

Social Media Optimization: The Future of Marketing?

There can be no doubt that the World Wide Web has greatly changed the way we look at the world, and the way that we conduct business. In fact, there are many who predict that the Internet will soon supplant all traditional media in all areas from entertainment to advertising.

A few years ago, companies first began to realize the incredible marketing potential of the Internet through the power of the search engine. People using the Web primarily as a research tool would use sites such as Google to find the sites which contained the information they were looking for. Often, those conducting searches would look only at websites listed among the top ten in the search engine rankings.

Companies soon began to pay big money in order to find ways to get their sites placed in these coveted positions. It often meant using the services of third parties who would try to calculate how search engines ranked the various pages in relation to certain searches. This process became known as Search Engine Optimization, or SEO.

Today, SEO is as popular a marketing mechanism as ever, although it has become a more refined process as the search engines have evolved to make their ranking algorithms more accurately reflect the needs of their clientele. The results are rankings which are more likely to turn up results related to the information the researcher is looking for.

Even as companies continue to spend money on making their sites more visible in the search engine rankings through SEO, a new strategy in Internet marketing has appeared on the horizon. Social Media Optimization is complementary to SEO in any company's marketing strategy, targeting an Internet audience beyond the search engines.

Even as companies spend thousands of dollars on SEO strategies, they are aware that the big engines are just a piece of an Internet marketing campaign pie (albeit a rather large piece!). Research has demonstrated that about 45% of visitors to sites arrive there through a search engine. Many of the rest do so through social media.

Social media refers to the transition of informational sources from monologues to dialogues, and has also been called the "democratizing" of information. Blogs, forums, networking sites (such as Facebook and MySpace), discussion groups, and multimedia sharing are all a part of the Web 2.0 landscape, and thus are major components of social media processes.

The key for companies in this second stage of Internet evolution is tailoring their marketing strategy to fit the wants of potential clients and customers in a Web 2.0 world. It means approaching leads on their own turf, using tactics that present the company message without the perception of pushiness or deception.

This new process has been termed Social Media Optimization, or SMO. The term was coined by Rohit Bhargava, who also formulated five rules of the process:

1. Increase linkability
2. Make it easy to tag and bookmark your site
3. Reward inbound links
4. Help your content travel
5. Encourage the mashup

(Source: Wikipedia, Social Media Optimization)

SMO means making your site friendly for those people currently using the Internet to increase their social circles. It follows the natural progression of the Internet from primarily a research tool to a place where more and more people are making personal connections. It's the marketing strategy of the future, one that you can expect to be hearing more about in the next few years.