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The Top 5 Local Online Marketing Mistakes
for the Home Improvement Industry…
And How to Avoid Them

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Introduction

The goal of every local marketing initiative – and the goal of this guide – is to help you generate jobs for your contracting or home improvement business. The challenges and solutions discussed in this guide come from a proven track record of experience in guiding contractor marketing strategies. The Top 5 Local Online Marketing Mistakes was created to help you avoid common local marketing pitfalls and to shed light on new tactics and strategies that can make a positive impact on your business.

You may already be considering a variety of online programs to drive new clients to your businesses. With those in mind, here are the top 5 local online marketing mistakes for the home improvement industry…

#5 – Trying to Build a Website on Your Own

Your website is an important piece of your business's local marketing efforts – today's customers expect that you'll have one. It can't just have a nice design, some photos and list your services. Your website needs to do one thing well –

convince visitors that you are the best contractor for their needs. Many small business owners create a website that they think is well designed or tell a friend how they want it to look. It may feel like an easy and fun project that requires a little time and effort, but it is as critical as any aspect of marketing your business in order to build trust and awareness. Just because it seems easy, it doesn't make it so.

It's a science

Enticing a website visitor to call your business is quite literally a science – something easily done incorrectly. Every word and image plays an important role and requires a specific skill set not commonly found by your average web savvy or creative individual. Here are few common website design pitfalls to avoid:

• Not making it clear what you want the visitor to do (i.e. request a free estimate)

• Not using web friendly copy – too much, brochure style

• Not satisfying various types of visitors (i.e. need, income level, etc.)

• Not optimizing your website based on customer feedback, new services and usage data

What can you do to avoid the #5 local marketing mistake?

We know it's hard to resist using the free web design software that comes with your computer, ready-made site templates or your tech-savvy niece or nephew to build your website. Resist the urge!

On the Internet, people are easily distracted and are always one click away from visiting your competition. Every choice made with regard to headlines, buttons, photography and colors can drastically alter its effectiveness. Help is available in the way of online marketing service providers that can ensure you're guiding as many people as possible toward calling or emailing your business. Unfortunately, most site-building tools and family members don't know how to create a site that does this, robbing you of customers that could have been yours.

#4 – Creating a Site No One Visits

So, you spent lots of money and time creating the perfect website for your business, but no potential customers ever visit! And after all, it's these people that you want learning about your business and coming to your site. If they do, it's likely they will contact you to learn more and become your customer.

When publishing a website, a common misconception is that people will just show up ("If you build it, they will come!"). Unlike a traditional storefront – where you can receive walk-in traffic – over 100 million other websites are competing for many of the same site visitors you are. Unless you take action to drive targeted traffic, it's possible that the only qualified visitor to your site will be you.

What can you do to avoid the #4 local marketing mistake?

Online marketing could be your answer. Today, better than 70% of people use search engines to find local services and 54% say they substitute the use of a phone book with a search engine. This audience also tends to be more affluent.

Search engines are the only form of advertising where a potential customer tells you exactly what they're looking for – giving you the opportunity to satisfy their needs immediately. Not only do search engines drive considerable website traffic, but virtually every search-based visitor is looking to buy your particular product or service! What could be better?

Given the large percentage of people going online to find local businesses, you might think that a huge percentage of the $100 billion businesses spend on local marketing would go toward online advertising. In actuality, only 3% of local marketing budgets are spent on online, but this number is growing rapidly – at a rate of over 30% a year as local businesses realize that no other channel delivers the measurable return that online advertising offers. So now is the time to take the initiative and start advertising online before your competition does.

Focus on your business

You have a business to run and less energy to focus on decoding the mysterious jargon of Internet advertising; terms like CPC, CPA, max bid, exact match, broad match or rich media. Unlike national advertisers who can hire and pay a team of skilled marketers to guide them through the online world, you as a contractor need

a solution that is more cost-effective.

Fortunately, experts in the field of online marketing have begun offering unique services to local businesses like yours. This takes the burden off of your shoulders and provides you with access to a virtually limitless source of potential customers for your business.

#3 – Not Knowing if Your Marketing is Really Working

Wait – you are already marketing your business? Maybe you ran an ad in the Yellow Pages, handed out brochures or took a chance by sponsoring a local event. That's great, but you have to ask yourself a difficult question: do you know how many people visited your site, called or emailed you as a direct result of these marketing programs.

If you're having trouble answering this question, you're not alone – most contractors can't either. Of course, your marketing budget can be wasted if you don't know the number of leads or customers it's generating. Larger businesses have also shifted more of their marketing budgets online for that very reason: traditional media like print, television and radio are far more difficult to track than their online counterparts.

What can you do to avoid the #3 local marketing mistake?

There are many different techniques you can use to monitor the performance of your local advertising. You could use a different phone number in each ad, set up multiple web pages and track "visits", or ask people how they heard about you. These methods work, but take considerable effort to coordinate and won't give you the confidence to answer questions like:

• Should I continue spending money on this marketing activity?
• Will it scale? If a marketing activity worked well on a small level, will it be even more successful if I invest more in it?
• Was it profitable? After accounting for fixed costs plus the price of advertising, did the amount of additional revenue earned add to my bottom line?

Again, beyond its effectiveness at driving qualified traffic to your business, the

great thing about online marketing is that everything is measurable. The best way to avoid failure is to make sure that you have a system in place to track the source of all website traffic, calls and emails. You'll also want to put this information to good use by avoiding the advertising methods that are not cost effective and potentially spending more on those that are. Ideally, these refinements should just happen automatically while you are busy serving an increased customer base!

#2 - Using Directory Services

Another marketing option that contractors usually consider are directory services that charge for leads. On the surface, it sounds like directories have the potential to reduce the level of effort and costs associated with bringing in new customers. However, here are some insights into directory services you should know before paying that enrollment fee.

Avoiding 3rd parties and direct competition

Directory services need to drive a significant amount of traffic to their websites in order to satisfy the thousands of small businesses that have paid an enrollment fee to be listed there. How do they generate traffic for businesses like yours?

Most advertise their "Comparison Services" via search engines, enticing consumers shopping for multiple quotes and the best possible deal to "click-through," provide personal information and a description of their needs. The directory service then typically sends this "lead" to five or more contractors like you – all of whom pay a fee to the directory service for the same customer information. In the end, whichever business closes the sale ends up being the sole beneficiary. The downsides to directories are many:

• You still have to pay for the lead even if you can't take the job due to scheduling conflicts or a shortage of resources, or if you never get in contact with the prospect

• If you aren't able to respond quickly, the odds of winning the business decrease significantly

• The customer looking for your services is more likely to negotiate on price due to abundance of quotes they are receiving

• Consumers are often annoyed by being called by far more contractors than they bargained for when they submitted their information

The big winner is the directory service that ends up with five or more payments in return for providing a single referral!

What can you do to avoid the #2 local marketing mistake?

You can take control of your marketing by promoting your services directly to your best prospects on the most popular search engines like Google, Yahoo! and MSN. That way you can avoid using third-party directories and competing head-to-head for projects, and instead direct interested parties to your business's website – ideally, one that has been optimized to convert visits into inbound phone calls and customers.

#1 – Not Turning Calls Into Sales Effectively

Generating qualified inquiries to your business will get you close to success, but you or your staff will need to take it the last mile and close the sale. As you know, managing dozens of leads, following up and scheduling can be a challenge. However, when it comes to getting a return on investment for your marketing activities, sales effectiveness is critical.

Missed calls are missed opportunities

To some degree, missed calls are inevitable in any business. But it's a sure-fire way to drive potential customers away – most likely, to your competitors. If you can't answer, you have to think about a solution to help you manage all of your business inquires, including phone calls and emails, to ensure you are getting the biggest bang for your marketing buck.

Another reason local businesses don't answer the phone is that prospects may be calling the wrong number. How's this possible?   It may be that your customers are searching in an online or offline directory that hasn't been updated, or are referring to a brochure that carries your old phone number. Either way, if they

can't reach you, you're missing out on a potential sale. In a down market, when every sale counts, you have to control what prospects see and have the ability to make changes to your contact information quickly and easily.

Don't let your leads manage you

It's a great problem to have until you have it. The problem, of course, is having to juggle and respond to so many leads that it becomes difficult to track and ensure the proper follow-through with all of them. There are several reasons this could happen:

• Instead of pacing your marketing efforts, you launch one large campaign causing a rush of activity

• No tools are in place to help manage your incoming leads and ensure timely follow-up

• You are not recording your calls to track your conversations with customers or prospects

• A system is not in place to aggregate leads from multiple sources such as web forms and phone calls

• Your receptionist is not trained or evaluated for his/her ability to further sell prospects on the benefits of your services

What can you do to avoid the #1 local marketing mistake?

Now is the time for you to upgrade your sales process and control how your potential customers are contacting you. Because with a lead management system in place – a way to capture and prioritize incoming leads, you have the opportunity to get a leg up on the competition.

It's easy to believe your situation is unique, and that no other businesses are experiencing the same challenges, but such issues are common – and simple solutions do exist. Working with experts to build a website that enhances your sales process can empower you update your information in real-time and ensure that you are not missing out on potential customers.

Conclusion

You've made it through all five local marketing mistakes. Hopefully you've thought about how to apply what you've learned to your own business and marketing activities. We've discussed strategies for building and driving traffic to your website, and the importance of measuring campaign performance. We've also explored some of the downsides to working with a directory service, and the upside of managing leads in order to build sales.

Of course, you don't have to go it alone. Companies like Yodle have helped countless small businesses like yours generate calls and customers with an expert turnkey solution.

About Yodle

Yodle provides local businesses with a simple way to get more new business using online advertising – one that ensures you of avoiding all five local marketing mistakes:

#5 – Trying to Build a Website on Your Own: Yodle's websites are built with a single goal in mind – to generate phone calls and customers. Your website will be built by experts in your specific industry and can be up and ready to start receiving traffic in days instead of weeks.

#4 – Creating a Site No One Visits: Using the major search engines like Yahoo, MSN, Google and Superpages.com, Yodle places your business in front of your local customers. We make sure that your advertising shows up in the right place, at the right time, across dozens of high-profile local search sites.

#3 – Not Knowing if Your Marketing is Really Working: Yodle provides your business with sophisticated measurement tools to track results and calculate your return on investment.

#2 – Using Directory Services: Unlike directory services that use your hard-earned

dollars to market their comparison services and simply list your business among other companies, Yodle promotes yours only and never sends your leads to a competitor.

#1 – Not Turning Calls into Sales Effectively: With Yodle's industry-leading lead management system, you can actually record and listen to your incoming phone calls. You can use the recordings to review how your staff answers calls, make improvements to your sales process and finally, determine how well you are turning calls into new contracting jobs.

To find out more about how Yodle can help your business, visit us online at www.yodle.com or call us at 877-272-6808.

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