PR. It was everything I had hoped for. The hours are flexible and their strengths balance my weaknesses and vice versa. Is there a lesson to impart? I learned many new things about myself: the trials of going on your own, and the need to take opportunities when they present themselves. I now have a wonderful balance of having my own independent consultancy for a few long-term clients, the time to teach my university marketing classes, AND the security of a steady gig with people I enjoy and trust. My lessons aren't extraordinary or new, but oh so true… don't let fear hold you back from moving forward. We often take two steps back for one step forward. But ultimately it is our willingness to take a risk and to keep an open mind that most furthers a career that seems stuck.

Linda Hamburger, On Call PR, www.oncallpr.com

Part #7: Agencies & Consultants on Growing & Managing Clients

97 I recently opened an Advertising/Marketing company in Idaho Falls and quickly ascertained that, with regard to agency representation, restaurants were underserved. Before contacting anyone directly, I sent out 130 letters of introduction and an offer for advertising in a magazine I'd established a relationship with. The letter turned out to serve an important function other than what I had intended. As I called restaurants to follow up on the letter, it quickly became apparent that the letter was serving to 'warm up' the prospect for my 'cold' call. In other words, the prospect had already heard of me, even if it was only the return name and address on the envelope. In fact, one owner responded to my cold call, "it's a good thing you sent that letter because I don't talk to salesmen on the phone." He talked to me, though, and he gave me his business. I found an advance letter helped warm-up my cold calling.

Aaron Atkinson, Growthinc

98 Here's a nifty trick I've used to increase my response rates for generating leads offline. I used classified ads in local newspapers and business magazines to generate leads for my marketing agency. The classified ad had a headline and offered a free report "17 Proven Marketing Ideas You Can Use To Beat Your Competitors," when people visited a webpage and left their snail mail. Responses per newspaper were tracked by having a unique URL for each paper. One small change to the classified ads boosted the response rates by as much as 35%. I added a thick broken black border (the type coupons have) around the ad, which did the magic. I guess that people have become conditioned to expect reading about deals from the text in broken border boxes as its very often used around coupons and discount offers. And so using the broken border box got more people to pay attention to the classified ad and increased the response rates.

Ankesh Kothari, BizTactics.com

99 We are a Dutch online marketing agency. We were the first in The Netherlands to have our own company weblog in our field of expertise. Also, we were the first to have a videoblog in the business area. The last year I spoke to a lot of other business bloggers in the field and tried to link bloggers to each other. Together with other bloggers we organized a blog diner, we did some event blogging and most of all, I kept my line of communication open for anyone who wants to know more about business blogging and how it affects our company. This has given not only me personally but also our company a better known name in the branch than advertising in trade magazines or any other 'paid' way of advertising. Our blog has lead to several new clients and invitations to pitches. Our weblog is now our main channel of communication and we plan on expanding the possibilities on it in 2006.

Frank Meeuwsen, Rhinofly, www.rhinofly.nl/frank-ly

100 After 10 years of client-side experience, I became a consultant this year. Suddenly, all the proposals, estimates and quotes I've seen over the years that seemed high at first glance (does anyone ever get an estimate that seems low?) were, for the most part, both realistic and fair.

Lorelei Curt, Direct Effect Marketing

101 If you can tell them something they didn't already know about their prospects or clients, you'll get their attention. If you can show them a smarter, faster, cheaper way to do what they've done by tradition, you'll get their engagement. And if you can show them how to close on a sale, you'll get their business. Every time.

We had a client like that in 2005. They wanted a website. We built a beautiful one. They wanted redesigned literature to go with it. They loved the literature. The website launched. The boxes of literature arrived, clogging their mailroom. But no one came to the website and the literature gathered dust.

Then we got the call we knew we would: 'What's wrong? Nothing's happening! No new sales!' 'Well,' we said gently. 'Thank you for the opportunity to work with you on your new look. Now it's time to go to work!' They understood, sheepishly at first. From there it was only a matter of laying out and following a plan for publicity, mailings, events, emails, and follow-ups. Lots of follow-ups. Now they are on track to hit a 27% increase in new clients and a 34% increase in revenue. Their next problem: "How do we handle all the new business?" "Well," we said, "we're glad you asked." We have a plan for that too.

Rick Telberg, Bay Street Group LLC, www.baystreetgroup.com

102 "Why doesn't my ad show up?" Anyone who does search marketing has probably heard this question all too often. CPC budget controls are a great thing, but for some reason it seems like the search sites can always tell when it's a client looking for their ad and they don't show. My advice: do some screen grabs right after you launch your campaign and send them to your client right away!

Peter Platt, Butler/Till Media, www.butlertillmedia.com

103 We were exhibiting our marketing strategy and coaching services at the ATLA (American Trial Lawyers Association) in Toronto. We sent a postcard saying "This is probably NOT for you." It created intrigue. At some points in the convention, our booth was crowded, and deep conversations were going on with a few lawyers. Our booth buddies on both sides could only look on jealously. What was most exciting was the quality of the people who responded. These lawyers came searching out our booth, postcard in hand. They just HAD to know what it was about. And they turned out to be exactly the people we wanted to work with. We probably intrigued a lot of people, but the ones who sought us out tended to be perfect prospects. We signed up a LOT of clients through this approach. To sum up, we totally focused on attracting and didn't chase anybody. Even when they did show up, we made them qualify to even get into the conversation. Made the trade show much more enjoyable!

Tom St. Louis, 4 Lawyers Only, www.UltimateYellowPagesAd.com

104 A strategy that has been successful for my clients and me is one I call, "Kilroy was here." It simply means making your mark online so that customers know who you are. Using this strategy has helped me to reach the top ten search engine results for competitive keywords, build my mailing list, get media attention, and make more sales. Each step takes very little time and no additional expense to implement.

• Put press releases online. When you send a release to the media, be sure to include online distribution services, such as PRWeb.com. Add the release to the media room of your Web site.

• Post articles online. Add original content to your Web site, and encourage others to link to it. Publish a reprint policy to let them know how they can use your articles on their sites or in their newsletters. Offer your articles to non-competing sites in your niche. Post them to online article banks.

• Participate in online forums and discussions. Answer a question raised by another member, post a link to a resource on your site, or offer a list of tips. Add helpful comments to blogs (but don't spam them with useless garbage). Always include a brief signature with a link to your Web site.

• Create your profile on Amazon.com. Post reviews and other content, and identify yourself with a tag line, such as 'SEO Guru.' Amazon does not allow you to post URLs in your content, but you may include your URL in your profile. To do this, from the Amazon.com home page, click on (Your) Store, then Your Profile.

• Offer testimonials. When you find a product or service you love, send a testimonial. Ask that your name, Web site and/or book title be used with the testimonial. Do not be overwhelmed by all of the opportunities available to make your mark online. Start today and do a little each day. The results will amaze you!

Cathy Stucker, Idea Lady, www.IdeaLady.com

105 Simply put, it doesn't matter how fantastic your direct marketing message is if the phone number doesn't work. You can have the best testing and segmentation plan, a hot offer, the cleverest creative piece, and none of this marketing magic will have any impact if the call to action is broken. It may sound fundamental, but make sure your operations teams understand how critical it is that the phone routing and the Web links work. Communicating how much money was lost gets the attention of management. If a failure happens, share how much it cost the organization to not have the systems correctly set up.

Kelly L Drow, Cox Communications, Kelly.Drow@cox.com

106 Be Relentless! Pound away on cold calls, email campaigns, and recontact. People leave jobs, are replaced, circumstances change. I finally have the lesson: 'No' in June may turn to 'Yes' in December. RELENTLESS PERSEVERANCE will bring a harvest. NEVER STOP MARKETING.

Nancy Mehegan, Porcupine Marketing, www.Web-Porcupine.com

107 When you start off with a new client that is ROI focused it's good to know your costs and projected revenue upfront. It's always a great idea to use historical data from their logs in order to extract what you need to define goals for an upcoming campaign. What you shouldn't do is open the flood gates right off the bat and launch a campaign that is so broad (and we are now talking about PPC campaigns) that not only is it difficult to manage, but that you are putting your goals in jeopardy. Working in an agency, you have set limits on budgets every month and when you start adding in all the time it takes to manage one of these campaigns you are so excited about that you try to reach the top of the tree by swinging carelessly instead of methodically, you may end up missing your landing. Start your campaign with something manageable that you can grow month to month without sacrificing your goals in the process.

BJ Cook, Interactivate Inc., www.interactivate.com

108 The lesson is managing client expectations! Several larger jobs dealing with optimization efforts seemed like cut and dry scenarios to accomplish. The keywords selected had very little competition, good percentage of traffic patterns for them, and would have increased the client's site from static to the top of the heap. When we presented examples from real life clients, they stated they didn't know of anyone looking for THIS (industry specific keyword) keyword and tossed the baby out with the bath water. Decided not to use us for the work based on this one example keyword, and not on the effort, keyword competition, search stats or ranking. This has changed our 'deployment' a little in allowing the client to see the potential in gaining the foothold in 10 or 12 'smaller' keywords equal to or greater than 'THE' one keyword. PPC campaigns played out the same way, only reversed. $0.10 per click for 10 keywords vs. $1.00 per click for one. (understanding the ROI involved) The clients in THIS case, choose, selecting 10 @ 10 cents, but for site optimization would only accept work for the one.... We continue to understand the client's needs, and understand how best to get the message across effectively.

David Hallmark, CrystalVision Web Site Design, www.cvwp.com

109 One orchard owner was the only major grower in our community not to have his own website. After I offered to set up a page that contained an ad of his running in a local newspaper, he received 208 page views, with visitors spending an average of 1 min 40 sec., in the key month of October. Lessons learned: Be willing to demonstrate a tangible result to the customer for free; be persistent about the benefits of your product/ service; and be willing to test your instinct. Now the customer listens more closely to what I say to him!

Peter Lyons Hall, Warwickinfo.net, Warwickinfo.net

110 It continues to amaze me how important relationship building is and continues to be in generating business, getting a new position, achieving any goal, etc., and many people still take it for granted. Many people who network still think of it in WIIFM (What's in it for me?) terms. They give up after not getting a position, business, etc. Networking is about patience and persistence. Networking may not reap benefits for days, months or even years. But developing and maintaining the relationship is what counts. Networking is about helping the contact. Three keys to networking:

1. You the networker must take the INITIATIVE — go to them.

2. Ask them about themselves — what they do, what keeps them up at night, their hot buttons, etc. And really LISTEN. Ask them what you can do to HELP them today — your help can be totally unrelated to your goals, but you have to LISTEN to them, and offer to help them either by you personally or by someone you know who can help them. Trust me, they will remember you taking time to listen to them and being caring enough to offer assistance.

3. Tell them about you once they ask (and they will) — tell them who you are, what you do, and your elevator pitch, because you never know if there is someone they know who could benefit from you. Remember, networking is all about them. I was in a situation a couple of years ago where I met someone, I stayed in regular contact with this individual for several months and continue to do so today, about one year later, out of the blue, this person called me and hired me as a consultant.

Sue Duris, M4 Communications, www.m4communications.com

The MarketingSherpa Story

Sherpas guide climbers up Mount Everest. This, however, is not Everest or a Sherpa. It's Clip Art.

*P*erhaps you've heard of the Sherpas of Nepal? They're natives who guide climbers up the treacherous slopes of Mount Everest.

The climb to marketing greatness can be almost as tough and exhilarating. Did you know the average VP marketing's job tenure in some industries is only 18 months? Plus, figuring out new tactics, such as search marketing, email segmentation, or online PR — can be as tricky as climbing an icy slope.

Consider MarketingSherpa your friendly native guide.

Where did the idea for MarketingSherpa come from?

From you, actually. During the fall of 1999, our Founder Anne Holland crisscrossed the US, Canada, and the UK meeting with hundreds of marketers to ask them one simple question, "What information do you really need to make your job easier?"

Marketer after marketer gave the same answer — Case Studies about marketers (not vendors), real-life results data, and how-to tutorials for the tough stuff. So, that's exactly what we research and publish for you.

Our first newsletter launched in February 2000 to a few hundred friends-of-Sherpa. Now we're up to 173,000 weekly readers, thanks almost entirely to word-of-mouth from folks like you.

How does MarketingSherpa get Case Studies?

Sheer hard work. Just like mountain climbing, it's not easy.

100% of MarketingSherpa's case studies and know-how articles are researched and written by our in-house editorial team. We don't accept outside columnists, contributed articles, or anything written by an outside expert or PR person.

Instead, we use old-fashioned reporting.

We're constantly surfing marketing, advertising, and PR campaigns online and offline. When we see a marketer using a tactic that might be useful for others to know about, we call that marketer up and ask, "How's it working?" If the marketer generously agrees to be interviewed, we talk with them in-depth about what he or she has learned during the campaign.

Then, we write up the story including tactical notes, results data, creative samples for everyone in the MarketingSherpa community to be inspired by.

Our reporters toil away at 499 Main St, Warren, RI to bring you new Case Studies weekly.

Continued…

Thanks to everyone who bought tickets to our Annual Summits this year. Here's a shot of the full house at San Francisco in November.

No, we don't take advertisements in our newsletters or on our main Web site. And we never ever rent out email names. We prefer to remain editorially unbiased and to serve only one master — you.

How does MarketingSherpa make money?

When you shop in our online bookstore at SherpaStore.com, or attend one of our Summits, your purchase goes directly toward making MarketingSherpa possible. We publish a full range of annual Metrics Guides and Buyer's Guides for marketers, plus carry "best-of" books and reports from other publishers you might find useful.

Just please don't ask us for consulting or agency services. Many of our best customers are consultants and agencies, and we would never presume to compete with them. We're a publishing company, pure and simple, and we aim to stay that way.

Action Shot – behind the scenes in our Warren, RI offices – Service Manager Sharon Hamner inspects a delivery from East Bay Printing before shipping reports out to SherpaStore buyers.

Why Rhode Island?

Marketing happens all over the world, not just on Madison Avenue. MarketingSherpa's staff is based all over the world as well — including Austria, Israel, Oregon, Arkansas, Massachusetts, Colorado and Brooklyn.

However, we chose to open our head offices on Main Street in the small bustling town of Warren, Rhode Island. We're conveniently located within a half hour of both Providence and Newport, and about 75 minutes from downtown Boston.

We like it here. People are friendly, houses are affordable, and you can't swing a dead cat without hitting a water view. Plus, Warren has great coffee shops, restaurants, and ample free parking. And with the money we save on Madison Avenue rents, we're able to give 100% paid medical and dental benefits to our employees. You can't beat that.

Got any other questions for MarketingSherpa?

We love hearing from you! Your input directly inspires every story we write and everything we do. You can call us toll-free at (877) 895-1717 (we're open during east coast business hours) or email President Anne Holland directly at AnneH@MarketingSherpa.com.

Thanks for your support!

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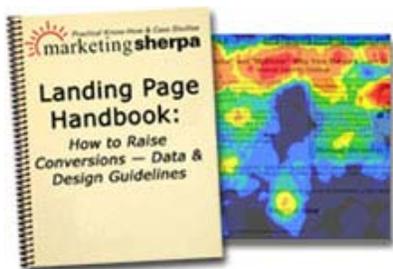
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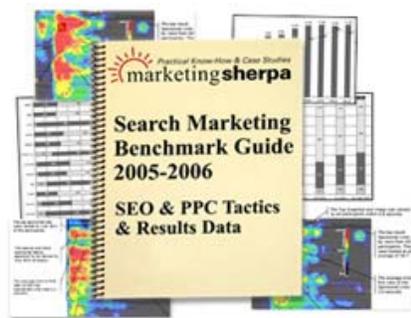
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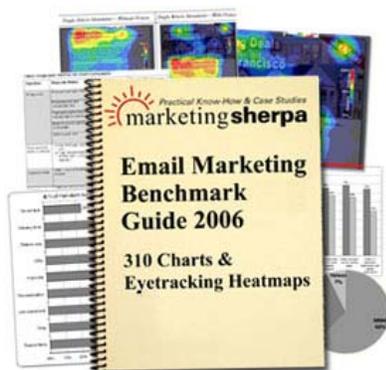
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