

KNOCK! KNOCK! aka: Internet Marketing Application for 'non-Internet' Businesses

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By Rick Beneteau

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Beneteau

My doorknocker is getting rusty! I don't know about your neighborhood but it seems only the occasional vacuum cleaner saleskid flashes free dishsoap through my screen door anymore.

On the other hand, the phone sure rings a lot more and I'm sorry to have to announce to telemarketers several times a day that Mr. Beneteau, or the "man of the house", has passed on.

Is it just me, or has the daily newspaper gone on a diet? Looking a little thinner these days with less display ads.

My eyes and ears don't deceive me when the now several hundred TV channels pump out hour upon hour of infomercials.

And radio has put its hyper-than-ever voice onto the Web, electing to follow you out of your car and onto your computer.

Have you also noticed it's a 24 hour-a-day news broadcast on the Internet?

The times they are a changin' one songwriter said. Question is, are you changing with the times? Being aware of this giant media shift and being a part of it are two totally different things.

I've written this article mainly for those entrepreneurs whose businesses might not seem to them like a logical candidate for Internet exposure and marketing. If that is not the case with you, please keep reading, as I'm sure you will get something useful from my ramblings.

Knock, knock, still with me?

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There is no business as apparently "far away" from The Internet as drycleaning. Customers have to show up live and in person at your counters with their cleaning. And, it's a drycleaning business I used to own and operate so this will serve my purpose well. Although I sold my company just prior to the laying of the pavement of the Information Super Highway, I would like to make a theoretical case study of how I would "marry" my drycleaning business and the Internet if I still owned MyCleaner (fictitious name of course) today.

Ok, these were the areas of advertising that worked best for me:

Newspaper (I ran a Dr. Drycleaner column once a week in our 200,000+ local newspaper plus seasonal institutional and promotional ads)

Television (1 general commercial and 1 wedding gown commercial, run seasonally on the only local station at the time)

Direct Mail Coupons (run seasonally, rotated in upscale neighborhoods)

Welcome Wagon Bridal Parties (we specialized in wedding gown restoration and preservation – 4 large bridal parties a year)

Local TV Guide (I ran weekly wedding gown service ads)

The reason I mention the above advertising mediums will become evident soon.

Knowing what I know today, this is how I would apply the Internet to MyCleaner.

GENERAL INTERNET APPLICATION

Of course MyCleaner would have a website. I would hire the best webdesigner in my locale and work hands-on with this professional to design a website that I've planned out very well in advance. The designer will of course bring a lot of great ideas to the party. I would create the following website sections:

The History of MyCleaner (old and recent photos of buildings, delivery trucks, staff, pricelists, memorabilia etc.);

All About Drycleaning (history, evolution to modern-day techniques);

We "Green" Clean (how we protect the environment – a large issue today);

Wedding Gown Restoration & Preservation (explaining the process, perhaps using video streaming);

Links to all the national and international trade organizations MyCleaner belongs to;

Links to our local Better Business Bureau and Chamber of Commerce;

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Our Testimonial Page (featuring letters of praise about our services);

Online Coupon Specials and a refer-a-friend program (you will see this soon);

Employee of the Month.

And, I would include advice from good old Dr. Drycleaner. But this time, I would make the column into an interactive web board where customers could write in and ask, and get posted answers to, particular questions about garment care.

Knock, knock, try to keep up here, ok?

FUNDING OF MY WEBMARKETING

My intention here is NOT to increase my advertising and promotion costs one red cent. MrCleaner is simply going to transfer advertising mediums and their budgets. In my case, I would resolve this issue easily. I would reduce my newspaper advertising by 50% right away (after all, the newspaper is looking kinda frail) and apply these dollars to my Internet exposure. I would also reduce the coupon mailings and their costs (remember, I will be using online coupons now) and transfer these savings into the

erection of two billboards on high-traffic roads that promote the website and the online coupons. The billboards will appear "down the road" only when the website is working perfectly (so the coupon budget becomes available instantly). These two items will fund the webdesign, domain registration (mycleaner.com) and server costs. I would also print a flyer announcing the MyCleaner website. All other advertising activities and budgets would remain in place (you'll see why soon).

ADVERTISING ADJUSTMENTS/ADDITIONS

Instead of producing expensive new television commercials I would just add "chirons" (text images 'pasted' over existing video) to my television commercials promoting the new website. Dr. Drycleaner and the online coupons would stream across the screen during the existing spots. Probably cost me nothing in production costs as the TV station would gladly do it just to keep my business.

Also, as we re-order our printables, the new website and its features would soon appear on our letterhead, envelopes, invoices etc. As mentioned above, I would design and print good-looking flyers announcing the "Grand Opening of the MyCleaner Website", again highlighting all its features.

Ever seen I.D. IT! Plates? At 39.95 per set, these are a great marketing tool! I would invest in a set for each of my employees, delivery vehicles, family and friends so that their vehicles become "travelling billboards" for the MyCleaner website. Check these out later at: <http://www.iditplates.com> .

But here is an 'option' I might use because I'm a fan of first-class flamboyancy. I would probably purchase mid-line PC's (which I could write-off and later give away as gifts to my employees or customers) and install a monitor and mouse on each stores' counter, proudly displaying the new MyCleaner website. Invite our customers to surf the site. They will receive a flyer anyway on their

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drycleaning order so the "connection" is strengthened and we of course, look more "leading edge".

Today, MyCleaner would be the only techno-cleaner in this market of over 300,000. The promotional exposure and image enhancement benefits would be immense to say the least.

GENERAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Drycleaning is a luxury service. I had a customer base of 20,000 families. Figure 90% of my customers are middle to upper middle class. Further, assume a conservative 50% have computers at home or work and are online. That's 9,000 customers. Let's be frugal again and estimate 25% of these customers actually visit our website because of the high exposure we have given it. That's 2,250 at-home or at-work customer viewers. Now please hold that thought.

MORE PROMOTION

The billboards I mentioned would be bright, bold and clean (and funded by the reduction of snail-mail coupons). Feature the www.mycleaner.com address, the online coupons, Dr. Drycleaner and I would implement a "refer-an-online-friend" program where the referring customer receives a lifetime 5% bonus discount for bringing in a new customer.

The MyCleaner website and its features are also appearing on television, what newspaper I am still running, my TV Guide ads, and I would definitely make sure my about-to-be, mainly computer-literate brides-to-be from Welcome Wagon receive my flyer highlighting the online presentation of the entire wedding gown process.

Also, I would set up a meeting with the large local online mall in this region. Knowing me, I would talk a deal where I would offer the Dr. Drycleaner column as a service for their customers in trade for a main page link.

OK, let's say another 2,250 people visit because of all the above.

IS THAT NOT A REASON TO PUT OUT A NEWSLETTER?

You bet it is! I now have 4500 visitors to my site and the ultra-conservative me predicts 25% of them will register to receive a periodic newsletter. My monthly newsletter circulation is then 1,125. This newsletter will feature upcoming specials, online coupons, the refer-an-online-friend program, the Dr. Dryclean column, and I would probably now run an online contest. Give away free drycleaning or pay for their Internet access for a year. Bear in mind that these newsletter recipients are dedicated, died-in-the-saddle cyber-customers. In other words, a captive audience.

MAKING THE MOST OF A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

I'm not naïve. If I have consumers at arms-reach, I'm going to sell them everything within reason that they would have to go elsewhere to purchase (photo finishing was a great add-on to drycleaning for me). So, I would take advantage of my captive online audience and now offer them the best Internet shopping available.

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Yes, I'm talking about affiliate programs. I would include books, music CD's, videos, software and a mainstay shopping site. Promote to my customers using the "for your convenience" approach.

Knock, knock, I'm just about done.

'NET' RESULTS

What I have done is taken a non-Internet business and made the Web work for me and my customers. I have increased my visibility, added to my customer base, increased my sales and enhanced my profile in one fell swoop without increasing my advertising and promotion budget. I now have in my newsletter a "free" way to contact my customers and make them appreciate the information they receive and the notification of upcoming specials. I may have saved them even more money on their yearly drycleaning bill because they referred their next door neighbor to MyCleaner. Plus, I have an additional income stream coming from purchases through the affiliate programs. It's win-win all the way.

This has been a rather lengthy article but I'm confident that if you've stayed with me this long you will understand that the Internet CAN be made to work for you, regardless of the nature of your business. It is this writers hope that if you are aware of what's going on and still haven't made plans to expose yourself on the Internet, that you will consider doing so now.

There is a country music saying, "where there's a Willie, there's a Waylon". You CAN make the Internet work for you and your customers. It's simply a matter of some creative thinking and developing the right application. If I were still in the drycleaning business, I'd be cleaning up in town right now just using the basic approach I've outlined in this article.

OK gotta go, there's a knock at the door!

The 7 Steps To Successfully Responding To Product Knockoffs

By Robert L Moment

It's every small business owners nightmare: you find and market the perfect product or service only to wake up one morning and find that someone else is producing cheap knock offs of the same thing.

So how do you deal with it? By following our seven steps...

1. Offer a better product

It sounds simple, but offering a better product is both the easiest and most effective way to respond to product knock offs. There is always a market for products which improve on the ones that have come before them: make sure you're consistently looking for ways to improve your product, and you'll remain one step ahead of the knock off sellers.

2. Create a marketing edge

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A great deal of good business comes down to great marketing. This is another area in which it's easy to gain an advantage over product knock offs. The people who sell knock offs aren't interested in building a brand, creating a buzz or researching their market. In fact, they want to spend as little time and money as they possibly can on selling more units of their product knock off. By investing in your marketing, you can gain an important edge.

3. Make quality a priority

You'll never be able to stop knock offs completely. What you must remember, however, is that knock offs have one big disadvantage over your product: their quality.

Most knock offs are cheap, mass-produced copies of quality goods. That's why they're sold for so little. By offering a product which is truly high quality, you'll appeal to those buyers who aspire to owning the real thing, and make it much more difficult for anyone to copy you.

4. Getting a patent does not prevent competition

A patent will help you deal with knock offs to a certain extent. What it won't do is eliminate the competition. You'll never completely eliminate the competition. All you can do is rise above them by making sure your product, service and marketing is the best it can possibly be.

5. Target smaller or niche markets where you can have the edge

While you may want to conquer the world with your business, it's often far more effective to conquer a small part of it by targeting a niche which you can excel in. By concentrating on a niche market you can get to know your clients and their needs inside out, and make sure your product or service is tailor made to fit that niche. Leave the rest of the world to the knock off sellers.

6. Adapt to market changes and trends

In business, you have to adapt or die. By allowing your business to trudge along, doing the same thing in the same way you leave yourself wide open to competitors who are willing to be innovative and to move with the times.

7. Provide exceptional customer service

Businesses which produce knock off products often aren't interested in customer service. People like to do business with other people they can trust: that may not apply to sellers of knock-off products, but it should apply to you. If it does, you have nothing to fear from product knock offs.

Summary

While it's impossible to completely eliminate product knock offs completely, it is possible to respond to them in such a way that your own sales don't suffer. This article provides seven steps to help you make sure that your products and service are able to stand up to the competition.

Robert Moment is an innovative business strategist and author of , "It Only Takes a Moment to Score" and upcoming book "Invisible Profits: The Power of Exceptional Customer Service" published in Fall 2006. Visit

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Profitable Ways to Turn Your Ideas into Wealth".



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