

Creating a Web Site for Your Service Business

If you're interested in setting up shop on the Internet to promote your service, these simple strategies will help you bring in the business.

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By Corey Rudl

Lately, I've been receiving a lot of questions from people selling a service--or thinking about selling a service--over the Web, asking what you need to do differently than those people marketing a physical product. It's a good question. Because while almost all the selling and traffic generation techniques I teach work equally well for both product- and service-based [business models](#), there are a few unique challenges faced by those selling services that warrant special discussion.

Challenge #1: You are the product. When you sell a service, you are the product, whether you're a real estate agent, doctor, lawyer, bed & breakfast owner, auto-mechanic, caterer, hair stylist, fitness trainer, accountant, investment advisor, childcare provider, housekeeper, dog walker, landscaper...whatever. You're selling your time with the promise of a particular result as opposed to a tangible product.

Challenge #2: Your time is limited. Unlike someone selling a physical product that can be stored and shipped on demand, you can only provide as many services as your time allows. And assuming you pause to sleep and eat like the rest of us, this means you're limited to an 8-hour day. (Okay, 12- to 16-hour days if you love your work as much as I do.)

Challenge #3: You must prove your ability to deliver measurable results, while emphasizing flexibility. People will want to see proof that you've delivered great results for other clients, but they'll also want to know that you're flexible enough to meet their own unique needs. So you must walk a fine line, making sure that you keep confidential client information confidential, while (1) proving that you've satisfied the needs of other clients like them with great results and (2) demonstrating your ability to customize your service to meet their personal, unique needs.

Challenge #4: You're using a global medium to attract local business. Service-based businesses frequently rely on local clients. Sure, the owner of a bed & breakfast in Seattle may be thrilled to be attracting clients from Australia's Gold Coast. But is the landscaper in Seattle going to be equally receptive to securing a weekly hedge trimming and lawn-mowing client from Australia? Probably not. So service-based sites that rely on local customers need to actively pursue sources of local traffic.

Sales Strategies

In order to overcome these challenges, there are several strategies you can employ.

Strategy #1: Establish your credibility. When you sell a service, you're typically selling a relationship with yourself. And this requires spending more time and effort establishing your credibility and developing a rapport with your visitors than is typically required on a site selling a physical product.

For example, a site that sells a product like [gift baskets](#) might include some brief "About Us" information that gives details about who the Web site owners are, why they started their business and how long they've been online. However, the majority of the site would focus on establishing the value of the actual product--the gift baskets--and providing detailed information about guarantees, delivery procedures, etc. Including reams of misplaced information about the Web site owners could actually hurt [sales](#) more than help because, in this case, visitors' chief focus should be directed to the value of the product.

When you're selling a service, however, you are the product. So establishing your credibility--essentially establishing your value--is critical to closing the sale. You need to not only establish the benefits of the service you're offering but also establish the value of you providing this service.

There are a few different ways you can accomplish this. First, you should include a good, professional picture of yourself. And no, the picture of you in your Hawaiian-print shorts and "Kiss the Chef" hat from last year's summer barbecue won't do. Giving your visitors a professional image to associate you with will go a long way toward establishing your credibility.

Next, you need to include a list of your credentials. However, don't just give point after point of accomplishments; be sure to state exactly how each of your credentials is going to translate into a benefit for your clients. Don't make the critical mistake of assuming that visitors to your site can make this leap on their own. Clearly spell out the benefits you offer in your sales copy. For example, if you're a real estate agent with [certification](#) in housing inspection, you shouldn't just tell your visitors "I'm a [certified](#) housing inspector." Instead you should say, "Not only can I find the best home in the best location for you and your family, but as a certified housing inspector, I can give you an accurate assessment of the home's structural soundness and let you know about any potential problems to make sure you avoid getting stuck with costly repairs in the years to come!" Doesn't that sound better than "I'm a certified housing inspector"? Make the benefit obvious!

You'll also need to provide evidence that other clients have been satisfied with your services. Depending on the nature of the service you provide, you may choose to do this in a few different ways. [Testimonials](#) from clients are a great way to establish your credibility. An online portfolio of your work might be another option (for example, landscapers might include pictures of well-manicured properties they designed and maintain). However, if the confidentiality of your clients is important, you may need to approach this a bit differently by including more general descriptions of problems you've encountered and steps you've taken to solve them, with no names or clues that could give away identities. If privacy is important to your clients, then visitors to your site should be able to understand why you can't reveal names and exact details. But again, don't assume they'll know. Be sure to explain this.

Strategy #2: Be specific about exactly what you're offering. We've already talked a bit about this, but this is such a common mistake I see Web site owners making--whether they're selling a service or a product--that I think it warrants further explanation.

You can never assume that providing information about what you've done for other clients will enable visitors to your site to make that leap and picture what you'll be able to do for their businesses. You need to be very, very specific about what you're offering. To help you do that, look at other similar service providers and ask yourself these questions:

- Do you offer the same services? More? Less?
- What makes you different from your competitors?
- Do you specialize in anything?
- What kind of guarantee do you offer?
- How will your services be delivered?

Too often, Web site owners fail to provide their visitors with enough information. Sales copy with a detailed breakdown of the services you provide, with the benefits you offer clearly explained, will be one of the most critical aspects of your site.

Strategy #3: Demonstrate your flexibility. As I mentioned earlier, people will not only want to see proof that you've delivered great results for other clients, they'll want to know that you're prepared to customize your service to meet their own unique needs.

So here, again, thorough sales copy that clearly explains how you're willing to customize your services will be very important. Do your clients typically fall into a few different categories? Can you talk about each group and explain how you adapt and change to meet their individual needs?

For example, on his Web site, the owner of a martial arts school offered basic summary descriptions of his classes. Instead of general descriptions, he'd be better off breaking his sales copy down from his existing summary descriptions into more detailed copy that explains the key differences between his child, teen, and adult classes. By focusing on these client groups separately, he could more closely target their unique needs (and therefore attract more customers) by emphasizing the benefits that apply directly to each.

Strategy #4: Make it easy for leads to contact you. Here's another obvious one. But I bring it up because I'm continually shocked by how difficult some sites make it for visitors to contact them. If you're selling a service over the Web, then you're generating leads--your goal is to compel visitors to contact you. But just as someone selling a product over the Web needs to make a seamless transition between their sales copy and their order form, you need to make a seamless transition between your sales copy and the point of contact.

You need to make it easy for your visitors to contact you. Provide an online form, your e-mail address, phone number, [fax](#) number, physical mailing address and any other relevant information (like the best times to call you). And make sure this information is highly visible and easily accessible from every page of your site. Why not invite a few honest friends to check out your site and time them to see how long it takes for them to find your [contact information](#)? What's obvious to you may not be obvious to the rest of the world.

Strategy #5: [Network](#) and get listed in local directories. While almost all the traffic techniques used to drive visitors to product-based sites can be applied to service-based sites, I'd like to mention a few that those of you who need local traffic will find useful.

1. [Network with other local businesses](#). If you want local traffic, start making personal connections with other local business owners--preferably those with sites of their own. Look for ways to position your service and your site as a resource to their customers, and then request a link on their site or get permission to leave your business cards (printed with your URL, of course) in their lobby or next to their cash register. Even consider rewarding local business owners for sending traffic and leads your way by offering them a special gift, a discount off your service or even a portion of the profits.

2. Get your site listed in local online directories. There are plenty of local online directories that list only two or three businesses in categories that should be quite popular. With consumers becoming more comfortable searching for information online, it only makes sense that they're turning to these local directories to hire local services with increasing frequency. Why not take advantage of the fact that few businesses are pursuing this valuable source of traffic? Look up local online directories in your area and request a listing.

3. Take advantage of sites like eLance.com. Depending on the type of service you offer, professional services marketplaces like eLance.com and FreeLance.com may be a great source of clients and leads. Post your qualifications and bid on posted jobs, using your Web site to help close the deal once you've entered into a one-on-one discussion with a potential client.

Strategy #6: Encourage referrals and repeat customers. Always, always, always follow up with existing clients! Are they happy with the job you did for them? Is there anything else you can do for them? Do they know anyone else who might benefit from your service? E-mail has made following up with your existing clients extremely easy and cost-effective, so there's no excuse for not taking advantage of this source of easy extra income. Don't be afraid to remind previous customers that you're there. And don't be afraid to ask for referrals. If you've done a good job for someone, they'll likely be more than happy to refer their friends and business associates to you. But if you don't ask, they'll rarely think to do it. Don't leave this to chance.

Quick Tip: Don't forget that while you may sell a service as your main revenue stream, you may also supplement your income by offering products that are complementary to your service through your site.

Final Thoughts

I get a lot of e-mail from people who think that selling a service over the Web must require an entirely different approach than selling a product. They think they'll need to use an entirely different set of tools and techniques, that their site design will be dramatically different and that to drive visitors to their sites, they'll need to use some strange, newfangled strategies. This simply isn't the case.

The only real difference between selling a service vs. a product over the Web is your focus: When you sell a physical product, every aspect of your site design and [sales](#) copy focuses on how the product is going to solve visitors' needs and benefit them. When you sell a service over the Web, the focus is on how you're going to solve visitors' needs and benefit them.

Once you've wrapped your head around this concept, everything else should fall into place. Sales copy strategies...traffic-generation techniques...Web site design strategies...all the techniques and strategies I've mentioned above can be used to dramatically increase the [leads](#) you attract, the deals you close and your overall online income.

Corey Rudl, president of [Internet Marketing Center](#), is the author of [Insider Secrets to Marketing Your Business on the Internet](#), a comprehensive how-to guide for e-business success, which reveals strategies for generating traffic, increasing revenues and automating your online businesses. Contact questions@marketingtips.com for free tips and resources.