

Would you print a brochure then lock it away in a cupboard?

This is obviously a loaded question.... of course you don't print marketing collateral and stick it in the nearest paper-recycling bin, but in essence the equivalent is happening with many digital marketing strategies. When the Board of Directors ask about the web site, many Marketing Directors feel safe that their digital marketing strategy is in action as the web site is created and meta-tags are in place, even the web development team are assured that it is accessible and optimised for search engines and pay-per-click advertising has been invoked.

But is this really enough? There is a missing piece to the digital marketing puzzle, which is simply email marketing. Once demonised as spam, email marketing is now accepted and even expected as part of any integrated digital marketing strategy. If your web site is considered the marketing heart and lungs of your organisation then email marketing should be considered the lifeblood, engaged to bring the oxygen to the vital organs.

How else are customers, key stakeholders and prospective clients going to know what you have to say or sell this week? Changing your web site does not mean there is an automatic proliferation of your message. An opt-in email marketing campaign will ensure your target market have a reason to revisit your web site time and time again whilst being kept abreast of your marketing message in a direct and cost effective way. It is also a known fact that email campaigns create an immediate and quite often profound effect when used as an integral part of your promotional strategy.

In the early part of 2006, the Department of Employment and Learning in Belfast launched an email marketing campaign in order to encourage attendance at their Skills Conference event being held in the Ramada Hotel. At the same time a postal

strike occurred in the Belfast Post Office, rendering their direct surface mail undelivered. As others cancelled their events due to poor publicity, the Department managed to gain over 200 attendees by purely digital promotion.

Hasting Hotels send an email marketing campaign every month to promote special offers, luxury weekend breaks and golfing specials. Last month as a direct result of their email marketing campaign, the hotel chain achieved additional revenues of over £19,000.

Email marketing technology is not only an accepted part of company marketing; but it also plays a vital role in lead generation by helping the sales team make informed decisions. It is possible to deploy an email marketing campaign and track who got the email, what they looked at and what links they clicked. Technology now allows us to track customer movement from the email campaign through the web site and in doing so it awards them points as they move from page to page. The result is a list of the Hot Prospects are established and displayed for the sales team with the highest scoring prospects at the top. For many companies this has become an invaluable tool in sales lead assessment and generation.

So what is around the corner with marketing technology? Email marketing has gained traction and has gone mainstream. Later expect to deploy technologies such as RSS feeds, blogging and podcasting within your digital marketing strategy. These may sound like tools for the youth web sites of today but rest assured they will soon become the essential digital marketing toolkit of tomorrow. Web marketing is evolving way beyond web site design and search engine optimisation and those Marketing Managers that see the potential in this technology are grasping with both hands and ensuring that their digital brochures aren't locked away for nobody else to see