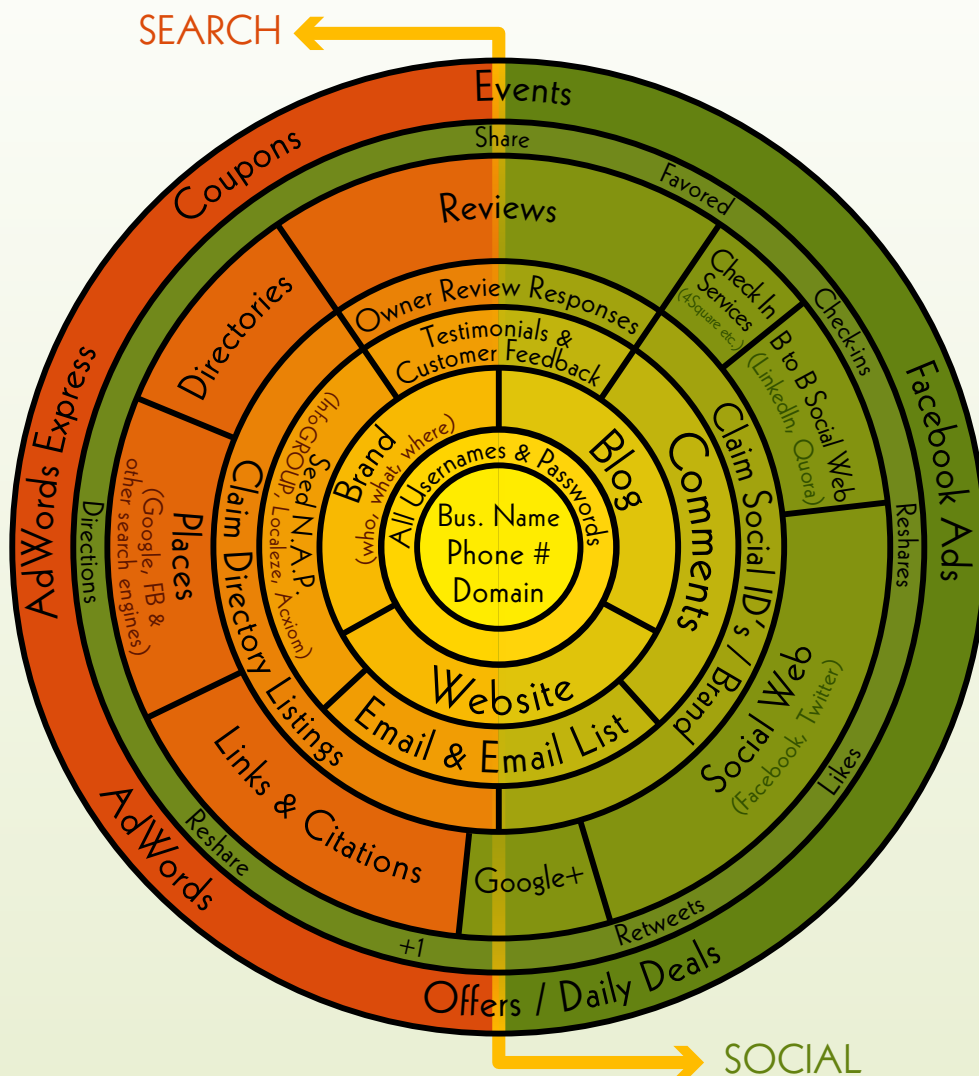


WEB EQUITY

owning your local web presence



OVERVIEW

Online marketing has two goals: engage and convert. The social side of the Internet encourages engagement, the search side focuses more on user intent and ultimately conversion of that intent into a sale.

The many elements of an online presence can build on each and work together for a business. The process is best done in an environment with more control rather than less. Because

of the changing nature of the Internet, a SMBs marketing investment should always reinforce and strengthen the elements over which they have the most ownership.

Can a business get by without a website by using only social media? It may be possible, but it fails to recognize that a SMBs presence on other's sites can change or disappear through no fault of their own. Like any

investment, the more control the SMB has, the better it will serve the company interests.

The services in the outer rings of this graphic should be used to reinforce those services of the inner rings where they can best nurture a business's marketing investment. If you think of these tools as investment, all equity should reinforce and build on the core.

THE IDEAS EXPRESSED HERE ARE MY OWN.

THANK YOU TO DAVID MIHM, MATT MCGEE, MARY BOWLING & LISA BARONE WHO HELPED INFORM AND INSPIRE MY THINKING.



EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Business Name, Phone #, & Domain Name

A business name, a phone number and a domain that NEVER change are at the core of an SMB's online identity. Name, phone and domain; these elements are the glue that allows for both branding, and for the value of that branding to come back to the business. Pick them well and make every effort to retain them forever. If you have had to change them over the past then you need to spend some time understanding how this information appears on the Internet. It is easy to place information on the web but not see easy to the wrong information off.

All Usernames & Passwords

All too frequently, SMBs neglect to manage the very keys to access the equity that they create across the Internet. Misplace them and entrance is barred. It seems self evident, yet frequently forgotten: Keep track of all your passwords in a secure manner. If using an outside service make access to the user names/pwds a key part of the service agreement.

Website

Provides a focal point for others to link to and is the key to conversion. Managing this central online presence allows the SMB to not only control the message, but to have meaningful metrics to able to change the content to meet the needs of the site's visitors. It also provides a platform to gather email addresses and other key pieces of information about the business's customers.

Brand

Seth Godin defines a brand as "the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. If the consumer (whether it's a business, a buyer, a voter or a donor) doesn't pay a premium, make a selection or spread the word, then no brand value exists for that consumer". In a more pragmatic sense it is the sum total of who you are, what you do, where and how you do it. It has become a core tenet of Google to favor a "brand" whether local or national in their search results. It should be set and then nurtured.

Testimonials

Are a time-honored way of engaging a customer in the activities of a business. Repurposing this content online on the SMB website adds credibility and provides recognition to customers.

Customer Feedback

The core of getting great reviews and testimonials is earning them by offering exemplary customer service and results. While most SMBs think that is what they do, they really don't know as they don't measure it. An integral and initial part of any review management process should be some sort of customer feedback survey. This allows the business to track satisfaction over time, improve where need be to avoid bad reviews and branch their better clients into a review management process.

Seed N.A.P.

N.A.P. - the acronym for Name, Address and Phone number. The whole of the local ecosystem uses these basic identifiers to keep track of the business listing and identity. Changing them, for whatever reason, risks confusing the many directories and search engines that are tracking the specific business location. It ultimately risks confusing the customer as well. At the top of the local ecosystem in the US is a small number of list management companies, InfoUSA, Localeze & Axiom, that provide baseline and enhanced data to nearly every directory, search engine, check in and social place service on the internet. Seeding the right information to these upstream data providers is critical for achieving an accurate representation of your business across the local ecosystem.

Email & Email List

Email is a preferred communication tool and is a proven way to stay in touch with prospects and customers. It is low cost but high touch and provides a personal way of marketing to them. This information should be meticulously backed up and preserved offline regardless of where the SMB's basic email function takes place.

Claim Directory Listings

The Local Ecosystem is a fragmented place. Being sure that an SMB listing is accurate at the most prominent directories allows the business to leverage the top notch SEO of the directory for additional exposure and reinforces the prominence of the SMB listing in Google.

Directories

Local is still a fragmented environment with new and older directory based services offering more social elements like reviews, check-ins and deals to retain and attract readers. The SMBs presence there captures some eyeballs and also reinforces your presence elsewhere on the web.

Places

The major search engines view the SMB Place page as search engine property, not the property of the business. Google, for example, will surface any information about the business on the Places Page that Google thinks is relevant to the searcher such (i.e. a competing business). The SMB needs to enhance this content with the understanding that the reader should be encouraged to call, come to their location or visit their website. Only then do they become the SMB's customer and not Google's reader.

Citations & Links

These are effectively the votes upon which the search engines decide the prominence and rank of a business. They are the key element in any long-term marketing program to increase the visibility of the business's website and blog. If a URL or phone number changes, the equity value of citations and links can be dissipated.

Blog

A platform to set the record straight and establish authority is a key to proactive reputation management. A blog should be located at the same location as the domain. Building a blog on a third party platform, while easy, builds link equity for the 3rd party and not the SMB. Blog entries allow the SMB to build out relevant content to attract links, but more importantly encourages the community and the conversation to take place close to home.

Blog Comments

Blog readers can enhance and improve on your content. These comments can explore the depth and engagement of the blog writing. Blog commenter's take ownership in helping convey key messages.

Owner Review Responses

The way in which the SMB responds to reviews, particularly negative reviews, can either build or destroy online equity. It is important for the SMB to remember that their response is for future prospects as much as it is for the current, perhaps angry, customer.

Claim Social ID's & Brand

Even if a business does not have time to actively manage the many social sites, the SMB should minimally claim their brand to prevent squatting.

Reviews

Have both search and social elements. They are often a search -ranking factor and provide credibility for the business at an important juncture in the consumer purchase cycle. Reviews also allow existing clients to engage on behalf of the business by highlighting the business's positives, but they are persistent and outside an SMB's direct control.

Check In Services

A social tool that can increase visitor loyalty and provide a direct way of communicating offers and deals.

Business to Business Social Web

Are a great place to build business relationships and perception of expertise. But like any social site, change can lead to loss of control and loss of equity. Don't put all of your eggs in the social basket.

Social Web

Can be used to engage both existing and new clients, build relationships and provide exposure. It is an opportunity to instill confidence and trust. Like MySpace and AOL, these properties can change course or go away. The SMB then loses not only control, but also any equity developed. The Social Web is best used to bring clients back to the SMB site or blog.

Likes, Shares, Retweets

The social and search sides of the web are merging with the content and sharing sides of the web. Making it easy for your customers/followers to reshare you content at one of the many social sites is a way of amplifying your message. These social activities are impacting the visibility of your business in both search and the social environment.

Events, Facebook Ads, Daily Deals / Coupons, Ad Words, Boost, Tags

Can be used to highlight a business to drive engagement, traffic and conversions. They can compliment search and social efforts by exposing your short-term promotions and longer term marketing efforts to new audiences.

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