

5 Free Ways to Jumpstart your Web Traffic

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Friday, 24 August 2007

So you have your own website. Congratulations. Now, what exactly are you doing to get people to visit your site? Just like a brick and mortar storefront or an office suite in the commerce park, your website isn't just going to become a popular hangout spot for clients and prospective customers. You've got to tell everyone about it!

When you open a restaurant, you put up signs, you take out a newspaper ad, you buy space in the yellow pages, you turn on the lights, you open the door, you tell everyone you meet about your new business. Your website deserves the same treatment. If you fail to promote your site, you've basically just spent a thousand dollars or more on a standard lot in cyberspace with no roads in and no roads out. You need to get the word out on your new company website, and here's the best part... it doesn't have to cost anything at all, if you're willing to take the time and make the effort to do it yourself.

So...how does a small business owner jumpstart his or her website? You may consider hiring a professional to do it for you. Your web design and development firm built your site for visitors, but probably did not include promotion along with it. A good ad agency will raise the topic when quoting on your site. An experienced marketer knows it's always best to group your promotions and cross-sell at every opportunity and should have suggested handling your web traffic. But in case they missed the boat, you can still contact a full-service ad agency to help. Of course, that's not the FREE methods mentioned in the title of this piece, so for those who'd like to take a shot at handling it themselves, this article tells you 5 FREE steps to jumpstarting your web traffic:

1. Connect the Cables
2. Start the Engine
3. Get it Running
4. Give it Some Gas
5. Put it in Drive

Everyone who's ever owned a car long enough to pay off the loan knows that an indispensable part of the trunk contents is a set of jumper cables (the other is a gallon of water). You never know when you'll be stuck somewhere with a car that just won't get going. Same with your website. It's there, but it's going nowhere unless you first get it connected to something that's already running or capable of running. Whether you already have established business or not, you've got to connect your website to every promotional piece you create. This means adding your web address to:

- company stationery (business cards, letterhead, envelopes, invoices, quote sheets, receipts)
- business signage (windows, counter displays, and company vehicles)
- ads (yellow pages, newspapers, and local magazines)
- everything else (boxes, bags, cartons, promotional pieces and more)

Everything that gets your name and phone number, gets your URL (web address). This shouldn't cost you anything if you wait until it's time to reprint. But, if you want to get started today, you'll need to redesign and reprint new promotional pieces to add your site. Since jumpstarting requires the cables be connected, it's a great way to get your site visited sooner rather than later.

It's important not to lose track of one key point, there are 2 sets of clamps on a set of jumper cables. You must make sure your website is sending the right message back to visitors. It must look and feel like your existing promotional pieces. Your brand identity is dependent upon it. And your website must clearly identify who you are, where you are and what you do. Your contact information is as critical online as it is on your business cards. Make sure the electrical current is flowing freely between both vehicles if you're ever going to get rolling!

Okay. So your cables are connected, and now it's time to start the other engine. The most important engine on the internet is the search engine. You want to become very friendly with Mr. Search Engine – because he knows lots and lots of people. You want his friends to be your friends. Search engines, and their brothers, Directories are the

traffic cops of the internet. They basically tell people where to find the files and pages they're looking for out of billions of documents on the world wide web. So...you can't have them over for dinner, but...you can get them to know about you by sending them an invitation to visit your site.

Search engines use robots and spiders to crawl all over the web and take inventory of the files and their content, it's a computerized process. You can wait weeks to be crawled, or you can help the process along by submitting your URL to the search engines directly. Well over 80% of internet users take their first step via a search engine like Google, AltaVista, or HotBot.

Directories like Yahoo, employ humans to compile lists of websites and web pages from the millions available online at any given time. You can also help the directories find you by submitting your site to the proper subdirectory inside these engines. Directories will "consider" your site on a free submission. If you want a guarantee, you'll have to pay for it.

So, as soon as your website is complete and live, SUBMIT. List your site on as many FREE (there it is again) engines as you can find. Check out www.directoryguide.com for a list. You should resubmit your site every few months especially if you have had content changes, page additions or other major changes to your website. Make sure you submit to the "local" yellow pages and white pages online too. Most offer free listings for businesses.

If you haven't already done so, confirm that your web developer added page titles and keywords to your website. If you aren't using metadata like this, you need to. Search engines utilize the keywords and compare them to your content. They return your title and page descriptions in search results. Don't expect the best ranking without metadata, so call on a pro to get your pages optimized. Consider your keywords carefully. They will be ones that are basic to your business or industry. Put the most important words and phrases first in the list.

Search engines like the popular sites. So, another way to make your site attractive to the search engines is to have lots of friends. The way to gain popularity is to have lots of good websites linking to your website. When a search engine returns results, they rank the pages based on relevancy and popularity. Your goal is to always be in the top five or ten listings returned on a search. Popularity pays off in ranking your site higher than other less noticeable sites (thousands of them!).

Getting popular doesn't have to mean spending money. Sure you could spend thousands and thousands on ads to get onto the first page of search results (basically buying your friends), but why? If you can get your site linked up, you'll get the engines fired up about you. You'll find more info in steps 4 and 5 below.

Step 3 – Get it Running. Once the engine starts up, you need to let it run for a while to get the power flowing to your site. While it's idling out in cyberspace, run off with promote your site via email. There are two email tactics you need to think about. The first is your email signature, the second is email marketing.

Your signature is unique, and your unique web address is as important as your name and phone number in the closing of every email you send out (business and personal). You and your employees must include your company's digital signature. It should include a clickable link to your URL. This form of viral marketing is both FREE, and easy. Your email software will have a place to format your digital signature. Find it and use it.

Email marketing is one of the most effective tools to market your website and to showcase products and services. Permission-based email can be extremely targeted by including only those people who've expressed an interest in your business, product or industry. By building and maintaining your own house list, you ensure you're compliance with anti-spam laws. There are also reputable list brokers who can help you choose a list of email addresses to prospect to with an offer, coupon, or other introductory special. Of course, list rental isn't free, but you can certainly start building a list of your own with friends, family and current customers. You can ask for email addresses and permission to send on every inquiry your company receives both online and off. Build your list, keep it clean and offer an easy way for people to unsubscribe or opt out. Most important, send relevant and targeted content, a clear call to action, and pay close attention to your subject line. You want your mail to be opened, read, and acted upon. Armed with this info, you can easily create simple text emails for FREE!

Done correctly, email marketing will become an extremely powerful tool for sales and customer service. When you're ready to make your email campaigns even more diverse, in-depth and creative, call on a professional marketer. But whether you keep it simple by doing it yourself, or hire someone for the task, don't let this one get by you.

Pushing down the pedal helps boost the power. Step 4 of our FREE Steps to Jumpstarting your Web Traffic involves content. Quality content makes the difference between visited and forgotten. Hopefully, when you created your website, you included the kind of useful information web surfers are looking for. Your content is what makes your website

important, it's what keeps people coming back, and it's what helps you rank in the search engines. Keep your content relevant, current, and easy to navigate. Some examples of content that you should include on your site, and keep updated, include:

- instructions for assembling and using your products
- technical specifications
- maintenance schedules
- warranty and upgrade information
- frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- articles/information bits on your industry, products, or services

You're already an expert in your field, so show it off online! Write hints and tips, articles (like this one!) and more. Post this information on your website, but also, submit it to article and press release websites. These types of directories house hundreds of articles on all different topics. If you can't write, then visit an article site and download some relevant content to use on your website. Here's the bonus: if you write and submit, your bio and website link go with your article. Anyone who wishes to use your content must keep your bio and links intact. BAM! You just added links throughout the world wide web, back to YOUR site! Watch those FREE rankings go up in the search results! Giving your website some gas by filling it up with quality content is step number four in our 5 FREE Steps to Jumpstarting Your Website.

When steps 1-4 are complete, you're ready to turn the key and shift into drive. You're marketing your website on all your promotional material (for free), your site is ranking with the search engines (for free), you're sending regular email messages to customers and growing your list (also for free), and you're keeping your content relevant to both customers and potential customers (again…for free!). So now it's time to take off! Once your site is doing things to help grow your business, it's time to turnover it over with step 5 -- new ideas. If you've started your website for ecommerce, it's time to enhance customer service. If you've begun as info only, it's time to sell or take orders online. If your restaurant started a site just to add its menu, then it's time to take customers in the kitchen, show them what their meal takes, what it's made of, what you're made of. Whatever you do, don't just jumpstart your traffic, then sit back and watch everyone drive past you.

The final step to jumpstarting traffic is really not the end of the road. The internet is different daily. Search engines change their algorithms, new technology is available almost by the minute, consumer tastes and preferences are in a constant state of flux. In this environment, you need to keep your website and marketing tools up to date if you want to stay competitive. Subscribe to free E-zines, newsletters and other information sources that will keep you current on what's new and what's hot. Keep your marketing efforts tuned up and it will always be rush hour on your website.

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