

Marketing 2000

The World of Cyber Marketing

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Foreword

In 2000 I had an opportunity to experience cyber marketing for the first time. I got so involved in this amazing world that I had to share my experience and spread the news to other enthusiasts in Pakistan. This was the time when very few people knew about the web and building a website was considered a sheer waste of money.

This article caters to some web development trends, ecommerce activities and provide insights and learning to its readers.

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The mystifying glories of Marketing have entered the new millennium. Year 2000 carries with it a unique value. It not only marks the beginning of a new year but also opens a window that witnesses the dawn of a new millennium. Our 19th century marketing is filled with scintillating successes and shabby failures. Success or failure marketing has come out to be the winner. Simple marketing mistakes have throttled the success of many. Like, Food Lion (a super market giant), Perrier, IBM, Sears (Discount stores), Euro Disney, Coca-Cola and Adidas have all tasted the fruits of their mistakes. On the other hand Iacocca's Chrysler and the U.S motorcycle giant 'Harley Davidson' have fought some instilling battles against their hostile competitors. Others, like Microsoft, Wal-Mart (retailing) and G.M (General Motors for their famous 'Saturn' launch) have experienced the joys and pleasures of success. These and other such cases exemplify the tough challenges marketing has to offer. It is for this very nature that marketing has kept alive its charisma.

The new millennium has brought new challenges. As for marketers, their battles are no longer restricted to boundaries. They have indeed expanded to virtual spaces. The gaining popularity of Internet has made imperative for companies to register their presence in cyber space. Cyber Marketing is the challenge of this century and the focal point of my article.

Internet, which started as a research and education forum, has now transformed into the biggest commercial centre of the world. This phenomenal success has induced businesses all over the world to focus their attention and resources on this lucrative channel. Possibilities of more segments, new explorations, more customers and lesser cost burdens have all played their role in making this into an attractive marketing investment. Conventional marketing techniques applied in our world are quite different than those applied in the cyber world. Here we can easily back our claims with tangible support like, free samples, displays, brochures and informational handouts that customers can hold, feel and visualize in absolute reality. Internet market, however, is devoid of such supports. We

have to use certain unconventional ways to market ourselves on the net. I will discuss some of these methods later but for now, let your marketing imagination wander freely through the crossroads of cyber-space. Then only can you attain a truly virtual marketing experience.

The Web Marketing Toolbox

In order to promote your business on the net you need to create your corporate web site. This, in fact, is your office, business centre, or store. There are millions of such sites on the web, so how can you make yourself heard? Surely you have invested a lot in order to attract hoards of visitors to your site. Internet is a place where hundreds of thousands of businesses are crying for attention and in order to compete you need to develop a framework of excellent strategic marketing attributes for yourself. Continuous focus, planning, changing and adaptation can create the very difference that captures the respect and attention of your customers. I have tried to enlist a few simple techniques. These techniques can, and have created a difference. They are presented to give you a glimpse of what is achievable using this platform. So use your imagination and achieve the unachievable!

Your Product Your Presentation

On the Net, your web site is everything. It can be your office, your exhibition area, your sales point or even your chatting ground. In general, they serve multiple purposes and should be designed in accordance with your goals and objectives. In this regard a powerful presentation is important. What message do you wish to communicate to your client when he or she visits your facility? The entrance, the atmosphere, the way a customer is greeted and dealt with and the way you capture his attention and loyalty are all carefully managed to achieve the desired result. In fact, your web site should, along with your vision and mission statements, contain your complete sales pitch.

Design provocative page-titles and sub-titles, which can easily entice viewers to click and enter a world of their choice. Design your welcoming page with care, as it is the first and can be the most powerful impression you have ever created for your client. It is the point in time, where he can easily turn away from you, a point where you need to construct his initial interest in your site and eventually in your offering. Here you need to focus on your core product and packaging. Your core product can be your goods, your message or simply, information, which you intend to convey to your client. Your packaging on the other hand can contain your choice of a suitable colour scheme, set of graphics or visuals which you may have carefully chosen to augment your core product. A blend of a well-worded text and a suitably presented offer can help you create a virtually marketable value package.

Designing a Web Address

Designing an appropriate URL for your site is the first and the foremost task in your cyber scheduler. This URL will not only direct your client to your cyber home, shop or office but it will also create the foundations of brand identity, brand name and brand promotion.

Try not to use long names and try not to use hyphens as they can, at times, create a lot of confusion. Try not to use language specific words like, “Mera-Ghar” for internationally focused sites. Keep them short, catchy, simple, complete and focused like, www.email.com. These URLs will become your brand and the voice of your existence, so design them with care and importance, as your cyber future depends on them.

Learning the Ropes

Before jumping in the pool of cyber space, just sit back and learn the norms, the codes and rules of online marketing. Join and explore a few communities and see how electronic groups are communicating. Read between the lines, see how

people move and collaborate in order to fully utilize the available resources. Sharing and caring are the ingredients that help you create an overall image of prestige, trust and reliance.

This Is My Site Calling!!!!

Millions of sites on the net are vying for viewer attention. At an average 3-4% of your visitors revisit a site. Competition is tough and when it crosses territorial boundaries, it becomes tougher for marketers to plan and launch effective and attractive promotional schemes for their businesses. There are, however, numerous ways of promoting your site or business, after all you have made bulky investments in it and you deserve a positive return!

a) Traditional Media:

Before focusing your promotional activities on the net, try ceasing all available opportunities outside the internet domain. There are quite a few options available at your disposal. In electronic media you have TV, radio and satellite channels, while the print media may include newspapers, magazines, direct mail, brochures, stick-on, billboards etc. Don't let your Ad go anywhere without your URL (your site address). URLs give directions leading to you and your brand and that is why your promotion is so closely linked with the promotion of these URLs. Have you seen the Sharjah Cricket tournament recently? There was a visible Ad placed throughout the boundary displaying the URL of a cricketing site called 'www.total-cricket.com'. Every time the ball went to the boundary viewers had to look at this Ad. I don't know about others but that constant bombardment made me visit their site.

Your ads should contain an invitation to your web site while carefully highlighting the advantages of their visit like, prompt enquiries and replies. Just to make things easier for your customers, put your email address in

these ads. People who go online have offline activities as well. Cleverly used, these media can bring targeted traffic to your site.

b) Your Presence in Search Engines and Directories:

In order to be accessible to searchers and surfers you need to submit your site to certain well-known search engines and directories like, AltaVista, Web Crawler, Lycos, Yahoo, Excite etc. You can also achieve this by hiring the services of a submission agency. A host of them are available on the net like, www.all4one.com. Remember the golden rule, in order to win it you need to be in it!

c) Get a Memorabilia!!!

In order to develop a strong database of prospective customers you need to solicit information from all your visitors. You can achieve this by allowing your guests to fill out a short input form containing the most basic of questions you deem necessary. Ask for your guests email and seek permission to send them updates, newsletters and informational mails so that you don't get disgruntled "Spam" (unsolicited mail) victims. Once they have shown their consent, you can establish strong promotional channels for your business.

d) Creating value for your Visitors:

While creating cyber-value for your clients you need to ask yourself the following questions: Who are my customers? Where are they located? What are their needs and interests? Which channels do they take to reach to a particular site? What makes them revisit a site? What are the factors aiding in popularizing a site? All these and many others will help you design the best marketing strategy for your site. One important lesson regarding the net is that, it has nothing to do with selling and has everything to do with caring, communicating, sacrificing, helping and providing value to others regardless of their origin, cast or religion. This value can be in terms of convenience, comfort, outright help, pure information or simple entertainment. Selling on the internet is a direct and an indirect process and needs to be handled

carefully. In order to win your visitor's interest and liking you can put some free stuff on your site. Anything beneficially related to your business and industry will do the trick. For example, a database of free-to-use articles covering your industry say, 'Packaging'.

The second important thing in this regard relates to updating these information resources so that old visitors keep coming back. I have been going to such sites not for their products but for the free information they are sharing. After revisiting their site I came to know of their products and now, if someone needs such a product I can quote their address. The bottom line is that, you come for the value and stay for the product!

e) Netting your advertising strategy:

Along with traditional media, certain online advertising opportunities are also available for promotional purposes. Like traditional advertising plans, netvertising (as you may call it) also requires a thorough analysis. You have to find the best place for your ad. Consider the following:

Suitable Environment

If I deal in books I will put my ad in Yahoo's book, education or library search pages. I can also go for customization; I can place an ad in Yahoo quotes-directory pages, about books relating to famous quotes.

Cost Per Viewer

To maintain an acceptable amount of viewership I will require a site, which draws maximum traffic like Yahoo or AltaVista. This will help me lower my overall costs.

Things to do

- Place an ad in the classified section, since most of them are free and can generate good response and feedback.
- Enter a banner exchange program like www.linkexchange.com.

- You can purchase banner ads to be placed at appropriate sections in different web directories, search engines or other sites suitable to your business.
- By placing your web address at the bottom of your e-mail you can attract a lot of traffic especially if you are a member of an email listing or discussion group.

What you don't need to do is, to go for an all out advertising spree and you don't need to put ads at unnecessary places. Stay away from viewer resentment. If you find these objectives to be daunting, you can always hire a company specializing in online promotion and advertising.

f) The Soft Selling Approach

There are times when direct selling fails, thus demanding the adoption of indirect strategies to do the job. Mailing lists and discussion groups are such indirect approaches. Both work on the principle of "sharing knowledge". Mailing lists consists of information, shared by members presently discussing a predefined topic. For example, "Overcoming the pitfalls of email marketing" can be one such topic. These discussions are consistently mailed to you as and when they proceed. Discussions are based upon the same concept. Here you need to mail your contributions to the group originator or moderator. How does it work? Well, at first you need to develop a rapport amongst the members by sharing information and helping others by solving their problems. While you are at it, you are placing a brief signature at the end of each email, thereby including your personals and your site addresses for all the members to see and in between these contributions you can wisely chip-in some information depicting your business activities. It is a powerfully practiced technique which requires a lot of time and effort.

g) Alliances & Collaborations

Strategic partnering is the prime need of this century. Specialization is at its peak and nobody can afford to be a lone ranger. Therefore, we must think of

such alliances where both or all can benefit. The infinite horizons of Internet have made collaborations an integral part of a company's overall marketing plans. You need to search for the most productive of partners. Sites maintaining a desired level of visitors belonging to your market segment, most wanted search engines and web directories are what you are looking for. What will your collaborator get after collaborating with you? What benefit can you communicate? Simply put, what's in it for me and what's in it for him? Address these questions and make them the foremost part of your sales pitch. The one, you have exclusively prepared for your collaborator. You can also enter into a Banner Exchange or a Link Exchange agreement thus opting for collaborative advertising. By forming these alliances you are multiplying your advertising and promotional channels and with the span of information broadened and your costs lowered you are getting all the advantages of outsourcing. It is therefore highly imperative that in such delicate circumstances you choose your partners wisely.

h) Promotional Stationary

Your entire stationary should be quipped with your web address. Don't let anything pass without a URL check. Your gift-items and giveaway's should also bear the URL of your company. You don't need to put your complete address. The "http://" part can, very easily be chopped-off. Stationary includes everything, ranging from pens, pencils and paperweights to stickers, envelopes and letter pads. While Gift-Items involve pens, diaries, wallets, calendars etc. It is amazing to see that such small-small things can achieve big-big results.

i) Direct Marketing

The induction of emails, has introduced an exciting new concept in direct marketing. They are comparatively quick and less costly than conventional direct mails. Apart from this, they form the smartest of communication links

with online users. If sent in an html format they can be as attractive as your Web Page.

Voice mails, as the name implies, are the combination of telephone and Email-Marketing practices where you can send voice enriched emails to your clients. These are not only quick and less costly, but also, more sophisticated and personalized. Emails are popularly used as effective web marketing tools. You can get authenticated (lists of prospects who don't mind getting promotional emails) email lists from different agencies operating on the net or you can create one of your own. In both cases, refrain from giving unsolicited or unwanted emails to people who despise them.

Sending promotional mails on special occasions like, 'Eid Greetings' is a wonderful way of getting your message through. Draft these messages with care. Try spending bulk of your time in creating the best possible subject for your message because customer's viewing decisions are based on these subjects. They help you enter your customer's heart and mind and let you tap into areas where buying decisions originate. Email marketing is a challenging job and this is what makes it all the more interesting for online marketers.

Global Marketing in a Global Village

Global marketing is the essence of Internet marketing practices. The global implications can be seen in many instances. For e.g. one ad produced for the entire online community irrespective of caste, colour, race or religion. They are being broadcast throughout the globe. A product sold globally on the net, maintains uniformity of quality standards throughout the world. Whether sold in America or Pakistan, the quality will always be the same. Despite of a few country-focused companies, Internet is full of globally focused businesses. With a 24-hr availability and cross continent access these companies are making 'Global Reach' systematically simple for all. Now doing world wide

business is simple, quick, effective and efficient. The global community concept, advocated throughout the Internet, has glorified the spirit of innovative thinking in global marketing.

Marketer Counts

Companies don't succeed, people do! Only people make things happen for a company. Within the peripherals of cyber-space all that counts is "you". You'll be responsible for maintaining on-the-net business relationships, communications with customers and business partners, developing a global rapport for your company, coordinating sales and representing your company in discussion groups. At the end of the day all that matters is, "you and your performance". Without such marketing souls Internet will just be a mixture of 0's and 1's. These marketers have given life to bits and bytes. Yes, a Marketer counts!

E-Commerce Creating a Buzz!!!

Online shopping has opened a whole new world of commercial activities, a world potentially open for online marketers to explore. It has schematically helped thousands of online stores, shops and shopping malls to transform lifestyles throughout the world. E-commerce works exceptionally well where people know exactly what to buy. Like a particular book or software, where customers have adequate information regarding the brand or company. As online shoppers keep increasing, more and more companies are bringing their businesses on the net. Mr. Haider Raza Mehdi, Customer Services Manager for '*Etisalat*' (Emirates Internet and Multi Media Company), while addressing in a seminar on e-commerce brought forward some interesting facts. According to him, e-commerce portrays some unique attractions for online customers in terms of distribution and transactions. Online distribution is instant, real time, at home and personalized. While transactions can be

immediate, on credit, securitized and validated. Regarding contemporary marketing activities, he pointed out that, “the time gap and the link between the business front and back end has virtually been eliminated. Solutions are defined, developed and marketed simultaneously”.

In spite of these instilling developments net commerce still lacks in maintaining the real spirit of selling. E-commerce sites, till now, are not provocative enough to attract and induce buyers to purchase. In the conventional world, there are times when certain stimuli result in spontaneous buying decisions like, products kept on cash counters may induce impulsive buying. Secondly, most of these sites create a sense of boredom, the same old procedure and the same old software being used by all. Try introducing new concepts and innovative techniques in selling and try embedding real world factors influencing a customer’s decision processes. A commendable effort in electronic-selling is, Cyland’s (software) “tterra”. According to Cyland:

“Your customer enters your shop, office, selling room and there he is offered more than just looking at the latest models or publications. You are there escorting and advising him, you are reacting to his wishes, questions and doubts. You can recommend and give special offers.”

Through “tterra” you can see and advise your clients and your clients can see their attendants all virtually depicting a real world scenario. E-commerce is developing briskly. What needs to be achieved is an environment fully catered to the needs and wishes of your clients. Make possible the fulfilment of all benefits and advantages presented by e-commerce. Like, spontaneous delivery and purchase (no waiting in queues), availability of internationally accredited goods etc. E-commerce is a new dimension. It is a product at its initial stages and it will take a few years to reach to its maturity. The good thing is, that the wave has started and in no time we’ll be saying, “Surf’s up!!!”

In Search of a Cyber Marketer

Not everyone can be a cyber-marketer. With Internet's increasing popularity, online marketing has emerged as a highly specialized field. We cannot expect real world marketers to cope with Cyber Marketing. For that purpose we need specialized marketers who know the ins and outs of cyber space. We need marketers with adequate online marketing experience, who have an appreciable database of contacts and a well maintained rapport in cyber communities, those who can deftly exercise online selling, and meticulously articulate relationship marketing on one-to-one basis. Since Cyber Marketing is quite different than the real world marketing in near future, it will create a lot of demand and openings for cyber specialists. There will be two specialized fields to choose from; cyber marketing and the real world marketing.

What I have given you is just a silhouette of futuristic marketing. Cyber Marketing has been an interestingly new development for marketing and a creatively attractive one for budding marketers. Internet, E-commerce, Web Sites, Windows, the Y2K bug all gained popularity due to some successfully run marketing campaigns. Marketing is an ever-evolving field, dynamically developing inroads for its growth. Cyber marketing is a thing of tomorrow, a challenge, openly posed by the dawn of this millennium. It expects vim, vigour and vitality from enthusiastic marketers, creative imagination from marketing visionaries and wonderful adaptability from marketing mavericks. In a nutshell, the new millennium promises a challenging new career for emerging marketers, a career remarkably established on the foundations of cyber space, where all that matters is you and your marketing.