



Attracting and Selling Online

A Marketing Guide
for Entrepreneurs



Table of contents

Introduction

What online marketing can do for you

1

What is your
message

2

Who are your
customers

3

How to attract
customers

4

Close the sale

Conclusion

Build, drive, measure, optimize

What online marketing can do for you

The Internet and mobile devices have changed the way consumers search for products, interact with companies and make purchases. More than 90% of people use the Internet to make buying decisions. The same is true of business clients. Almost 60% of the B2B buying process takes place online, before a salesperson is contacted. Yet only 53.6% of Canadian businesses had a website in 2017, according to Statistics Canada.

Businesses that want to be successful need to be online. And, choosing the right techniques to drive traffic and convert website visitors into paying customers is an essential part of the process.

We are confident the advice you'll find in this eBook can help you gain the full benefits of this opportunity.



Brian Kroeker,
President, Little Rock Printing
[Read his story](#)



1

What is your message

As you are reading this, potential customers are looking for your products or services on the web. How will you tell them who you are, what you do and how you can help them?

Developing your organization's brand is the first step in creating effective marketing and sales strategies. Working on your brand can help you understand your place in the market—equipping you to reach customers with the right message.

Create a consistent brand

Your brand allows you to present consistent messaging to customers on your website, or through social media, email, advertising, signage or the in-store experience. Your brand makes it easier for everyone in your team to speak with one, consistent voice.

How do you define your brand?

① Vision statement

What do you want to achieve? What are your core values? How will your brand reflect them? A vision statement helps you focus and rally your team to achieve your business's goals.

② Value proposition

What value does your organization provide to customers that no one else can offer? Defining your unique value proposition allows you to stand out and deliver the right product to your customers.

③ Positioning statement

How do you want to be perceived in the marketplace? Your positioning statement sums up the key message or elevator pitch you want to deliver in all your marketing communications.

Position yourself as a trusted advisor

With a clearly focused brand, it's time to bring it to life. You will achieve this with effective content.

Blogs, videos, articles, eBooks, infographics and other compelling content that is regularly updated encourages visitors to return to your site. It also helps your business rank higher on Internet searches. The goals are to have a growing number of prospective customers find your company and to build relationships with them as a trusted expert in your field.

2

Who are your customers

- Personas: A shortcut to understanding your customers
- Map your customers' journey
- Customer purchase journey template



It's an old saying in the advertising business: a message aimed at everyone often appeals to no one.

To communicate effectively, you have to know your customers. Are they familiar with your product or service? Are they likely to resist or accept your message? Are they old or young, urban or rural, highly educated or not?

Knowing your customers makes it easier for you to answer everyone's most pressing question: "What's in it for me?"

In other words, you need to say the right things, to the right people in the right way.

Personas:

A shortcut to understanding your customers

Personas are portraits of typical customers that many businesses use to target their marketing efforts.

All customers are not equal

A large majority of your sales will come from a small minority of your customers. Your goal is to get to know those customers as well as possible.

Try to imagine a typical day in their life. Drill down further by segmenting your customer list by various criteria, such as spending history, product preferences and responsiveness to offers.

Understanding your customers helps your business stand out from competitors by offering them what they want and need. It also helps you innovate by creating new offerings based on what they desire.

How to create your personas

Think of your three best customers—the people you want to attract more of to your business. Then, write down what you know about each of them.



Geography

Where are your customers located? This will help you target your marketing and seek out new customers in the same area.



Demographics

Who are they? Are they mostly male or female? How old are they? How much education do they have? How much do they earn?



Psychographics

Seek to understand customers' "soft" characteristics—their values, attitudes, interests and lifestyles.



Transactional

How do they like to do business with you? Online or face-to-face? How much do they spend? What kind of products do they buy?



Challenges and needs

Why is this person interested in your product or service? How can your product or service help them resolve a problem they are currently facing?

Map your customers' journey

It's important to understand how your customers find, evaluate and purchase your product or service.

The customer journey highlights all of the key marketing, sales and digital touch points.

You'll need to consider what content and marketing tactic is most applicable to move customers through each stage of the journey. Mapping your customers' journey will also help you prioritize how to invest your marketing resources.

Customer purchase journey

Awareness

Customer becomes aware of your brand. They may or may not need your product or service at this time.

Evaluation and consideration

During this stage, the customer has a need and is evaluating you against your competitors.

Conversion

At the conversion stage, the customer is making the purchase. It's critical that they have a good purchase and post-purchase experience.

Retention

Retention and customer loyalty is critical to long-term success. Look for opportunities to upsell (sell more expensive products or services) or cross-sell (sell a different product or service).

Customer purchase journey template

Persona name		Awareness	Evaluation and consideration	Conversion	Retention
Challenge/need		Highlight the primary needs and trigger points at this stage of the journey.	Highlight the primary needs and trigger points at this stage of the journey.	Highlight the primary needs and trigger points at this stage of the journey.	Highlight the primary needs and trigger points at this stage of the journey.
Touch points	Marketing touch points	Out-of-home or outdoor advertising, such as billboards, posters and advertising on public transit Television, radio or newspaper ads	Quality content on your website Brochures	Customer testimonials	Customer loyalty programs
	Sales touch points	Business networking events Consumer sales shows Cold calls Shopfronts	Meeting with a sales representative to discuss the product or service Browsing your store	Sales representative walks customer through the process and answers any questions	After-sales services
	Digital touch points	Organic search engine optimization Search engine marketing Online banners Social media campaigns	Browsing your company website	Product search on your website Re-marketing using banners and social media ads	Promotional emails
Key messages		What key message can you use to help the customer move to the next stage of the journey?	What key message can you use to help the customer move to the next stage of the journey?	What key message can you use to help the customer move to the next stage of the journey?	What key message can you use to encourage repeat business by the customer?

[Download the full marketing plan template.](#)

3

How to attract customers

- SEO: Get all the free traffic you can get
- Boost your SEO with referrals
- Build an effective paid marketing campaign with SEM
- Do's and don'ts for driving traffic with social media
- Use video to attract customers
- Keep in touch using email marketing
- Case study: International Machinery



Begin your online marketing efforts by thinking like a typical customer. Most people start their online buying journey with a search. And so most of your efforts should focus on organic (free) and paid search engine marketing.

SEO

Search engine
optimization

The use of keywords to attract organic or non-paid traffic to your website.

SEM

Search engine
marketing

A paid strategy to bid on search keywords that will drive traffic to your website.

Social media is another way to get online traffic, but it requires more time and money. The same is true for online video and email marketing.

Also, before you start driving traffic to your website, you should ensure it is set up to handle the visitors. One place to start is [BDC's free website assessment tool](#).

How to attract customers

SEO: Get all the free traffic you can get

Make it easier for search engines to find you

Search engines aim to provide users with the information they're seeking the first time, every time. In order to do that, a search engine must recognize the content of your webpages. By building each page of your website around a single theme, you make it easier for search engines to present it when it's relevant to a search.

Choose the right keywords

Think about the keywords people are most likely to use to find the information each page provides and make sure they appear in your page title, page description, headings, image description and URL structure.

In some industries in which online marketing is competitive, this may not be enough for your site to appear on the first page of search results. But without optimizing these components, it's very unlikely your website will rank in any searches not involving your brand and company name.

Design your site with your users in mind

Design your site and write content for users first. Don't add keywords that make your content confusing because you think it's good for search engines. Site speed is also important for users. Finally, you'll want to make sure your website is optimized for mobile platforms. Search engines now penalize websites that are not easily displayed on a mobile device.

Great content is your best weapon

As long as people will be asking questions, search engines will strive to deliver the pages with the best answers. So your best strategy to get to the top of search results is to create quality content that is updated regularly.

Stay patient

There is no silver bullet or overnight success with SEO. It's a long-term strategy that can take months to show results, but it's foundational to your online marketing.



Go deeper

[SEO basics for entrepreneurs](#)

[Building your local](#)

[SEO presence](#)

Boost your SEO with referrals

The more websites that carry links to your site, the higher you will rank in searches. Here are four tips to help you get more external links.



① Create partnerships

Ask your suppliers or partners to link to your website. You can reciprocate, too. Focus on quality. One link directing to your website from a chamber of commerce or a university website will be more effective than multiple links from obscure sites. You can also reach out to online directories such as yellowpages.ca to get them to link to your site.

② Make full use of social media

Social media is a great ally for your SEO strategy because people also use these platforms as search engines. Your company's social media profile will rank in the search results when people search for your company or related terms.

③ Answer questions

Another strategy to get more external links is to answer any questions your customers post on blogs or forums such as Reddit and Quora. A professional answer with a link can result in a fair amount of traffic to your site.

④ Boost local searches with Google My Business

Authenticating your business with Google My Business is the best way to boost your local search results—the ones that appear for users in your area. You can get started by [clicking on this link](#).

Build an effective paid marketing campaign with SEM

Search ads are the fastest way to drive traffic to your website.

These ads are bought by bidding on keywords potential customers are likely to search for if they are looking to purchase your product or service. You pay only when someone clicks on your ad.

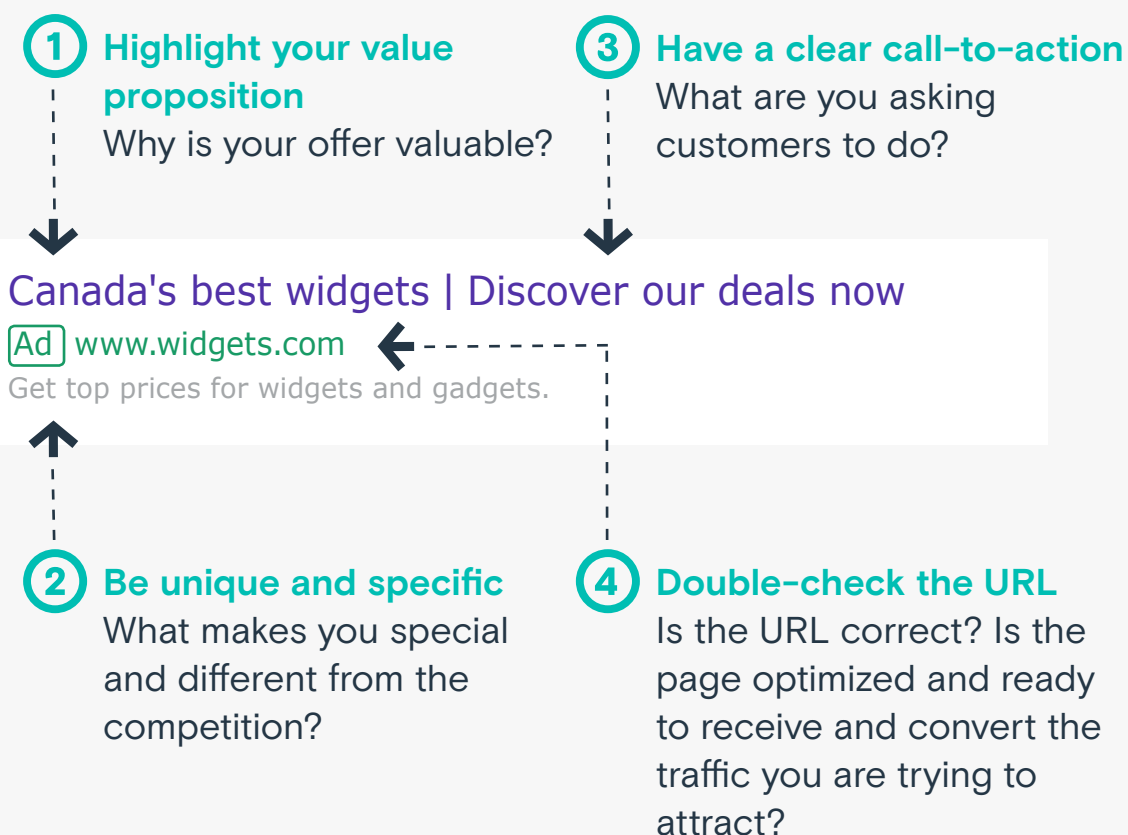
Once you're familiar with the basics of pay-per-click advertising, you can use the control settings in your account to adjust the time period during which you want your ad to appear and how much you are willing to spend.

By monitoring the performance of your ads, you can fine-tune your keywords, ads and website to increase the effectiveness of your campaigns.

Get expert help

Unless you have in-house expertise, it's probably best to work with a partner to design and run search marketing campaigns, since this is a rapidly changing tactic that requires constant attention to get results.

It's important to ensure your website is aligned with your advertising pitch. Your site has to make the same offer as your advertising. And, your site must be clear, compelling and differentiated from your competitors'; otherwise, you risk wasting your money.



Do's and don'ts for driving traffic with social media



Go deeper

[Read our social media guide for entrepreneurs.](#)

Do's

Have a strategy

Rushing to create a Facebook or LinkedIn page without planning usually leads to wasted resources and poor results. A social media strategy will help you clarify the goals you are trying to achieve.

Use paid advertising

While you should post content organically, the real power of social media as a marketing platform comes from targeted advertising directing new customers to you and re-engaging existing ones.

Pick the right platform for your business

It's a good idea to have an account on all major social media platforms, but try to focus on the ones where your customers are most likely to spend their time.

Don'ts

Try to do it all by yourself

Social marketing can be time-intensive. Unless you have someone who can take on the challenge, it's a good idea to get external help.

Think it's too expensive

Social media advertising is affordable compared to traditional advertising. You don't need a big budget. Facebook, for instance, has ad options for any budget and expertise level. (You can spend as little as \$5.)

Forget to track your results

The volume and quality of interactions—comments, likes, retweets—indicate that you are attracting the right kind of fans, whom you can then convert into customers.

Use video to attract customers

Video is a great way to build credibility and find prospective customers. But, videos need to be used strategically to have an impact online. Here are four tips.

① Solve problems

If you want your company to be noticed, it's hard to do better than how-to videos. Answering common questions related to your field can also get results.

② Share testimonials

Testimonials and reviews are great for building trust and increasing conversion. Create short testimonials showcasing success stories and post them on your site's product pages.

③ Don't be afraid to use humour

Laughter sells. Funny videos have the potential to get more shares and generate buzz. But, make sure the humour doesn't distract from your overall brand message.

④ Consider online video advertising

Targeted online video advertising is a cost-effective way to raise awareness about your business. Any video you put online can be turned into a paid video ad, but it's probably best to create a video specifically for advertising.

Even if your video doesn't reach millions of eyeballs, it will usually get more social media shares than other types of content.



Go deeper
[10 tips for creating an online video strategy for your business](#)

Keep in touch using email marketing

Email marketing works exceptionally well to boost brand awareness, generate new sales leads and educate your target audience.

Email marketing is also getting a lot easier to use thanks to new software tools. These come with mobile-responsive templates and analytic functions that help you measure and optimize your campaigns.

Start by building your list

Naturally, email marketing cannot be done without email lists. And, while permission based email marketing has long been advertised as a best practice, [Canada's anti-spam legislation](#) means it is now a legal requirement.

Think about existing customer lists. Do you have a list of leads from an event or previous marketing campaign? Could it serve as a list of subscribers who have opted to receive your emails?

If you don't have a list yet, now is the perfect time to put a pop-up form or newsletter sign-up on your website. Then, think about what you can offer that would be of value, whether it's information or a special deal.



5 types of emails

1. Welcome email

Be sure to acknowledge when a user signs up for something. This is important because it confirms the action they took and also builds trust and credibility.

2. Promotional email

This is a special offer email to promote a product or service. Keep it short and sweet, and make the value clear.

3. Transactional email

These emails are triggered after the user completes an action, typically a purchase. This category also includes thank-you emails and reminders for customers who abandoned a purchase on your website.

4. Newsletter email

Keep your customers in the know by sharing news, recent blog posts and more.

5. Educational email

Help your users by sharing knowledge related to your business or products. This builds a relationship and makes you the go-to place for advice.

Back from the brink: How to recover from a website disaster

Michael Faulkner was excited about his company's stunning new website. However, as soon as the new website launched, he could tell there was a problem. His company, International Machinery, had hired an outside firm familiar with the trucking industry to relaunch its website, but the previously steady flow of leads dried up on the new site. "It was catastrophic," Faulkner says. "The phone stopped ringing and the leads dried up and we were non-existent online."

Website as a sales tool

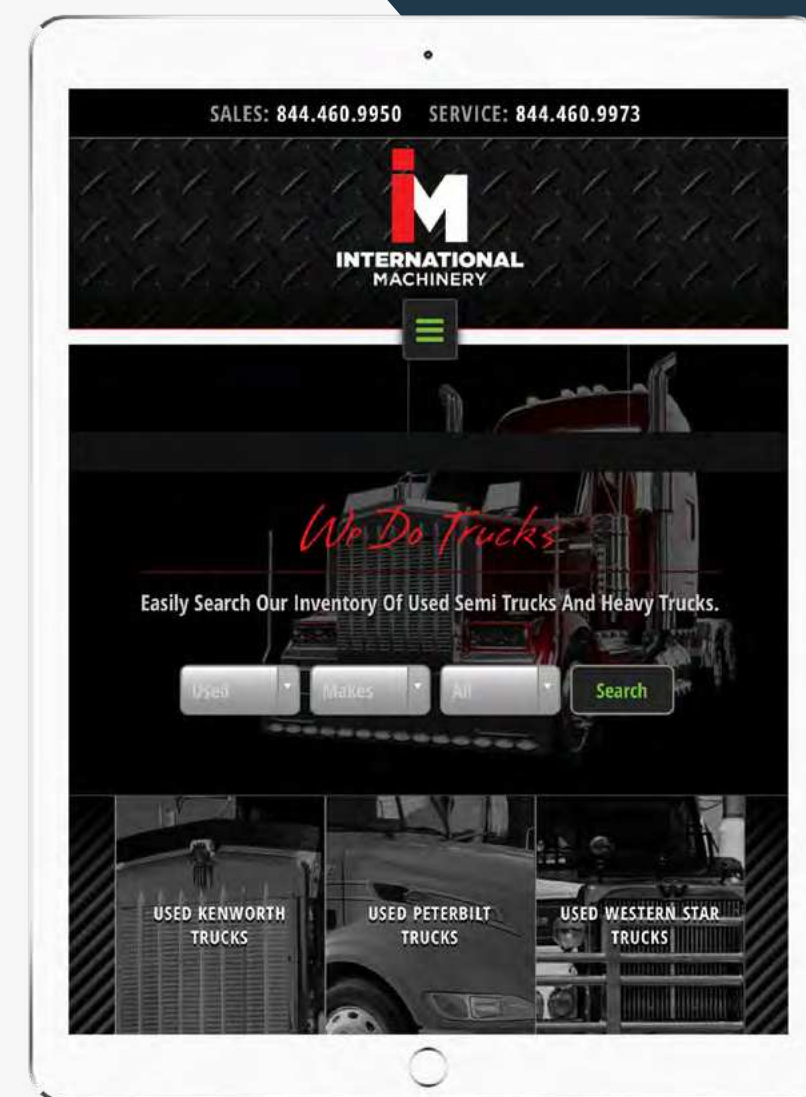
The Maple Ridge, B.C., company sells used and refurbished semi-trailer trucks across North America and was an early adopter of online marketing in its industry. The company had its first website at the start of the millennium. "It brings us the sales," says Faulkner. "The days of the Yellow Pages are gone. How are you going to find your customers if you don't have a strong online presence?" But with the leads from the website gone, revenues started declining and the business was in trouble.

From Polaroid to digital

The Internet and mobile devices have changed the way consumers search for products, interact with companies and make purchases. At International Machinery, Faulkner says he couldn't run his business without his website. He remembers the pre-digital days of taking photos of trucks, getting them developed, sending them by courier and then hoping to make a sale so it wouldn't be a money-losing effort. "It was just Polaroids back then. That was how you did your pictures."

The importance of getting a second opinion

After six months of poor results from the website, Mike turned to BDC to get a second opinion on what might be happening. A technical review of the website's performance found a major technical error that caused the loss of their online SEO ranking. With a list of repairs in hand, Faulkner was able to work with his agency partner to fix the mistakes and improve the website's performance. "It took a while to get back on track, but my phones are ringing off the hook now."



4

Close the sale

- How to get people to convert on your pages
- Social proof: The final argument to close the sale
- Learn to listen: Boost sales with analytics
- Email analytic metrics to measure
- How to use re-marketing to drive repeat sales
- Advocacy: Get customers to speak on your behalf

Most of your online marketing efforts are likely going to focus on driving traffic to your website. Yet, your efforts will be wasted if your website isn't ready to receive visitors.

Start by asking yourself what you're trying to achieve. Are you selling to customers directly from your website? Are you generating leads for your salespeople? Or, are you serving customers?

From there, you'll be able to establish your objectives and then build your website to efficiently boost revenues. You'll also need to make sure you are measuring results and following up after a sale.

How to get people to convert on your pages

Any interaction with your site that moves a customer one step closer to making a purchase is called a conversion. For example, signing up for your website newsletter is a conversion. These four tips will help you convert website visitors into paying customers.

- ① Make it easy**
Determine the path you want people to follow on your website. Your star products need to be easily accessible from your homepage and all products classified by category to help customers navigate the site. Any forms should require as little customer effort as possible.
- ② Have a strong call-to-action**
You don't want your users to guess or spend time thinking about what they need to do next. Tell them clearly. Feature a clear call-to-action that pushes visitors toward your goals—Shop Now or Sign Up for Our Newsletter, for example.
- ③ Optimize individual pages for conversion**
You should work to optimize individual pages for conversion rather than trying to redesign your whole site all at once. If you make too many changes at the same time, you won't be able to tell which elements actually helped boost conversion. A typical test would be to see whether changing the colour of your Order Now button from green to red generates more conversions.
- ④ Improve the speed of your pages**
Online customers are easily frustrated and will be quick to leave if your website isn't user-friendly. Small improvements to the speed of your website can help it rank higher with search engines and ensure customers don't get annoyed.

Close the sale

Social proof: The final argument to close the sale

Social proof is a psychological and social phenomenon in which people tend to copy the actions of others when trying to make decisions. Here are three ways to use this phenomenon to get more sales online.

Monitor social review sites

Know what's being said about your business. Listening with an open mind will provide you with a great source of business intelligence and the opportunity to react appropriately when there are issues with your product or service.

Respond to negative comments

When responding to negative reviews, remain polite, truthful and transparent. Start by inviting the person to work out any differences offline. Customers are usually grateful when a company admits and corrects mistakes. But, negative comments can add weight to positive ones because consumers become suspicious when reviews only paint a rosy picture.

Use testimonials

Your customers want to see that other people have purchased your product or service. Don't be shy about telling your success stories. Explain how your product or service solved a pain point. Interesting anecdotes are often better than facts when it comes to selling a product or service. Use testimonials on product pages where customers make their final purchase decision.



Boost your sales **with analytics**

Your online marketing efforts need to be measured to show results and improve performance. The key is to set clear goals and decide which numbers matter to your company. Here are common metrics for measuring the effectiveness of various marketing channels.

Measuring SEO

Number of one-time visitors

That's the number of individuals who visit your site every month. Make sure to analyze the trends. Is traffic increasing or decreasing? Why?

Top entry and exit pages

Analyze from which pages visitors enter and exit your site. You may want to take a close look at your top exit pages.

Top referral sites

Which sites refer traffic to you?
Which sites aren't working out as well?

Positioning in Google search results

Are you moving up in the rankings for your top search terms?

Measuring paid search

Impressions

Measures the number of times an ad is displayed, whether or not it is clicked.

Click-through rate

The number of clicks on an ad divided by the number of times the ad is shown (impressions).

Cost per click

The cost you pay when someone clicks on your ad.

Website conversion

Do visitors entering your site after clicking an ad make purchases or complete other micro-conversions? Even when an ad doesn't get clicked a lot, it might be worth keeping if it's converting at a high rate.

Measuring conversion

Micro-conversions

These track small things such as clicking a video, downloading a brochure or engaging with a piece of content.

Macro-conversions

The number of completions for bigger goals, such as submitting a quote-request or completing purchase.

Customer lifetime value

Customer lifetime value represents the revenue and/or profit you will receive from a customer over the entire relationship. A very general guideline is that your customer lifetime value should be 2.5 to three times your cost of acquisition.

[Discover free and low-cost tools to help measure your performance.](#)

Email analytic metrics to measure

Number of new subscribers

Look at how many new people subscribe to your newsletter each month. The more the better!

Number of bounced emails

Bounced emails tell you the number of emails that didn't get delivered to an inbox, which shows you the accuracy of your email list. You want a low bounce rate.

Number of emails opened

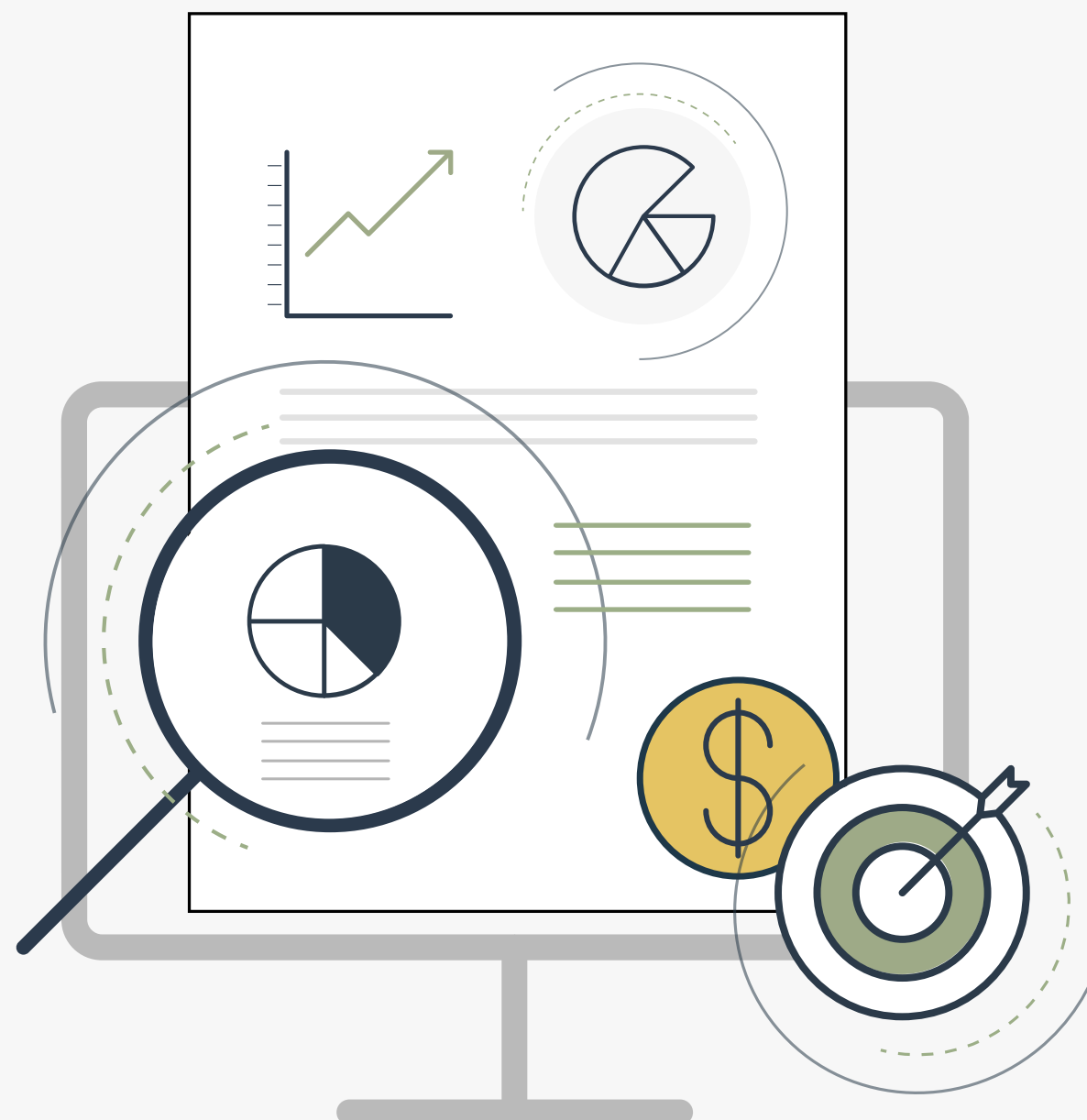
Keep track of how many emails get sent versus how many get opened. This tells you how interested customers are in your newsletter.

Number of clicks to your site

Measuring traffic to your website is helpful for seeing what topics subscribers are most interested in, which can help determine content for the next month's newsletter.

Number of unsubscribes

The number of people who unsubscribe from your emails is helpful to know so you can see how interested they really are in receiving information from you.



Close the sale

How to use re-marketing to drive repeat sales

Re-marketing ads follow people who have been to your site and pop up on other sites they visit. They remind people of who you are and that they've looked at your website.

Once you've included re-marketing tags to your site, you will be able to re-market to potential customers based on what pages they've already visited. For example, you can design ads that show customers a product they were looking at on your site.

It's a good idea to target users who have not taken actions such as downloading eBooks or completing forms. While most re-marketing is done using banners, some companies also use re-marketing techniques on search engines.

How re-marketing works



Close the sale

Advocacy: Get customers to speak on your behalf

The period right after a sale is the “honeymoon phase,” when there’s a certain level of excitement on both sides. Take advantage of this to ask customers for a testimonial for use on your website or social media pages, or on review sites.

Check in after the sale

Some companies send emails. Others say it with a card they enclose with the invoice. Still others do it with a call to customers a week or two after the sale. Whatever your method, it’s important to say thanks and make sure your customers are happy. At this stage, avoid trying to make another sale. Instead, listen to customers’ needs and opinions, and resolve any outstanding issues.

Think second sale

Talking to customers who’ve already made a purchase might seem like a waste of time, but it’s the key to future sales. Regular contact will help you understand customers’ needs, give you ideas about product improvements and set the stage for you to offer a complementary product. By creating a relationship, you move beyond a simple transaction.

Ask for referrals and testimonials

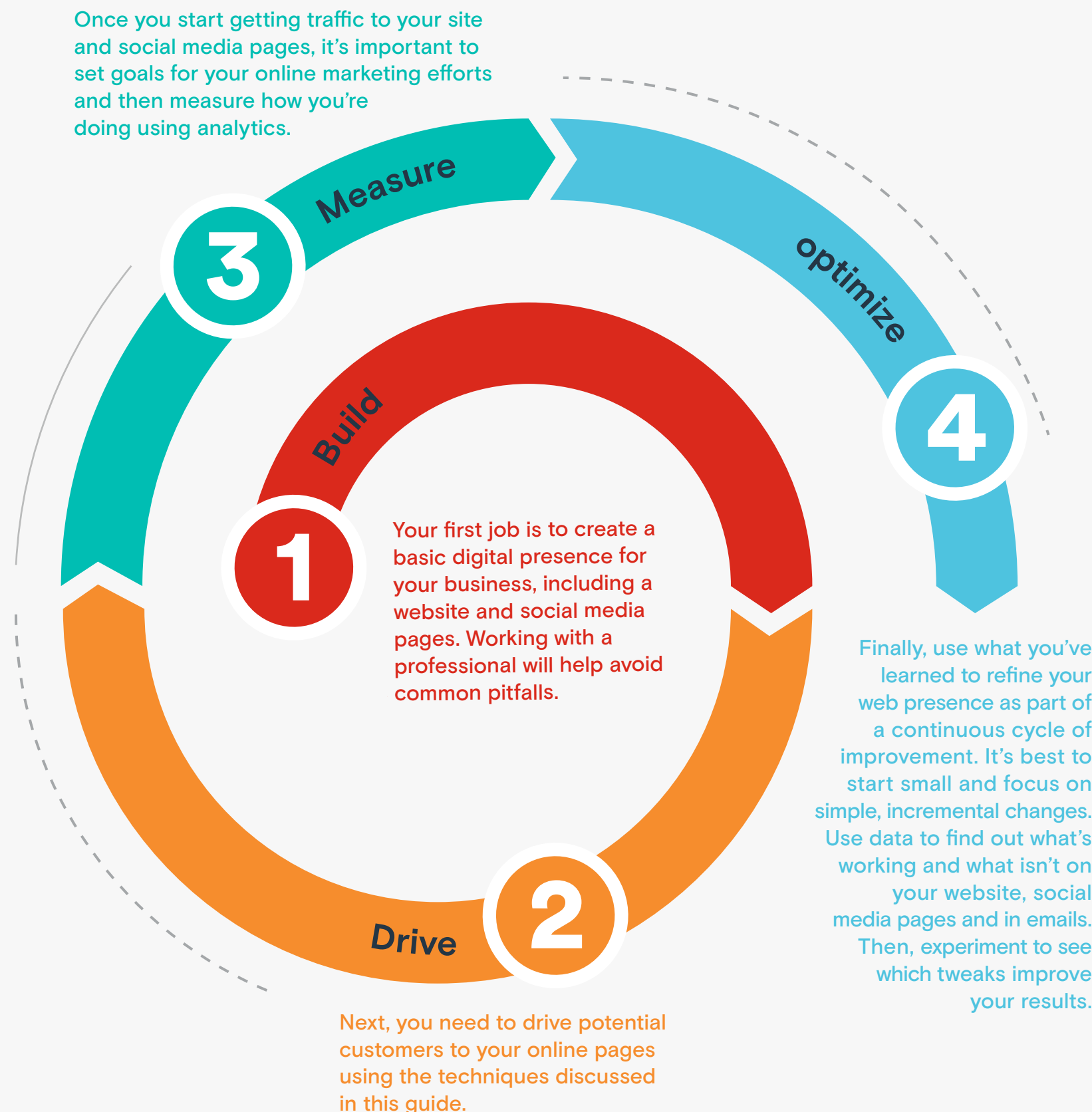
Happy customers will serve as ambassadors for your company. When a recommendation comes from a customer, it has an extra layer of credibility. Delighted customers make the best advocates, because third-party claims of excellence carry more weight than self-promotions.

Conclusion

Build, drive, measure, optimize

Online marketing is a fundamental activity for businesses today. But, many Canadian small businesses don't even have a website. A well-implemented online marketing plan can help you find more customers and better serve the ones you already have.

It's a proven strategy that's had positive results for hundreds of BDC clients over the years. With some hard work and the right advice, it could prove to be just as successful for growing your business.





Get expert advice to differentiate yourself from your competitors and generate more business.

Get financing to launch a new marketing campaign, invest in technology or expand your market.

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**financing.
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**For more information,
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