

## Overview - Bridging the Gap between Tradition and Digital Thinking: White Paper

We are living in a digital economy. It may seem as if it happened suddenly, but changes have been developing progressively over the past few years, and were recently boosted by rapid advancements in smart device technologies. Consumers have changed the way we will engage them going forward by the way they search, shop, and socialize. With each advance in technology, they become attention-challenged, and the competition for their limited attention increases. Many companies are faced with making adjustments to their business models to engage a new generation of consumer. Retaining and gaining loyalty requires keeping pace by adaptation, innovation, and consistency.

This paper is a guideline of basics to begin the process of **Digital Thinking**.

### We will address:

- Developing a Digital Strategy
- Website Changes and Challenges
- Search Marketing
  - Message Distribution - Increasing Your Digital Footprint
  - Organic vs Paid Search

### Developing a Digital Strategy

Simplified...any digital strategy should address the company's presence on the web. The ratio of dollars spent on digital versus traditional marketing is increasing rapidly even though traditional marketing is typically more expensive. Digital strategy begins with developing an understanding of the options related to how your message can and will be found and viewed.

1. The base for all digital strategy begins with the company's **website platform**, design, and content. Careful consideration should be given to message priority, graphic design, navigation, and organization of content.
2. **Social media** and an awareness of its potential impact should be part of any company's overall strategy. Every company's social media options will vary based upon products / services, geographic / demographic presence, resources, and other social factors. Be aware that gaining significant and measurable results from social media comes at a cost.
3. Utilizing social sharing tools in website content is an effective and inexpensive way to expand **message distribution**. Press release and news distribution effectiveness has changed, but can still be a valuable tool for message distribution. Press /news releases have to be properly optimized for search to be most effective.

4. Video production and distribution via YouTube, Vimeo, and other video-friendly social platforms aid in increasing your ***digital footprint***. Any opportunity to gain additional links to your property from the search engines via other powerful websites should be considered.

5. Creating a strategy based on being found ***organically*** through good website practices and website content should be a priority. ***Paid search*** options should be a consideration, but preferably not until a strong organic foundation has been established.

### **Website Changes and Challenges**

Search algorithms have gradually been modified to reward content-rich sites that follow good (white hat) web practices, and to ding those that do not. Interface / device technology has further prompted design basics. Unfortunately, most sites developed prior to the end of 2013 are deemed obsolete by many users.

1. In order to achieve rank among other related sites, regular content creation with researched and specific guidelines is necessary. Some previously utilized web practices may actually create negative results and (if previously employed) should be carefully analyzed immediately.
2. Keywords and search terms often become overused. Competition for use is a primary factor when designing content. Over-stuffing content with keywords and terms can create negative results.
3. Smart device technology and consumer attention span have fostered responsive website technology. Responsive platforms help website's appearance conform to the device being used to navigate the site. Non-responsive sites will be passed over for more device-ready sites. Failure to keep pace will create higher bounce rates and fewer conversions.
4. Conversion Centered Design (CCD) is a new buzz word related to the attention span of this generation of web surfer. Every page of a website has to be designed with a conversion result in mind. Busy and cluttered home and landing pages will be passed over for sites with a more direct and simplified appearance. CCD requires a precise blend of science and art.

### **Search Marketing**

Search Marketing is a very broad subject that we will summarize for the purpose of this paper. Search Marketing, often referred to as Search Engine Marketing (SEM) or Search Engine Optimization (SEO) encompasses the process necessary for being found on the web. It begins with the right website platform, content creation and optimization of the content to accomplish the desired search results.

Desired search results include being found early in the search engine's list of related query results, and achieving a conversion to your website's specified page. Over the past few years search engine algorithms have been developed to ensure that only rich content relative to the site's message is rewarded with the favor of indexing. There are still (black hat) methods being utilized to create misdirected and fake traffic, but those efforts may create short-term analytic gain with a very negative end result. The risk is NOT worth the appearance of real traffic. Vanity traffic and ranking is transparent to a trained eye and achieves nothing in the end.

### **-Message Distribution - Increasing Your Digital Footprint**

Getting your message (with links back to your site) in as many places on the web as possible will increase your digital footprint. If you rely solely on your website and its content, the links back to your property are limited to the unique URLs created within the site. Although home-based content creation can work effectively, getting links to your site from other more powerful sites is advantageous.

1. Content creation within a website is necessary for search engine presence. The more URLs created with the website domain as the root – the better. Choosing a website platform that allows for search-friendly permalinks is a must. This is why blogging and article creation work so well as a method of message delivery, but only if the web platform is designed to create search-friendly content.
2. Getting your message (with links back to your site) placed on other, more powerful sites can be advantageous, especially if yours is fairly new and / or not properly optimized for search. This can be a good intermediate and longer-term step in your overall digital strategy, just know that the conversion may be affected by your site's ability to engage the visitor.
3. Video production can be a rewarding tool if properly approached, and can be very effective in widening your digital footprint. Most videos uploaded to YouTube, Vimeo, and other platforms are searchable within the platform and can create search engine presence outside the platform with links to the video. Getting conversion opportunity (to your site) from the video will come primarily from optimizing the video description.
4. Utilizing forums and other social platforms for posting information about your message can be effective, but care should be taken not to appear too advertorial. Our culture seems to be more resistant to advertising with each passing year.

### **-Organic vs. Paid Search**

As mentioned earlier, creating a foundation for organic search should be a high priority. Gaining page 1 presence organically depends upon competition for the same keywords and terms, content structure,

and your website's strength compared to others vying for the same positions. Paid search can create page 1 search engine presence, but that presence is lost when payment stops.

1. Content, content, and more content! There are some effective and approved practices for gaining search engine page position organically that go beyond simply creating good content. We'll leave that topic for another White Paper. In every case maintaining position often requires continuous creation and optimization of relative content. Often trial and error is necessary to learn the most effective methods. Good analytics is a must. We've seen more and more space being allocated for paid ads at the top of search engine pages, but statistical data proves consumers still seem to favor organic content.
2. Paid search options such as Google Adwords and other pay-per-click campaigns require the careful creation of ads designed to generate clicks to a specified and carefully designed landing page. Conversion Centered Design (CCD) landing pages are crucial. The last thing you want to happen is to pay for a click that bounces upon transfer. The value of the clicks will vary depending upon competition for the keywords and search terms utilized.