



# Building your business **online**

by Fidelis Zvomuya

For years, most advertisers followed a simple rule to keep their marketing effective: keep commercials creative and under wraps until the moment they go on air or appear on the pages of a magazine, newspaper or on billboards. With the introduction of the internet, this has changed greatly.

The growth in internet affordability and accessibility, combined with the rapid growth in social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, has ushered in a new era that has dramatically changed the face and platform of marketing, both enabling and forcing marketers to now do what was once unthinkable.

The world wide web has shown inconceivable growth globally - and more specifically in South Africa, where it has grown in excess of 2 000% over the past decade.

In early 2010, World Wide Worx, an independent South African technology research and strategy organisation, reported that the number of South Africans with access to the internet grew by 15% between 2009 and the beginning of 2010, from 4,6 million users to 5,3 million users. In June 2010, statistics revealed that almost 11% of the country's population were active internet users, and at the end of August last year, an unbelievable 3 187 180 of these were active Facebook users.

According to Acceleration director, Richard Mullins, the country's online marketing industry looks set for another year of healthy growth during 2011. He says this year is likely to be all about the continued maturing of the country's online industry as marketers and publishers refine their digital strategies and extend their use of existing technologies, such as cellphones.

Internet marketing specialist Nicolas Robson says the web has fundamentally changed the way we live, as well as the methods we use to market organisations, products and services. This highly social, technology driven and constantly evolving environment requires a special sort of agency to make the most of these new opportunities.

“Online marketing has taken advertising to a whole new level. The online directory has replaced the telephone book. Your business advertisement will be available online 24/7 to potential customers on the other side of the ocean,” says Arthur Goldstuck, managing director of World Wide Worx.

Ian Robert Ndlovu, internet marketer and director of IR Marketing, says strategic online marketing is something that companies with websites need to take seriously if they wish to make a great success of themselves over the internet and in turn take advantage of the overwhelming advantages that having a website can offer.

### **Huge opportunities for advertisers**

Through internet marketing, companies are able to reach out to many potential clients who frequently visit the internet. It has become the most effective marketing strategy in place, because people look for everything in the internet.

The affordability and reach of the internet also allows advertisers ample time and space to give prospective customers more information about a particular product they are endorsing. In addition, consumers can log on to the internet, learn about products and purchase them at any hour.

Ian says dairy brands like cheese, low fat milk and organic dairy products are all over social media trying to drum up interest from consumers - and it is paying off.

“The advantage of internet marketing is that you interpolate your offline and online campaigns, outsource e-commerce work to cheap and efficient third party resources and thereby lower your marketing budget, and battle test new creative ideas. Also, you have more consumers of every type who routinely use broadband services. This means that you can reach practically your full spectrum of customers,” he explains.

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With millions, if not billions, of sites on the web, there is increasing potential to market your product or service on-line.

Customers find it quick, easy and convenient to search the internet for products that they intend to buy, which has made internet search engines indispensable tools of modern life and an advertising gold mine for both organisations and individuals. The number of Google search queries in this country on a single day alone now practically exceeds the targeted reach of all other advertising mediums combined, including radio, television and media.

However, this potential cannot be taken advantage of if your site is not easily found by your potential customers. “Search engines categorise their results according to on-site criteria, such as the visible text and design structure of your site, along with off-site aspects such as link popularity,” says Ian.



- 1 Online marketing reaches a variety of people and attract new clients



- 2 Cellphone internet usage in this country has grown drastically

### Borderless, measured and affordable

Ian also says that advertising over the internet is far more convenient than traditional means and the results of effective online marketing can be seen in just a matter of a few days or months, provided that the proper marketing strategy is followed.

"You can update product details, include product reviews and also maintain a mailing list to keep in touch with existing customers. The internet provides space for companies to include not just the product information, but also a whole lot of details about the company's existence and more information about the services that the company has been providing over the years," he adds.

Companies can also incorporate video demos of their products with ease and at comparatively little additional cost, thereby expanding their marketing campaigns with breadth and depth that can go a long way towards convincing prospective customers to buy their services or products.

"Online marketing costs less compared to any other kind of advertising or marketing. The number of potential customers can be in their hundreds of thousands, since there are millions of internet users all over the world," Ian says.

Expansion of a business over the internet is

also far more convenient than in the real world, and the cost thereof is miniscule, regardless of whether this expansion is local, national or international. "Online marketing is one of the easiest ways to reach a variety of people and attract new clients.

The internet has also produced other forms of communication, such as e-mails, social media, podcasts and many more. Social media can build buzz for an event or audience and making good use of it can assist in business growth," Ian confirms.

### The internet in the palm of your hand

According to research by World Wide Worx, cellphone internet usage in this country has grown drastically. The Mobility 2011 research project backed by First National Bank states that the cellular habits of South African phone users have evolved dramatically in the past year, as smart phones, mobile applications and the mobile internet entered the mainstream. It reveals that 39% of urban South Africans and 27% of rural users are now browsing the internet on their phones. South Africans' increased use of cellphones to access the internet is in turn boosting online marketing. "It is technology like cellphones that could cause a shift in the advertising world," says Ian. **M&J**