

The Importance of Marketing in an Economic Downturn

Eight Essential Strategies for Success in 2009.

Customer Relationship
Management (CRM)

Email Marketing

Survey's

Social Media &
Social Networking

Blogging

Search Engine
Optimization (SEO)

Adding Video
to your Website

Web Based PR Services

Summary

What's new
from Caterconsult, Inc.

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Eight Essential Strategies for Success in 2009

Experienced marketers agree that a recession provides an opportunity for proactive companies to grow their market share and strengthen their businesses. When competitors drop the ball by cutting back on their marketing budgets, they are losing brand awareness among their customers. This provides an opportunity for smart marketers to build their brand awareness, as their messages will stand loud and clear in the absence of the competition.

Effective online marketing to your existing customers will turn them into loyal brand advocates. They will also recognize that your company has "staying power" and a commitment to the future. If you actively engage your customer base it will be more difficult for the competition to win them over.

Marketing spend has shifted from traditional advertising, PR and direct marketing to online platforms including websites, email marketing, social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, and social media forums such as blogging and RSS (really simple syndication) feeds. I find these new platforms fascinating, and I am both obliged and delighted to share my knowledge with clients and friends.

I liken my role as a trusted business consultant to that of an Octopus ... swimming in a sea of new information and changing tides.

My many receptive tentacles reaching for the new information and knowledge on which I feed. However, as a member of the human species, blessed with the gift of communication, I feel a responsibility in bringing these resources to you, in a shortened & more succinct format.

What follows are what I consider to be the eight essential strategies for marketing success this year. I am delighted to present some new ideas for 2009, along with some enhanced options for what we know already works.

After the summary you will find some exciting new opportunities from Caterconsult, Inc., along with some additional services which should allow you to accomplish more in less time and with less expense.

CRM

Customer Relationship Management

Remember the word database? It used to describe what we referred to as a list of contacts along with their appropriate contact info. That was in the "olden days". Nowadays, the challenge is to not only list our contacts, but to segregate our lists into groups with shared needs, and to gather as much specific information about a contact as possible. Classifying our contacts is what enables us to deliver a specific message directly to a group of shared interest contacts. Target marketing increases the positive outcome of our appeal by generating more leads and closing more sales.

In the "olden days" we didn't have a quick enough vehicle in which to

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store and share all of the info we would have liked to collect about our clients and prospects. Thankfully, those days are long gone.

We now not only have the software available to store the kinds of contact info we wish to gather, but we also have the opportunity to access proprietary info from any computer anywhere. Cloud computing ... a term we didn't recognize in the "olden days", allows us to access our CRM and other software with a password, and to make changes or updates in real time, which allows our associates instant access to critical updates and information.

Programs like Salesforce and Microsoft SharePoint allow file and data sharing from anywhere, anytime. Many industry and proprietary software programs are also available in web based versions.

When the software is in the "clouds" (loaded onto servers stored by the vendor), if there is a glitch, it can be easily and affordably fixed by the vendor. It is no longer necessary to take on the huge expense of purchasing and maintaining your own servers and software. It is simply easier and more cost effective to do your computing in the clouds.

Email Marketing

We all know what it's like to have a mailbox stuffed with new mail. As busy entrepreneurs with scant few extra hours, we peruse the subject lines for intriguing, interesting or relevant info from senders we trust.

These are the emails that WIN our inbox survival test.

As business owners interested in selling and marketing our own products, we can stand in the shoes of the marketers flooding our own inboxes. We don't want to skip something valuable, insightful, informative, or even just plain fun. We tend to open or delete based upon our level of interest or how much time we have. Sometimes we may flag an email to read at a later time, when the opportunity allows.

One notion on which we can likely agree, is that if we consistently find relevant content, value and information from senders we trust, we will continue to look for new emails from those senders. They stay on our radar and we stay on theirs ... a mutually beneficial arrangement for relationship building and generating leads.

Email marketing is alive and well in 2009 because it is still incredibly affordable, extremely effective, interactive, and provides the analytics to measure the return on your investment.

Web marketing solutions company, Eight by Eight says, "The most powerful tool today for direct marketing, branding and building relationships with customers on the web is email".

According to the September 2008 Marketing and the Economy Survey released by Marketing Sherpa, 48% of marketers plan to increase their email marketing efforts in 2009.

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Here are some of the things we've learned about email marketing:

- Successful campaigns establish powerful relationships with clients and prospects by delivering specific and timely benefits.
- Designing your email with a compelling subject line, eye catching photos and text designed for a quick scan by the reader, will optimize the impact of your marketing message.
- Subscribers will take advantage of the various "calls to action" and promotions.
- Newsletters will drive more traffic to your website.
- A smaller, targeted list of subscribers will always yield better results than a larger list of unknown addresses.
- A Marketing Sherpa survey suggests that segmented lists have double the open and click through rates because you can target your specific solutions to groups with common needs.
- Email marketing can enhance the message of an integrated direct mail piece or your website.
- The average lifespan of an email address is about three years, so engaging in proper list hygiene with an ESP (email service provider) like Constant Contact makes big sense.

Subscribers who click through to your website are the best prospects for follow up, which allows for personal contact and an additional opportunity to provide information or to close a sale.

Survey's

Conducting an online survey of your customers and prospects is a powerful tool of engagement which can give you an invaluable look at their needs, concerns and desires.

Conducting an anonymous online survey gives you the ability to speak directly to an individual rather than a group. In the privacy of a moment of their own choosing, an individual may provide feedback untainted by the influence of peers in a different setting.

The survey tool which is available through Constant Contact, is a ridiculously affordable add-on to your monthly fee, and provides yet another way to strengthen the relationship between you and your customers, as well as impressing your clients and prospects with your commitment to excellence in customer service.

Social Media & Networking

Online marketing is always changing. Just about the time you think you have it figured out, here comes another idea. It's the new frontier ... the wild west ... hold your horses and jump on up. There don't seem to be any certainties on the new frontier, just a lot of experimentation and gut feelings.

In a recent Hubspot blog, written by Pete Caputa, Caputa mentions that "people are talking about Facebook everywhere", and that they (Facebook) are "adding users at an unprecedented rate".

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That's right you "old timers" ... Facebook is not just for the kiddies anymore! Caputo further postulates that social media sites like Facebook, LinkedIN, Xing, Twitter and many others, will begin to impact search and search advertising, gobbling up search market share.

This is why it will be imperative for business owners and their key sales and management staff to have a professional presence on social networking sites.

These social media sites are also launching targeted ads on their sites and marketers should take note. It may be another cost effective way to be found by targeted consumers.

If you haven't already done so, list yourself on LinkedIN and Facebook for starters. I would also suggest "googling" both yourself and your company to see where else you appear in the search rankings. I would then edit any profiles on sites which are incorrect or not to your liking. The more info you add about yourself and your business, the better your search ranking will be.

If you choose to connect and interact with your clients on these social networking sites, your relationship building efforts may lead to more sales. If your clients refer you to others in their network, those referrals will be more likely to trust you and your products and services since someone they know has given you their stamp of approval. As a result, you may be more likely to convert them into clients too.

Blogging

Hubspot also declares 2009 the year of the business blog. Caputo says, "The economy will affect businesses in such a profound way (or CEO's will fear it so much), that they will be aggressively looking for ways to attract more traffic, capture more leads and make more sales via the web. Blogging is the first step to doing this cost effectively. A business blog will be as essential as a website in 2009". Wow ... how will we ever find the time?

If you decide to blog, it is a good idea to consider the commitment before you begin. Blogs are only effective if they are updated at least a couple of times per week, and it's mandatory to engage in industry best practices by offering fresh insight and ideas on any given topic. Blogs are most successful when they are not self promoting.

If your blog catches the attention of your clients, they are more likely to pass it along to their friends and associates in the social networking arena. You will be generating interest in your products and services, which will help you capture more leads and generate more sales.

Optimize your Website for Search (SEO)

Talk about an application in a constant state of flux ... the rules of SEO (Search Engine Optimization) seem to change as fast as the new formats and technology appear.

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Yes, engage in organic SEO with keyword content, title pages and supporting text. Yes, link to as many appropriate sites as possible and have them link to you. Yes, consider some pay per click ads if it makes sense. Yes, add a blog to your website and make it an RSS feed that subscribers can sign up for.

Refreshing your web content is one of the most effective strategies for SEO in the current timeframe.

Add Multimedia to your Website

More big news for SEO in 2009 ... videos will boost search rankings. It's a smart idea to consider adding a short marketing video to your website. Think of it as a 30-45 second commercial for your business.

Use your keywords, while succinctly conveying the essence of your business with integrity and passion. Videos tell a story with both a visual and audio component, and have a huge impact on a prospect if you capture their attention by providing a solution to their needs within a few seconds.

Submit Press Releases to a Web Based PR Service

Another enticing option on this new frontier of online marketing is writing press releases with SEO techniques integrated into the release.

It used to be that a press release was written and sent to a specific journalist or several journalists for a specific purpose.

However, journalists as well as consumers are now going online to find news and information about products or services when researching a story or a purchase.

Writing an informative and professional press release with a marketing spin and including many of your keywords, can be a powerful tool when submitted to a web based PR service. When a journalist or consumer is looking for information on your product or service, the search engines will likely find the content in your release and draw readers both to your release and your website.

When you can incorporate photos or multimedia content like videos into your press release, it will not just be more graphically pleasing, it will also ensure that your news is indexed in image searches, and will create more visibility for your product or service.

Summary

We entrepreneurs wear many hats, shoot from the hip, dance backwards in high heels and have a huge responsibility on our shoulders ... but yes ... we love it and we wouldn't have it any other way.

I understand the demands on your time. It's a challenge to spend the requisite time to learn and assimilate new practices when your heads are spinning from the daily grind of running a business.

If you are willing to commit to at least a few of these marketing strategies for 2009, I guarantee you will add new customers and gain more market share in 2009.

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Freelance writers at a lower cost.

I will be adding some affordable freelance writing partners to assist with the blogging, PR and social media registration that you may wish to outsource at a lower rate than my standard consulting fees.

Software and IT solutions.

I will continue researching web based software solutions and technologies to make our lives easier and more efficient. I have added experts in SEO, IT & Cloud Computing to my roster of independent consultants.

Affordable QuickBooks experts.

Financial management is an ongoing concern for all small business owners. I have had the opportunity to evaluate many P&L's over the last couple of years, and will continue to stay on top of industry standards as we strive for more profitability. In addition, I have partnered with QuickBooks experts who understand our industry, and who are available for both bookkeeping and accounting services at very competitive rates.

Communication, sales training, leadership & human resources.

As always, I am available for all human resource and communication issues including conflict resolution and facilitating group discussions. I will continue to provide leadership and sales training in addition to updated templates and scripts for sales letters, emails and front of the house efficiencies.

Staff training.

I have partnered with a restaurant consultant and have put together a training program for both restaurant and full and freelance catering staff.

Chef & culinary consulting

I have strengthened my partnership with Chef Eric Levine, an award winning catering chef who is not only at the top of his game from a culinary standpoint, but who is also an expert in food costing, portioning, and presentation. He has tremendous expertise in all back of the house systems and operations for both on and off-site kitchens.

Workshops & seminars

Together with a roster of freelance consultants and a few other special experts in the industry, I will be offering intensive one and two day workshops and seminars on topics of interest starting sometime in Q3.

Organic Life Wholesale

I have teamed up with the leading fresh Organic Meal distributor in Chicago. The food is incredibly delicious, nutritious, low in fat & calories and produced by a team of creative chefs in Chicago.

We have set up an opportunity to offer their diet meal programs to your customers in a revenue sharing capacity. They do all the work, you promote their wonderful products and earn a referral based percentage on customers who sign up for monthly meal packages. This is a no-brainer for a new revenue stream.

Let's put our heads together.

Let's set aside some time in the next few weeks to put together a marketing plan for this year. We'll need to roll up our sleeves and dig in deep to survive and thrive in 2009.

Best wishes for good health, happiness, peace and possibilities in the New Year.

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