

TIRE REVIEW



THE GREAT PROPERTY DEBATE

MARKETING MATTERS

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audience, and delivers a positive user experience overall," he says.

Brad Timofeev, director of website marketing for WebArt (webart.com), a division of Madison Avenue Marketing Group, agrees, adding that a tire dealership's website needs to clearly communicate what sets the shop apart from others in the same market.

"What sets you apart is not the tire brands you carry or the size of your inventory, or the words 'quality' and 'service,'" he explains. "Consumers have lots of choices, so why should they pull into your shop? What do you offer that's better, different, more valuable?"

Set your shop's website up for success by including strong calls to action, Timofeev says, adding, "If you're going to buy advertising that directs people to your site, make it simple for those people to become customers. The best way to do that is to give them easy access to free estimates, special offers and online appointments."

Because a website is the anchor to your entire online marketing strategy, it's important that it offers information consumers need, according to Margaret Klemmer, chief marketing officer for Autoshop Solutions (autoshopsolutions.com), a website design and Internet marketing agency that works exclusively with the automotive aftermarket. This includes simple navigation, easy-to-find contact information, appropriate calls to action and a mobile-friendly site with responsive design.

"Once you have a quality website in place, you need to start driving traffic to the website," she notes.

Most Effective Methods

To drive that traffic, there are a handful of methods, these marketing professionals agree, that make for a solid starting point.

"Once you have a strong website, the most effective type of digital marketing for tire dealers is low funnel," says Timofeev. "That means marketing in order to see quick results: search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click advertising and local directory profiles/advertising."

Pocci recommends paid search, online display advertising and email for a basic digital advertising foundation. Paid search involves placing ads within search engine results pages (Google,

Digital Advertising Select the best methods for your budget and target audience

WHILE RADIO, TELEVISION AND PRINT – IN CERTAIN FORMS – ARE STILL VERY RELEVANT advertising methods (see "The Art of Purchasing: Building a Media Plan" in the November 2015 issue of TIRE REVIEW), digital advertising now plays a large role in tire dealers' marketing efforts.

This is for a good reason: digital allows for complete customization around each tire dealer's individual needs, including budget, targeting, methods used and more. However, due to the constantly evolving nature of all things online, it can be difficult to keep up.

Several digital ad experts weighed in to provide dealers with an in-depth introduction to the most effective means of digital advertising, as well as some budgeting tips and a crash course in monitoring results.

While some customers still walk into a store, choose a tire and make a purchase, the majority today use the Internet as a starting point for research, according to Mike Pocci, director of connections planning for Hitchcock, Fleming & Associates (teamhfa.com), an Akron, Ohio-based agency that counts Good-year among its clients.

"Consumers will often visit tire dealer websites before making a purchase, which is why it's crucial to ensure that your website is easy to use, offers relevant and useful content for your

TAKEAWAYS

- > Online display advertising is ideal for websites your target audience will visit.
- > Customers are more likely to trust a business with an active social media presence.
- > Smaller budgets should go toward a good quality responsive website, SEO, AdWords and active social media pages.

Bing, etc.), so that they appear after searchers enter a specific keyword – “discount tires,” for example – and should send them to your website when clicked. Paid search is an effective way to reach consumers who have shown a clear interest in a particular product or category, he notes.

Online display advertising is more graphical in nature than paid search and usually includes images, animation or video content, Pocci says, adding, “These ads can be placed on websites that your target audience is likely to visit and are ideal for reaching new consumers who are in the market for tires.”

Email is ideal for customer retention, as contacting past buyers via email with special offers and discounts may entice them to return to make additional purchases, he adds.

Klemmer touts the importance of correctly using SEO, which essentially is optimizing a website for search engines to read by selecting search terms that apply to a business, such that when a consumer uses those terms on the search engines to find information, that shop’s information will appear in the results.

“SEO must be done correctly, according to the terms set forth by the search engines,” she cautions. “When done incorrectly, like trying to ‘game the system to improve rankings,’ a shop may see a temporary increase in ranking, but will then quickly get back flagged and sent several pages back or disappear altogether.”

Echoing Pocci’s sentiments on paid search, such as Google AdWords, Klemmer recommends it as a targeted way to drive quality traffic to a website. “With paid search, a dealer can specify the geographic target, like a 5- to 10-mile radius around the shop, write ads with calls to action based on the search term and drive a website visitor straight to a landing page related to the search term,” she explains.

Klemmer adds that one final method, social media, can be a very effective component of a digital marketing campaign – again, if done correctly.

“Social media is no longer an option; it’s a requirement if your shop wants to be successful in being found online,” she says, adding that search engines also look at a shop’s social

media cues when ranking its website for SEO.

Maximizing Your Efforts

Now that you have a general blueprint for successful online advertising, the next step is making sure your shop is using each method as effectively as possible.

“Given the inundation of marketing messages that consumers receive on a daily basis – and the fact that they now have much greater control over their media experiences, thanks to the digitally-connected world we live in – consumers don’t have the time or the attention span to sit through lengthy marketing messages, especially if they’re not relevant,” Pocci cautions. “It is imperative to focus on reaching the right consumers, at the right time, with the appropriate message.”

He stresses the importance of providing them with something of value, and communicating why they should care about your brand and purchase from your stores.

“Keep it engaging and relevant to your audience,” Pocci says. “It’s also helpful to think about the different types of consumers and where they are in the path to purchase, which may dictate the advertising methods you select.”

For example, for someone who isn’t necessarily thinking about tires but will undoubtedly need new tires at some point in the future, consider online display advertising on local websites, branded content or sponsorships on tire-related websites, or video ads on your audience’s favorite TV show streaming sites, to start building awareness and brand recognition, he explains. On the other end of the path – for someone who is in need of new tires right now – paid search and hyper-targeted advertising on mobile devices may be better options, Pocci adds.

Timofeev seconds the need to create different messages for different audiences, referring to a low-funnel, mid-funnel and high-funnel model. Consumers generally move from high-funnel, in which they are unaware of your products or services or do not have a need yet, to low-funnel, in which they have a need and a desire to make a purchase. While high-funnel

marketing (think general branding) often includes TV, radio or online display advertising, low-funnel methods include search engines and local directory websites – Yelp, tire manufacturer dealer locator sites and yellowpages.com, he notes.

“A majority of tire dealers start at the low-funnel channels online because it returns the most, and as they get more customers in the door, they then begin to feed their online advertising budget to support more of the higher level forms of online advertising,” Timofeev says. “We’ve found that low-funnel customers want to know how they can save money with you and that you’ve been in business a long time, so your ads should address those needs.”

Using Google as an example, Klemmer says to be most effective, it’s important to understand the difference between paid search, or Google AdWords, and SEO.

“AdWords is a pay-per-click advertising platform on which advertisers can position (and pay for) their ads on a Google search; you can target specific search queries that you want website traffic for, such as ‘buy tires’ or ‘auto repair,’” she explains. “SEO often takes longer than AdWords to see results, but is equally as important. SEO focuses on making your website content relevant to search engines, which enables your website listing to rank higher on Google’s organic search results for the search terms most important to your business.”

Regarding social media, Klemmer stresses that it’s not a “set it and forget it” type of marketing, but requires the same amount of time and attention as other marketing methods.

“Because customers are more likely to trust a business with an active social media presence, it’s crucial that you post several times a week and engage with your fan base when they comment or send you messages,” she says. Posts should be interesting and relevant to your business, with a mix of subjects including humor, employee information, customers and car projects, as well as valuable automotive and tire content.

Monitoring Digital Campaigns

As with any advertising, to truly measure the effectiveness of a digital

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campaign, you must know how – and what – to track.

“Measurement is key in not only understanding whether your digital marketing is working, but which specific elements of your plan are working, what the results mean, and what you can learn from it to continually improve your results,” Pocci says.

Timofeev, Klemmer and Pocci all recommend Google Analytics as a great free resource.

Google Analytics allows advertisers to place tracking codes on their websites and measure the activities of anyone who has been driven to the website, such as how many visitors made it past the home page, how many clicked on a specific tire product page, and how much time users spent on the site, Pocci says.

“Google Analytics will give you all the insights you need, Timofeev says. “You should track conversion metrics such as appointments, estimate requests, and coupons viewed and printed.”

He adds that Google Webmaster Tools will show how your keywords are ranking in the search engines. “If you haven’t dominated the organic search engine results for keywords related to service or tires, use Google AdWords until you can start ranking naturally in the search engines,” Timofeev says.

Social media reporting is readily available through each platform, according to Klemmer, who adds, “Facebook, Twitter and Google+ each have their own reporting insights that will help you refine your social media strategy.”

Several other companies in the digital marketing and social space offer free analytics tools, from larger names like YouTube to more specialized programs such as Hootsuite, Moz and EZ Website Monitoring, according to Pocci, who adds that other analytics tools such as DoubleClick by Google, Adobe’s Omniture and Webtrends also are available, but require an investment.

Budget Tips

Whether you’re dealing with a limited or substantial budget, maximizing a digital campaign’s effectiveness is a top focus.

For smaller budgets, Klemmer

recommends concentrating on a few main components of online advertising. “A good quality website, SEO, AdWords and active social media pages are the foundation to online marketing success, and you build upon that over time,” she notes.

“When it comes to selling tires, it is extremely beneficial to localize your advertising efforts, as consumers may only be willing to travel certain distances to visit a tire dealer,” Pocci says. “For example, if you use online display advertising to target consumers only within a 15-mile radius of your store, you’ll increase the efficiency of your media buy by eliminating wasted budget on consumers who wouldn’t consider traveling any farther.”

He adds that in general, paid search is particularly efficient due to the ability to set your own bids for the keywords for which you want your ads to appear – and you only pay when someone clicks on the ad.

For limited budgets, Timofeev recommends skipping social media advertising and display advertising, as well as hiring an agency for social media management.

For larger budgets, he suggests a comprehensive strategy that includes creating strategic messages for all levels of the marketing funnel: low, middle and high. “That means you’ll be reaching potential customers at every stage of the buying cycle, from those who might need tires in a year to those who are ready to pull the trigger today,” he notes.

“Online advertising is not cheap, but it doesn’t have to be an additional investment,” Timofeev adds. “Many of the tire dealers we work with have completely eliminated their Yellow Pages spend and invested all of that money online. None of our clients lost any business doing that; in fact, they all increased business by up to 300%.”

He recommends dealers evaluate all forms of marketing, stop the ineffective methods, and put that money toward more advanced strategies of online advertising. **TR**