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How The Internet Is Changing The Way Consumers Find Local Businesses
Introduction

When the internet first began to grow in popularity, it was generally thought to be a means of connecting people from around the world, to share data and information, and to improve communication. As these things became second nature, big businesses grabbed onto the notion of the internet and took it to a whole new level. Soon every major corporation had an online presence, and even the most traditional businesses were forced to embrace the new technology. With millions of people on the web every day, and the internet now a trillion dollar industry, it would be foolish not to try and harness this new technology to your advantage.

People used to think that the internet could only really be utilized properly by large companies with huge marketing budgets. In 2000, millions of dollars were spent on both online advertising and offline advertising trying to drive people to certain websites. This was never going to be a particularly viable business model, because the internet simply hadn't grown enough to accommodate such huge spending. Suddenly everything fell apart, and in the wake of the dot com crash, it seemed that even big businesses were going to struggle on the internet.

Over the last few years, however, things have changed dramatically. Technology has improved, the internet has become more popular, and big businesses are now much better placed to harness the power of the internet. It is now the time for a new internet generation to really flourish, that of the small business.

Everyone using the internet these days is familiar with search engines and browses various websites regularly. Because of this, there is less emphasis on being a household name, and as long as you have a strong online presence, someone is going to find your business. As more and more people search for local businesses, rather than major chains, there is clear potential to dramatically increase your business prospects.

There are various ways you can do this, and we'll look at the different marketing strategies that can be used to take your business to the next level. There's a myriad of consumers out there who want to find your product or service, and the internet is the best way for them to find you. If you can build a stronger online presence than your other local competitors, you've won a major battle and can look forward to a profitable future as your business grows exponentially.

Every day, new people discover the internet, and they could be right next door. Instead of only being used by college students and the younger generation, the internet is now a powerful tool to find almost any customer base you could think of.

Building an online presence

Your first port of call when building your online presence will probably be to build a website to showcase your business. All you need is a simple website which will give clear information about the product or service you provide. There's no need to fill you website with pages and pages about the industry your business is part of, because this just isn't interesting to the people visiting your site. The important thing is to appeal to your audience and make sure you answer any questions they may have through the content on your website.

Building your local business website isn't necessarily about breaking the mould, it's about proving to people that your business can be trusted, and the best way to do that is not to fill your website with boring copy and an uninteresting history of your company. If you look at big businesses, they have all recognised that they can't be overly serious with their online presence; they have to appeal to a number of different audiences. Therefore, they've created much more diverse websites that generally speak in a slightly more informal tone, in order to build up rapport and trust.

As we can see from the graph below, building your website can have a fantastic effect on your potential customers.

Action Taken After Finding Local Business Online
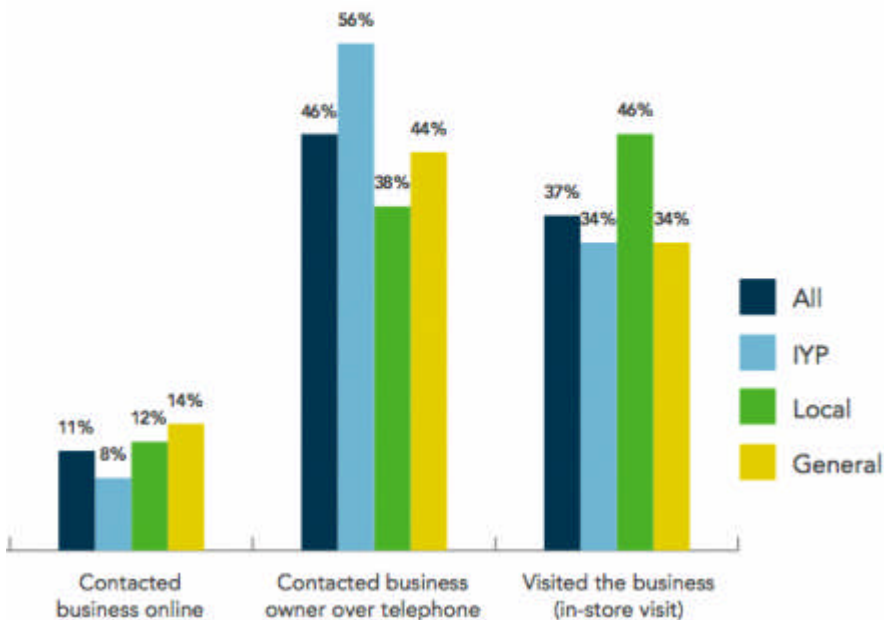
Harnessing the search engines

The most popular way for someone to find a website is by going through a search engine. Google is the most popular, so it's important to target their results more than other search engines. Here are some incredible stats about search engines that you may not know:

- 75% of Americans use search engines on a regular basis.
- 56% of all Americans using one every single day.
- 40% of all search engine searches are for local businesses and services.
- 54% of Americans regularly use the internet instead of the phone book to find local services
- **92% of all local searches will eventually convert into a sale**

The whole search engine industry used to be about very short "keywords" that would lead people to finding the website they were looking for. Everyone used to simply type things like "New York Rea Estate" into a search engine, check out the first few results and then make a decision.

However, these days consumers are becoming much better at searching with Google, so keywords have progressively become longer in order to return more relevant results. For example, instead of just "New York Real Estate" which may give us some good websites for that keyword, we might be looking for something a little more specific.

Therefore, we might type "New York Low Price Apartments". The reason we would do this is because we're fed up searching through websites that don't offer us the chance to see any low price housing, so we're searching using Google rather than simply clicking on various websites.

This sort of mentality has revitalized the world of small businesses online. Instead of just searching for a product or service, people now search for a niche product or service in a particular area. This means that, instead of massive chains dominating the search results, small business websites are flourishing.

Local Internet Marketing is something that requires a great deal of experience and expertise. Without it, you simply aren't going to know how to get your found on the front page of Google when local customers search for your product or service. The competition won't be that fierce considering you will be competing for more specific keywords, but you'll still need to be able to those local consumers to succeed.

With more people moving towards local searches, you're going to need to target your Internet Marketing to specific keywords and areas. If you fail to do this, you'll be competing with the major players in your industry nationally, and it's a battle you almost certainly won't win. The graph below shows the massive increases the local search industry is seeing.

Annual Searches (Billions)

|			
▪ 2005	▪ 2006	▪ 2007	▪ 2008
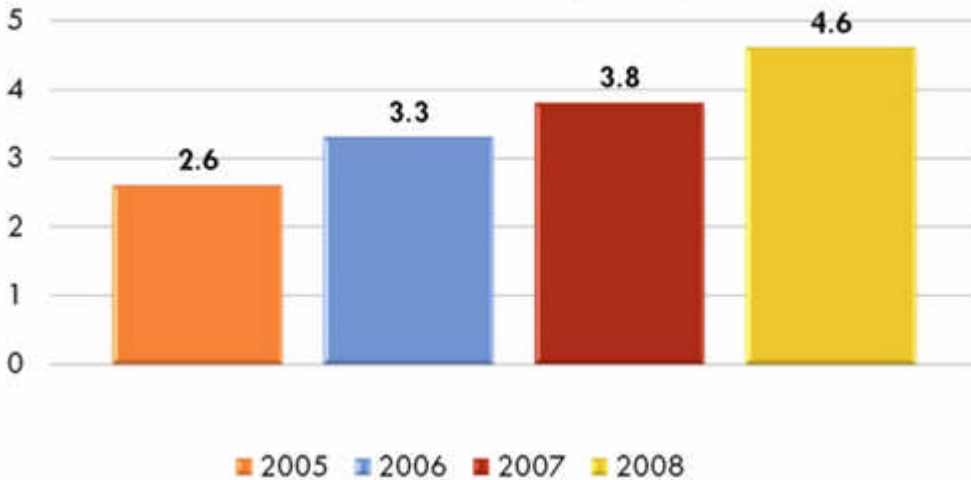
Building a captive audience

When local customers start searching for products or services in their area, they will most likely be very clear of their intentions. They are generally ready to buy. One of the most powerful parts of internet marketing is the ability to build a relationship with someone without ever having spoken to them directly.

By allowing consumers to find in different locations throughout the internet, you can be sure to reach a wide ranging audience, all of whom will be interested in your product or service.

As we can see from the graph below, the internet is an incredibly effective way of selling your product to a potential customer. Never before have businesses been able to communicate so well with their potential customers.

Sales ROI By Medium

Internet: $63
IYP: $55
PYP: $52
Outdoor: $49
NP: $26
Magazines: $20
DM: $12
TV: $11
Radio: $8
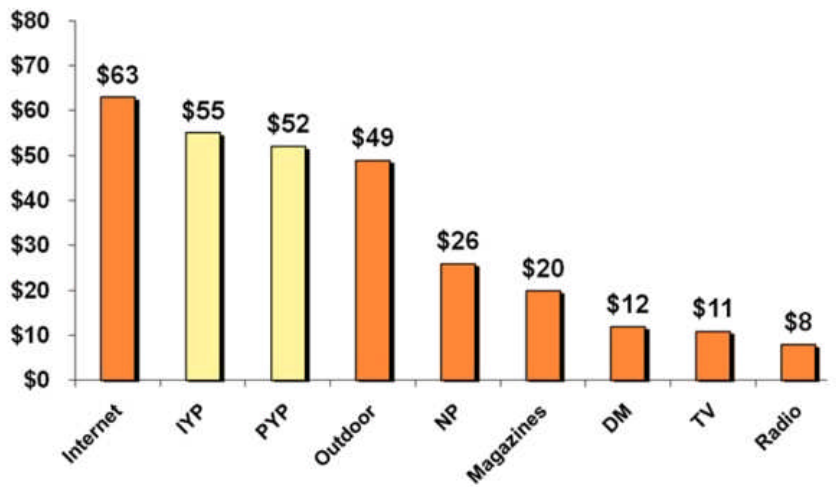
Being found on the internet

People use the internet in very diverse ways, and you can't possibly hope to capture every single person who might be looking for a product like yours. However, you can make it extremely easy for people to find your business by being prominent all over the internet.

With so many different types of content, and various ways of receiving information, there are limitless possibilities for marketing your website on the internet. Whether this is in the form of local business directories, online classifieds or videos about your product posted on popular websites, you're sure to find people who are looking for your product or service.

Internet marketing is essentially about being "found" online by the people who will become customers. They will be looking for what you are selling, and so you have to make it as easy as possible for them to find you. Your business should be all over the internet; in classifieds, directories, search engines, and once this has been done, there'll be a flood of people wanting to do business.

Building links to your business

One of the most important parts of Internet Marketing is listing your business on websites with high levels of traffic that will give you the best opportunity to be seen by local customers, and therefore make plenty of sales.

There are actually local directories on the internet that showcase only businesses in a particular area. These are excellent resources for you to use because they allow your business to be shown in a highly targeted manner. Local directories also tend to be used by people who are struggling to find what they're looking for, so if your site is listed properly in the right categories, then you're bound to entice people towards your business.

Conclusion

As we can see from the graph below, the internet is dominating the way that people find local businesses. The graph shows the breakdown for the primary source of finding local business information:
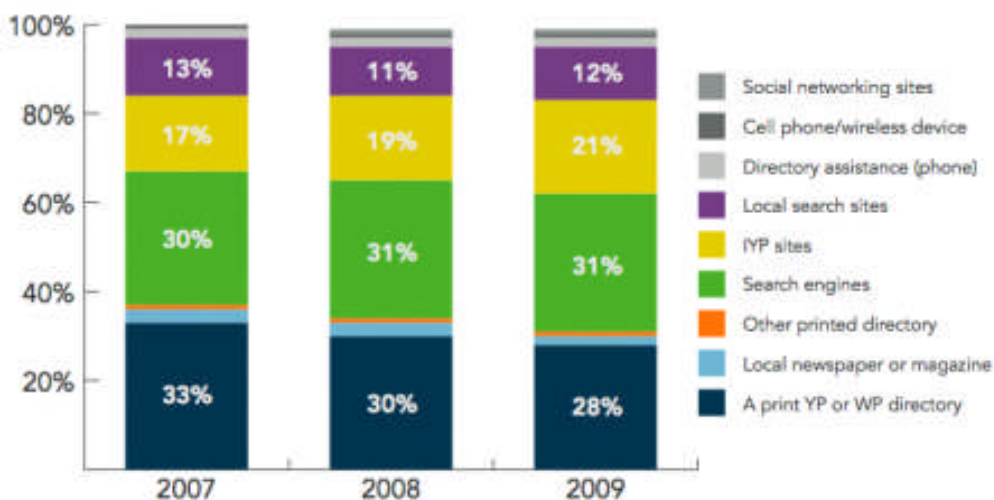
As we've seen throughout this report, the internet is taking over as the most important way to market your business. If you embrace it now, your business will survive and probably flourish even in the most difficult times. All of the data and statistics should tell you everything you need to know, and given that local search has only become truly popular in the last few years; it is likely to grow even more in the future.

There are so many different ways of building up a good online presence that you can't fail to succeed. By putting your business in front of a highly targeted audience, the profits are almost guaranteed.

To put your business in the place that local consumers are looking most contact me at:

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