



EXPERTS TONY GATTARI

# OLD MARKETING RULES STILL WORK ONLINE

“Many marketing strategies are just as effective online as offline.”

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For many established ‘bricks-and-mortar’ businesses, building a complementary online presence is now an urgent task. In many industries, businesses are already well established online and aggressively pursuing domination of their respective niches.

An online business is, however, quite different from traditional bricks-and-mortar stores in several ways:

- Online businesses are invisible to consumers unless targeted traffic is driven to it;
- The online market is global in reach, which means it is the biggest and most competitive market of all time; and
- The Internet is based on ‘free’. Most successful online business models incorporate some aspect of ‘free’ to attract online visitors.

However, while your business is operating in a different marketing space online, the psychology of buying has not changed. As such, success online can be achieved through applying our usual marketing tactics to the Internet as follows:

**1. Unique Selling Proposition (USP):** A USP is crucial for an online business, as you are now competing in a global market. This requires the USP to have even greater uniqueness, as your business is not necessarily protected by geographic boundaries. Often an effective USP is delivered via an outstanding service or product guarantee. Ensure that the USP and guarantees are heavily promoted throughout your Website.

**2. Answer objections to purchase:** The Web is a powerful tool for helping your customer’s research before purchase. In a bricks-and-mortar store, purchasing objections are addressed in person. Online, they can be overcome by providing comprehensive product and service information on your site. Another effective tool is a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Web page. Make it very easy for users to ask questions online, either through a targeted online form or call-to-action buttons that are highly visible on all pages. Some businesses even have online chat available and call-back functions on their Website.

**3. Make it easy to buy:** Keep the complexity of online purchasing to a minimum. Make it easy to add products and services to a shopping cart, and reduce the number of steps in the checkout process. Avoid a lengthy customer sign-up process in any online store transaction and provide multiple payment options.

**4. Don’t sell, solve people’s problems:** Avoid excessive selling and marketing messages on your Website. Instead, present a convincing argument on emotional and intellectual levels. Provide comprehensive information to help your customers make informed decisions. Also provide detailed information, tutorials, guides and manuals on your site so your customers can make the most of their purchases.

**5. Cross-sell:** Provide complementary products and services based on the recent purchases. Amazon.com does this brilliantly by suggesting books that others with the same interests have already purchased.

**6. Up-sell:** Provide a comprehensive range of products on your Website at various price points. For services, provide easy selection of standard, premium and deluxe packages.

**7. Permission marketing and follow-up:** A Website is ideal for obtaining your customers’ details so you can send follow-up communications, updates on specials, and electronic and mail newsletters. Obtain permission to contact during sign-up and then communicate regularly with your customers.

**8. Partner with other businesses:** Partner with complementary businesses online and refer to each other’s product and services. Link to your partner Websites and display their logo on appropriate pages. This approach builds credibility on your Website and provides you with access to new customers.

**9. Test and measure:** Test and measure is a real strength of the Web, when the data is recorded and used to optimise the sales process. Measure every visit, click, subscription, sale and repeat sale. Use this information to improve your customer conversion rates and average dollar sales.

**10. Avoid advertising clutter:** The number of advertising messages we see on a daily basis is overwhelming. As such, ensure the advertising messages presented on your Website are clear and relevant.

**11. Perception is reality:** Your Website is a powerful tool for shaping customer perceptions of your business. Use high-quality branding and design, staff profiles, testimonials and professional images to amplify the size and quality of your business.

**12. You need trust to make a sale** — Many web users are distrustful online. A quality Website presence, backed up by customer testimonials throughout the Website, as well as a comprehensive product range, can go a long way to presenting a trust-worthy image. Ensure that all payment facilities online are provided by recognised brands. Use an SSL certificate on your Website to ensure encrypted online payment transactions.

**13. Referrals** — Offer online discounts for referring friends to your online store and to those that subscribe to your newsletter for social media pages, like Facebook and Twitter.

**14. Great Customer Service** — Respond rapidly to online enquiries. Make sure your email is being checked every few hours and ensure rapid delivery of product and services.

Many of these strategies that are just as effective online as offline. Examine the strengths of your real-world business, and then apply the same tactics online. ■