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## **How to Drive Traffic to Your Business Website**

*—By Malaga Smith*

It isn't enough to design a fabulous website that will be the talk of the town. You also have to make sure your customers will be able to find your site and that they'll want to come back.

As the developer of more than 50 websites, including radstons.com, whose online orders increased by 24 percent and order totals increased by 43 percent by volume after website redesign, and berkeleychamber.com, which gets more than 80,000 hits per month, here are the most important questions to ask yourself about your site. Be brutally honest, because that's the way you'll get the most out of one of your most important investments.

First, do a quick overview to make sure your site is worthy of more traffic. Visit it and become your own customer. Ask yourself:

1. Is this site effective? Why would I go there, stay, or return? What action would I take while there? Why would I refer it to others?
2. Is this site customer-focused? Does it provide the right information and an easy to use navigational system? Does the content read well? Are there typos or grammatical errors?
3. Is this site attractive? Is the design up-to-date and uncluttered?
4. Is this site frustration-free? Are email and webform contacts responded to quickly? Any bad links or errors?

With these questions answered, you may decide to make some changes before driving more visitors to your site. But when you're ready to increase your traffic, here are some basic tips:

### **To drive traffic using the Internet:**

1. Optimize your site. Analyze and maximize all your meta data: title, keyword, description and alt tags. (Go to Google "search engines meta tags" for help.) Narrow keywords by geographic location or niche (it may not be possible to rank on "widgets," but what about "special widgets berkeley"?); analyze your content (Google "keyword ranking" to find an online tool that analyzes the most common words on your site) and make sure your keywords reflect your content. Make sure that all page graphics, photos and images are correctly coded. Add or improve one page per month — search engines like sites that are both seasoned and fresh. Use search-engine-friendly ecommerce URLs for better tracking and search

engine ranking.

2. Check out your five biggest competitors' websites. Why are they ranking ahead of you? (Check keywords, content, and other optimization techniques they're using.) A good way to gauge the fine line between good optimization and "over doing" it, which can be harmful to your ranking, is honesty — build your site with integrity. For example, write content that your readers will want to read. Of course they don't want to read the same word 50 times on a page! So don't pack in redundant keywords just to rank.
3. Develop online partnerships and exchange links with websites that add to your business credentials. (Search engines give extra points for reciprocal links). Get listed on industry-specific sites and business directories. Send out press releases and post them to your site. Send email blasts to prospective and current customers on a regular (but not too frequent) basis, with links to your site. Give clients a useful portal page they can use as home page. List as many levels on your site map as possible without making it difficult to navigate.

#### **To drive traffic using offline vehicles:**

1. Your website should be listed on all marketing and promotional materials. Anytime you speak or someone announces you to a group, make sure your URL gets a mention.
2. Give something away for signing up for your mailing list — a document download or something that doesn't require direct action on your part. When you write a cold-call letter, direct readers to your site for useful free information. Send a market segment to an entrance page created just for them, and track the hits to that page. If you send out a direct mail piece, direct the customer to a unique trackable URL to take advantage of an offer.
3. Make referrals easier. Use a URL that can be remembered easily and make sure the URL of your website and email match. Don't use multiple email addresses unless you want to keep your customer dazed and confused. All of your contact information, including your web link, should be in the signature of every email that leaves your outbox, including replies. Contacting you should be a no-brainer.
4. To bypass the search engines and your competition completely, put your website on a business-card-sized CD and hand them out with your business card.

The bottom line in driving traffic to your site is the same as in any kind of marketing: Stay motivated! Schedule a regular block of time to analyze, plan, and implement, and over time it will pay off. Keep your ideas fresh and stay in tune with the world around you, especially your number one concern: your customer.

Malaga Smith is President of Malaga Corp., which helps customers market their businesses. Get more information and the "Marketing QuickCheck" at (877) 477-7847, or .

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