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Unrealistic Expectations

Internet Marketing (IM) won't cure AIDs or make you an instant millionaire. Many people get into Internet marketing with unrealistic expectations that they'd never consider entertaining if it were in some other field. Just because you don't need to go to school for years to get a degree in Internet marketing for you to be able to open an online business doesn't mean that it won't take hard work and commitment to succeed within this arena. Like other business endeavors, it's going to take money and time to get started and the results won't be instantaneous.

Let's take a look at some of the misconceptions that people have about Internet marketing and place them in a more realistic context. Some of these unrealistic expectations include the following:

- **Little To No Work Involved** – This may come about from the idea that there is little physical labor or that you are working in a virtual environment using the power of the Internet. However, as any business owner will tell you, running your own business always takes a lot of work to start and much more work to maintain. If you are getting into IM to make money, consider it a full-time job to start.

- **It's Easy Money** – Making money on the Internet is easier than doing manual labor. However, the number of hours you have to devote to learn the ins and outs is not limited to a 40-hour work week. Can you make easy money? Yes, but often this takes years of steady progress before you realize that dream.

- **Anyone Can Do It** – Anyone can hop online and build a blog, but it's not as simple as writing and attracting an audience. You will want to take the role of learner in this endeavor and seek to upgrade your skills and knowledge to exploit the power of the Internet. It's not a birthright that everyone has just waiting to be put to use. You have to make a conscious decision to work at it and to keep learning.

- **You Can Make Tons Of Money In One Shot** – It may come as a surprise to many people that the "tons of money" actually comes from a number of diverse online ventures. You probably won't make tons of money on just one blog, although that does occasionally happen. Instead, if you concentrate on building multiple income streams from a variety of websites, products, and services, you'll have a much better chance of striking it rich later on.

Not Enough Research Before Starting

If people fall prey to any of the unrealistic expectations we've discussed, the outcome is that they don't spend enough time researching and planning their online activities to make them a success. Instead, they'll think it's just a matter of slapping a website up and putting a shopping cart on it to get orders. That couldn't be the furthest thing from the truth. You have to start by knowing what niches are hot online and how you plan on attracting people to your site. Even if you managed to get a huge traffic stream, do you know enough to convert those visitors into leads or customers? This is where people fail miserably when they could have improved the chances of success simply by taking some extra time upfront to research and learn how to implement a successful online business.

What Is Your Hot Niche?

Typically, people can get carried away with a specific, personal passion that they instantly focus all their energies on marketing it, thinking that customers will be equally enthralled with this topic. That's a poor way to establish a business online, especially with so much information online about what people are actually buying, searching for, or talking about. Why not market something that everyone already has an interest in and that don't need to be convinced to buy?

One thing to remember when working out what niche you want to target is that they can be dependent on world events. Right now, the recession has made some niches more important than others. Finance is always a hot niche, but the influence of the recession means that there is less interest in the stock market and housing and more interest in debt management and consolidation. Or, you might find a sub-niche like "gold mining stocks," which weren't very popular before the recession, but that now have numerous investors flocking to them.

Research Using Online Tools

Use online tools like Google Keyword Analyzer to find out what keywords, and thus niches, are being searched currently. Go to places like Digg.com or Technorati.com to find out what topic is tops on everyone's mind right now. Go to eBay.com or Amazon.com and look through their top sellers. This will give you great ideas on what is hot and easily marketable, even before you take the time to develop a website or open a blog, saving you tons of time and heartache down the road.

Fuzzy Branding

Fuzzy branding can apply to multiple aspects of your online business. It can be as obvious as a bad domain name or it can even be how poorly you've designed the site. It's any fault in your site that is an Internet faux pas that makes it difficult for your visitors to associate your name with the brand of product or service you're offering. Instead, they're left scratching their heads trying to figure out what your site is all about.

Domain Names Are Very Important

After you have your niche in mind, it's time to start getting the elements of your website together. You will have to register a domain name and start to think about the organization and branding of your site. If you are selling fishhooks online, you want to try to include that in your domain name somehow. A good domain name is short, descriptive, and tells the customer in a few words what your business is all about. Obviously, many domain names have already been bought, leaving you less choice on what to name your site. If you must pay someone else for a name, be sure it is a very well branded name that is going to stick with your business for a while.

Is Your Home Page Clear And Concise?

Most people will log into your top-level domain first, meaning the home page. If this is cluttered with bright fonts, a disorganized menu, a bizarre or confusing design, and copy that doesn't equate to your business, you are going to have a number of people leaving as quickly as they showed up. The idea is to get people interested in your site enough to browse it some more. Make your home page as clear, concise, and descriptive as possible.

The look and feel of the website should also reflect the brand or image you are trying to associate with your business. An office supply website will look more professional, with muted colors in blue, gray, or black, and be highly organized. A website for web scooters might try to attract a younger, funnier crowd by providing colorful snapshots of scooters and a fun domain name.

Pay Attention To Content

Next comes content. In order for people to find your site, your content should be optimized for major search engines, using Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques. It should also be written with an eye for headlines, white space, lists, and other sales copy techniques that make it easy for someone visiting to briefly scan your copy and to pick up the most salient points about your products and services.

Poor Traffic Streams

The site is now up and you've done your research to optimize it for success, but you've noticed that it isn't getting enough traffic. Why is that? Many Internet marketers think that putting up a fantastic website is all that you have to do to attract traffic. There are millions of people on the Internet, so it seems a fair assessment that getting a thousand eyeballs a month is not a big deal. Actually, the most successful Internet marketers adopt promotional strategies to maximize their traffic streams and to make their websites a success.

The main way to increase traffic is to find sites that already have a large audience and to siphon off some of those people back to your site. There may be rules about what types of links you can post and how to do this, but it's basically the same process.

Some Strategies To Increase Traffic

Here are a few such strategies that you can implement to promote your website and to increase your traffic month after month:

- **Article Marketing** – Create free articles and submit them to article directories. They allow you to add a resource box with a couple of links back to your website. Try to keep the articles to topics within your niche to only attract people who might have an interest in buying your products.

- **Commenting On Blogs** – Another great way to bring streams of traffic back is to find some very popular blogs and comment on related topics to your niche. Add a link back to your site, and people who may find your comment useful will surely click on the link back to your site to find out more about you.

- **Joining Forums And Groups** – There are numerous groups online with large audiences, like Yahoo! or Google Groups. Look through the different categories and find some relevant to your market niche, then join them. Participate in the ongoing online discussions and add a signature to your postings with a link back to your site.

- **Social Networking** – Social networks like Twitter.com, Facebook.com, or LinkedIn offer numerous opportunities to meet new people and add status updates about your online activities. Include a link and make it interesting so that you can create relationships that will increase your bottom line.

Inability To Convert Traffic To Customers

Even if you manage to attract gobs of traffic, the real goal of any Internet marketer is to sell or make money. You have to monetize that traffic in order to achieve your dreams of success. If you aren't aware of the strategies to convert traffic to customers, you will let many valuable opportunities pass you by. Worse, you will feel as if you are working your tail off for few rewards. Always keep in mind that it isn't enough just to have a popular site; that site has to produce income, one way or another.

Some of the fault may lie in poor website design, like poor advertisement placement or inefficient payment processors. However, there are other ways that people fail to plan to convert traffic to customers. They don't plan ways to make money with the site and assume that only putting out a few products will create income. This is one way to make money, but not the only way.

Features To Monetize Your Traffic Stream

- **Copy That Sells –** When you advertise a product or service, add in features in the copy that make the deal hard to pass up. By that, it's important to get into the mind of the customer. Try to create a sense that they might lose out if they don't take you up on your offer right away. You can do this offering for a limited time or in limited quantities of a particular product.

- **Incentives -** Can you persuade them to sign up by offering a free ebook in exchange for subscribing to a free trial membership? Once the trial is over, you'll bill their credit card. Will you get a better conversion rate if you give new subscribers coupons off of your products and services?

- **Affiliate Programs –** Affiliate programs work like incentives to allow others to sell your products and make a commission on them. This will help you by getting other people to do some marketing work for you while you create a fatter paycheck.

- **Advertising –** There are all sorts of advertisements that you can implement to increase the chances of creating income with your website copy. They can be in text advertising, links to other people's affiliate offers, or even Google AdWords campaigns. Partner with other people who might be looking for a larger audience in exchange for paying for advertising on your site.

Not Planning Ahead For Sales

The whole point of Internet marketing is to sell online. It may come as a surprise then to find out that many Internet marketers fail to plan their sales funnel ahead of time. Doing things by the seat of your pants may work to make a few sales here and there, but to really exploit the power of the Internet and make a living doing Internet marketing, you must plan ahead for sales using a carefully thought out sales funnel.

The Mouth Of Your Sales Funnel

Your sales plan should include different ways to harvest an email address from your visitors. This puts them into the mouth of your sales funnel where you can market to them again later on. Without this initial contact information, later plans won't generate sufficient sales. Always start by getting the contact information and permission to contact that person online.

A Whirlwind Of Sales Activity Down Your Funnel

A well-planned sales campaign keeps track of people visiting and what they are buying. It has several email campaigns going at the same time, depending on what group a customer happens to land in demographically. One email list may be marketing to people who have yet to buy anything, while another may be marketing to people who are your top buyers. Whatever your approach, you should have definite categories or demographics of visitors and planned sales campaigns directed at just that group.

One way to do this is to put customers into groups based on the amount of money they tend to spend. Small spenders might be marketed with low cost product lines, while big spenders are marketed with bigger packages and items. If someone starts out small and suddenly buys a large package from you, you will want to have a system in place that shifts them from the small spenders' campaign to the big spenders' campaign immediately. That way, you don't lose the opportunity to market to people or to send them two offers, one from a big spenders' list and another from a small spenders' list.

Automate Email Campaigns Carefully

Take advantage of multiple online tools and services to keep track of your email sales campaign. A good service that many Internet marketers use is AWeber.com. This allows a third party to manage your email sales campaigns, giving you the opportunity to spend more time planning roll-outs and to feature promotions.

Lack Of Automation Tools And Services

At first, the temptation for most Internet marketers is to do everything manually to save money. This will quickly become unmanageable as your lists get bigger and your product line becomes more varied. Add a few extra sites to manage multiple income streams, and you can quickly become confused or overburdened with the multiple minute details of operating several Internet commerce sites. The solution is to start automating things before your business gets too unwieldy and you lose customers.

Tools Versus Services

Automation can be done via tools or services. The AWeber.com site offers a service to manage multiple email campaigns. This is done by a third party, and there are some advantages to this approach. You don't have to install any special tools on your site, and everything is managed by someone else. The disadvantage is that you pay for the service monthly and you are subject to their terms and conditions. If that is still cheaper than installing your own tools, then there's no reason not to use a service versus a tool. However, typically, installing the tools on your own site will give you far more control and be less expensive in the long run.

Things You Want To Automate

The email campaigns are definitely an example of an online business activity that you want to automate. Other types of functions might be helpdesk activity, where the first line of response could be an FAQ or a search box that is specifically set up to look through help content to aid a person in figuring out their own problems.

Don't forget that other tools exist to centralize your entire business activities, regardless of how many sites you own. This can help you to keep track of what is selling or not across multiple sites. It will also help with affiliate programs that might be available on different sites too.

Speaking of affiliate programs, that's a perfect example of scripts and software programs that you can install on your website versus using a service. You can go to third-party sites like ClickBank.com or CJ.com and just use their programs to add an affiliate site. The cost though can be very high for someone starting up. If you plan on making an affiliate program an integral part of your sales strategy online, the sooner you get that functionality up and running on your sites, the more you will save money.

Failure To Track And Test Results

After a failure to plan ahead for sales, one of the biggest faults that young Internet marketers tend to fall into is a failure of tracking and testing results. They may not even be aware that there are techniques, like split testing, that can help them to define why one sales campaign works better than another. It might even be due to something simple, like a different headline in the sales copy that can generate 50% more sales, but having done no split testing, they will never figure that out. It's very important to continually track and test the results of different sales campaigns and strategies to see which ones work for you and which ones yield poor results.

Email Results Tracking

This can be especially true for Internet marketers that choose to go it alone and not automate with tools and services that provide some sort of feedback on the efficacy of a campaign. For email services, you want someone who can give you open rates and click-through rates on the email campaigns that you send out. If you have low open rates, you will know that the hooks and headlines are potentially uninteresting. If you have low click-through rates, you can concentrate on increasing the immediacy of the promotion to add a sense of urgency to your sales promotions. There are a number of different things that can be tracked to give you feedback on how you are doing, even before you make a sale.

Tracking Across Multiple Sites

Other types of functionality that need to be tracked are the results of your affiliate campaigns and sales promotions. If you are putting up multiple sites (as you should be), this type of tracking can be difficult to compare across websites. Try to centralize the operations of your sites so that you can get a

good view of what techniques are more effective than others, regardless of the site you are on.

Do More Of What Works

It may seem to get boring, but a general rule is not to change a sales campaign until sales start to drop off. If a campaign is creating a lot of buzz and excitement amongst your visitors, it's only going to lose you money to cut it short before demand peaks out. On the other hand, you can increase demand by putting up short one-time offers and limited quantity offers. If you find that these types of offers work best, have these types of offers more often to bring in more money.

Failure To Meet And Exceed Customer Expectations

It's not enough to just give people a good deal these days. It has to be a great deal that is perceived to be of such great value that it would be a shame if they lost out on the opportunity to buy. One of the ways to create value packages like this is to understand your customer's needs and then exceed their expectations on what they think they can get for their money. This is a strategy that is becoming necessary as the recession wears away people's discretionary income and people are buying based on perceived value.

The Value Package

If your customer expects to get one ebook for a set price on some topic of interest to them, and instead you offer them an ebook, an online video tutorial, and some short reports, all for just a little more, you will have created the perception of a high value package. That's because you not only understood what your customer wanted, but you met and exceeded their expectations on what they thought they could get for their money.

Other Ways To Create High Value

Your product line isn't the only place where you can project an image of high value. Your business processes and customer service will also be important to meet and exceed customer expectations. If you have someone who buys a piece of software from you and then can't get it installed, no matter what deal they got, they won't be happy if they can't get someone to help them trouble-shoot the installation. Keep in mind that you are going to have to add some services and business processes that keeps the customer in contact

with you when they need you so that you can continue to have a great online business reputation.

Solicit Feedback And Act On It

There's no way you can think of everything that a customer might need or demand. That's why you want to add some functionality to your site that allows customers to submit feedback about their experience buying from your site. You should also have a system in place that categorizes and responds to these issues, whether good or bad, so that the customer doesn't feel like they're being ignored. If you listen carefully to what your customers tell you, you can generate ideas for future products or business improvements that help you to keep exceeding customer expectations.

Poor Backup Systems

If your site goes down, do you have a mirror site or backup strategy to get back up as quickly as possible? If the answer is no, then as Murphy's Law suggests, this will happen at the worst possible time – mostly when you are rolling out one of your hottest, time-sensitive campaigns for the entire year. The impact will be immediately felt in lost sales. If you continue to have problems like this, you will also lose customers who will judge your online business based on the fact that you offer spotty service.

Always Back Things Up

It sounds cliché, but this advice is often ignored at the peril of the online business owner. How many Internet marketers have busted their butts to put up large amounts of keyword rich content, sales promotions, and image-laden pages only to have the entire site crash afterwards? If the site is not backed up online, they will have lost months of work, lots of sales, and a few customers too. Always back things up.

Have Redundant Systems

Content and sites are the only systems that need to be redundant. Payment processors are a typical example where an online business only offers one payment gateway, like PayPal, only to have it experience some problem that makes a sale unable to be closed out. If you offer multiple payment processors, if one goes down, another may be able to step in and handle the transaction.

The same is true of your affiliate offers. Every offer is not going to be around forever. If you are using affiliate offers and marketing them on your site or

within the content of your infoproducts, it's important to plan a redundant offer in case the other offer disappears. The way to do this is to have a library of offers in an Excel spreadsheet or some other digital document. When you link to an offer, link to a redirect page that takes the person to the actual affiliate offer. If an offer changes, is exposed as fraudulent, or expires, you don't have to go back and change links in any content on your site or within your infoproducts. Instead, you will change the redirect page to a new affiliate offer and log that information into your spreadsheet. This way, you don't lose money from bad links and you keep your customers happy. They won't even notice that an old link is broken since the entire process is automated behind the scenes.

That's basically what you're hoping to achieve with redundant systems: a flawless execution of business processes, no matter what mishap might happen.