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5 Free Ways to Promote Your New Web Site

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If you've recently launched a Web site for your retail store, you've probably discovered that just because you build it, doesn't mean that they will come. Sold on the idea of using the Internet to drive customers to their brick-and-mortar location, store owners may create a Web site only to be disappointed at its lack of visitors.

There are millions of Web sites on the Internet; it takes some effort to make yours visible to search engines and to the specific market you're trying to reach. If you have several hundred to several thousand dollars to spend on promotion, you'll want to explore sponsored search advertisements, banner ads, print campaigns and search engine optimization strategies to jump-start your online traffic.

If you're like most store owners, however, you don't have extra money set aside for online marketing. And the good news is that you don't need to have a big budget to be found online. By making full use of free resources and directories, capitalizing on your current promotion activities, and getting creative with spreading the word, you can build momentum, traffic and repeat traffic to your site—and your store. Following are some effective and inexpensive ways to market your store's Web site.

1. Submit your site and describe it carefully.

In order for your Web site to be found in search engines, you have to submit it to them. Site submission is the fastest way to get your site "crawled" by the likes of Yahoo!, Open Directory (DMOZ) and Google. Site submission to Google and DMOZ is free. Site submission for inclusion in the Yahoo! Directory (not the same as Yahoo! search results) is \$299 per year.

Keep in mind that it can take a while—sometimes up to several months—for your site to begin showing up on search results.

When you submit your site, be sure to craft a description that uses important key words (i.e., your geographic location, store name, specialties) and tells your store's brand story. Describe your unique, best-selling products and your store's competitive

advantage in a short, snappy couple of sentences. This is the text that will show up on most search engine results.

2. List in free online directories.

In addition to search engines, build an online presence by creating free listings in directories. The top five to start with are Yahoo! Local, Yellow Pages.com, Superpages.com, Google Maps and Local.com. You can use the WebListings service by Intuit to write one directory entry that will upload to four free directories (does not include Local.com). Examples of other directories to explore are neighborhood groups or directories for your particular type of market.

3. Add your URL to current promotional activities.

Do you place print ads now? If so, update them with your new Web site address. If you manufacture any products, add your new URL to your product labels and packaging. If your store has give-away items or advertisements on TV or radio, be sure to include your new Web site information on those as well.

4. Use the ways you already communicate with your customers.

Ready to print new business cards, brochures, or shopping bags? Add the new URL to them. If you're not ready to reprint, consider making stickers for use on your store's current inventory of shopping bags, or print an inexpensive postcard to include inside each one. Don't forget store signage! And update your after-hours phone recording with mention of your new site.

5. Ask every business you know to add your site as a link.

Your business has natural partners: vendors, service professionals, membership organizations, and more. Contact the people you work with regularly and ask them to add your Web site link to their Web site. If possible, offer to reciprocate. Natural link exchanging like this is still an effective way to build an online presence.

None of the above options is time-consuming, costly, or difficult. With a little work and persistence, you'll soon be reaping the benefits of your new Web site with valuable traffic to your site—and your store.

Tara M. Bloom is a copywriter and small business marketing consultant who puts her own advice into practice with her retail store, Maternitique. Offering the best natural and organic pregnancy and baby products to modern moms, Maternitique can be found at www.maternitique.com. Get free small business marketing and development resources on Tara's blog at www.dustywidget.blogspot.com or reach her about writing and consultation at tara@bloomcopywriter.com.