



Internet Marketing and Sales: The Changing Landscape

By Jennifer McGuigan, Owner, The Word Cellar

The topic of Internet marketing is neither simple nor succinct. Nonetheless, Dr. Ralph F. Wilson successfully presented the key basics of the subject during the “eMarketing and eSales II: Top Line Growth” conference presented by the Center for eBusiness and Advanced IT (eBizITPA) in Erie, Pa. on April 27, 2005.

Wilson, widely recognized as one of the top international authorities in the area of Internet marketing, is uniquely situated to speak on the topic of “Internet Marketing & Sales: The Changing Landscape.” In addition to being the founding editor of the grandfather of the Internet marketing e-zines—[Web Marketing Today®](#)—Wilson is the author of hundreds of articles and numerous books, including *Planning Your Internet Marketing Strategy* (John Wiley & Sons, 2002), *The E-Mail Marketing Handbook* (2003), and *The Shopping Cart Report* (2004).

Wilson noted that while authors Al Ries and Jack Trout have *The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing* (HarperBusiness 1994), Wilson sticks to his five *mutable* laws of Internet marketing.

The Five Mutable Laws of Internet Marketing

- 1. The Law of the Dead End Street:** Wilson compared operating a Web site to opening a business on a dead end street. In other words, “No one will come unless you give them a reason to come,” said Wilson. “That’s what marketing is for.”
- 2. The Law of Giving and Selling:** To give people a reason to come to your online storefront, Wilson suggested giving away something such as free articles or white papers. Wilson noted that once you give visitors something, you can sell them something.
- 3. The Law of Trust:** Before people will buy from you—either online or off—they must trust you. Wilson called trust “the lubrication of business, especially on the Internet.” How do you build trust? Make your contact information comprehensive and easy to find. Offer a stellar guarantee or refund for online sales. Use testimonials from other customers. Anticipate and answer obvious questions. In other words, good customer service goes a long way toward building trust.
- 4. The Law of Pull and Push:** Pull people to your site with the lure of quality content. Then push information to them regularly via e-mail.
- 5. The Law of the Niche:** While small businesses can offer a variety of things locally, they must narrow the choices they offer consumers online. Unless you’re rich, you cannot afford to be a generalist on the Internet, said Wilson. In other words, small businesses succeed by finding niches that are either unfilled or only partially filled, and then filling them with excellence.

Search Engine Optimization

In addition to his five mutable laws of Internet marketing, Wilson focused on one key area that small businesses must understand in order to be successful online: Search Engine Optimization (SEO).

For potential customers to find your Web site through a search engine, your business must be listed as close to the top 10 search results as possible. Wilson delineated the five steps to optimizing your site and improving your ranking.

Step #1: Choose Keywords

The first way to improve your search engine ranking is by optimizing your Web pages. Wilson suggested using meaningful keywords on your site, even going so far as to consider what synonyms and misspellings people might use when searching for your service or product. There are several ways to determine what search keywords are popular. You can look in your Web site's log files to see what words people used to search for your business. Alternately, Web sites such as [Wordtracker](#) and [Overture](#) provide low-cost services to determine keyword popularity. You must know how people are looking for you before you can choose appropriate keywords.

Step #2: Determine Ranking

After selecting your keywords, determine your current ranking so you know when you rise or fall in the search results. Tools such as [WebPosition](#) can calculate your position for your chosen keywords on various search engines.

Step #3: Be Friendly

The third step in SEO is making your Web pages search engine friendly. Search engine spiders automatically scan sites to determine how they fit into the overall search results. Wilson advocated giving the spiders the clues they need to figure out what your site is all about. Each page of your Web site should include the following clues:

- **Title Tags:** "When someone searches," said Wilson, "the only thing they're looking at is the blue hyperlinked title [in the search results]." Make that title count by using keywords in it. This will clue-in search spiders and will help humans connect their keyword search to your site. Wilson stressed that the title is more important than anything else when it comes to search results.
- **Description META Tags:** Develop a strong description by using keywords from the body of the text. Write one or two 200–250 character sentences that are readable but tight; eliminate as many filler words as possible.
- **Keyword META Tags:** Wilson noted that while [Google](#) no longer uses these for their rankings, [Yahoo! Search](#) does. So while keyword META tags are important, Wilson advised not obsessing over them.
- **Headings:** "If you were a search engine," asked Wilson, "what kind of clues would you be looking for?" He suggested using headings with keywords throughout your Web pages. You can also emphasize your site's keywords by linking them to other sites that pertain to each keyword.
- **Content Keywords:** Wilson suggested building focused content pages by dividing long pages into 250–500 word topical pages, each focused on a single theme and optimized for a particular keyword or keyphrase.

Step #4: Optimize Navigation

Once your clues are in place, be sure that your navigation system is search engine friendly. First of all, remove frames from your Web site. "If your Webmaster says, 'I think frames are the way to go,' fire her or him," said Wilson. Next, use HTML links to every section of your site; spiders can't read navigation systems built with JavaScript or Flash. If your Web site contains dynamic, "on the fly" pages that are pulled from a database that generates pages only when called for by a Web browser, consider using these work-around solutions: include a site map with hard links to all products or pages; use a "URL rewriting" programming solution; or use commercial solutions such as [YourAmigo.com](#).

Step #5: Get Links

After you optimize your Web pages, focus on the second way to affect your ranking: develop a linking strategy. In other words, get other sites to link to yours. Wilson explained that Google essentially tries to mimic online how real people determine a business's reputation. In other words, incoming links are the Internet's version of networking and referrals. As such, not all links are created equal. Links from sites with high page rankings count more than links from lower-ranking pages. Wilson pointed out that links from online directories are most valuable and cautioned business owners to be very selective about upgrading to a paid ad in a free directory; the free listing might be all that you need. Wilson suggested the following additional ways to generate quality links to your site:

- Exchange reciprocal links with similar, non-competing businesses. Do not exchange links indiscriminately, since this can confuse search engines and weaken your position. Also, "Don't link to anybody you wouldn't want to send your customers to," Wilson said.
- Write an article and offer it to other Web sites in exchange for a link back to your site.
- Use a business blog to offer your take on your industry. Get others to link to it based on the merit of its content.
- Develop a free service—such as a mortgage calculator—that others in your industry will want to link to.
- Make your site content rich; others will link to you and you will become an instant "expert."
- Submit newsworthy press releases to news outlets. The goal is to get enduring links to your site in the archives of major newspapers.

If your pages aren't showing up, you can also submit them directly to the search engines; but do not resubmit obsessively. And if after all of this, search engines just aren't indexing certain pages of your Web site, Wilson recommended submitting those pages to [Yahoo! Search Submit Express](#). This service guarantees page inclusion for a price. In the end, whatever you do to optimize your site, monitor your position and make appropriate changes every one to two months.

If you're asking yourself, "How am I supposed to do all this *and* run my business?", consider outsourcing your SEO efforts. Wilson advised that small companies should expect to pay \$1,500 to \$3,000 for such services—a relatively small price for "free" traffic as a result of prime placement in search engine results.

About eBizITPA:

eBizITPA is a Pennsylvania resource initiative begun in 2002 and designed to help your company apply e-business technology to business processes, increasing efficiency and making you more competitive. Learn more about eBizITPA at <http://www.ebizitpa.org>.

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