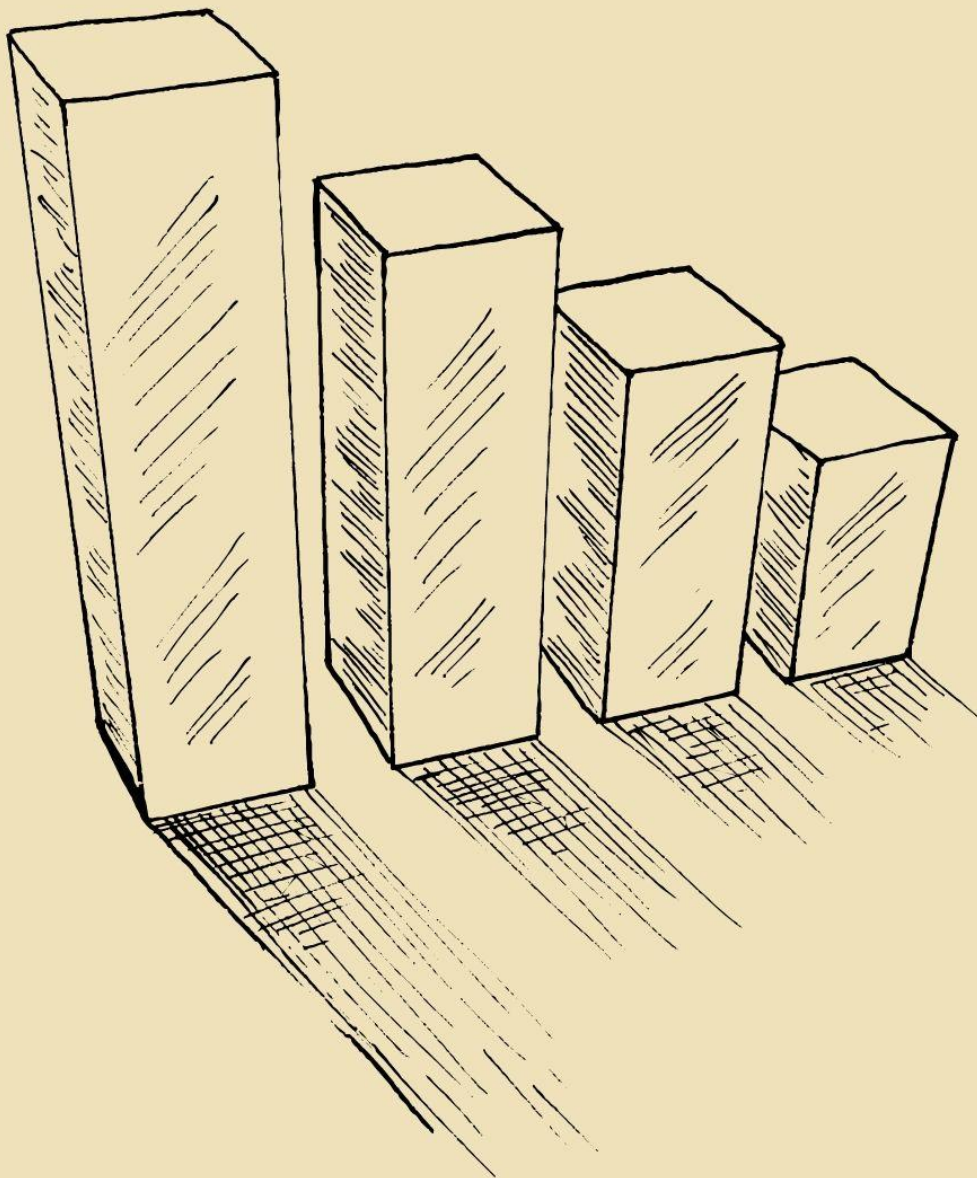


Small Business Marketing Content



Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
First - A Plan	2
Content Delivery - Online	4
The importance of Local SEO	5
Google My Business	6
Website	7
Social Media	8
Email Marketing	9
Content Delivery - Offline	10
Press Activity	10
Exhibitions and Events	10
Direct Mail	11
Content Focus	11

Introduction

So you have a shiny new website. You have various pages of content that tell your prospects what you offer. You have something about you and/or your small business. Hopefully, you also have some prompts to suggest prospects get in touch. Now what?

If you are a business with a local customer base, then a simple website combined with a Google my Business listing might be enough. Add some local marketing and you might generate sufficient enquiries, but what if you want more?

Depending on your market, many businesses could be vying for position in the Google my Business (or Bing places) panel. One factor that appears to influence the Google ranking algorithm is the business website ranking near the top of the organic results.

To make a website rank in the search results, you need content. Building authority and credibility when a prospect lands on your website, requires content. In short, content fuels the small business online marketing process.

What if you want more enquiries than a Google my Business listing can generate? Then you need your new website to be on Page 1 Google (or, worst case Page 2) when a prospect types in a relevant search phrase.

To secure a high position in search, your website must have authority (as defined by the search engine algorithms). What influences authority? Lots of things, but one is backlinks. Without some form of content, it will be difficult to generate those backlinks. What's more, to rank locally, you will need local backlinks.

You could decide that social media is a good way to reach your prospects. But to fuel your social media marketing process you will require text, images or video (or all three). Reaching out to prospects via email or direct mail might work. The problem is after the first contact, how do you follow up? You will need something of value (that will be some form of content) to offer.

If you intend to build any online marketing process, I suggest content fuels that process. But creating content takes a lot of effort. To ensure that effort delivers a result, you need a strategy, a plan and a process. Your content must focus on your target audience. It should be useful and create the right impression.

Strategy

First, you need to clearly define what you offer and what (if anything) makes you different from all the rest. Review our series of posts on business strategy to learn more. With your offer in place, you then need to define your audience.

Identify who (what groups) you are trying to reach and why. What is the message you are trying to deliver? How can you help your customers overcome the challenges they face?

With target groups and messages in place, identify how customers make buying decisions. This process is not easy and it takes time and effort. Sometimes it involves facing some brutal truths, but it is an essential first step. Miss it, or fail to give it the attention it deserves and everything that follows WILL fail.

Be careful to clearly define if your content is designed to build awareness or to generate leads. There is an important distinction between the two and you should not try to cover both in a single piece of content.

To clarify, you build awareness with those in your target audience who might need your product in future but are not currently in the market. You generate leads from those who have been triggered to seek out a solution to whatever problem they have.

So that's prospects covered including those in market and those who may be in the market in future, but don't forget existing customers.

Research shows that >60% of customers who leave a business do so simply because they do not feel valued. Delivering relevant information aids customer retention and makes a company more trustworthy.

Once you know what you are trying to achieve break it down into time-limited objectives. Only then can you get to strategy. The how we are going to do it and how content fits into that process. The content strategy must be in place before moving on to the content plan.

Plan

With the target audience identified and a firm understanding of the challenges to overcome, it is time to move on to the content plan. What are the objectives you are trying to achieve and what type of content is best to achieve those objectives? Who will produce those key pieces of content and in what order?

With the key pieces of content dealt with, it is time to move on to secondary content. identify:

- Where are the customer pain points?
- What are common objections?
- How can we help them use our product or services?
- What are common questions?
- What smoothes the purchasing decisions?

How can you help existing customers understand the potential problems with services/technology/products? Help customers understand the shortcuts lower price competitors take and the potential implications.

Try to think through what is the best content format. Is it text, or video? Are there any speaking opportunities at events or exhibitions? Assemble this content into a plan covering what will be delivered and when.

The plan should identify what we do and in what order, who is responsible for what. What is the desired outcome of each piece of content and how are they interlinked? Think through what could come out of the blue to knock it off track and, in general terms, how will you react.

Ideally, customers should use your site as a resource. It should be the first place they look for answers. You have two options. Either use ONLINE marketing to drive people to the website and/or OFFLINE marketing. Let's start with online.

Delivery - Online

There is little point in creating content if it is not consumed by the target audience. We discuss social media and Email marketing later. Let's start with ensuring your content is found online.

You can read about the basics of search engine optimisation in a series of posts on our blog. For small businesses, we strongly suggest local SEO and Google My Business (see below) are the best way forward. Getting found online, organically (without Ads) on a national level will be extremely difficult.

Local SEO is defined as a process designed to increase the visibility of your web pages in LOCALISED search results. Where a localised search generally takes the form 'service in location'

As a small business operating in a restricted geographical area, you want your website to show up if a prospect in that area makes a search.

The key elements of local SEO are:

- Website structure.
- Content.
- Local links.
- Reviews and citations.
- Google My Business and Bing Places.
- Website design.
- Buzz.

This list is the same for a business undertaking SEO on a national level except for Google My Business and Bing Places. These are specific (localised) elements provided by the major search engine businesses.

The above is my list, but most search engine optimisation experts would agree on the first four elements. I believe Google (not so sure about Bing) can now interpret the design of a website (layout, text, graphics, consistency across pages) and use this information as one input to the ranking algorithm – others may disagree.

If your website structure is incorrect (the technical setup of your website on mobile and desktop), you will waste your time on all that follows. A website also needs some content (words, graphics or video). Content, wherever practical, should relate in some way to the locality.

Backlinks are links to your site from other websites and they are important, especially for relatively new sites. For local SEO it is best if those backlinks come from other websites in your locality or with some relationship with the locality.

Reviews and testimonials are vital for local businesses. The best of these should be on the website to build credibility, but they are also an important element of the Google My Business and Bing places listings. Citations (mentions of your business details on websites you do not own) are also useful, as is their consistency across the web.

If your business works on projects and these can be written up as a case study (ideally complete with pictures or even video) then these are excellent content for a local website.

The importance of local SEO to local business

As those searching for local products or services scan down a typical search engine results page, they will see the Ads, then the Google My Business panel and finally the organic (SEO-influenced) results.

You have two types of prospects. There are those who have an immediate need and those who might buy from you in future. Those with an immediate need you can attract via Ads and/or Google my Business. These will both direct your prospect to your website.

When trying to attract those with a potential future need, you will need your website to rank in a high position on the search engine pages. You need to rank for a localised search for search phrases related to your product or service.

Remember if you would like to appear on the first page of the search engine results pages when someone searches for “wedding bouquet flowers” you have no chance. You want to appear if the search is for “wedding bouquet flowers (*location*)”

Don't forget the power of word of mouth. If your business does good work, people will refer to their friends, family and colleagues. Anyone referred will probably check your website before interacting with you. If your website shows in a prominent position on the search engine pages and has testimonials and reviews, it will help.

By optimising their online presence to target local customers, small businesses can boost their visibility, attract qualified leads, and drive foot traffic to their physical locations. You do not need a marketing agency to succeed, but you do need to put consistent effort into the process over time.

Google My Business

The importance of a Google My Business listing should not be underestimated. Those making location-based searches are often looking to buy. It potentially delivers a high profile on Google, for free.

When a prospect searches with a local component (Florist in Canterbury or Italian restaurant in Skegness), the Google Local Panel often appears towards the top of page 1 Google. Securing a place in the top three positions (the 3 pack) in the panel gives a business with a local customer base a profile on page 1.

The top 3 listings of a Google local panel include information on the business address, opening times, phone number, and reviews. It may include thumbnail photography, or a website link and directions link.

A click on the more places link opens a panel showing more businesses that Google considers relevant to the search phrase. Obviously, the objective should be to secure one of the first three listings. Even better, the top listing.

To succeed, the listing must be kept up to date, and that requires content. It can be images, short (text) posts or video. As a minimum, there must be text covering the business contact details. It is essential this is kept up-to-date and consistent across the web.

Website

The first step, before embarking on any website development exercise, is to define its primary purpose. It could be to build credibility to aid client retention, or it may be a lead generation tool. Define the purpose of each piece of content you write. Is it brand building, link building or lead generation?

The corporate brand helps build long-term customer and prospect relationships. When most sales come from existing clients carrying the brand through into the website content is all-important.

If the target is the existing customer base, then most traffic to the website will be direct. Either the company name will be searched, or the website address typed directly into a browser.

Therefore, search engine marketing is not of great importance. What is important is delivering a consistent message and maximising credibility. Understand the content existing clients need and deliver it via website and other relevant channels.

A lead-generating website should deliver content that engages and provides value. That information should encourage prospects to return. It should build relationships, gather Email addresses to facilitate ongoing communication and convert. The value of a lead-generating website is not in graphics and layout but in content.

Regardless of the choice between a corporate brand or a lead-generating website, it is a single element in the marketing mix.

Social Media

Before allocating any effort to social media in your small business, it is important to define your objectives.

Define what success will look like and measure progress towards that goal. How much time and resources will be required and will that resource generate an appropriate return? Whatever you do should fit with your small business marketing plan.

The first step is to consider if potential customers are active on social media. If they are active, then what is their preferred channel? Is it Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or something else?

The challenge is to choose the most appropriate channel and not to spread effort too thinly. In B2B markets, the best channel might be LinkedIn. If you aim your product or service at those in their early teens, it could be Snapchat. If the product or service is visual, then Pinterest could be best.

To generate any reasonable return on social media activity requires content. That information needs to be of value to the target customer base, engaging and of high quality. The content itself can take many different forms. Match the purpose of your content to the medium.

To succeed with social media marketing you need to build a genuine base of followers. That takes time, a writing/posting style relevant to the channel and content.

To succeed with social media marketing you need to build a genuine base of followers. That takes time, a writing/posting style relevant to the channel and content..

Note, that social media activity is a branding/awareness activity. It is not a lead generation medium. Also, remember only a small percentage of your followers will ever see your social media posts, unless you are prepared to pay to boost or use ads. We suggest, if you do intend to use social media focus only on your local area.

Email Marketing

It's relatively easy to set up a small business Email marketing process. Tools like MailChimp and CampaignMonitor make it easy (and cheap).

Two questions to ask yourself are: how am I going to build an Email list and what (content) am I going to send?

Building an Email list of your current customers should be relatively easy, but what should you send them? Producing content of real interest/value is hard and time-consuming.

We suggest if you can't produce that valuable content, then don't Email. Your Email will (best case) not get read (worst case) annoy your valuable customers. That said, if you run the type of business that regularly creates offers, then Email marketing to existing customers can work.

If you want to Email prospects, you should be aware of the GDPR regulations. You might think my business is too small and they won't come after me, but they might and given the fines involved, is it worth the risk?

Then you need an Email list (don't buy one!). How are you going to build that list? If you have lots of traffic to your website it's possible, but note the SEO discussion above.

You should try to build a prospect list over time. Don't discard the prospect Email addresses you can collect (within the regulations), but be aware it will take time.

Delivery - Offline

Offline marketing options include:

- Press activity - PR
- Sponsorships
- Events and Exhibitions
- Poster and display
- Press advertising
- Direct mail

Some of these need some form of content, but the time and resources required are much less than online.

Press Activity

Most locations have local newspapers, local event guides, business listings and more. If your business has something to talk about, then it is worth producing a piece in one or more of these publications and making every effort to get it published.

Things to discuss could be something significant you or a staff member has achieved, an upcoming event, a mini case study after completing a project or something relevant to the local area.

For a local business to publish regularly is difficult, but it is important to stay close to publishers and editors, so when there is something to say, it reaches the marketplace.

Events and Exhibitions

Content including brochures, flyers, posters and pull-up displays are required to support events. Producing this type of content is time-consuming and often requires some design expertise.

Direct Mail

As with EMail marketing, the problem is the mailing list. Whatever you do send needs to look professional, so some design expertise helps.

Content Focus

Small businesses have limited resources. We therefore suggest the focus on content production should be as follows:

- Google My Business
- Existing customer (Website, Email, DMail)
- Website updates (including review and case study)
- Events and Exhibitions
- Direct Mail (prospects)
- Social media
- Email marketing (assuming you have no list)

Some of these need a consistent effort, others are more Ad Hoc. Obviously, the priority depends on the business and the above is only a guide.

Google My Business Content

The first step is to ensure the basic business information is in place (business name, telephone etc). This information must be correct and consistent across the web.

Then add plenty of images including a profile and cover photo, photos of your team, your premises (if appropriate) or your products. Also, add some photos relevant to the locality.

If you can create videos to showcase your business or services that helps. Then create posts to share updates, promotions, events, and news related to your business.

The importance of reviews we mentioned above. If you are able (and it makes sense) to create a Q and A section, that also helps.

About the author:

Phil Smith is an experienced small business marketer Learn more at <https://findmorelocalcustomers.co.uk>.

Copyright © 2021 HundredOctopus Ltd All rights reserved. No part of this guide may be produced in any form or by any electrical or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems – except in the case of brief quotations in articles or on social media – without the express permission in writing from the author.

The content of this guide is for informational purposes only and is subject to change without notice.

Great efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of the contents of this guide. However, the advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. Neither the author nor HundredOctopus Ltd will be liable for any losses or damages (including but not limited to commercial, special, incidental, consequential damages) arising from the use of the contents in this guide.

Findmorelocalcustomers is a trading style of HundredOctopus Ltd.