
The ecommerce
encyclopedia
of increasing
brand exposure

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INTRODUCTION

Increase visibility, increase sales

Successful businesses understand one fundamental concept: it's far easier to sell to people when you become part of an experience they already enjoy. An article that helps them accomplish a task, a human interest story that leaves them thinking or an interesting product that they can share to enhance their personal identity — all are ways to surprise and delight customers.

In the following pages, we'll explore ways your brand can increase visibility and sales using strategies and online resources that get results. You'll

learn how to meet new customers while they consume news, research information, shop and share content with friends online.

It doesn't matter if your company is a brick-and-mortar shop on Main Street or a publicly traded ecommerce powerhouse; every business needs visibility and access to new customers if it wants to grow. With a little time and effort, you can discover new markets and position your business for long-term success.

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wants to grow.

The scoop on public relations

Publicity can be absolute gold for a business, or it can be a death knell — it all depends on what the press has to say about you. Public relations is a mystery to most businesses. In fact, many confuse it with advertising, although the two couldn't be **more different**.

First, you don't pay for an article written about your business. At least, you shouldn't. With advertising, you pay a medium to distribute a message that you own and control. It doesn't

work like that with the press. Reporters have a relationship with their audience that is based on trust, and that trust would disappear in an instant if readers and viewers found out that their news is simply another advertising channel.

Second, positive publicity is far more valuable than advertising. There are expenses involved, sure, but in most cases, successful public relations offers a much greater impact than advertising. Ask any business that's been featured in a TV segment

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how it impacted sales, as opposed to a 30-second ad that runs in commercial breaks. News stories get archived, shared and remembered far longer than ads do, providing benefits for months or years after they first run.

Lastly, businesses that get press coverage project an image of legitimacy. If a reputable news source sees your organization as worth sharing with the public, your company will look like a major player in the marketplace.

Most business owners dream of that amazing story the media writes about their brand, but getting attention from the press is a challenging, baffling and frustrating endeavor if you don't follow a clear strategy. The first step is to make sure you're offering real value to the news media and not just pestering them.

Understanding the news media

Companies often forget that most news organizations are businesses, too. They have strategies, goals and revenue targets to meet just like you do, even though the editorial staff is far removed from business operations.

Reporters are busy people. They don't sit around all day waiting for the phone to ring or a press release to land in their inbox. In fact, they're inundated with "important announcements" from businesses, organizations and government agencies all day long. Most of those announcements will go ignored in favor of more important leads. Businesses that succeed at getting publicity understand certain things about the press that others do not.

You have to make the press *care*

No matter how amazing you might think your company, product or event is, the reality is that reporters probably will not care about it. Unless you're pitching the business editor — and even then you need to make a strong case that your tale is compelling — your announcement about “the sale of the century” will likely become recycled paper. Think about the stories you've seen about other businesses; the focus was probably on a unique concept that seemed different and compelling.

The worst thing you can do is to try negotiating with a reporter by pointing out that you are an advertiser, or worse yet, threaten to pull

your ads if you don't get editorial attention. This is a bad idea for many reasons. For one, it's not fair to the reporter. It isn't his or her job to keep you happy — that's the sole responsibility of your ad rep. Second, good journalists take their responsibilities to deliver objective news coverage very seriously. They will resent and reject any attempt you make to bully your way into the news copy. Good media companies separate news and sales like church and state. Accept that, and your job will be much easier.

Remember that a story that only promotes your business is not really a story at all.

You need a PR strategy

Just like all marketing, good PR starts with a good strategy. You need to identify a target market and create a well-defined public relations campaign.

1. **Define your objectives:** What are you hoping to achieve by getting the

public's attention? "Getting your name out there" is not a goal. Be specific and set a timeframe to accomplish it.

2. **Identify your target audience:** What audience do you want to reach? Is it people who shop at your store now, or are you targeting an entirely new market segment? Make sure you know your audience, especially their interests, values and the publications they read.
3. **Determine the right media:** Make a comprehensive list of all the media your target audience uses, traditional and new, and get contact information from news people who will be most interested in hearing from you. Some news outlets have reporters that cover a specific geography or topic of interest. Find out who is the best fit so you can be sure to pitch the right person at the right time.
4. **Know the story:** Study the media you want to pitch and make note of the types of stories they cover. Remember that a story that only promotes your business is not really a story at all. Reporters are interested in compelling stories that draw emotion from the audience. Sometimes the topic might be controversial. Other times, it's more of a human interest variety. Regardless of your approach, you need to be honest with yourself and ask why would anyone care about this story. Is there a real benefit to the audience? Is it informative, entertaining or thought provoking? Make sure you've got a real story before you approach the media.
5. **Pitch the story and follow up:** Send a succinct letter (maximum 3-5 paragraphs) that clearly describes your suggested story and demonstrates that you are an expert who can provide answers. Make sure you lead with a question or statement that will pique the reporter's interest, and that your presentation is professional, in a format that **newsrooms like** and includes your phone number and email address. If you don't hear back, try again a week later and every week following until you get someone on the phone. When asked for additional information, make sure you reply promptly.

Online resources that can help your PR

There are many [resources on the web](#) that can help your brand get more exposure.

Handle Your Own PR

If you want to manage your own PR efforts but need a little help and expertise, you can use [Handle Your Own PR](#) (HYOPR). This free service gives you the tools to start generating publicity for your business. You'll find helpful tips, media list building tools and other resources that will help you learn the dos and don'ts of public relations campaigns.

Localist

Businesses that host a lot of events should check out [Localist](#), an online calendar platform that helps you manage and spread the word about your local events. Once your account is set up, you can import your events calendar, set up recurring schedules and venues you use, and manage other aspects of event planning. Localist also helps you create a community where people can check in at your event, write comments and reviews, and even upload pictures. The starter package costs less than \$20 a month.

Help a Reporter Out (HARO)

Every day, reporters around the globe are seeking good sources of information for their stories. Online services like [Help a Reporter Out](#) (HARO) connect experts with members of the media, giving you access to journalists and bloggers who need your expertise for a story. When you sign up as a source, HARO will send queries from reporters directly to you throughout the day. When one of those queries looks like a good match, you can send your qualifications and offer an interview or a quote.

HARO offers various subscription packages, including a free service for businesses that are just getting started in PR.

Muckrack

Muckrack provides a slightly different service from HARO, allowing you to search through a database of 20,000 journalists and media representatives (7). You can email pitches to reporters, get alerts sent to your inbox, find out who is sharing your content online and customize your own media contact list. Their standard package starts at \$179 a month.

Public relations can be vastly rewarding, but it takes patience and discipline. Invest the time to understand the medium, audience and strategies that will help your story get told, and you will save yourself time and money.

CHAPTER 2

Affiliate marketing programs

In simpler times, driving new customers to a business meant running print, radio or television ads and waiting for people to come. Even though the digital age has made marketing more complex, that same fundamental structure exists in affiliate marketing programs.

An affiliate marketing program seeks to bring your business and the consumer together through affiliate websites:

- **The business (advertiser)** wants to sell a product, and joins a network to promote it
- **The affiliate (publisher)** is a part of the network, and promotes the business's product on its website
- **The consumer (audience)** clicks on a link on the affiliate's website and goes to the business's website to, hopefully, buy the product
- **The network** manages the relationship between affiliate websites and businesses, tracking clicks and paying commissions to the websites that drive traffic to participating businesses

Whenever a publisher sends a consumer to a business's website, they get a percentage of the fees paid by the business to the **affiliate marketing company**. These leads can be delivered in a variety of different ways, including search engine

optimization (SEO), pay-per-click search engine marketing, content marketing and display advertising.

Businesses that target popular consumer interests often do well with affiliate marketing, but that doesn't mean you can't be successful selling to a smaller audience. The key to winning at affiliate marketing is to focus on quality over quantity. A good affiliate network will target your ad to an audience that's more likely to buy based on a variety of interests and attributes.

When choosing an affiliate program, you should first examine the products you're selling. What interests or hobbies center around them? What problems do they solve? Somewhere out there, content producers are talking about these problems, and they can connect you with an audience that is ready-made for your products.

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How do affiliate marketing programs work?

Affiliate programs have been around for years, but their popularity soared when prolific blogging sites started to accumulate large numbers of followers. When the

owners of those sites realized that a favorable review on their blog could drive thousands, if not millions, of dollars in consumer purchases, they began looking for ways to monetize their endorsements. [RewardStyle](#) is a great example of an affiliate marketing program that started as a popular fashion blog.

These networks usually hold their affiliate websites to a high standard, requiring them to publish content frequently and maintain a high level of engagement with their fans and followers on social media. The more engagement affiliate websites can create with their fans, the more money the network stands to make by delivering quality referral traffic to sponsors.

How to join an affiliate marketing network

There are many affiliate networks where you can register your business and connect with affiliates that [deliver leads](#). Here are some of the biggest players in the affiliate marketing space:

- **CJ Affiliate by Conversant:** With thousands of merchants on its platform, [CJ](#) is one of the largest networks operating today. They are reputable for having a big network of merchants and affiliates, a reliable payment structure, and great reporting tools that help affiliates optimize your offers on their sites.
- **Amazon Associates:** Due to the massive scale of its product offerings and popularity with consumers, [Amazon Associates](#) is a good fit for almost any merchant. Even niche products can sell successfully in the granular categories this ecommerce giant offers to its users.

- **LinkShare (Rakuten Affiliate Network):** Like CJ, [LinkShare](#) connects companies with affiliates, helping you identify the best publishers for your business. It also offers optimization services that help affiliates sell your products. It has a smaller network than some options, but it remains a popular choice for merchants and content providers.
- **ShareASale:** This network offers access to more than 3,300 merchant programs in a variety of markets, including home and garden, fashion, and eco-friendly products. [ShareASale](#) partners with smaller brands and offers attractive payouts to affiliates, which keeps them motivated to sell.

If the products you offer are digital, like software or ebooks, you can choose from affiliate [networks that specialize](#) in these industries. Some of the biggest include [Clickbank](#), [e-Junkie](#), [Avangate](#) and [White Paper Source](#).

An affiliate marketing program can drive a lot of revenue, but it takes time to make it profitable. Start by making sure that your products and offers are good enough to interest your target customers, then begin testing different affiliate networks. If you can manage multiple networks at once, your chances of success will be even better.

Paying for reviews

Some websites will allow you to pay directly to have your product reviewed. If you choose this route, you should go in knowing that a positive review is not guaranteed. These websites have big audiences because people trust them as an objective source of information, and a smart content provider will never jeopardize that trust for short-term gains. Some websites focus all of their content on reviews,

making them great prospects for niche businesses. One example of this is [Freezer Burns](#), a website that provides reviews and answers about frozen food choices in grocery stores. Search online for websites that specialize in publishing reviews about products like yours. A good review can often be a springboard that puts your brand in front of entirely new audiences.

CHAPTER 3

Inbound marketing and SEO

We all think of a top ranking on Google as the Holy Grail of brand success. According to a study by Advanced Web Ranking in 2014, the top five results on a search engine results page (SERP) get nearly **68% of the clicks**. Everyone else is just fighting for table scraps.

What is the recipe for getting your products to the top of organic search results? It takes one part research and planning, two parts marketing prowess, and a generous helping of really compelling content.

Differences between inbound marketing and SEO

Inbound marketing is the process of bringing qualified leads to your business by offering content that users want, and SEO plays a big role in that. SEO and inbound marketing have become inextricably linked, and marketers often use the terms interchangeably. However, there are differences between the two. The goal of SEO is to help a website rank higher in search results, especially Google. Inbound marketing, on the other hand, focuses on generating inbound leads, conversions and sales. The two tactics are linked, since inbound marketing depends on optimizing your content for search, as well as social media and other platforms.

“Must-have” SEO tools

Inbound marketing is an essential component of brand and sales growth, but before embarking on that, you should make sure your SEO house is in order. Here are some essential tools that will make your job easier.

1. **Google Keyword Planner:** The most commonly used tool for keyword research, [Google Keyword Planner](#) is a free resource that allows you to easily generate lists of potential keywords, along with estimated search volume, average bidding price (for pay-per-click ads) and the competition for that keyword among advertisers.
2. **Ubersuggest:** Long-tail keyword phrases have become increasingly important for SEO and inbound marketing, and [Ubersuggest](#) can help you get suggestions from some of the root keywords that came up in your initial research. You could enter a term like “house painting,” add a letter or number after it, and get suggestions of longer keywords people search for like “house painting costs” or “house painting estimates.”
3. **SEMRush:** This powerful tool is one of the most popular among SEO practitioners. [SEMRush](#) offers keyword research that will give you insight into your competition’s paid and organic search strategy. It can also help you determine if a link-building prospect is a good one by estimating the website’s domain authority and how well it ranks for keywords. For example, a site that has a high volume of inbound links, yet ranks low for targeted keywords, has likely been penalized for bad SEO practices. SEMRush is a subscription service with plans starting at \$69.95 a month.
4. **SpyFu:** Like SEMRush, [Spyfu](#) is a useful tool for competitive research (5). It shows you what keywords a business is targeting with PPC and what the

average cost is. You can also see what keywords they rank for in organic search. The basic plan includes access to all pro tools for \$79 a month.

5. **BuzzSumo:** Finding the right topics and headlines for blog content is critically important for SEO. [BuzzSumo](#) helps you research the most liked, shared and retweeted content on the web. Their plans start at \$99 a month for bloggers and startups, and go all the way up to an enterprise level for large brands and publishers.
6. **Ahrefs:** This link research tool will help you keep tabs on your competition and research quality link-building prospects. It shows you how many referring domains a site has, how authoritative those inbound links are and how natural the website's link growth looks. You can also map out a link-building strategy by sorting prospective websites based on the domain rank range of each page. [Ahrefs](#) offers a free "newbie" plan that offers limited data. After that, plans start at \$79 a month.
7. **Majestic:** This program provides information on link prospecting, reputation management, link analysis and website traffic data. [Majestic](#) also offers an interesting feature that allows you to gather trust and citation flow metrics from industry websites, which can be useful in your outreach efforts. Plans start at \$78.99 a month.

Inbound marketing solutions

Creating quality content on an ongoing basis is challenging and labor intensive, but [inbound marketing software](#) can make your job easier by automating certain functions. A good inbound marketing partner can make content distribution, lead capture and ROI measurement much faster and simpler.

- **HubSpot:** [HubSpot](#) has become one of the most important inbound marketing solutions in the industry. The platform allows you to create blogs, manage social media, design lead generation forms and send emails — all from one interface. It also gives you inbound traffic metrics that go much deeper than Google Analytics. Plus, HubSpot users have access to an impressive array of training resources, conferences and certifications. Their most basic package costs \$200 a month, but Bigcommerce merchants can integrate it [for \\$99 a month](#).
- **Marketo:** Focusing more on the B2B industries, [Marketo](#) is a high-end platform that follows a buyer throughout the sales journey. It collects detailed information about users who visit your site and presents content that will lead them to the next stage of the sales funnel. Their “Spark” package starts at \$895 a month, which includes email marketing, a customer engagement engine and lead management.
- **Eloqua:** [Eloqua](#) offers increased customization options for a higher price tag, which often makes it the choice of large enterprise businesses. Starting at \$2,000 a month, it offers a lead segmentation tool that filters data based on various user attributes. It also allows you to score leads, run campaigns and measure your content marketing efforts.
- **Pardot:** This B2B inbound solution provider is known for making it easy to create lead forms that work on your landing pages. It also integrates well with pay-per-click campaigns, social media and email marketing, moving qualified traffic directly to the salesperson of your choice. [Pardot’s](#) standard marketing automation package starts at \$1,000 and includes prospect tracking, lead scoring and nurturing, CRM integration and more.

SEO and inbound marketing can be a big investment, but the potential rewards for retailers are enormous. Most businesses that are serious about SEO use multiple

tools for keywords, competitive research and link building. Try a combination of tools to make sure your website communicates well with search engines. If you want to use your optimized content to drive leads to your website and generate sales, you may want to sign up with a good inbound marketing platform. This will take a lot of the guesswork out of knowing how well your strategy is working and what content types are getting visitors to buy.

Online marketplaces

Of all the marketing strategies your business can pursue, one of the most important is listing your products on online marketplaces. These platforms put you directly in the path of consumers who are looking for products with wallets in hand.

The big three

- **Amazon:** Boasting nearly 85 million unique monthly visitors, [Amazon](#) is the 800 pound gorilla in ecommerce. Based on the scale of shoppers it attracts, retailers find it easy to get people in front of their products. Other advantages include gaining new consumers who may purchase from you again, and an easy checkout and fulfillment process for retailers and customers alike. The [downsides of selling on Amazon](#) include marketplace fees (which can vary by category), restrictions on branding your business, and an inability to capture personal information from customers that will allow you to market to them in the future.
- **eBay:** Like Amazon, [eBay](#) commands a huge base of avid shoppers. It also has an easy-to-use interface for selling, listing and managing inventory. The

disadvantages include fees that can vary based on the items you sell and the methods you use to sell them. Some retailers are also frustrated by policies they feel are overly generous to buyers, including eBay's 180-day return policy.

- **Etsy:** This marketplace offers a substantial user base that is interested in hand-crafted, artisanal or vintage items. [Etsy](#) is credited for having a passionate community of like-minded shoppers, and retailers find it easy to launch a store on the site. Disadvantages include vendor fees which, coupled with PayPal processing charges, can add up quickly. Retailers also complain of having few options to customize their shops. Lastly, because Etsy has very specific categories, it tends to be very competitive.

Other marketplaces for SMBs

- [Newegg](#) offers automotive supplies, electronics, sports gear and office goods
- [Sears](#) has electronics, home products, fitness and toys, to name a few
- [Rakuten.com](#) specializes in computers and electronics, but also features categories like sporting goods, home and garden, health and beauty, and many others
- [iOffer.com](#) is a commission-based marketplace, offering a variety of categories from fashion, to electronics, to sporting goods
- [eCrater](#) offers free online stores and unlimited products and categories
- [ArtFire.com](#) is for sellers of handmade crafts and products
- [Offeritem.com](#) is a free marketplace that offers a large selection of categories
- [Shopandmade.com](#) is a marketplace created for handmade items
- [Zibbet.com](#) has handmade items, art, crafting supplies and vintage goods

- [Atomicmall.com](https://www.atomicmall.com) offers auction or fixed-price selling with no listing fees
- [3tailer.com](https://www.3tailer.com) is for sellers and buyers of niche products
- [Sell.com](https://www.sell.com) is formatted similarly to classified advertisements

Social shopping sites

What do you get when you mix social media, ecommerce and a passionate audience that loves niche products? Social shopping sites are quickly becoming a major attraction to buyers and sellers, bringing together the intimacy of social media sites like Pinterest with a digital shopping mall experience. Here are some **creative websites** that are helping brands find new buyers in a variety of different markets:

1. **Fancy.com:** Trends are front and center on this platform, which offers products ranging from fashion to novelty items. They have even created their own “Fancy” button for users to tag different items online. **Fancy** gives users customization options that provide a personalized shopping experience in the dashboard, search functionality and checkout options.
2. **ShopStyle:** Billing itself as a search engine devoted to fashion, **ShopStyle** is a popular digital marketplace that features everything from big-name designer brands to up-and-coming boutique stores. Like other social shopping sites, ShopStyle empowers its users to create their own personal brand of fashion and interior design.
3. **Fab:** This social shopping site is like a digital department store, providing many of the same categories and items you would find in Walmart or Target. **Fab** seems focused on capturing bargain hunters, offering flash sales and price matching on products.

4. **Polyvore:** Focusing on fashion and home décor, **Polyvore** is a community site where shoppers can create collections that others can browse, shop and follow (5). The site uses themes that makes it easy to browse and share products. It even offers an option to get alerts when items go on sale.
5. **OpenSky:** **This site** offers mainstream products ranging from apparel, to healthy living, to tech items. Users can add items to their newsfeed and follow individual sellers, who can create a storefront that looks similar to a Facebook brand page.
6. **Ownza:** Drawing inspiration from Pinterest, **Ownza** relies heavily on a pinboard-style layout, allowing users to pull content from anywhere on the web and put it on virtual shelves. Retailers create profiles where they can post links to products that are owned and shared by the users.
7. **The Grommet:** **This platform** stands out as a curated marketplace where shoppers can explore and buy products from independent retailers. The site seeks out unique products, tests them and publishes video reviews that also tell the story behind the product's creation. They don't allow every merchant to feature products on their site, though. They tend to favor working with manufacturers instead of merchants, but that doesn't exclude small shops that create their own products.

Conclusion

Getting publicity, optimizing search traffic, tracking and nurturing inbound leads, and finding new markets all contribute to the larger goal of interrupting a consumer's life in a pleasant and memorable way.

When you truly understand your customers — their problems, aspirations and self-identity — you can position your products to be more than just things people buy. You can add value to their lives by being there when they need you. One day they might need a problem solved, another day they might want something cool to share on their Pinterest board, and sometimes they may just be browsing a website that specializes in a passion of theirs.

By developing a strategy and selectively using the resources we've discussed here, you will find customers in the moment they need you, and increase sales for your online store.

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