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Your Web Site's Objective

By Bobette Kyle

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Based on the strategic marketing plan book "How Much for Just the Spider?"

Do you know your Web site's objective? With an objective to help overcome your main challenges, you can work smarter, not harder. Through this second article in the four part Web Site Marketing Plan series, learn how you can consider business building models and customer stages when setting objectives.

Think of a Web site objective as the "big picture". In general terms, the objective answers the question "How can I use the site to overcome my business's main Internet related challenge?" or "What is the purpose of my site?".

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Customer Stages: Awareness, Interest, Trial, Repeat  
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When setting your objective, it may help to think in terms of awareness, interest, trial, and repeat. These concepts are often used in marketing to explain the stages a new customer (or site visitor, in this case) goes through on the path to becoming loyal to your business. The potential visitor must first become **aware** of your site. Once aware, you must spark an **interest** with the potential visitor, motivating her/him to **trial** – responding to a call to action on your site. After (s)he visits your site, that person becomes **loyal** by revisiting in the future.

You may be able to most effectively build your business by focusing on one or two of awareness, interest, trial, or repeat visits, then changing your focus over time. If your site is brand new or known to very few people, for example, your plan is likely to concentrate on ways to increase awareness and interest. A focus on interest and trial may be in order, however, if you get an above-average number of "window shoppers" – visitors who never purchase (or do not respond to some other call to action). Alternately, for example, if you sell multiple products or a product that needs replenishing, focus on repeat purchases may be more effective.

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~~~~~ Business Building Models ~~~~~

Direct Revenue/e-Commerce

Some of the most known Web site objectives relate to e-commerce or other types of direct revenue from the site. That is, the objective is to establish a direct source of revenue from either orders or advertising space. There are different e-commerce options, or models, to consider if your site objective is direct revenue. To learn about your options, go to http://www.bpubs.com/Internet_and_E-Commerce/ and explore articles in the "Strategies and Models" section.

There are other valuable ways, beyond direct revenue, a Web site can enhance your business:

Build Brand Image

A long-term objective for your site could be to improve sales by building an image for your product, brand, and/or company. Increasingly, this is an explicit goal for large companies with ample budgets. Small-budget companies can follow suit on a more affordable scale by building an image during the natural course of marketing. You can do this by consistently presenting similar design elements and "personality" at each point of contact with the world – whether that contact be virtual or physical.

Enhance Customer Service

Your site can increase revenue indirectly by improving customer service. When customers are more satisfied, they tend to spread the word about your products as well as buy more often themselves. Another way your site can indirectly increase sales through enhanced customer service is by supporting sales through other channels. Customers often do product research on a Web site then later place orders via catalogue, telephone, sales representatives, a physical retail store, mail, and/or fax. In all of these cases, a Web site indirectly contributes to building the business.

Lower Operating Costs

A Web site can help your business by lowering costs. Automated customer service functions – Web-based FAQ, order status reports, product specifications, etc. – can lower the number of customer service calls, reducing customer service labor costs.

A Web presence can also lower operating costs by streamlining communication with your business partners. Business-to-business companies can create secure Web space to communicate and collaborate with customers. It is even possible to have individual, private sites for major clients. A central "meeting place" that archives communications and other customer-specific information can cut down on administrative costs related to "phone tag", inquiries, and/or the need to consciously keep all players "in the loop". On the supply side, you could reduce costly business disruptions by giving key vendors Web-based access to your inventory or other real-time information.

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Setting Your Objective  
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While there are different approaches to setting objectives, my preference is to develop a single objective for a site, which may encompass more than one approach to business building. In the plan, I include separate strategies and tactics to address each approach. I also like to include, in the objective, both the customer stage(s) and business building model(s) I will focus on in the plan. This way, it is more apparent which strategies are appropriate.

Another approach is to address the customer stages separately from your objective in a summary or write-up. With either approach, you should view your plan as evolving over time. As the business environment and situation change, your focus should change as well. Once you get past the launch stage of a new site, for example, you are in a better position to evaluate site traffic, so your plan may shift from focusing on awareness and interest to building trial and loyalty. Similarly, a better understanding of site visitors may lead you to adjust your business model to more closely address your

company's and Web customers' needs.

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Other Articles in this Series  
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In the first article of this series, "Developing a Web Site Marketing Plan", I discussed the elements of a marketing plan – objective, strategies, and tactics. In the remaining two articles in the series, I will take a closer look at strategies and tactics you can consider for your Web site.

Part One: "Developing a Web Site Marketing Plan"

Part Three: "Strategies for Your Web Site Marketing Plan"

Part Four: "Choosing Tactics for Your Web Site Marketing Plan"

Google PageRank: Not Worth The Worry

By John Metzler

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I notice that a lot of webmasters are obsessed with Google PageRank (Entire sections of SEO forums are even devoted to PR). Web sites do not live and die by their PageRank. A PR 6 web site may rank lower than a site with a PR 5 due to other Search Engine Optimization factors. Search engine results are not proportional to a web site's PageRank value.

The PageRank value is a representation of a web site's internal and external link structure. Internally, your web site's pages should be easily accessible from each other and use anchor text relevant to the

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theme of the web site. Externally speaking, outbound links should be good quality and/or relevant to your web site's content. And finally, it is widely known that incoming links also contribute quite a bit to PageRank. There is obviously much more to achieving good search engine rankings than the above linking strategies.

With that being said, many webmasters become obsessed with the PageRank of their web sites and consider it to be the bottom line of any search engine marketing campaign. This type of thinking can cloud a much more important issue of whether or not the client has seen an improvement in search engine placement and web site traffic. Always base your achievements on specific rankings for keywords that have been well-researched. If you go parading around about achieving a PageRank of 6 for your client, he or she won't care if they aren't seeing a return on their investment, now will they?

If you're working to increase your link popularity through reciprocal links and refuse to link to web sites that are lower than PR 5, rethink your strategy. Well-designed, well-ranked sites with informative content are always a safe bet to link out to. That was my basic strategy with a client of mine, www.1bbweb.com.

They have a PageRank 4 (at the time of writing this article, January 2005) and rank at #6 on Google for 'bed and breakfast directory' (without quotes). The #7 result has a PR 6 and the next three spots in the first page of results are PR 5 web sites, all higher than my client. This example is repeated throughout the Web and proves that preoccupying yourself with PageRank can result in losing sight of more important ranking factors.

John Metzler is a Senior Vice-President at Abalone Designs (www.abalone.ca) which offers Search Engine Optimization at affordable prices.



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