

► Strengthen Your Digital Footprint

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Everything you do online creates a digital footprint. Every picture, every social media post, every shopping adventure—they're all part of the trail you create via digital platforms. Some of us may have a more sizable digital footprint than others—ahem, have you Googled yourself lately?

Businesses need to create a digital footprint to stay ahead of the curve, as it has become the leading source for content, products and services, entertainment, and connections. Want to differentiate your business from your customers? Want to get in front of your target audience? Want to be recognized with authority and increased credibility online? Look no further than your digital footprint.


But before you go marching off determined to create a Bigfoot-sized digital presence, wait just a moment and understand this: It's not the size of your digital footprint that matters, it's the strength... the effectiveness. A guiding question when you're ready to put your foot down should be "where are my customers engaging content and what do I have to offer that fits that space?" When you're ready to create content, build relationships and become remarkable, then read on. Here are five strategies for increasing the effectiveness of your digital marketing.

- 1) **Produce something of value and share it.** Value comes in all shapes and sizes. Craigslist.com offers a priceless resource; Google Maps provides a vital piece of information; purchase airline tickets on your smartphone to save time; save a few bucks by using Groupon or Amazon Local; produce entertaining content, be relevant, timely, or just helpful by being an extension of someone else's work.
- 2) **Befriend the news media.** Everything the news media produces these days goes on the Web and if your business becomes a source of information and assistance with meeting tight, daily deadlines, then those news stories can include links and citations back to you. Local news has the highest levels of trust and authority with search engines and your customers are reading/viewing them—almost guaranteed. In order to build a relationship with your news media, offer to be an information source or a source for quotes on relevant stories and articles, be a guest author/commentator, write and submit articles or pitch stories to the reporter that covers your newsbeat.
- 3) **Create a connection with your customers.** Through inbound marketing, create ongoing relationships with your customers and become "remarkable"—worthy of being remarked upon.

When your business provides a positive (read: fantastic) experience to a patient, they will become your advocate and spread the word, digitally, on your behalf. People who are willing to tout your brand have access to more people in their own social sphere than you would be able to reach even with thousands of dollars in advertising. This is remarkable.

- 4) **Enjoy the spotlight.** Publicize any changes in your business—honors, awards, moves, new technology, etc. Think of business events as an opportunity to push information out onto your own website, social media, e-newsletter, to the local media, and through press releases. If the content you produce is well written, timely, relevant, and interesting to your target audience, it will grow legs and find its way around the Internet.
- 5) **Diversify.** But not so much that your digital presence becomes watered down or that you can't manage it all. Here are the top strategies/mediums to strengthen your stance online:
 - a. **Directories**—review and ratings sites such as Google+, Facebook, Yelp, HealthGrades
 - b. **Social Media**—Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube/Vimeo
 - c. **Your own website and blog**
 - d. **A homegrown email list**
 - e. **Online advertising**—Google Adwords, Facebook, Bing, and local news websites

Utilizing these mediums really does separate the really successful from everyone else.

One thing you may not have ever thought about is that your digital footprint also creates a digital reputation. How your customers engage with and perceive your brand while online is entirely within your control through the platforms where you choose to be active, the content you produce, and how you respond to relevant news and events. It can be intimidating to increase your visibility and boost your exposure, but doing so also boosts your trust and authority online. 



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