

The Great Online Marketing Lottery

 By [Anton Ressel](#)

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Am I alone in starting to believe that the only people who make money on a consistent basis from online marketing, are those who provide online marketing services to poor schmucks like me?

I suspect more and more that nobody in the world actually knows enough about this constantly evolving marketing landscape to confidently ask 'Hey man! Is this stuff actually working?'

Before I get hauled over the coals, let's look at some facts based on personal experience. If I send out a newsletter via email to 100 people and 14 recipients actually bother to open it and scan the headlines for a few seconds before they hit delete, this is seen as a success. If I spend thousands on a PPC campaign (including setup costs and management) and get a dozen leads (NOT orders, but leads), we are well ahead of the curve, apparently.

Hands out

And don't get me started on Facebook. Zuckerman and his henchmen have their hands outstretched at every turn, it seems. Hell, our company can't even be guaranteed that the posts we pay our social media providers a chunk of cash every month to generate will actually be seen by the people who have made the effort and Liked us - which kind of makes the whole shebang seem a bit of a lottery - unless we pay for a promoted post of course, or a Facebook ad, or ... you get my point.

Online marketing experts, you can stop sharpening your pitchforks and preparing the stake at which to roast me for the above comments, for a moment at least. Cynicism aside, I do see the value in this medium, which is why we continue to do it, and spend lots of money at that. I have seen businesses enjoy significant success from a well-structured online marketing campaign, and have been the recipient of newsletters and mailers that have struck a chord and motivated me to get in touch with the sender right away. I also use Google as my primary vehicle to find new suppliers and providers of needed services, so SEO and PPC makes huge sense to me - in theory.

Where's the sense of order?

My problem is the random nature of it all, the constantly shifting goalposts and the fact that even the experts often seem just as bewildered as a greenhorn like me as to why some stuff works, and some just bombs. Not that they would admit it, of course.

I suppose a lot of the conundrum lies in the natural progression of things. Facebook's metamorphosis from social platform to business imperative, and subsequent public listing, made monetising the platform both necessary and easy to do. Google's monopoly on internet search facilities created a whole new industry in SEO, with an increasing need to pay your way to the top of the pile.



Sometimes it's all a bit like smoke and mirrors?

Traditional marketing is not much different, let's clear that up. Whatever the medium, marketing is a process that requires ongoing investment and focus before any returns are harvested. In fact, in this regard social media probably has the edge, because it is a quick way to reach a large audience, and there is always the outside chance that your campaign will go viral and interest will come flooding in. But again, the randomness of it all makes it feel like a gamble more than a sure thing.

The unanswered questions

(Image: NASA, via Wikimedia Commons)

I have worked with some experienced and very sharp digital marketing and social media people, who clearly understand the medium and make a lot of sense in terms of proposed strategy and course of action. That they cannot tell me with any certainty why one PPC campaign works when another does not, or what made 25% of recipients open a newsletter on a Wednesday and only 11% open it on a Thursday, bothers me. Like most small business owners, I need some level of confidence that if we do X, our results should be Y. I do not have thousands to throw into the pot while we dabble and test and poke and prod. Nor am I buying the constant deflection and excuses given for yet another really average campaign - your database is no good, your messaging must be wrong, we need a better subject line, Facebook has changed its policy, Tuesday at 11am is a bad time to send a mailer, so is Wednesday, and Thursday ... we need to refine the PPC campaign every week and by week six we should see some traction... etc.

The fact that online marketing, SEO and social media is growing and changing so fast, seems to have created a scenario where nobody really knows exactly what is going on. Our small company has a web developer who does a bit of PPC, an SEO guy, a social media provider, a branding agency and an overall strategist giving us input on an ad hoc basis. All these people, taking their cut and delivering what frankly are pretty average results - and that is no reflection on their particular capabilities, simply the nature of the field on which they play.

Seems a bit like smoke and mirrors to me sometimes.

ABOUT ANTON RESSEL

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