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**Outsourcing your Web Marketing**

**By Philippa Gamse**

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The online world is still very new, and constantly evolving. You may be thinking about outsourcing your Web promotion to an expert who is immersed in this world as their fulltime occupation, rather than trying to acquire this knowledge, and cope with the pace of change in-house.

So, what should you look for in a consultant, and what guarantees can you expect?

**Choosing the consultant**

The consultant should ask a lot of questions about your business and your objectives. They need to be very clear about the strategic and specific goals of your site. Do you want as many visitors as possible (as in: "We get millions of hits on our Web site"), or are you more interested in attracting qualified leads for your association? Are you selling products? Are you looking for new members, sign-ups for your newsletter or events, media coverage, etc.

It's possible that there could be different markets for each of your objectives. The consultant needs to demonstrate that they clearly understand the demographics of the audience you want to attract. This includes whether your markets are currently online, whether they are comfortable using e-mail, etc. It's also important to clarify any restrictions on your marketing - for example, if you are only targeting specific locations.

The key to effective Web marketing is to have a comprehensive, integrated plan that focuses on where your markets "hang out" online. It's absolutely not enough to concentrate your efforts on search engines - that's a passive rather than an active approach. You want to reach out to your potential visitors, not wait for them to come to you. And, you want to ensure that your offline marketing includes your Web site - up to a third of your traffic can now come from real-world sources.

## Outsourcing your Web Marketing

So, the consultant should propose to you a wide-ranging plan (assuming that's appropriate for your goals) that includes: Search engine strategies Paid (bid for placement) listings Review sites and directories Linking with other appropriate sites Advertising / e-zine sponsorships (depending on your budget) Online public relations opportunities Integration with your real-world marketing

Effective Web marketing must also include an e-mail strategy. The consultant should include in their proposal some ideas for targeted, personalized (and fully opt-in) e-mail. This requires a contact database that you can use to select out the different audiences that you might have for these messages. The consultant should also be able to help you create this, if required.

And finally, the consultant should explain how they propose to evaluate the success of any marketing campaign against your goals and objectives. Marketing is an ongoing process, during which you'll learn a lot about your site and about your visitors. This knowledge should be analyzed and used to tweak your site and refine your business strategies. A good consultant will be able to work with you to achieve this.

What guarantees can you expect?

Let's be very clear - there is a distinction, which often gets blurred, between sales and marketing. The job of a marketing consultant is to bring qualified traffic to your site (or in other words, into your storefront). Completing the sale is then a separate challenge.

Marketing is also a very gray area, in which it's difficult to provide cast-iron guarantees of results. This is particularly true in the area of search engine optimization, since the search engines are so unpredictable. In my opinion, if a consultant promises you "top ten placement" you should be very wary - it's possible that they are using tactics that could be classified as spam - soon if not now.

But obviously you do want to check that the consultant has a good track record, and that they can provide references from other clients. I believe that good Web knowledge and proven online marketing tactics are as important as an in-depth familiarity with your industry.

In setting your contract with the consultant, it's important to have a mutual comfort level with your goals, expectations and budget. There are many opportunities for free promotion online, but if you're prepared to spend some money, you can potentially build your traffic faster. Since building awareness of a site takes time, perhaps a minimum six-month period would be advisable, but with appropriate get-out clauses for both parties.

### Conclusion

Good Web marketing is a team effort! Hire a consultant who you feel very comfortable with, who asks lots of questions to really understand your business and your goals, and who seems genuinely interested in promoting you. But then be prepared to work with them - respect and consider their suggestions, and allow them to be creative in their approach.

Philippa Gamse, CyberSpeaker, is an internationally recognized e-business strategist. Check out her

free tipsheet "Beyond the Search Engines" for 17 ideas to promote your Website:

Philippa can be reached at (831) 465-0317 or

### **Outsourcing Your Packaging Is A Strategic Option**

**By Thomas Bacon**

In a recent article in "Investors Business Daily", it was revealed that outsourcing has become more than just an easy way to cut costs. It has become a strategic tool that gives businesses flexibility and access to skilled personnel.

Since the advent of the Internet, and the rush to get online, companies have turned to outside professionals for services and solutions. Hiring a full-time IT technician is costly and not an efficient use of resources. Outsourcing allows companies to focus on their core businesses while gaining access to skilled labor when they need it.

\* Outsourcing is a way to boost revenue \* Outsourcing is a way to cut costs \* Outsourcing eases labor shortages \* Outsourcing cuts payroll costs \* Outsourcing allows companies to focus on core competencies \* Outsourcing reduces or eliminates some capital expenditures

Outsourcing also allows businesses to change their corporate culture. If companies have renegade groups that are costly, ineffective, or difficult to manage, that group can be outsourced. This enables employers to change their workplace environment on-the-fly.

Still, most companies outsource projects in order to reduce costs and to gain outside expertise. A survey by "The Conference Board" indicated the following "Top-10" outsourcing objectives (numbers are approximate):

\* Reduce Costs (40%) \* Access to Expertise (38%) \* Improve Internal Service (37%) \* Focus on Core Business (34%) \* Maximize Resources (27%) \* Internal Flexibility (25%) \* Improve External Service (24%) \* Changing Customer Needs (20%) \* World Class Standards (15%) \* Continuous Improvement (15%)

When deciding to outsource your packaging, the real litmus test is whether outsourcing adds value. Does it really reduce costs? Is the investment in in-house training and machinery too great? Does outsourcing a service give you access to people with greater skill sets or companies with more resources available to them?

Bottom line: outsourcing your packaging service needs is about more than just saving money. It is a strategic option for savvy businesses and entrepreneurs.

Thomas Bacon has been involved in the contract packaging industry for more than 35 years. He is an

author, speaker and owner of Aaron Thomas Company, Inc., a packaging service company with locations in Los Angeles, Memphis and Chicago. His articles on contract packaging are available on and through various media outlets.

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