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An Introduction to Corporate Websites and Search Engines

Have you noticed how many websites are deployed as simple online brochures? These *'brochureware'* sites typically contain between 5 and 20 static web pages offering product or service information and generally lack interactive capabilities. They introduce the company products and provide information on its location and perhaps driving directions, staffing, and some marketing information. You might think of this type of website as a cross between a sales brochure and a general company handout.

Does *'Brochureware'* Attract New Customers?

Designing a *'brochureware'* website is a process that is similar to designing a printed brochure. The design, production and printing process are completed and a static, printed brochure is delivered to the client. Both the client and the owner feel the brochure is cost effective. The owner says "I'm going to leave copies in the lobby for prospective customers." A few weeks pass and the disappointed owner asks, "Where are the new customers?" Perhaps the owner misjudged the new brochure. Why isn't it working? A simple analysis reveals the following critical issues:

- The brochure has no 'outreach' beyond the lobby of the owner's building.
- Prospects can't access the brochure, because they don't yet know the business is there. Simply put, the current customer will see the brochure in the owner's lobby, but the prospective customer will not.

Like the brochure hidden in the owner's lobby, a website that is designed using the *'brochureware'* concept will not attract new customers. This type of website simply does not leverage the power or the reach of the Internet. If used appropriately, the internet provides a valuable business platform that printed brochure cannot. Internet search engines can inexpensively reach your business prospect while the prospect is looking for the specific products and services you offer.

How Can Search Engines Cut Prospecting Costs?
Most modern promotions involve 'pushing' a message through traditional channels such as brochures, posters and marketing collaterals. Whereas, internet search engines provide more targeted prospects by fitting a solution to an expressed need. Consider the prospect that 'pulls' information from a search engine, compiling this information to make purchasing decisions. A website that ranks high in the list of resulting sites 'pulled' by the prospect search will get significantly more attention and benefit by closing more sales.

Once a prospect has arrived at your website, the site will provide valuable content to help the prospect make a purchasing decision, all through the electronic exchange of information. The fully leveraged use of search engine marketing techniques is, in theory, the lowest cost advertising possible, as it targets those who are already looking for your products.

However, we would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that your competition is also looking to achieve that coveted high ranking spot on the list of websites your prospect will generate by using search engines. It is this very ranking that constitutes effective search engine promotions.

How Do Search Engines Rankings Work?
Search engines send web 'robots' that read and store website content in databases. When queried, the search engine runs algorithms on its stored databases and returns ranked web page results. Advertisements frequently accompany search results, but studies show that people believe in the search results more; so the algorithmic rankings have high promotional value.

What Factors Promote or Impair Search Engine Rankings?
Improper web page coding can strongly impair search engine ranking. A search engine robot reads millions of web pages daily; when it encounters a problem reading web page code, it will typically decide not to index the page. This is a common problem and one that most web page owners never see lurking behind the scenes of search engine

functionality. Design issues that may result in non-indexed web pages include the use of pages designed in Flash, pages with heavy graphic content and interactive HTML pages, as well as database driven sites, and scanned documents. Any and all of these design factors can cripple the search engine rankings for your site and make the site all but useless for marketing your products and services.

But even if we assume that your web page is read and indexed, several additional factors can significantly affect search engine ranking. Consider these questions:

- Does the web page text match the query text entered by the prospect?

- Are there links from other websites that provide open channels through which the robots and prospect can enter your site?

- Is the web site architecture appropriate for search engine optimization?

If a web page has low ranking factors or has improper coding, the site and its pages will rank poorly. Fortunately, these types of sites can often be repaired to correct the problems described above.

Is There More to Search Engine Marketing Than Simply Rankings?
Most companies that design *'brochureware'* sites do not recognize a change in their perceived target market and submarkets. What they may not realize is that the target market and its submarkets have expanded because search engines now enable prospective customers to more easily find a company that best satisfies their need. The exploitation of these expanded submarkets can greatly benefit your business. Let's look at some examples:

Niche Marketing in the Medical Profession
The standard website for a dermatologist practice talks about practice or the doctor's skills, perhaps including certifications and number of years in practice, how to contact the doctor,

directions to his office and his hours of operation. Let's say that this dermatologist can perform three expert and uncommon treatment methods. Before search engine promotions, 75% of his revenue derives from regular treatments and 25% from expert treatments that yield a significantly higher profit margin.

After completing a website evaluation, WebAndNet determines that the web competition for his expert treatments is weak, which will enable him to easily achieve high rankings in these areas. The website is redesigned with pages that explain his expertise to fellow physicians for referrals, and to prospective patients. These pages are search engine promoted.

Tens of millions of people search for medical information on the web. The promoted expertise of this dermatologist coupled with the internet huge audience can change his entire practice, growing his patient base and resulting in significantly higher revenue.

Competitive Pricing in the Distribution Market

A regional distributor of products for which prospective customers commonly search has over 40 competitors with websites. Because this distributor knows that a competitive web marketplace has been established, the company should create a website that is designed to *close a sale*. They can do this by using search engine promotions that emphasizes the reputation and attractive prices of the company and produce high rankings on search engines.

The target market for this company is repeat buyers who have already been educated on the benefits of the products. The company saves expensive sales and advertising time and the expense of finding and educating prospective customers. Instead, the distributor simply targets informed or repeat buyers who are shopping for good prices on the web. In the end, the distributor lowers his selling cost and increases his volume, thereby boosting his profits in a dramatic way.

Local Markets

A keyword search using 'Houston restaurant' will produce thousands of website links and restaurant guide websites that have paid for top ranking positions. It can seem difficult to promote a local restaurant through search engine ranking because of the significant competition.

Let's examine the competitive advantages of this restaurant that can yield positive results. This company is a large restaurant with the capacity to host banquets and large parties. Keywords such as 'Houston banquet facility' or 'Houston wedding reception' will yield far fewer web competitors during a search, and each person that searches on the word 'banquet' is worth ten to one hundred times more than a person who is merely searching on the keyword 'restaurant'. Banquets and catering halls serve hundreds of people and one event can pay a lot of business bills. By making this simple modification to the promotional keywords on the site, this restaurant will have a high ranking in the areas that give it a unique competitive advantage and will increase its business revenue.

These examples illustrate the simple, cost effective use of well designed web marketing techniques. While companies continue to use the 'brochureware' approach to their website, if your company uses the search engine promotion and keyword design techniques recommended by WebAndNet, you can easily leverage your competitive advantages, with content that will attract and retain customers. Other companies have used these techniques to achieve higher profit margins, create new and more competitive business models, and reduce advertising costs. When compared with non-web marketing methods, search engine promotions are one of the most cost effective and timely promotional methods available. Please contact WebAndNet to find out how your business can benefit from this simple, but powerful, web marketing technique.