White Paper

Steps to Maximize Online Exposure
# Contents

- Introduction 3
- Start with the Basics 3
- Tackle Social Media 5
- Start a Blog 6
- Reach out with Email 7
Introduction

WHEN IT COMES TO JUST ABOUT ANY KIND OF BUSINESS, MARKETING is everything. Without a solid client base, success is virtually impossible. Of course, there is no shortage of methods that can be utilized to create and grow clientele, and flyers, cold calls and word of mouth are all time tested and will usually have varying degrees of success. However, clients are increasingly turning to the Internet to conduct research and get the process started. In fact, during the 2013 holiday shopping season, more shoppers said they planned to shop online than in stores, according to Deloitte’s 2013 Annual Holiday Survey.

That means it’s up to professionals to give themselves the online presence they need to attract new clients. It’s essential to use the Internet as a marketing tool, but using it correctly is key. It’s not enough to simply have a website—especially one that is outdated or rarely updated.

While having a great Web presence is essential, it doesn’t have to be a complicated process. Here are a few tips to maximize your online exposure:

Start with the basics

Before tackling social media, it’s essential to start building an online presence with a solid base. In the case of online marketing, that means beginning with a great website. What does “great” mean? It should be sharp looking, easy to navigate and updated frequently with interesting and helpful information.

It’s important to start with a strong domain name, which should be easy to spell and as short as is practical. It should also be clear and easy to verbally tell potential clients, which means dashes or elements that need explanation should be avoided. For example, if a home contractor’s website is “Remodels-4-U.com,” they would have to say “remodels, dash, the number four, dash, the letter ‘u.’” Stick to the domain extension “.com” when possible, as well. It’s likely
that clients will type it in by default when searching for any given website and agents don’t want to give their clients away to JoanSmithConstruction.com when they were directing them to JoanSmithConstruction.net.

Professionals also want to encourage new clients to find them when conducting a general online search. For this reason, using geo-specific domain names can help drive traffic to a given site as well as ensure potential clients know what they are getting into. When shoppers are on AntiqueWoodworkRenovations.com, they know exactly what they can find there. On the other hand, if professionals have designs on expanding their offerings, that domain could be a small roadblock. Each professional should consider their short- and long-term goals when selecting a domain name.

Once the domain is established, professionals should be sure their websites are sharp and modern looking. Anyone who has used the Internet has landed on a website that looks like it hasn’t been updated since the 1990s, and it doesn’t reflect well on the person or business it is representing. An out-of-date website makes the agent seem old fashioned or out of touch.

Of course, everyone can’t be expected to be Webmasters as well experts in their own fields, so it’s important to outsource. There are plenty of options to get a new website up and running, whether that’s to use a template provided by a third-party company or just to bring in a professional website designer.

On the site, be sure to use lots of images and stay away from big blocks of text, instead sticking to headlines and bullet points. Users should be able to get the information they need—that is, the real estate listings they are looking for—quickly and easily.

It’s also important for professionals to bear in mind the fact that people aren’t always going to be browsing the Internet on their desktop or laptop computer. Mobile devices like smartphones and tablets are hugely popular and consumers frequently use them to shop on the go. Because of this, professionals need be sure their websites either look great on a device of any size or come with a special mobile site that is made just for the smaller screens of smartphones and tablets.
Tackle social media

According to a September 2013 poll from the Pew Research Center, nearly 75 percent of adults are on some form of social media, making it an essential market for professionals in any field to tap. There are quite a few options out there, each of which has their own specific uses that can be advantageous:

FACEBOOK
Far and away the most popular social media platform, more than 70 percent of adults are on Facebook. Small business owners looking to tap this market should start by creating a professional page and update it frequently with information that their current and future clients will find helpful. For example, posting recent offerings, relevant news and helpful tips will all be useful for consumers.

Pictures—whether it’s of new products or a satisfied with their new purchase—look great on Facebook. All small businesses should be sure to encourage people to “like” their page with the promise of great content.

TWITTER
The short-form setup of Twitter lends itself to brief announcements. Twitter followers value brevity, so real professionals should use their Twitter feeds for quick messages. The announcement of a new product with a link to their website would work well, as would promotions for sales or offerings.

One of the benefits of Twitter is the use of hashtags, which link tweets of similar themes across various feeds. For example, tweeting a message with “#AustinRestaurants” will link it with all other tweets with the same hashtag and make it more searchable. With Twitter, it’s essential to update frequently to remain on clients’ radars, but not so much that they are clogging up their news feeds.

INSTAGRAM
This picture-based platform is perfect for professionals who want to highlight a great new dish in their restaurant or a new car owner next to their purchase. Similar to Twitter, users can utilize hashtags to make their pictures easier to find. Instagram photos can also easily be shared through other platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

More than 70% of adults are on Facebook.
LINKEDIN
Less a social media platform and more a professional one, LinkedIn is a great way to network with other professionals. Small business owners can take a peek at what marketing techniques their competitors are using and trade strategies with peers. Plus, they can build up their professional relationships with others in their business and develop a pool of contractors that may come in handy.

Start a blog

While the aforementioned social media platforms are perfect for sharing content or quick messages, all professionals should consider kicking off a regular blog. It’s a great way to not only get their brand out there, but establish themselves as an expert in their respective industry. The blog posts should provide clients with interesting and, more importantly, useful information. As with social media, it’s important to update the blog regularly. Even if a new post only goes up every two weeks or once a month, agents should be sure to publish them like clockwork.

Blogs also differ from social media in that there needs to be a strong focus on search engine optimization, or SEO. Commonly searched terms and questions should be included in each blog post so that it shows up when someone enters it in a search engine, which will drive traffic to the website. Just like with domain names, geo-specific keywords—Los Angeles real estate listings or homes for sale in Boston—are most helpful.

If the small business owner’s writing skills are somewhat lacking or they find keeping up with a blog to be too time consuming, they may consider outsourcing the posts to a freelancer who can update the blog a couple of times a week.

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Reach out with email

As a supplement or substitute for a blog post, professionals may try sending out an email newsletter. Just like the blog or any other form of social media, the emails should be useful and interesting so they offer value to clients. While they should be sent out frequently and regularly—think monthly or every other week—the practice of just sending out emails for the sake of sending something should be avoided. It’s a quick way to get sent to the spam folder.

There’s no doubt that the Internet is an important resource that can provide a huge return on investment for very little upfront capital. For millions of consumers, the first step when beginning any search is to get online, so being highly visible is essential for developing new leads.

Ready for the next step? Download our FREE Marketing Playbook for Small Business Owners: colecommunity.com/marketing-playbooks