



The Easy Guide to Starting and Running a Business

Practical business advice

This eBook shows the steps you need to know in order to run a successful business on or off line.

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Setting up a Business



There is no right or wrong type of person to run a successful business. If you are *determined* to make it succeed, and are prepared to work long hours, then you'll have all the right ingredients for success.

If you look at top business people, the one thing they all have in common is solid determination. They do not give up at the first hurdle and they keep going until they finally succeed.

In fact, thousands of people set up their own businesses every single year. Some do it because they want to work for themselves, others because they have a great idea and have spotted a potential gap in the marketplace. And of course there are those that think they can make a pile of money. These are all valid reasons for starting a business.

Commitment and motivation are vital if you want to make a success of any business venture.

Enthusiasm is also important and good planning is an absolute must. Without a good business plan you could struggle to make a go of your fledgling business. You need a detailed business plan to keep you on the road to success.

Set up and run a new business - The Business Plan and Financial Needs

Trying to set up and run a new business without planning the way forward is like burying your head in the sand and hoping for the best.

Lack of planning and resulting cash flow problems are two of the most common reasons for business failure.

To get on the road to success a well researched business plan and a detailed cash flow analysis will be needed.

It's far too easy to underestimate how much money you will need to put into your business to make it a going concern. A fully detailed business plan that covers all the information in a logical way will often reveal any potential pitfalls before you even proceed with your new business venture.

By compelling you to think again, your business plan may save you from making expensive mistakes and give you an insight into an alternative idea. Despite this good advice literally thousands of people still attempt to start a new business without any sort of plan at all. And because nearly everyone's first steps into business life are flawed in some way, a significant number do not even survive their first year of trading.

Even if you make a successful start to running your business you may still find it hard to expand at a later date without additional financial backing of some sort.

A Plan of Action

Although a well thought out business plan is no guarantee of success, without a detailed plan you will not know how much money you might need to borrow to finance future growth.

Your business plan should be prepared very carefully . It must contain everything there is to know about your business including the type of product or service you offer, how much it will cost, the markets you will sell to, your promotional ideas and long term objectives.

And don't forget to prepare a detailed monthly analysis of your expected income and costs.

If you are new to self employment the thought of having to draw up a detailed cash flow analysis can be a daunting prospect, but this is an essential piece of equipment if you need to seek out financial help or need to open a business bank account. It is common for banks and other financial organisations to demand a cash flow projection from even the smallest of businesses. So take your time and develop a good working model of your company's current and future financial position. The best way to do this is to carefully analyse your business hopes using a spreadsheet program like Microsoft Excel or the free version of [Libra Office](#). If you are using [Microsoft's Excel](#) you can download [financial templates](#) from the Microsoft Office website, to help you along the way.

A cash flow analysis that is badly drawn up is clearly of little use. It serves merely as a snare and a delusion. Producing a well thought out financial forecast fulfils the same result as writing a well prepared business plan - it will help you to focus and sharpen your ideas and will make you aware of the effect on your bank balance of the decisions you make in planning and instigating your business venture.

The banks and other providers of finance usually have their own cash flow forms that will help you to prepare a simple cash flow analysis. This will just about do for a small short term loan but for larger amounts a more sophisticated document will have to be prepared - preferably a full business model including profit and loss accounts and balance sheets covering a 1 to 3 year period. At this stage good professional advice and a fully detailed financial spreadsheet will be needed.

Cash is the lifeblood of any business and bad management of this vital resource can soon lead to disaster. For this reason it is important that your income and costs are regularly reviewed to keep your business firmly on track.

A Detailed Business Plan

Here are a few suggested topics for your own business plan:

A Vision Statement: This will be a concise outline of your business purpose and goals.

The People: By far, the most important ingredient for your success will be yourself. Focus on how your prior experiences will be applicable to your new business. Prepare a resume of yourself and one for each person who will be involved with you in starting the business. Be factual and avoid any hype. This part of your Business Plan will be read very carefully by those with whom you will be having relationships, including lenders, investors and vendors.

However, you cannot be someone who you are not. If you lack the ability to perform a key function, include this in your business plan. For example, if you lack the ability to train staff, include an explanation how you will compensate for this deficiency.

Your Business Profile: Define and describe your intended business and exactly how you plan to go about it. Try to stay focused on the specialised market you intend to serve. As a rule, specialists do better than non-specialists.

Economic Assessment: Provide a complete assessment of the economic environment in which your business will become a part. Explain how your business will be appropriate for the regulatory agencies and demographics with which you will be dealing. If appropriate, provide demographic studies and traffic flow data normally available from local planning departments.

Cash Flow Assessment: Include a one-year cash flow that will incorporate your capital requirements. Include your assessment of what could go wrong and how you would plan to handle problems.

Marketing Plan and Expansion Plans: Your expansion plan should describe how you plan to test markets and products before rolling out. Refer to helpful government Web sites such as the Small Business Administration.

Damage Control Plan: All businesses will experience episodes of distress. Survival will depend on how well you are prepared to cope with them. Your damage control plan should anticipate potential threats to your business and how you plan to overcome them. Here are three examples:

Plan for 35% loss of sales: During economic downturns, your survival will depend on your ability to maintain liquidity for a period of at least 12 months. Can your Damage Control cash flow plan show how to avoid running out of cash?

Plan for a catastrophic incident: Businesses can be overturned by unforeseen disasters which can be avoided by maintaining appropriate insurance. You will need the assistance of a qualified business insurance agent.

Plan for product obsolescence: If your business is in a rapidly changing technology area you will need to plan to keep a one step ahead of the technical changes or advancements.

Another way to approach this important task is to set up a list of headlines and then fill in the blanks as and when you have the information to hand.

Here are the main headings taken from the QBS PC Help Business Plan to give you an insight into the amount of detail required, especially if you are seeking financial assistance of some sort.

1. PROJECT SUMMARY/VISION

1.1

2. MARKET AND ECONOMIC VIEW

2.1 Initial Market Research

2.2 Local Market Research

2.3 Existing Competition

2.4 Seasonal Trends in Business

2.5 Economic Overview

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The Initial Planning

3.2 Developing the Concept Further

3.3 Future Employment Prospects

3.4 Overall Development Costs of the Project

4. MARKETING

4.1 Terrestrial Sales Promotion

4.2 Online Promotion

5. FORECASTS AND FINANCIAL DATA

5.1 Pricing Calculations

5.1 Sales and Profit Forecast

5.2 Financing Requirements

6. OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

6.1 Personal Ownership Data

6.2 Business Locations

6.2 Advisors

Presenting your case to the banks and financial institutions

The golden rule when presenting your completed business plan to prospective lenders is that you must be completely confident with the facts, figures and projections.

Your presentation should be:

- Clear and to the point: free of superfluous and distracting things such as jokes, anecdotes and over-familiarity.
- So well-rehearsed that it doesn't actually sound rehearsed.
- Convincing. Remember you're asking someone to invest money in your business, which means they are sharing in your risk. They need to be convinced you know what you're doing and that above all else you are confident that you can achieve what you are saying.

How to maintain a healthy business



Life is full of uncertainties but one thing is at least guaranteed - once you start a business it will not stand still. It will always be changing either to boost or lower your profitability.

If left to its own devices the apparently orderly way in which your business runs will eventually degenerate into an unmanageable chaos.

As a business owner it is your job to plan and manage these changes so that your business goes on developing and growing to achieve a good and reliable cash flow position and growing long term profits.

How do you achieve the ideal position in what is after all a far from perfect world?

If you launched your company more than a year ago you may have been fortunate in having a regular stream of customers arriving at your street door and/or your e-commerce website.

This level of ongoing business may have provided you with a positive cash flow and a decent operating profit.

By now you will have noticed that some areas of your business are more profitable than other areas. It may be a particular product line or perhaps a group of products. Your accounts, business plan and pricing model will show you exactly what your most profitable lines are at any particular point in time. They will also show you which customers buy the most products from your company.

The information you gather from this analysis will show you if any products sell at a loss. This will let you focus your efforts on the high margin products and weed out the loss makers.

Your customer base also needs some careful analysis. For example, have you noticed that a small group of customers seem to provide the bulk of your sales? This is often the case with many different types of business and this outcome is often labelled as the 80/20 rule, e.g. 20% of your customers may be producing 80% of your profits (*the Pareto rule*). This group needs your attention. You can sell other products or services to them and keep them informed of any new developments in your business.

It's best not to rely too heavily on this special group. To grow your business over time you have to seek out new customers who will buy your products or services.

Your approach to selling and advertising must be regularly reviewed to make sure it is still supporting the most effective parts of your company.

In starting and developing a new business always keep one step ahead of the competition, be determined to win the war against cash starvation, and keep your business afloat by carefully managing your precious financial resources.

Keeping your business afloat

So there you are up and running with your business venture. Everything is in place. You have obtained the financial help you need and you are looking ahead with renewed confidence.



From the volume of sales you've already made you might think your business is doing better than you originally planned. But with all the start up costs and the ongoing costs of running your business you may be doing just a little worse than that. Perhaps you are just a little unsure of how your business is really doing.

You will no doubt make good use of your existing business plan to keep yourself in touch with your original plan of action. And you will have no doubt used your cash flow analysis to compare your original projections with the daily running costs and ongoing sales income you've actually experienced over recent months.

One of the key dangers for any business owner is a preoccupation with the day to day problems faced by the business. And the more work on hand the truer this scenario becomes.

Continually review your business plan and financial projections

You must review your business performance at regular intervals. Take the time to study your original business plan and the latest updated cash flow figures and then reassess your business in the light of the actual performance you have recorded. Be critical. See what needs changing, what needs diverting or slowing down, what needs speeding up and where to go next. These are just some of the questions to be considered and resolved, but they are not the only ones.

Always be careful about running before you can walk. For example, always think carefully before committing yourself to any financial decisions. The art of running a business includes the ability to distinguish between what is necessary and what is merely desirable. After all money is hard to earn and often expensive to borrow.

Even if your cash flow and your profit and loss account forecasts show a surplus after a few months this does not mean that the longer term predictions will come true. Planning can be a veritable minefield for the optimist.

In probably nine out of ten cases you will have been over optimistic, particularly about the rate at which sales will increase. So avoid the desire to over spend in anticipation of future business success. Unless absolutely essential don't rush out to buy the latest Smartphone and that swish looking office furniture until you are making enough profit. And don't replace that old family saloon with an impressive executive car until your profits are substantial.

Far too many businesses have failed, not because of high interest rates or even a deep economic recession but because it could not support its borrowing requirements and the owners' increasing debts.

To keep your business afloat you must review your business activity on a regular basis. Always be critical in your appraisal of the facts, control costs and batten down the hatches to weather any violent economic storms.

Customer Relationship Management



CRM stands for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) which is a business strategy that can help you learn more about your customers needs and behaviours, so that you can develop stronger relationships with them. And of course, good customer relationships are at the heart of any business success.

A successful customer relationship management strategy depends on bringing together lots of pieces of business information about customers and market trends so you can sell and market your products and services more effectively.

With an effective CRM strategy in place, your business can increase revenues by:

- Providing services and products that meet your customers needs and expectations.
- Offering a better level of customer service to both new and existing customers.
- Cross selling your products and services more effectively.
- Helping your sales staff to close deals faster.
- Making it easier to retain your existing customers and discover new ones.

A CRM software solution will not produce these results straight out of the box. For customer relationship management to be truly effective, businesses must first understand who their customers are and what their value is over a lifetime. A business must then determine what the real needs of its customers are and how best to meet those needs.

When a CRM software solution is working well, it improves the internal processes within your business and personalises all your external business relationships. The overall benefits of CRM software will spread throughout your company because of effective data integration, better customer retention and loyalty and being able to respond quickly to competition in the marketplace.

In the last few years, the market for on-line CRM has soared particularly among small and mid-sized companies, largely because of fears about the expense and complexity of a large-scale software implementation. And indeed, on-line CRM is often a good choice for companies that want to implement standard CRM processes, are able to use out-of-the-box data structures with little or no internal IT support, and don't require complex or real-time integration with back end office systems.

However, on-line CRM is not always as simple as the vendors would have you believe. For instance, customisation can be problematic and hosted CRM vendors' API tools cannot provide the degree of integration that is possible with local applications.

Getting a hosted CRM system working shouldn't take as long as a traditional software package, but larger and more complex rollouts can still take a long time. And while the hosted option reduces the need for in-house technical support, upgrades can still sometimes be a problem. In addition, some companies with particularly sensitive customer

data, such as those in financial services and health care, may not want to relinquish control of their data to a hosted third party for security reasons.

The Keys to a Successful CRM Implementation

You must develop your customer focused strategy first before considering what kind of CRM solution you need to invest in.

It's a good idea to break your CRM project down into manageable pieces by setting up pilot programs and short-term milestones. Start with a pilot project that includes all the necessary departments but is small enough and flexible enough to allow fine tuning along the way.

Think carefully about what is best for your company - either a solution that ties together software from several vendors via web services or, an integrated package of software from one vendor.

Don't underestimate how much data you might collect and make sure that if you need to expand your systems you'll be able to do that easily, without any complications.

Be thoughtful about what data is collected and stored. The impulse will be to grab and then store every piece of data you can, but beware of storing too much. Storing excessive amounts of data wastes both time and money.

Management and Departmental Responsibilities

The biggest returns come from aligning your business processes, a customer relationship management system and IT strategies across all departments and not just leaving it for one group to run. In fact, it's best for the business departments who actually use the CRM software to take ownership of the project, with IT and management playing an important advisory role.

The Causes of Failure

Lack of communication between everyone in the customer relationship chain can lead to an incomplete picture of the customer. Poor communication can also lead to technology being implemented without proper support or buy-in from the users of the CRM Software.

If your sales force isn't completely sold on the system's benefits, they may not input the kind of demographic data that is essential to the program's success.

Listed below and opposite are seven specific benefits that can result from the successful implementation of a CRM strategy.

1. Increase your revenue and profits

Finding the right online or offline CRM software that matches your companies' strategies and objectives allows your management team to develop a plan for increasing sales and profits for the long term. A good CRM solution makes sales data and forecast information immediately accessible and permits decision-makers to accurately study revenue and

expenses to decide where to cut costs, decide how much inventory to stock, and determine what discounts may be allowed.

2. Improve the capture of sales leads

When companies generate a large amount of leads, they can then increase their sales and revenues. With an automated workflow system that includes set timers, CRM software enables the sales team to view leads on the computer screen and then see those leads disappear when they become customers. A seamless flow of information that increases customer satisfaction for your company.

3. Gain flexibility through scalability

Scalability is an especially important factor for your business CRM if you plan to expand and develop your customer offerings in the near future, but don't want to outlay a great deal of money up front. Many CRM solutions offer a package that requires no software installation on your company's computers and gives your employees the confidence to slowly build their system to match their departments needs.

Some CRM solutions for small businesses use a web-based CRM to share data with other applications, such as Microsoft Outlook. This can help you to integrate a CRM solution into your business plan, while lessening your administrative time.

4. Improve your customer service levels

Your selected CRM software should include access to centralised customer data as well as e-mail templates that allows all CRM users to quickly communicate with your customers, especially when they need assistance with their services or products. This customer data will usually be captured from either point-of-sale (POS) systems or through sales and purchase data.

5. Increase your companies cross-selling opportunities

All businesses tend to make money when they have a large and loyal customer base that they can sell to.

With sales leads from call centres, advertising and other enquiries you can easily find new customers to add to your CRM database. This will help your sales force, who can use the CRM data, to offer expanded services to your customers.

6. Benefit from vital business information & reports

When the CRM software solution contains a competitor tracking function, management and the sales team can access these reports to identify trends, measure and forecast sales, track sales processes and evaluate their own business performance. This top of the range CRM software usually includes access to important resources such as brochures, white papers, social media and competitor reports.

7. Improve customer profiling & target marketing

In order to know your customers and serve their needs, your CRM software system must be able to capture customer details like present accounts, pending orders and payment history. A centralised and detailed customer database is also needed for customer profiling and for predicting what services that customer may need in the future.

Making Customers Count and Stay

The concept of CRM has existed in the business world for a long time, but in recent years CRM use has grown because of better technology access and database integration. Companies should investigate CRM solutions to keep their existing customers and serve their unique needs. If companies focus on delivering exceptional service that is tailored for these customers, then, they will build loyalty, which will in turn build revenue.

Finding the right CRM solution is an investment for the company and the company's management need to wholeheartedly support the new CRM solution. This solution must fit within the company's objectives and staff must be trained, or the CRM solution will go to waste if sales leads aren't captured correctly, or if additional customer windows of the CRM software aren't accessed by the right people in a timely fashion.

A CRM solution used by trained staff who have your company's goals in mind will promote shorter sales cycles, reduce administrative costs, require less time to track down information, improve reporting and give quicker issue turnaround time, increase sales closing rates and improve customer retention. As a result, CRM software solutions allow companies to escape revenue plateaus by capturing new customers, retaining existing ones, and by better managing their business.

CRM for the small business



If you are the owner of a small business, customer relationship management (CRM) has likely been on your mind at some point. Small business CRM's have shown themselves to be an effective tool in marketing and increasing business and profitability for many small businesses, wherever they are based.

Even though personalised attention and customer care are easier within a small organisation, small business CRM platforms can streamline the process and make customer satisfaction within your business grow ever higher. Let's take a look at what it takes to install a CRM software solution for a small business and investigate some of the benefits it can have for your particular business. You will soon see just how profitable small business CRM software can be for your company.

The Small Business CRM

Small business CRM is a combination of tools and programs that can be used to enhance your relationship with your customers and expand the profitability of your business. A small business CRM simplifies the recording of customer information, sales records, employee tracking and management accountability. It can also provide you with enhanced marketing solutions, greater customer satisfaction, and help to increase your sales revenue.

Improve Customer Experience

If you want to build your business by enhancing your customer experience and seizing lost sales opportunities, then a small business CRM can certainly help. Any company that is using more than one program to track their customer files, sales, and employee information can easily benefit from the installation of a small business CRM.

Take a look at the efficiency of your company's record keeping and see where a small business CRM can improve things. If your sales are suffering and your customer records are hard to decipher, a small business CRM could be your perfect solution.

The Many Uses of a Small Business CRM

At the employee level, customer information can be entered and sales or service details can be tracked within a small business CRM program. At the management level, quotas and sales data can be tracked and analysed to assess employee performance, requests can be sent to employees, tasks can be delegated and reports can be gathered from the information within the small business CRM database. In the marketing department, the reports and data taken from the small business CRM program can allow for more directed marketing and advertising campaigns.

The effectiveness of previous campaigns can be analysed and stronger campaigns can be developed using the updated customer information from the small business CRM. Additionally, many tasks, such as mass mailings and follow up emails can be automated

through the small business CRM interface, freeing up employee time and saving payroll. Depending on your company's needs, there are simply dozens of things that a small business CRM can accomplish if it is properly set up and managed.

Choosing a Small Business CRM

Choosing a small business CRM program is as simple as looking at the tasks that you need to achieve and the information that you need to store within the program. If you use a program such as Microsoft Outlook already, finding a small business CRM that integrates within Outlook will save many man-hours and tedious re-entry of customer information. Lastly, but most importantly, you want to find a cost effective small business CRM that can grow along with your business. Comparing a variety of small business CRM options will help you to make your final decision on the type of CRM you need.

The best Outlook CRM solutions

Here are some of the best Outlook CRM solutions for you to consider as part of your search for the ideal CRM.

Microsoft Business Contact Manager

Office Outlook 2010 with Business Contact Manager enables you to organise and manage all contact, prospect, and customer information in a single location so you can spend less time looking for information and be more responsive to your customers.

It includes all the usual small business CRM tools including managing opportunities and sales leads, creating and tracking marketing campaigns, working on projects and setting tasks etc.

See Microsoft's description of this CRM add on - [Outlook 2010 with Business Contact Manager](#)

The Prophet Small Business CRM

The [Prophet small business CRM](#) is one of the most complete and affordable choices for small businesses. This software has a few different versions, with various features allowing you to choose the least expensive small business CRM to fit your current needs.

Prophet software also fully integrates with Microsoft Outlook 2003, 2007 and 2010, allowing you to use what you already know, while adding greater accessibility to your small business CRM needs.

Prophet also have online tutorials to teach you how to make the most of your small business CRM and even offer more in depth, yet affordable, training options for you and your staff. Prophet may just be the perfect solution to your small business CRM needs.

MX-Contact CRM

[MX-Contact](#) is a suite of CRM solutions and caters for most requirements but comes into its own in bigger multi-user, more complex sales environments. A very scalable Outlook CRM solution.

OpusFlowCRM

OpusFlow CRM specialises in Microsoft Outlook & Exchange Server Add-ons. Their award-winning products have been around for years and are well established and stable. They offer various CRM Outlook solutions so have a look to see what suits your requirements. They also offer CRM for Handhelds which is worth looking at.

BizAutomation CRM

BizAutomation offers an integrated suite of CRM, Accounting, ERP, and Ecommerce software. It is a web based CRM for users of Outlook, MS Exchange and QuickBooks.

Larger CRM Offerings

Here are a few CRM solutions for a larger company to consider. The links go directly to their respective website's so you can take a look around and get free demos of their CRM solutions.

[Goldmine](#)

[Maximizer](#)

[Software on SaleBoats](#)

[Sugar CRM](#) (*QBS PC Help have tested the open source version of this CRM and it certainly impressed us!*)

E-Commerce Sales Tips



It's no good paying a lot of money to get your e-commerce website well placed in the major search engines if your site puts people off when they arrive to buy your products or services.

You may well have the best product or service in the world but if your site isn't specifically designed to convert visitors to sales, you will be wasting a lot of money to bring traffic to a dead site. All your marketing efforts and advertising campaigns will be

pointless.

Before you begin to employ an SEO, social networking or external link building company, or continue marketing your site using other methods, be sure you are ready to get your customers through your ordering process with absolute ease. Also do a double check to ensure that your site can instil trust in your visitors. A good way of checking these things out is to run a usability test on all your sites content.

Usability testing helps you replicate the experience of the average website user and correct problems before online visitors find them. It also gives you valuable answers to other questions:

- Do visitors enjoy using the site?
- Do visitors find it easy to buy?
- Do they understand the purpose of the site?
- Is there any incentive to return after the first visit?
- Can they recover from errors?

Usability testing is the best way to test how well your site search, site map, forms, shopping carts and custom error pages function. They should all work together to guide visitors through your site and help them to get where they want to be. Frustrated visitors aren't likely to return.

If your website conforms to user expectations it will make them feel more comfortable and more inclined to visit your site again. They will also recommend your website to their friends and acquaintances.

There is no doubt that good usability is critical to your website's overall success.

So what else do you need to do in order to dramatically increase conversions and hence sales? There are a few things you can do right now that could pay off big time!

Make it Easy to Find Information

Instead of creating rigid pathways through your site, build in search functionality and a dynamic database that lets customers find exactly what they want. Similarly, make sure your customers can get quick answers to their questions about your products or services.

A March 2008 survey of nearly 3,000 online customers found that 44 percent abandoned a shopping cart because they couldn't get the answer to a question (according to Harris Interactive).

A prominent FAQ page or Live Chat function can easily respond to questions and problems like these, which means your customers can have a happy time when visiting your website.

Reduce the Number of Clicks to Purchase

Make it really easy for your potential customers to find the information they need by implementing the three-click rule. Generally, it should take no more than three clicks for your customers to get from your site's index page or landing page to the checkout page. Visitors to your site will not hunt for a way to spend their money. If they cannot quickly find what they are looking for they will simply leave.

Collect Customer information

Collect enough customer information so you can deliver your product or service and stay in touch with your customer using email. However, if you force customers to register too much personal information before they check out, you'll lose the sale - either because it takes too much time or because the customer is annoyed by your information demands.

You may wish to give customers an incentive to share their personal information. For instance, you could offer a discount coupon or free shipping in exchange for registering their full details.

Offer Multiple Payment Options

Giving your customers payment choices is always a good idea. This lets them feel as though they are in control. So as a minimum, you will want to offer a choice of at least three major credit card options and perhaps a PayPal account as well.

Provide Multiple Sales Channels

Use every possible sales channel, including phone orders, shopping cart orders, mail-order catalogues, social networking channels and discount offers emailed to your customers.

Set Attractive Delivery Policies

The advantages of Internet shopping for buyers include that they can easily and quickly compare products and prices by using a comparison based search engine. That also includes shipping charges. So do your homework before setting your delivery charges and even consider offering free delivery by setting your prices so that they include these costs.

Make your Privacy Policy Obvious

With all the spam and scams these days, customers are getting more and more tired of giving out personal information. They want to know exactly what you intend to do with it. So tell them! Make sure your privacy policy is up-front and easy to read. Make sure that a link to this privacy policy appears on every page of your website.

Provide Great Customer Support

Make sure your website provides easy access to a Frequently Asked Questions page and have a good search tool so your site visitors can easily find what they are looking for.

Give an email address and physical address and even a phone number on your site. Let the visitors know that if they have a question or problem you'll be there to help them.

In this Internet age, make use of the Internet to provide additional customer support channels and marketing opportunities. These will include the likes of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Build a Relationship with your Customers

Don't overlook opportunities to treat your customers well, such as greeting them by name when they return to your site, remembering their preferences, and offering to keep their shipping information on file so it doesn't need to be entered again.

Use a Content Management System

Using a Content Management System will not only make it much easier to post crisp and clear product descriptions, but will also allow you to quickly update prices and product information. Such systems, which used to be costly and geared to large retailers, are now much more affordable and in some case even free!

Why not check out a few of these mostly free content management systems that can be used for all sorts of websites, including a full e-commerce site complete with shopping carts, payment options and delivery solutions.

[Alfresco](#)

[Drupal](#)

[Joomla](#)

[Mambo](#)

[WordPress](#)

Regularly Test Your Site

To successfully manage an online store you have to pay as much attention to detail and customer service as in the conventional world of bricks and mortar.

Take the time to frequently test all your links and features. If a link to your check out or payment page is broken, you might be missing out on sales!

The Power of the Major Search Engines

When visitors input the product you sell or your brand name on search engines, make sure the link connects to your landing or product page, not your company home page. This enables customers who don't know your company, or who forget its name, to still find you and make a purchase.

Regularly Track Site Results

Set up a good system to capture traffic information. QBS PC Help like to recommend [Google Analytics](#) but your own web host may well provide a good statistical package such as [AWStats](#) so that you can easily track your sites progress.

Both these methods of tracking your sites performance can tell you, among other things, the sites and search engines that refer your best customers as well as which pages draw the heaviest traffic. Such tools also enable you to identify return customers, new prospects, and understand how users typically navigate through your site - where and what they clicked. You can then adjust your design or products accordingly.

Once you have your site tidied-up and ready to convert - then you can begin driving traffic to it. You should then see a dramatic increase in your sales income.

Finally have an SEO Campaign

SEO will drive qualified traffic to your website. Before people buy they will first research the net to see what is the best product or service. SEO should, in time, have you ranking highly on the search engines.

Before you select an SEO company its best to find out what search engine optimisation (SEO) is all about, and what can and cannot be done do to make your website successful.

Take a look at some of our SEO articles as these will equip you with all the information you need to make an informed decision.

SEO - [How long to get results?](#)

SEO - [Pay Per Click Advertising Tips](#)

SEO - [Search Engine Optimisation Guidelines](#)

Or buy our eBook, [The Easy Guide to SEO](#), which clearly shows you what to expect when you employ an SEO expert. In fact this eBook is so good that if you follow the steps outlined you will become your own SEO expert and will not even have to employ an independent SEO company.

If you wish to spend serious money on an SEO expert try a Google search for 'SEO companies UK'. When last checked this search revealed over 300,000 UK sites offering SEO services. How do you choose which one to use?

QBS PC Help do not recommend any particular SEO company as we believe in letting our readers decide for themselves about the company they wish to use.

Overall, 75% of online shopping carts are abandoned



It has often been estimated that around 75% of shopping carts are abandoned before the sale can be closed. It is no wonder then that 'abandoned shopping carts' are considered one of the biggest problems for ecommerce websites.

A recent survey by Pay Pal supplies some of the reasons why this cart abandonment seems to happen.

Pay Pal Survey - A breakdown on why shoppers abandon shopping carts

Higher than expected shipping charges	46 percent
Just wanted to comparison shop	37 percent
Lack of money to spend	36 percent
Wanted to look for a money off coupon	27 percent
Wanted to shop offline	26 percent
Couldn't find a preferred pay option	24 percent
Item was unavailable at the checkout	23 percent
Couldn't find customer support	22 percent
Concern for security of credit card data	21 percent

There are quite a few of these reasons for quitting that you can do nothing about. However, there are a few where you can take corrective action to limit the fall off in the ecommerce sales process.

High shipping charges

46% of prospects who leave the shopping process before clicking the Buy Now button, do so because of higher than expected shipping costs.

If you only sell a few products it's far better to include all your costs in a single competitive price so you don't even have to mention shipping charges. For larger ecommerce sites who ship to many different locations it is often better to mention shipping charges earlier in the sales process and not introduce them as virtually the last process before the Buy Now button is clicked. This means your shopping cart software must be flexible enough to accommodate this preferred route to the final sale.

Lack of money to send

If a window shopper has no money to buy your product or service there's not much you can do about it. Perhaps they will return when they get their weekly or monthly pay packet.

Wanted to look for a money off coupon

Give customers an incentive to buy again. Always include money off or special deals coupons with all the packages you despatch. Customers who have just brought something from your website are your best prospects to return and buy even more products.

Also mention any special offers in prominent locations throughout your website to encourage visitors to buy your products.

Wanted to shop offline

The survey shows that 26% of your site visitors just use the Internet to check prices for the things they intend to buy offline. To get these discerning shoppers to buy from your site you must be competitive with your pricing not just with your online competitors but also your offline competitors. You must also show an attractive online display with crisp photos so that the product has visual impact when viewed. If you sell a physical product have options that let the customer increase the size of a viewed image and let it be rotated to show it off to maximum effect. Just take a look at some of the major e-commerce sites, like Amazon, to see these effects in full use.

Couldn't find a preferred pay option

24% of those interviewed were put off because they could not find the payment method they preferred. This certainly means that all online businesses should offer a range of payment options including all the different types of credit and debit cards. Pay Pal is another increasingly popular payment method that should be accepted by your e-commerce site.

Item was unavailable at checkout

Don't wait until a customer reaches the checkout before explaining that a required product is not available. This could cause a potential customer to abandon the shopping cart and leave your site.

There are a number of shopping cart software products that give you the capability to add, edit and delete products from your inventory database, some of which are even free.

Make sure that you keep your stock availability clearly displayed against every product you sell.

Couldn't find customer support

If you run an ecommerce website you must make it easy for potential customers to find your customer support area. This may be a dedicated FAQ type page, the prominent display of your customer telephone help line or live help of some sort.

Concern for security of credit card data

Make sure you always explain the security that your e-commerce site offers to alleviate any concerns a potential customer might have.

There are many other reasons for shopping cart abandonment. And a few of these are now discussed below.

Competition comparisons

One of the major attractions of online shopping is begin able to easily compare several competing website's. There are several comparison website's that are widely advertised on TV and can help people get the best value for money.

A lot of your potential customers will abandon their shopping carts midway, when they find that your competition has a far better offer.

Second thoughts

While initially taken in by the product and its cost, at the time of final payment online shoppers can abandon the shopping cart due to second thoughts. Wanting to think over the purchase a little more, these prospects are likely to abandon the shopping cart and maybe come back later for the final purchase.

Decide otherwise

While second thoughts do leave some room for a comeback, there are many potential customers who choose items but give up the idea of buying them completely while going through the sales process. They may decide that the item is not required or is not as attractive as they first thought.

Collective cost of products

While shopping online people tend to pick up several products and dump them in their shopping carts. When they finally view the total cost of these products, some find them too high and therefore completely abandon the shopping cart contents rather than going through the whole process again.

Length of check out process

One survey suggests that 41% buyers abandon shopping carts because they find that the time required for the final check out is too lengthy. Irritated by the time that the check out process is taking, these buyers despite being committed to the deal, simply abandon the shopping cart and move on.

Complicated check out process

Confused by complicated check out process buyers could decide to give up buying your product online, rather than try and figure out how the system works.

Registration process

There are several sites who have a pre-requisite to register before the final buying process can be undertaken. This can cause some buyers to abandon the shopping cart rather than register for the site.

Online businesses who fail to satisfy customer needs are finding that customers are leaving their sites, never to return. So what can you do to stem the flow and improve your customer retention?

A few well tested ideas and site improvements can make all the difference. The aim is to boost customer confidence in your site and what you sell.

Remember Abandoned Cart Details

E-commerce website's need to remember the items that customers abandon and make it easy for them to buy when they return to site at a later date. Sweetening the deal with free shipping, coupons and special discounts is also a great way to encourage online shoppers to revisit your site to complete their purchases.

Add a 'save for later' button

It may be that your customer is busy or is interrupted in the middle of buying. You could substantially increase sales if customers feel they can come back to the site within a reasonable time and carry on with their order.

Consider return and money-back policies

Having a money back return policy shows customers that you stand by your product and increases their confidence in buying from you. It also shows that you care about the satisfaction of your customer. Specify clearly how the customers should handle the process of returning the item, and when and how they can actually expect to get their money back.

Maximize cross-sell opportunities

Cross selling is the strategy of pushing new products to current customers based on their past purchases. Cross selling is achieved by including in your confirmation email other items they may like. When the product is dispatched you can again include special product offers and other promotional items to encourage your customer to return to your website and buy some more items.

The essence of any successful cross-selling strategy is recommending the right product at the right time. To do this, you must have information on the purchase history of the customer and product relationships.

Quick page downloads

Minimize the use of graphics only to those that are essential to enhance the look of your site, and make sure that you compress the file size. Check your HTML to avoid bloated coding. Make sure your site is designed using CSS and XHTML to make it quick loading.

Make sure your cart software is up to date

If your cart software is more than two or three years old, chances are it's missing a lot of the features that are standard these days and that shoppers have come to expect. Like any online technology, shopping carts have come a long way and it may be time to update your current software.

Examine what visitors are searching in your site

Your site search can provide you with important information that can improve your conversion rate. Check what visitors are searching for in your site and make sure you have these products in stock.

Also watch out for those searches that do not bring any results - because this means that people are looking for products on your site that you do not carry. If a sizeable number of visitors are looking for the same products, maybe you need to consider stocking these products as well. If you are carrying those products and yet customer searches yield no results, then your search dictionary may not cover the terms used by the visitors. This indicates that customers are using different terminologies for your products that you did not expect, and the word is not included in your search dictionary. The customer is ready to buy - unfortunately, your site search does not anticipate other ways a customer will look for the product. In this instance, you must get your web design company to correct this problem.

Communicate product offers clearly

Use clear, concise wording. More importantly, explain clearly the prices and sales terms up front, and not at the very end of the buying process. By putting the total costs including shipping and other charges at the start of the ordering process, the potential customer can decide whether he or she is willing to pay the price for the product. Doing so will minimise the rate of shoppers abandoning your site's shopping cart.

Alert users that they are abandoning their shopping carts

One of the strategies being adopted by some big companies to prevent shopping cart abandonment is by having a popup reminder when a user is about to exit the site without purchasing any of the items placed on their shopping carts. Try offering an additional discount in these pop-up's. The downside, of course, is that many users block pop-up's so the visitor may not see your reminder.

Keep in touch to Stop Your Customers Departing

If a customer abandons their shopping cart find out why with a follow-up call or email. If they are prepared to respond, you can use the opportunity to make changes and possibly reassure or give them the information they need. You may even be able to win back the sale.

The Very Best Affiliate Marketing Tips

Affiliate marketing is obviously not the easiest thing to do because many people seem have a go at it, but soon give up due to the lack of any real success.

So what can you do to improve your chances of becoming an affiliate marketing super star?

Here are a few vital tips to point you in the right direction. But bear in mind that it takes dedication and persistence to be successful in affiliate marketing. Your first attempt may even fail! But keep on trying and success will eventually come calling.

Buy a few good affiliate marketing books

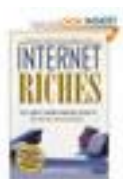
It pays to learn a bit about affiliate marketing before you put your toe in the water. Here are a few popular affiliate marketing books available from Amazon.co.uk and I strongly suggest you read one or two of these. They will help you to get a firm grasp of affiliate marketing techniques.



[The Complete Guide to Affiliate Marketing on the Web: How to Use and Profit from Affiliate Marketing Programs \(Paperback\) by Bruce C. Brown](#)



[Make a Fortune Promoting Other People's Stuff Online: How Affiliate Marketing Can Make You Rich \(Paperback\) by Rosalind Gardner](#)



[Internet Riches: The Simple Money-Making Secrets of Online Millionaires \(Paperback\) by Scott Fox](#)



[e-Riches 2.0 \(Hardcover\) by Scott Fox](#)

Also make good use of the Internet to find informative articles on this subject. And don't forget to check out blog's and forums based on affiliate marketing.

See top affiliate website's for even more ideas

Another good tip is to check out some of the top affiliate website's to see how they have made their money.

For example check out [Jeff Johnson at the underground training lab](#).

There are 3 main types of affiliate program

Pay per Lead

With Pay per Lead, affiliates are paid a fee for each customer they refer to a merchant's site that completes some sort of information query. Information gathered from lead generations may be used by the merchant site itself, or sometimes sold to another party.

In all fairness to your own site visitors, you should offer a disclaimer that the information they provide in a lead query is captured and could be sold to someone else.

This type of affiliate program is the least effective for generating income because unless you have a very specialised website that serves a focused purpose (i.e., offering information about dog food) most people are not going to take the time to fill out lead queries.

Pay per Sale

The Pay per Sale method is where a merchant site pays an affiliate when a customer, referred by the affiliate's website, makes an actual purchase. Pay per Sale programs, like the Amazon Affiliate program, may offer a flat fee for each sale, or a percentage based on a variety of factors, or even a combination of flat rate and percentage payments.

This affiliate payment system is the most reliable way to earn income from your affiliate programs. It is easy to track what people are buying, how much you are earning and make adjustments in your affiliate program advertisements to maximum selling potential.

Pay per Click

With Pay per Click, the merchant pays you for every click from your site to the merchant site whether or not a sale results. This may sound like a really easy way to make money but it is not. Unless you have very high traffic to your website this payment system not an effective tool to use and may actually detract from the quality of your site.

There are flaws in the Pay per Click system. Merchants are often targeted by individuals who sit and click repeatedly from their own sites or ask family and friends to click for them - people who have no intention of ever buying anything. This practice is unethical and unfair to other business owners.

If a merchant believes you are artificially inflating click-through's or using automated methods to increase clicks they have the right to refuse to pay you anything at all.

Initially, choose a topic you know well and love

By using what you know you should be able to build a simple website and add a few nice touches. You will be able to write good and informative copy that draws people to your website.

Starting with this personal project, you can then grow your affiliate business by creating other website's that focus on more profitable niche areas.

There is no best merchant program out there

Just as if you were buying something in a shop, it always pays to shop around for the best and most appropriate merchant to sign up with. Some people start with [Clickbank](#), which has thousands of merchants to choose from.

Keyword research

Once you have a good idea about the products or services you want to provide you need to gather targeted keywords and groups of keywords that will be woven into your web sites copy.

Use one of the free keyword analysis tools to help you come up with this important list.

You must do this research before you buy a domain name and build your website.

Buy a domain name

Once you have decided what your first site is all about you will have to purchase a domain name that is keyword rich and clearly reflects your target market.

Build your website

Either create a website yourself using commercial or free software, or sign up with a web host that has an online web design tool. All these options should give you plenty of choices - especially the hosting companies who offer a range of professionally designed templates that make it easy for you to get started with your first affiliate site.

Write compelling website copy

Above all else, your page content must be your highest priority.

Without valuable and helpful content, visitors will not come and visit your site. They will end up with one of your competitors who are providing exactly what they need.

If you focus on providing excellent content your affiliate marketing strategies will work out to your advantage.

The larger your website is, the greater your traffic draw from your valuable content will be. The higher your traffic rate is, the more likely you are to be successful with affiliate marketing.

Choose ads that fit with your website's purpose

Keep your affiliate ads tuned to your website's purpose and content as much as possible. You can be broad and creative, but remember to consider the interests and sensibilities of your website visitors. Affiliate ads should complement your site - not compete with it or swamp it.

Adding too many ads to a page and using annoying pop-ups and flash ads will usually accomplish only one thing - it will distract and annoy your readers who will just go somewhere else to find the information they want.

Keep your site fresh, content-rich and use ads as an added feature which has the appearance of being an extension of your site, that is, a service or convenience feature for your visitors, not as a primary way to get rich.

Try Google AdSense which targets ads based on the copy on your web pages.

Be Prepared to Work for Your Affiliates

If your affiliate ads are not working well on a page or section of your website, move them, change them, or remove them completely. Affiliate programs will drop you if your site is not performing well for them.

If you lack good results it tells you that your readers are not interested in the particular ads an offer you are showing them, or that they are ignoring them for other reasons (which are often due to placing far too many ads on one page).

Try Different Affiliate Programs

If one particular merchant program doesn't seem to be working for you, try another one.

Affiliate programs don't look the same. They offer different products, services, and payment structures. Some programs will have a lifetime pay-out on sales while others will limit it to 30-90 days. Some programs allow much more flexibility in the types of ad units available, as well as colours and design, so that they fit better with your website's layout.

Also, check your favourite vendors to see if they run their own affiliate program. Sometimes you can go directly to the source. You're not limited to big affiliate networks.

Advertise using Google AdWords

Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising is one of the best and fastest ways of targeting prospective customers to your website, no matter what merchant program you choose to run with.

One of the most widely used PPC advertising models is Google AdWords, although Yahoo Search Marketing and Microsoft Advertising adCenter are similar PPC products.

When you sign up to your preferred PPC provider you select targeted keywords or phrases that your potential customers will use when searching for your featured products or services. These Pay Per Click advertisements are usually called 'Sponsored links' or

'Sponsored ads' and generally appear next to or above the natural or 'organic' search results.

PPC advertising is not always easy to do, especially if you have not had any previous experience, so here are some of the key steps in setting up a [Pay Per Click advertising campaign](#) and here is how [to write effective PPC ads](#).

Banners - are they a good idea to use?

Are banners a good idea for your first and subsequent affiliate website? Many commentators seem to think that banners are a waste of time, yet many large and successful website's still use banner advertising and seem to profit from them.

If you decide to set up a WordPress blog as your first affiliate site then you should certainly try using [Max Banner Ads](#). We use this free plug-in on the QBS PC Blog and so far its proving very successful.

Article Marketing

Articles bring in the targeted traffic you need to run a successful web site with affiliate links. They build those all-important one-way back links and create those even more important top rankings in Google for your chosen keywords and phrases. Article Marketing can also build your online reputation and credibility in the eyes of your visitors which builds trust in your product recommendations.

[Article marketing is very much alive](#) and sites like EzineArticles lets you Tweet your articles to all your followers.

You can also place your articles, or links to them, on FaceBook, MySpace and the other social networks.

Getting your articles on Digg, Reddit, Stumbleupon etc can bring in a lot of traffic and improve your sites rankings.

The popularity of free article directories has grown and some of these sites have very high traffic numbers. Here are some of the main ones:

[EzineArticles](#)

[GoArticles](#)

[&iSnare](#)

[IdeaMarketers](#)

Article marketing is still a very good way to get your site and name on the web. It can still bring in traffic and help build those all important back links and search engine rankings.

YouTube

Turning your articles into short series of "how to" videos and placing them on YouTube, and your own site, can open up a whole different flow of traffic to your website and your targeted affiliate links.

Even if you are not keen on doing this yourself, consider getting some help with video production. It will certainly boost your visitor numbers.

Make good use of Google Analytics

Set up a good system to capture traffic information. QBS PC Help like to recommend [Google Analytics](#) but your own web host may well provide a good statistical package such as [AWStats](#) so that you can easily track your sites progress.

Both these methods of tracking your sites performance can tell you, among other things, the sites and search engines that refer your best customers as well as which pages draw the heaviest traffic. Such tools also enable you to identify return customers, new prospects and understand how users typically navigate through your site - where and what they clicked. You can then adjust your design or products accordingly.

Work Hard to get the site making money

The payoffs aren't usually instant and can take a while to build up. It could be a few months before you can make enough money to cover your start-up costs. It takes perseverance, dedication and patience to succeed in affiliate marketing.

Do not quit if your first attempt does not produce the results you're looking for. Try a different angle.

Beware - crooks can steal your commission

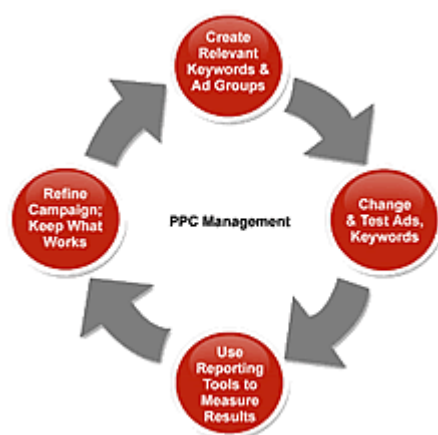
To be successful at affiliate marketing make sure you cloak your affiliate links so that thieves cannot steal and redirect your links for their own benefit.

When you use a full and unmasked affiliate link there's always a possibility that others can replace your affiliate information with their own and earn commissions themselves instead of you.

Discourage them from doing this by getting [MaxBlogPress Ninja Affiliate](#). This amazing WordPress plug-in can cloak your affiliate links to stop commission theft right then and there.

It's your hard earned commission, so don't let anyone mess with it. Use Ninja Affiliate and earn the commissions you deserve. [See our review of this WordPress plug-in.](#)

Pay Per Click Advertising Tips



Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising is one of the best and fastest ways of targeting prospective customers to your website, whether you sell a product or offer a service of some sort.

One of the most widely used PPC advertising models is Google AdWords, although Yahoo Search Marketing and MSN Adcenter are similar PPC products.

When you sign up to your preferred PPC provider you select targeted keywords or phrases that your potential customers will use when searching for your product or service.

These Pay Per Click advertisements are usually called 'Sponsored links' or 'Sponsored ads' and generally appear next to or above the natural or 'organic' search results.

PPC advertising is not always easy to do, especially if you have not had any previous experience, so here are some of the key steps in setting up a Pay Per Click advertising campaign.

Knowing your Market

To be successful with PPC advertising you must find out what search terms your potential customers are most likely to use when looking for a site like yours. You should try to come up with a few words and phrases describing your products or services. With that list of 'keywords' you can use the Internet to help you find even more words or phrases that you might not have considered. There are a few free tools that can help with this task, just type "free keyword tools" into any search engine.

Selecting your Keywords

PPC advertising is very competitive and some of the keywords you have chosen can work out to be very expensive and be way beyond your planned marketing budget. The key to cheaper bids is to find keywords that are less popular and therefore cheaper to bid for. To help you with this job grab a free keyword analyzer. Just search for "free keyword analyzer tool" using one of the major search engines and you will find many options to choose from.

Some keyword tools are very good at helping with this PPC research as they will not only provide you with a list of alternative keywords, but also display the number of searches for that keyword and the number of campaigns already running for the keyword or phrase you enter. This gives you a good view of what words you can bid on without going over budget, and also allows you to find keywords to bid on that get a large number of searches but do not have a competing ad campaign currently running. To do this yourself, type one of your keywords into a search engine and count all the sponsored links or sponsored ads that appear. Try several search engines, including [Google](#), [Yahoo](#) and [Bing](#).

Writing Your PPC Advertisement

Nothing in your PPC ad is more important than an attention grabbing headline. Unfortunately, the tricky thing with PPC ads is the lack of space you have for writing an eye catching ad. For example, Google allows ad titles to be only 25 characters long and the two description lines and display URL under the heading are limited to 35 characters each, so every single word definitely counts.

Using your main keyword in the title and body of the ad will increase the likelihood that the readers of your PPC advertisement will click through to your web page.

Listing a benefit of your product or service in the form of a question is also a good way to attract the view of potential customers, who may then click to view your site content.

Split Testing your PPC Advertisement

Once you've written your first advertisement, write another that's slightly different and test which ad gets the most clicks. Once you've found out which is the best performing ad write another ad to see if you can improve the click through rate (CTR) even further. This process will eventually provide you with the best performing PPC ads for your product or service.

To help with this analysis Google (and others) will alternate your ads for you and you will be able to see which ad performs the best by looking at your click through rate (CTR).

TIP: PPC advertisers who do this 'split testing' are usually more successful with their PPC advertising campaigns.

Using targeted Landing Pages

You must make sure that the page your prospective customers end up on provides exactly what they are searching for. This will not always be your home page, but some other landing page within your site. If a visitor finds exactly what he needs when he clicks your advertisement he is much more likely to buy your product or use your service.

Securing a high page position with your bids

All the major search engines use a slightly different method for working out the position for your PPC ad. Google and Yahoo use a combination of ad relevancy and bid price.

A big mistake a lot of people seem to make is not targeting keywords tightly enough and specific enough to a particular product or service and not bidding high enough on targeted keywords to secure top placements.

It is estimated that 85% of all PPC clicks occur on ads that appear in one of the top three positions on the page. This means, if you are not targeting your ad closely enough to your potential customers needs and are not bidding enough to get a top spot, you are missing out on a lot of potential clicks that could lead people to your website.

Google AdWords

Many companies use Google AdWords for their PPC advertising campaigns and take advantage of the Budget control within AdWords to limit their daily and monthly spending to their desired marketing budget. What not everyone realizes is that this can often result in higher cost per click (CPC) and fewer clicks! This is because of the way Google AdWords makes sure you don't exceed your budget, by limiting the number of times your ad is displayed, which therefore limits the number of clicks your ad receives.

Here's a *very simplified* example to illustrate the point. Say you have only one keyword and it has the following monthly cost and volume data (*hypothetical data*):

PPC Marketing Campaign for The Widget Co			Keyword: widget		
Position	Bid	Clicks	CTR	CPC	Cost
1	£6.91	1,600	4.0%	£8.30	£13,280
2	£4.31	1,100	2.5%	£5.20	£5,720
3	£2.74	800	2.0%	£3.43	£2,744
4	£2.37	700	1.8%	£2.95	£2,065
5	£1.98	600	1.5%	£2.44	£1,464
6	£1.60	500	1.3%	£1.94	£970
7	£1.23	400	1.0%	£1.47	£588
8	£0.85	300	0.8%	£1.02	£306

First, imagine you have a bid of £4.31 (since this is an important keyword, you want to rank highly) and your monthly budget is £2,750. In this case, your ad will show up at position 2, but because of Google's budget limiting, the ad will only appear 48% ($£2,750/£5,720$) of the time. This means you get just 528 clicks ($48\% \times 1,100$). Your cost per click is £5.20, which brings your monthly spending (£2,745.60) within your planned budget of £2,750.

Now, imagine that your bid was £2.74, with the same budget of £2,750. Here, your ad shows up in position 3 but shows 100% of the time so you get 800 clicks at a cost per click of £3.43 for a total cost of £2,744, again within your planned budget.

Comparing these two cases, in the first one you were budget limited by Google and got 528 clicks, and in the second case, you used your bid to achieve your spending target and got 800 clicks for the same cost. That's why managing PPC spending using budget control results in higher CPC and fewer clicks.

PPC Management Software Makes It Easier

Of course, it can be hard to estimate which bid will result in what cost, especially when you are dealing with 100's or 1000's of keywords instead of just one. To find software to help just type 'free pay per click management software' or something similar into one of the major search engines.

Google AdWords, Yahoo! Search Marketing, and Microsoft adCenter were the largest network operators in 2010. Depending on the search engine, minimum prices per click start at £0.01 (up to £0.15), these prices are often referred to as Costs Per Click (CPC). Be warned - popular search terms can cost a lot more if you use the most popular search engines.

Create a Killer PPC Advertisement



When it comes to Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising there are only two ways to decrease your spending. You can lower your cost per click (which will lower your position and your click through rate (CTR)) or you can improve your PPC advertisements (which will increase your CTR and your position).

Great ads will attract more clicks for a given amount of impressions, which will be rewarded by Google AdWords and Yahoo Search Marketing with lower bid prices or higher rankings.

The real secret to writing the most popular PPC advertisement on the page is to ruthlessly test and track multiple ads - which is called split testing. By doing this, you will improve your advertising skill over time, and will eventually have a great performing ad with a very high click through rate.

To get a high click through rate your ad must be designed in such a way that it attracts the eye of potential customers so here a few tips on how to design the perfect PPC advertisement.

Write ads for small groups of keywords

You should try to get your keywords to appear multiple times in your ads so that you can take full advantage of keyword grouping. You could even include the keyword in all four lines of the PPC ad for maximum effect. But make sure this does not detract from the advertising message you are trying to put across.

And also by grouping your selected keywords very tightly, and writing your ads specifically for those keywords, you will give yourself a large advantage over your main competitors. Many people do not seem take the time required to do this job properly, yet it is something that will always increase your click through rate (CTR) every single time!

Create an attention-grabbing headline

Nothing in your advertisement is more important than your headline. The problem with PPC ads is that you don't get much space for it.

For example, Google allows ad titles to be only 25 characters long.

Layout your headline wisely, but don't stress over it too much, as you will probably be split testing many different variations before you find the one that performs really well.

Write ads with your audience in mind

When you write an ad, ask yourself "what is my audience looking for when they search for this particular keyword?" If you can write an ad that 'solves a problem', people with that problem will be instantly drawn to your ad.

You do have much space when it comes to writing your ads description as Google limits the two description lines and display URL to 35 characters each, so every single word you use is important.

Give the ads some visual appeal

This takes some additional creativity and planning, but can really help your PPC ad to stand out. For example you could make each line progressively longer (or shorter) for a cascading effect or you could alternate lengths to create a visual “arrow” or “reverse arrow” shape within your ad. You could even make your ad extra short. All of these ideas could help make your ad stand out from the rest and will hopefully increase your ads click through rate.

Ask the audience a question

This is definitely a good strategy for certain markets. If you can work a question into your headline or description, test it out and see how it performs. If someone is searching for something, and then you confirm what they are searching for, they are far more likely to click on your ad. Additionally, the tone of the question, along with the question mark, helps differentiate your ad from all the others.

Use specific numbers

Numbers create interest and specific numbers create curiosity. They won't always perform better, but try to test the impact of including numbers in your advertisement. Always include whole numbers such as 31% rather than numbers including decimal points, like 31.13%. In other words, round up or down rather than using decimal points.

Borrow ideas from others

A copy writing principle that has been in practice for decades is borrowing ideas from other ads. If you only take “ideas” (such as rewriting an ad about “fish” to work with your “pc repair” keywords), you should not get into any trouble copying the ideas of direct competitors. Take some of the top ads that are being shown for your keywords and mix them up to create something completely new. If they are at the top of the listings, they probably have a pretty good advertisement, or are paying out a lot of money to have it appear in the top position.

Emphasize the benefits of your offer

Your audience doesn't care how many features your are offering or how great they are - all they want to know is “What's in it for me?” If you can tell them, you will likely have a hugely successful ad.

Use words that evoke emotion

If you can get people to feel emotions when reading your ad, they will probably feel compelled to click it. The list of emotion words is very long, so here is a nice [Wikipedia guide to emotion words](#).

Test multiple versions of your display URL

You can certainly experiment with capitalization (i.e. "DomainName.com" vs. "domainname.com"). You should also experiment with "www", sub domains and pages.

Including your keywords in your domain name can often increase your CTR. You can essentially do this one of two ways: "Key-Words.DomainName.com" or "DomainName.com/Key-Words."

Be cautious with prices

Although prices do have their place as negative qualifiers, they will usually be detrimental to your CTR.

Unless your price is definitely the lowest on the block, it's probably best to leave it out of your PPC ad. You can, instead, perhaps state the savings your product provides as a benefit to your potential customers.

Include a call-to-action

Sometimes, the most effective way to get someone to do something is to simply ask them to do it. That's the principle behind the call to action. Because you have such limited space in a PPC ad, the call-to-action might not be beneficial, but it is at least worth a test. Just including something like "Click here to receive this benefit" or "Get your free copy now" is more than sufficient to test this idea.

Don't waste space with useless words

The space available to you in a PPC ad is extremely limited. Although your ads should be grammatically correct, they do not need to be sophisticated sentences. Keep them simple and concise so that it is easier for the reader to quickly understand what you are offering.

Use negative keywords

Negative keywords permit advertisers to specify when ads should not be shown, such as when a keyword has multiple meanings or is part of other popular queries. You will be able to do this from within your PPC interface.

Although negative keywords are not directly related to how you write your ads, they are important. If you don't use negative keywords, your ad is going to be triggered by keywords that you did not plan for. When this happens, your ad will not match what the consumer was searching for and will result in lower CTR and a lower placement.

To find out more about negative keywords see this Google page - [How can I find the right negative keywords to benefit my campaign?](#)

Make the ad relevant to your landing page

Although your landing page does not affect the CTR of your ad it can affect what you receive from it, in terms of a product sale or in signups for your service. It is therefore very important that you make your ad relevant to your landing page.

If a visitor reads a particular offer or benefit in your ad, they are expecting to find it when they click through to your landing page. Give them what you promise in your advertisement and you will experience a higher conversion rate. Give them something that doesn't match the ad and you will have a lot of confused visitors who will quickly reach for the back button.

Always double check spelling and grammar

This might seem obvious, but it can be very easy to make a stupid mistake. Having a grammatical or spelling error in your ad (or any document) hurts the credibility of your advertisement and will most likely get it disabled by an editor, costing you valuable testing time.

So there you have it. A few tips on writing killer PPC ads.

Using Twitter to promote your business



Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that is free to use and is available to everyone. But there is a certain degree of etiquette involved in any type of social networking, so here are a few suggestions about how to promote your business by using Twitter.

Set up an Account with Twitter

The first thing to do is [create your twitter account](#) and then populate it with interesting tweets, which is Twitter's way of describing a micro-blogging post containing no more than 140 characters.

Before you get too involved with this new account and all the tweets you intend to do, take some time to choose or design a customised Twitter background for your business page. Far too often individuals and even businesses go for the common default ones provided by Twitter. Here's a really good blog post that's all about twitter backgrounds and why you should keep away from the default ones - <http://www.mashable.com/2009/05/23/twitter-backgrounds>.

Once you start to deal with your tweets, retweets and a growing list of followers, it's best to use a free tool like [Tweetdeck](#) to help you with your Twitter marketing campaign. Tweetdeck is a desktop application that allows you to review and post updates to your Twitter Account. You can even use this tool to update your Twitter and Facebook pages at the same time!

Tweetdeck lets you sort the people and businesses you follow into groups and allows you to limit the number of tweets you view at any one time. It also lets you remove all the tweets you have seen with just one click.

Adding Interesting and Informative Tweets

By adding tweets that are interesting and relevant about your products and services, you can keep your tweets current and therefore popular with Twitter users. You should also add relevant news about your 'industry' to keep your Tweets interesting and varied.

To build up a following you should begin following people and businesses who are also using Twitter. As you follow others, most of them will follow you back. This is an important step as a blank Twitter account will not attract anyone.

You can use Twitter to point people to content on your website perhaps to articles you have written or the products or services you want to sell.

Bear in mind that Google indexes Twitter so your Twitter business page can appear in the organic search results.

So how can you follow others?

The best way to follow others is to do some research.

Go to Twitter.com and run a search by using keywords that are related to the industry you are targeting. For example if you are trying to sell an application for Apples iPhone you would search using the keywords such as Iphone, Iphone App and Iphone Apps and anything else that might find people who use Twitter and own an iPhone.

If your tweets are interesting to your readers you will find that other people will begin to follow you as they stumble across your Twitter business page.

Another way to pick up followers after you have logged-in is to click the Find People option at the top of the page and then enter keywords, related industries, locations or other details to locate potential followers and begin following them.

Always respond when your followers tweet you. If you do not keep up with you hard earned following it may begin to crumble. If you have a large following to maintain outsource you retweets or assign the task to one of your employees. Also make use of twitter tools like Tweetdeck to help with your twitter marketing campaign.

As you develop your Twitter marketing campaign you need to keep your followers engaged so you will have to tweet often, preferably daily or weekly.

Ensure that you retweet relevant tweets from other Twitter followers. If they then start to follow you will begin to benefit from all their followers. Retweeting is certainly one of the fastest ways to build your own Twitter followers.

By checking search.twitter.com frequently you can look for your brand name to see what customers are saying about your company. You can follow these tweets whether they are good or bad and get involved in the conversations. Your customers will be thrilled when you thank them for their kind words or even rectify a problem for them.

The ability of your customers who use Twitter to contact your management team is an invaluable resource. This one to one exchange permits you to keep close tabs on customer viewpoints, concerns and interests and is a great way to tap into social networking to test new ideas and to ask for customer feedback.

Avoid Spamming your followers

Beware - if you start to spam your followers they will quickly un-follow you. Spam activity includes things like only tweeting about your own products or services or retweeting the same URL time and time again. Too many frivolous tweets can also be classed as spam.

It's best to avoid these sort of tweets if you want to continue to build up and retain your Twitter followers.

A few really useful Twitter tools

Twitter Feed

Twitter feed let's you show your blog posts directly in Twitter. It also allows you to post your tweets to your blog (by installing a WordPress widget). This two way interaction can push Twitter users to your Blog and get your Blog readers following you on Twitter.

<http://www.twitterfeed.com>

Twuffer

This a Twitter tweet scheduler and is very easy to use. It lets you tweet ahead and lets you select a posting schedule by day and time. if you are publishing content about your product or service this is a great tool to use. Set your tweets days, weeks or a month ahead and feed content to readers in addition to your regular tweets.

<http://www.twuffer.com>

TweetBeep

This great little application let's you manage your online Twitter reputation and sends email alerts whenever someone tweets about your name, your business or your domain name. This is really useful if you are concerned about branding and online identity.

<http://www.tweetbeep.com>

Quitter

If you want to know who has stopped following you sign up for this service. This can be a useful tool to help you find out what a reader hated about your recent tweet that caused them to stop following you. This lets you fine tune your tweets so you can retain your following.

<http://www.useqwitter.com>

Twitoria

Here's the best way to find out which people never use Twitter or post infrequently so you can delete them right from the Twitoria website.

<http://www.twitoria.com>

Using Facebook as a branding strategy for your Business Website and Business Blog



Facebook has undergone a few changes of late and is now a much more viral experience for you and your potential or existing customers (collectively called Fans in Facebook).

The new Facebook Business Page layout is divided into two distinct areas.

The left-most column is where your brand logo, business information summary, fans, links and admin links can be located. Make sure you write something interesting about your company in this left column. Be sure to include a link to your website here. Your description can be changed at any time, so this is also a great place to highlight a promotion or some other news about your company.

The right hand column is the certainly the largest and is divided into a series of tabs, with the Wall tab generally being the default view.

The Wall acts as a Twitter-style update feed that puts your business news directly on your Facebook Business Page.

When you are logged into Facebook and click Edit Page a third column appears containing blocks of advertising.

As you make changes, add links and share other information on your Facebook Business Page, it automatically appears in the new Wall feed. Updates and Wall posts made by your fans are also shown in this Wall feed. And any updates that you add also appear on all your Fans Walls, so this can be a truly viral experience.

Sign up for a Facebook Business Account

Go to the Facebook sign up page and create your Business Account - <http://www.facebook.com>.

Once you are logged into Facebook, scroll to the bottom of the page and click "Advertising," and then click "Pages." at the top of the page. There is some great information here, so take a moment to read through the information and when you are ready click "Create Page."

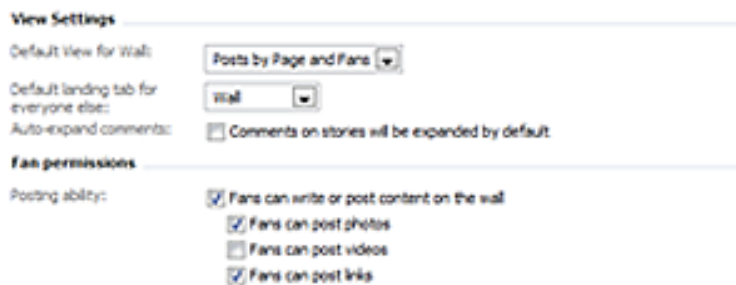
As you go through the set-up process, remember that you must categorise your company in the right area to help people find you business.

Setting Up a Business Page

One of the first things you need to do when you set up a new Facebook Page is to give it a title. A tip with this is to think about using rich keywords related to your business that you would like to be found for. Use your own collection of keywords and choose the main one that currently attracts people to your website or blog.

You also want to choose a good, clear photo for your Facebook Page. This can be a personal picture or your company's logo.

When setting up your page you will have to decide if you want visitors to be able to post messages for everybody to see or if you only want your own messages shown. It may be best to allow everything, as this will help to build your Wall content faster because people love to post messages.

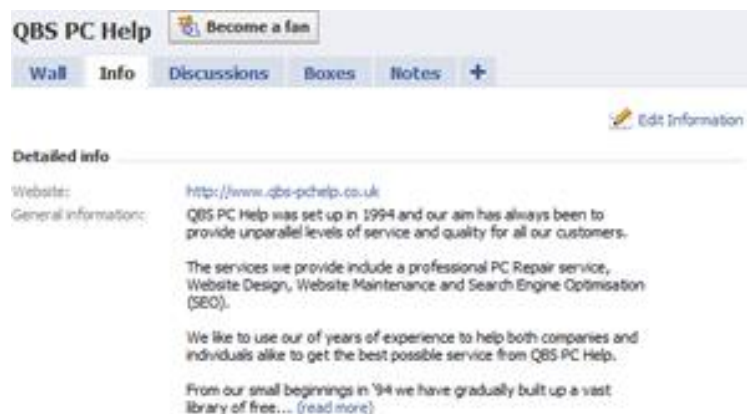


When you are logged in and at the Wall, click Edit Page (under your Logo or picture) and edit the Wall settings. Select the options you require for your business.

If the posts become out of control or unflattering, you can always delete individual posts or change the settings later.

One of the great things about Facebook is the ease of set up. Setting up a business page is really just about carefully finding your way around and following the various prompts.

Other Tabs



At the top of your new Facebook Wall you will see an Info Tab where you can create a full-length version of your company information.

There are also Tabs for Custom Facebook Applications that you choose to add to your Business Page, like RSS feeds Pictures and other applications.

Once you fill in all of the basic information, save everything.

You have now successfully created your Facebook Business Page.

Provide Interesting and Useful Comments

It is important for you to let people know about your Business Page. This is where having an already active Business Page comes in handy because if you already have a lot of people who are interested in your Company, you can suggest your new Facebook Business Page to them.

Just like in other areas of social media (blog's, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc), it's extremely important to provide interesting content to your readers.

You should add fresh content and updates to your Facebook Business Page on a regular basis (daily or weekly). This will keep your fans returning to your page. And Fans that do return, are far more likely to become paying customers at some point.

When you update your Facebook Business Page you'll need to find a good balance between getting your business message across to your Facebook Fans without commercially spamming them. Keep the updates light and useful rather than advertising-heavy.

Offering regular and useful content will naturally encourage interaction because you are giving people something to respond to. You don't need to come up with all the content yourself, either. You might just link to an interesting article or blog post you have found on the web that's related to your business or industry.

To help with this content creation you can also use an application like Notes to enter your blog's RSS details so that it pulls your blog posts straight into your Wall. The Notes application can be found in the Application settings section of your Facebook account (Edit Page/Applications/ Notes).

Ultimately, the more time you invest in your business's Facebook page, the better response you will get from it.

Keep in mind that a user can simply click a little X beside your update in their news feed to hide all future news updates about you. So make your updates newsworthy and interesting but do not aggressively promote your business as other Facebook users will probably frown on this.

Marketing and Branding

Marketing and branding your Facebook Business Page can take time. You can't just set up a Business Page and hope that people find you. If there is nothing on your page that interests people, no one will become a fan.

Try posting open-ended questions to entice responses from your fans such as what is your favourite widget? What do you like about this widget or how did you find our widget?

Posting links and photos are also a great way to get people interested, plus they are more visually appealing so people are more likely to pay attention.

Posting links that point to your website has the benefit of pushing people to your site to find out more about you and your Company. Try posting on your Business Wall page every time you update your blog or just use the Notes feature mentioned earlier.

You have to be a little proactive about getting Fans, especially when your Page is new.

A couple of good ideas is to add your Facebook URL to your email signature and use the free badges and widgets that Facebook provides and add them to your website. And don't forget to mention your business page in your blog posts and your twitter tweets. If you have a newsletter mention your Facebook Business Pages to your subscribers.

The more people in your network who find out about your page, the more friends you can make, and the larger your network becomes.

Once you have some supporters of your Page, you want to encourage more dialogue and interaction between yourself and them and even among each other. The biggest impact comes from simply having conversations with people.

Facebook Advertising

Facebook Advertising is a worth exploring. This allows you to place small display type ads in the right sidebar of Facebook pages and profiles. Currently it's not as effective in pure responses as a well targeted Google AdWords campaign. But it's not really the same kind of vehicle and in any case you won't find Google AdWords in Facebook at the moment.

Advertising space is a bit limited in these Facebook ads so use it wisely. Your headline (25 characters) should grab attention immediately with a strong benefit. There's another 135 characters, in the body of the ad, you can use to attract your potential followers. You also have the option to upload an image. Take this option. It may be the most important aspect of your ad as Facebook users are very image driven (it's the largest photo sharing site in the world) and the visual graphic you choose will make or break an ad.

To find out more about advertising with Facebook see this page - <http://www.facebook.com/advertising>.

Customising Facebook

There are many more things you can add to your Facebook Business Pages such as customisable app's, connecting the main page to your Twitter feed and blog. There are many other app's and widgets to choose from.

The introduction of Facebook Applications is probably one of the most popular moves ever made by Facebook. They released their API so that developers and business owners could collaborate to create fun and cool applications that engage users. The applications created so far widely vary in purpose - some are fun games, some are useful, some are directly related and tied into businesses and some are just plain utilities, but still useful.

Many popular applications have hundreds of thousands of monthly active users and that information speaks for itself.

If you want to read more about creating your own applications for Facebook, you should check out the Facebook Developers page. Once you have an application created, be sure to add it to your profile and to your Facebook group and page.

Boxes and the FBML App

A new default tab called Boxes holds lots of potential for businesses as well. Think of a box page as a free-form scratch pad. You can add up to 10 of what Facebook calls FBML elements (you must add the Facebook Static FBML application to your app's to edit these). FBML is Facebook's mark-up language but these elements will take any HTML as well. So you have the ability to add newsletter sign-up forms, eBook downloads, and other HTML based elements. (You can add any of the default elements such as video or discussions as well.)

Once you create the elements you can slide them around the page to get them to display as you like, but you must go to the wall page and hit Edit the page to edit an individual FBML element that's already installed.

You can even create custom landing pages inside of your Facebook Page and promote them as entry points.

One source of frustration at the moment is that many app's don't work with the latest update. Facebook's included app's, such as video, events, photos and discussion, all good ones for your Page, seem to work, but many other 3rd party app's do not.

Facebook Widgets

In addition to all the app's you can also make use of Facebook Widgets that can help spread the word about your new Facebook Business Page. You can check these out at <http://www.facebook.com/facebook-widgets>.

Once you have something like this on your website and blog, visitors can just click on it and they will land on your Facebook Business Page where they can become a fan.

Finally, if you don't have a Facebook Business Page yet, head over to <http://www.facebook.com> and get started. You won't regret it!

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