

Queenstown Internet Marketing Seminar:
22 July 2009 - Millienuim Hotel

Dan Roberts

daniel.roberts@xebidy.com

Mobile: 021 360 486

Facebook: www.facebook.com/xebidy

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/xebidy>

And check out <http://xebidy.com> for regular blog posts

1. Introduce me and Xebidy.

I thought I would break this presentation into two parts - firstly search engines and then secondly what are commonly perceived as Web 2.0 phenomenon - that is the social networking and social media side of Internet Marketing. There is a thesis that I subscribe to that says that Google and Facebook are competing to be the "operating systems" of the Internet. That is, the first place a user goes to do anything on the Internet - their home page. One search, one social media.

I believe there are 4 cornerstones to successful Internet Marketing:

1. Appearing high in search results and getting your result clicked on regularly;
2. Advertising campaigns, whether that be cost-per-click or banner or other, that are cost effective and work in terms of supplying the "right" visitors;
3. High conversion of visitors to a stated goal; and
4. The cliché - fish where the fish are; that is, go out and get your visitors by attracting them through the websites they are visiting (social media in particular)

2. The importance of search engines

There is one thing that is undeniable - search engines are imperative in your marketing strategy. The low cost of search for the user is undermining brand loyalty - it is easier to search for something than return to a specific site; search engines are increasing the way we shop around on the Internet. Not doing well in search engines severely handicaps your likelihood of selling much on the web.

2. What Makes a Good Website: Content is King!

A website should look great - it is the first point of contact many of your customers will have with you and your business. It should be professional and it should convey an instant visual message that you want your visitors to associate with your company - much like you do with a business card.

Seed: A landscape company in Brisbane - wow!

Travel Generation: Hippy, cruisy, modern, travel

Adventure Tours: If this was a wine we might say emotive, deep, rich, I so want to be there
images

Backpacking Queensland: Fun, young and information packed

But over and above how a website looks it is the content that is most important and unfortunately one of the most often ignored; cobbled together in the last minute or written by the intern, often content pages are just scribbled at the last minute.

There are a few simple rules to writing great web content:

1. Use of headings: Users don't read websites - they scan them. The clear use of headings will help your readers quickly identify with your content and product. Ideally, start your site with a "big fat claim" that will immediately grab the attention of your visitors - such as lose weight in 21 days, or this is one of my favourite "the pick of backpacker hostels - Lonely Planet" (which is the opening line of the Hot Rock Backpackers website in Rotorua)
2. Use headings to create visual order: use fonts, colours and weighting etc that tells your users the relative importance of your content.
3. Your introduction is very important as people read that to decide weather to read on.
4. Keep it simple stupid: It's cool that you tour company has 24-seat Mitsubishi Fuso buses - but no one really cares. Ignore the technical aspects and focus on the benefits. At Kiwi Experience the brochure used to read "our buses have big windows to look out and big stereos to cruise to".
5. Me, I and we: It is great to tell your website visitor what your company does, but marketing 101 says there are only two questions they are interested in - what is in it for me and how do I get it? Focus on the benefits of your product to produce a written visualisation - that is help your customer see themselves with your product. A very important point that is often overlooked is that websites should be written in the first person. Like emails, websites are very rarely read by more than one person at a time and therefore you should market to the visitor as if you were talking to them directly. So, rather than saying "Our Clients enjoy the year round sunshine" you should say "you will..." There is an interesting tool that you can use

to test how customer centric your content is. The we-we test analyses content for words such as "we" or your company name relative to customer centric-terms.

<http://www.futurenowinc.com/wewe.htm>

Unfortunately, there are two readers of content - your web visitors and the search engines. We base the whole approach to search engines and content around the concept of keywords. Keywords are the words that a search engine extracts from your content (based on a whole mystifying algorithm of on-site and off-site voodoo) to determine when to display your site in search results when a user types those words into a search. Quite obviously the whole goal of a field called search engine optimisation is to make the search engines recognise your website for the keywords you want to come up well for in the search results page for your particular company. Easy peasy apparently!

The focus of Internet Marketers thus becomes where you rank in search engines for those terms and overall traffic to the website.

Competition for many keywords is highly competitive - and a word of advice here is necessary. Keyword selection should be focussed on attracting the "right" visitors to your website. The more specific the keywords the more likely the searches is to purchase your product. Better still it is shown that the longer the phrase that a user types into Google the more likely they are to purchase. For example, cheap Queenstown ski hotel August. I say to my clients - what if I lowered the number of visitors to your website but dramatically increased your sales, would it matter? It actually does not work out that way; well-made websites that are well optimised for search engines will always generate more traffic and more conversions.

A few tips:

1. Concentrate on only 5 to 8 keywords (why? because we believe the Google algorithm only holds 250 characters for meta-data)
2. Use your keywords in headings
3. Position your keywords at the front and end of pages and paragraphs
4. Bold them if appropriate
5. Link your keywords to other parts of the website (I will explain this in more detail in a minute)

AND:

6. Make your content readable by people - search engines don't buy stuff!

While I am talking technical there are a couple of other rules that I know you have heard before, but I need to reinforce as there are a raft of web developers in this town and across the country that continually break them and then a client comes to me and says can you make my site do better in search engines and I say yes, it will cost x\$ plus it will cost you \$5k or more to completely recode your website so that it will work in search engines:

1. Make sure search engines can navigate through your website - they can not navigate flash and in most cases can not read it! Likewise poorly coded dynamic or drop down menus. Stick to simple text-based navigation. Good web designers can make it look awesome.
2. Don't have dead links - search engines will penalise you
3. Avoid dynamic urls (usually characterised by a ? in the URL - and representative of a poor content management server) and deep folder structures - search engines will often abandon sites like these before indexing the whole thing as they fear becoming trapped within the URL structure linking round and round.
4. Finally, code quality is important and something that we at Xebidy are very very strict on - and we believe it sets us along way apart from our competitors. Let me explain:

Search engines have a preset algorithmic way of indexing a website. Most important is the title tag. The title tag is like the title of a book - it is the thing that a reader (in this case search engines) judge a website on. Now, with keyword selection in mind thus - the title tag should NOT be the name of your company. Rather it should explain what your website is about using your desired keywords. For example, this is one I worked on. Instead of "Fletcher Living at Jack's Point, Queenstown" - the company - I wrote "Your next house at Jack's Point, Queenstown - houses for sale". I wanted to tell Google that the site was about, and therefore attract people searching for, Queenstown houses for sale and Jack's Point houses for sale - these two terms are much more important than the company name. Brand loyalty on the Internet is very low.

The title tag has one more very important function - it is the text that appears in the heading of your "listing" in the search results page. Once again it is the main thing that attracts this time the user to your website. In a page of blue links a user will scan the page looking for the heading that catches their attention. In my example above, "Your next house.." is pretty catchy, as opposed to the boring old company name. In this way - and this is very important so I shall say this only once - the number of times your search result

is clicked on relative to your competitor is more important than your actual position once it comes to those top 5 or 6 results. Being number 2 and generating no clicks is useless!

You can use webmaster tools to evaluate the ratio of times your site comes up in searches relative to the click volume. If you are running a Google cost per click campaign you can come up with even more accurate data. For example, I did some work for a company in the North Island where we ran a paid ad for "tongariro crossing". From our analytics I knew we had a click through rate of 5.07% - that is 5% of everyone that saw our ad in the search results clicked on it. Now provided my budget never ran out - that is my ad showed every time - working backwards I then calculated approximately the number of searches for this term. From this estimation I worked out that we actually receive a further 2% of all searches from the organic results. This mean't that provided our budget did not run out we were receiving approximately 7% of all web traffic that searched for Tongariro Crossing.

An important point here:

This provides a very strong argument to run Google ads for a search term even if you already appear in the organic results because you increase market share - in fact the percentage of clicks we received in the organic results declined when we did not run the ad.

And I am going to make another point which I am going to have to explain later:

Being that we also ran a banner ad on other websites and found that when we did not run the banner ad the number of times both our Google ad and our organic results were clicked declined. Why is this? A study by Avenue Razorfish showed that if a user is exposed to your URL twice through online advertising before seeing it in search results they are 7 times more likely to click on your search results from the big blue list of links. The secret to success here is to advertise where your customers go - fish where the fish are.

I have digressed. Following from the title tag a website should be broken into headings and in code language we use heading tags to tell a search engine that this piece of code is a heading. Because remember that when a search engine looks at a website it simply looks at a whole load of text. We have six different heading tags that we can apply to a page that signal the level and importance of the heading. The H1 tag is the most important - there should only be one of these on the page.

Finally there is the content itself - as discussed the content is king. The content should be clear and easy for a search engine to read. An extremely important factor is the code to content ratio. A poorly coded website will have a lot of code relative to content. This is an

old style of coding and unfortunately it is very popular. We use a method called CSS which basically puts all the code that organises how a site will look into another file.

Sure these are technical issues, so why am I telling you this - because I think it is important that people know what is going on in the Internet. You get what you pay for!

What happens if you don't optimise your website right, or the keyword selection is poor etc. Well here is a classic example of how easy it can be to hijack someone else's keywords or marketing campaign. Kiwibank had a promotion that said Google 100% interest to get more information. Our lead developer Mat saw the ad and wondered if they had actually optimised their website properly for those terms. A quick look suggested they hadn't so with a blog post, a bit of work on Twitter and a few retweets within an hour Xebidy.com was number one for 100% Interest and other Kiwibank terms. We followed it up again the next day to prove a point and take positions number 1 and 2.

The hi-jacking of competitor keywords or company slogans is a legitimate search engine strategy, but obviously it makes it a lot harder if you have a well coded website with good quality content and appropriately researched keywords.

Can I just make one last point on content, and this is probably more relevant for the travel industry - but might be a factor also say for the real estate industry where you are listing houses on more than one website, say Trade Me etc. Plagiarism is ripe on the Internet and Google is very very clever - and one of the key parts of its search engine algorithm is to try and work out who owns content. Duplicate content is heavily penalised by search engines. For travel companies this means that in all those third party booking engines and travel websites you should not be replicating the content of your room descriptions etc as it appears on your website. You should rewrite that content for your online partners. Because these websites are so big (they have more content, they have more links etc) it is quite possible that Google will in fact consider these websites as the originator of your content and penalise you for your own keywords!

2b. Linking

After content the number of links to your website is the most important consideration in how you perform in search engines. To understand the rules of linking you should understand the history of the Internet. Sir Tim Berners-Lee invented the Internet as a means of sharing scientific documents at CERN (which is the European Organisation for Nuclear Research) where he worked. Each document was in effect a web page. Search engine algorithms are rooted in the premise of documents being shared; basically, when an academic paper is published say in a Scientific Journal it is published for consideration

by others experienced in the appropriate field. Other articles are subsequently published with references back to the original article. The more references in subsequent articles the more we consider the important article to be of importance. Therein lies the premise of the Page Rank algorithm - the more links a web page has the more important it must be.

Unfortunately, that works well until the geeks cheat the system. Reciprocal links for example - I'll link to you if you link to me. Not what the Page Rank algorithm had in mind, so Google now deprecates reciprocal links. How about I buy a link then? Google now has the ability in webmaster tools to do in a site that is buying links. Links are essential but they are also harder to get AND search engines have got much better at analysing the quality of a link. For example, I have a web design company and you have a fashion directory and you link to me - Google sees right through that and says hang on, this is not a vote for this website because they are relevant to your visitors - they don't count the link. In fact, Google has a thing called the "bad neighbourhood" - if you have a link from a website that is considered spammy, or banned from Google etc., Google won't just not count the link they will penalise you in the rankings too. If you get listed on one of these sites - it could be bloody hard to get off it too!

There are a few ways to improve your linking. Going back to code content - and one of the things that Google changed in the way they deal with links some time ago is to put more emphasis on what we call the anchor text - that is, the text that makes up the link. In probably 60% of cases these are those two golden words - click here. However, if you have the link on words that actually describes the page that the user is going to, for example, click here for hotels in Queenstown (with the whole phrase being the link) then that link will be counted much higher in search engines and therefore the page it links to. The first place to start is the linking within your own site. Change all the read more and click here to actually describe the page your are linking to. On other websites if you know the person who is linking to you well enough you can also try and ask them to change the anchor text to be one of your keyword phrases.

There are two great ways to get more links. The first is article syndication. Article syndication involves the distributing of content by you for use by others on their websites. There are particular websites where you can submit an article and other websites owners can go there to get the content to use on their site. Your article subsequently contains links back to your website. The rules of thumb are create content that is interesting, well written, and easy to read, don't stuff the articles with keywords and remember the duplicate content penalisation rule - don't put content up that already exists on your website. Article syndication is good - but it carries with it the risk that the article could end up in a bad neighbourhood. A better alternative is guest posts on relevant blogs. Like an article a guest post is a piece written by you with said links, but you control where it is

published. Writing an article or blog post specifically for other websites that attract your target market is one of the best possible ways to generate traffic and quality links to your website. I use Twitter amongst other things to find websites willing to take our articles for clients.

That reference to Twitter and Blogs kind of brings us nicely wrapped into discussing social media and Web 2.0. However, before I do I just want to make one more point that I think is important and sums up.

Competition! I view search engine optimisation as a war. You want your website to rank higher than your competitors and generate more traffic. The first thing I would do is look at the search results for my selected keywords and work out who is in there and what I have to do to beat them. Here is some of the steps I would do and it wraps up what i have just gone through:

1. Compare the webpages titles and compare them to yours for the quantity, density, position, number of words and number of characters.
2. Same again for the meta data (description and keywords)
3. Do the same again for the content of their page - looking for keyword density, the number of words, the position of keywords etc
4. Compare anchor texts on links
5. Look at the outbound links that they have on their site compared to yours
6. Compare the heading tags looking again at number of characters, words, position
7. Look at the theme of the website - and I am just not going to have time to go into theme silos today unfortunately because I would like to
8. And finally look at the general page properties, the HTML size, code to content ratio, etc - you are looking to see that your site is doing everything right here.

And thus all things being equal it then comes down to a matter of who has the most links! That is, if all things are equal - but i bet you can write better content, and get better code than most of your competitors first.

3. Social Media Marketing

I guess this is really the only bit that everyone has come for. You have been here to two bloody boring hours and all you really want to know is how do I make money from Facebook and what the hell is Twitter?

If you think about the original Internet that spurned from the work of Sir Tim Berners Lee it was about pages being published for others to read - it was a one way system. Funnily

enough his original design had users being able to update the web pages themselves - but he had trouble getting everyone to use it so dropped that idea. The major difference between this Internet and the Internet we now refer to as Web 2.0 is precisely that - the ability of everyone to easily publish content. From blogs, to reviews and ratings, to uploading videos to You Tube and writing messages on Facebook the ability for anyone to be an author of content has spurred a whole new social direction in the internet.

Blogs are the original darling of the Web 2.0 era. They made it easy for anyone to start producing content daily, even hourly. From my point of view blogs are an absolutely essential part of the online marketing mix:

1. Content is king! And fresh content is the king of the kings - search engines love regular fresh content and there is no easier way to do this than with a blog.
2. In fact search engines will crawl websites with regular fresh content more regularly - sometimes daily, even hourly in the case of our Xebidy.com website
3. In the case of most businesses the content on their website rarely changes - a blog gives a medium to introduce regular fresh content
4. A fresh informative blog helps a site be seen as a greater authority on a topic
5. The nature of comments and inter-linking of blog posts dramatically helps search engine rankings
6. Blogs are the best way to communicate with your customers on an informal basis. It can be a more customer friendly face giving opinion, news and a human side to the business
7. Blogs can be fun and involve the whole company

One of the hardest things for those that do maintain blogs is trying to come up with fresh content. Some of the methods I use include:

1. Look at relevant questions and answers or forums sites looking for hot topics in any particular area.
2. Often I will produce content around a keyword phrase that is not necessarily on my main list of keywords - sort of second tier phrases
3. Comments generated from your own blog can provide a source of new post inspiration
4. I look to other thought leaders blogs.
5. Finally I use Google trends to try and predict what might be a hot upcoming topic that I can be early to talk about

If we were to try and write a job description for a social media marketer we might include such terms as brand evangelist, engagement of customers, community building and even

viral marketing. The role might be described as retaining your current customer base and growing it. In terms of basic bottom line profit Eric has already explained that it is theoretically easier to make money from your existing clients than continually roll over new clients. A person in social media aims to keep their current customers happy while adding new ones.

Let me introduce you to Twitter as a great example of how this might happen. Firstly, I guess the question is what is Twitter. Twitter came to the fore in 2007 and began to be picked up in the mainstream in mid 2008. I describe it as SMS on speed - it is in fact based on the idea that SMS texts are limited to 140 characters and originally Twitter was expected to be primarily phone based. In this way it is really like sending and receiving lots of texts to and from lots of people. To that end that is pretty much all there is to it. And the one thing on your phone that drives you crazy is getting marketing messages texted to you!

Many companies that first ventured into Twitter met with absolute disaster. The old methods of blasting out promotional information down Twitter were met with a backlash from users. Users were not going to follow someone who spam them with ill-considered marketing messages. I have a great personal experience of such a story with Vodafone NZ. I was in the middle of a week long argument with Vodafone over my eligibility for an iPhone - so when I saw them arrive on Twitter I tackled them publicly. The verbal intercourse is amusing.

Telstra Big Pond in Australia suffered similar indignation when they first entered Twitter. People simply do not want to be messaged at. Social media is not an opportunity to ram traditional marketing messages down people's throats. Recall it is an opportunity to make existing customers happy, engaging them in a more loyal relationship - at the same time as generating new customers.

The Telstra Big Pond story (and Vodafone in NZ now too) is a very interesting example of a Twitter success story. Firstly, after a slaughtering at the hands of the public of Twitter, Big Pond retreated and using their corporate blog they asked the community what they expected of them within the social media environment. The feedback was surprisingly positive - and despite not being what we call a loved brand they were able to get support from bloggers and Twitterers for their effort, essentially turning a PR disaster into a success by engaging those same naysayers to help them. I like the saying - "failing forward" - I think it appropriately describes many of the most successful social media stories over the past 36 months (Dell, Staples, etc).

From this effort Telstra launched @bigpondteam made up of a few individuals that personally identified themselves on Twitter. That was point number 1, they were not a company face but in fact real people. Secondly, they adopted a strategy of listening to the chatter - not marketing, but listening. The Big Pond team watch the twitter stream listening for conversations where they might be able to jump in and add value. If someone is complaining about Telstra they offer support - they try and take on the persons problems personally, getting their mobile number and sort out the issues. In this way it is not about numbers of followers at all - there is no marketing message. I like to think of it as going out and looking for your customers and helping them in their own environment without obviously force marketing.

This leads to an interesting point of view on social media marketing - unlike search engines effort above it is not about what is the competition doing. Rather it is about meeting the expectations of your customers. Rather, ask yourself "what do my customers expect for my businesses websites in terms of Web 2.0?" Different customers are demanding different information and methods of receiving it, the younger market is in tune with blogs and forums, other markets are well versed in RSS feeds (now in standard practice on newspaper sites), females prefer social networks such Facebook and males age 35+ prefer Twitter. So it is not what your competitor is doing, but rather what your customers are demanding. Nonetheless, it is possible to raise the bar for all your competitors by giving the service demanded by your customers better than they can.

I use Twitter every day, so how do I use it? Firstly, I think there are two fundamental principles to social media marketing: relevancy and trust. I like the Seth Godin concept of permission marketing - that is people sign up to be marketed to through newsletters, becoming fans of community groups and pages, becoming friends on twitter or receiving an RSS feed. However, they give you permission to market to them on the explicit social contract that you will send them only information that is relevant to them. These "followers" for want of a better word trust that you will share content that is relevant. The quickest way to fail in permission based marketing is to lose your users trust through spamming them, through getting the message wrong, through pushing your user base messages that are not relevant to them.

So, I am conscious of what I say on Twitter. I run an account for myself (being Xebidy and Travel Generation) and a few for our clients. I run an application called Seismic Desktop - one of the big things about twitter is not actually the website but the number of applications that have been built on the Twitter API outside of it. I hardly ever visit the Twitter website itself as I use Seismic. The two most popular applications are Seismic and Tweet Deck. I prefer Seismic because I can run multiple accounts through it - but for most single users Tweet Deck is preferred.

I try and Tweet regularly throughout the day - not too many at once because I don't want to appear spammy. I am trying to build up a relationship with my followers even though I do not know them. The primary goal is to generate page views for my sites - in particular, Travel Generation. I try and share relevant links with the idea that by sharing good quality content all the time when I share a link to one of my websites I will get lots of clicks through to them. There is also the etiquette of retweeting, which is when someone shares something you have already shared thereby increasing the network of possible exposure of your link. By retweeting periodically key peoples content and certainly by thanking anyone that shares your content you build up what we call social currency such that when it is your turn to need a link shared it happens. A Travel Generation link that I share usually generates me between 50 and 100 page views.

Further on the Travel Generation website we have included easy ways for people to share our content. Travel Generation has been experiencing 80% growth of visitor numbers since the beginning of March about the same time as we were voted by Lonely Planet users as one of the top 5 Group Authored Travel Blogs in the World. A request - we need more travel writers - if you know someone who you think could write some good stories I urge you to get them to get in contact with me.

Where do I find the other content to share? I run Google alerts for things across the internet on keywords, and I run searches against the Twitter stream around these keywords as well as subscribing to key blogs and industry news. Google alerts alone reports new web information early enough to me that I am often one of the first to tweet many relevant stories.

Just a side point, there is some key terminology you should know about Twitter. You can say I am on Twitter, the verb of which is Twittering, or you can conjugate the verb to say I just tweeted that. But you never say "I am twatting now"!

So what is the difference between Twitter and Facebook? The biggest difference is in Facebook there is reciprocity in who you follow or are friends with. In order to view another's profile you need to communicate and be friends with each other. In Twitter however the following only needs to be one way. In Twitter anyone can follow anyone else - and that means that your Tweets are being listened to by complete strangers. You don't have to accept a follower and although many do, you don't have to follow them back. In Facebook the equivalent is a company page where people become your fan and receive your updates on their wall like they would with any friends. The alternative is a group. A Group gives you more functionality, you can create message boards and forums - but I prefer a page for exactly the reason that the information you share shows up on your fans

walls. A group necessitates that a person will return to the group to receive the information and I challenge that this is not a frequent occurrence. The same rules apply in maintaining a Facebook page - share only relevant information to your fans, and don't share too often - the last thing someone wants is their wall crammed with your messages.

Personally, I think that Facebook provides its own challenges in that in many ways users view Facebook as their own personal space in the same way as they view their emails. Marketing to someone on Facebook can therefore risk being viewed as interruptive marketing or spam. However, I have two great successful examples that we have been involved in with Facebook. The first occurred a few years ago with Oz Experience. Oz Experience had three different designs for its new website done - we had organised Fluid in town here to do these on our behalf. However, no one involved in the project could agree on which design was best. So we put all three designs up on the Oz Experience Facebook group and asked for feedback on what these customers expected in an Oz Ex website. The response was great. What's more by empowering the customers we created an air of anticipation too. We kept the group in the loop of how the development was going, announced new functionality and generally spread the word as we went close to going live with the new website. It was a pretty exciting project.

The second was more recent and involved AJ Hackett Bungy here in town. Bungy was faced with a problem that the customers through their own phones and handhelds were getting more and better media than they could buy - media which they were sharing without their friends and family instantly. Bungy aimed to come up with a solution that was vastly better than anything the customers could create themselves and more than the standard three pics and a 2 minute video that had become the norm for tourism operations. First step was a huge investment in infrastructure with new filming and photo positions.

The second step involved us at Xebidy to develop an amazing unique media sharing website. Instead of the standard offering customers can now get all their photos (up to 10) and all their cutting floor video within their own personal space. Included in this is a number of AJ Hackett promotional material. This gives the customer the complete story with which they can share with family and friends. We made it easy for them to quickly export the content to You Tube, blogs, Facebook, and so on. Further we integrated Facebook connect so that users could see which of their friends had also jumped and easily share their content.

In my opinion this has been a stroke of genius. The Queensland "Best Job in The World" phenomenon has led to a raft of imitation campaigns where you upload a video of yourself to You Tube to win free travel where you subsequently blog about your travels. The

strategy is to generate loads of user generated content that is then shared across a multitude of social media websites. In contrast the Bungy site has recognised that by keeping your current customers happy they will become your biggest sales advocate - and by creating this community, Bungy has given them all the tools to market their product through social media for them - it the equivalent of retweeting I guess.

Bungy has actually hit on an underlying principle of social media marketing, probably without realising, and that is that a key ingredient in the social web is the concept of social currency. I have already mentioned the basic marketing axiom of "what's in it for me?". Social currency is the value a user perceives for themselves by using your site. The more value a user feels they are earning by using your site the more they will return and the more value they feel they have the more likely they will be to share your website. Emotive images of yourself jumping off a bridge earn pretty good social currency with your friends. Social currency is an important element in reviews and ratings websites - if a user feels they are going to earn esteem, points, a true thank you from others for sharing their information the more likely they are to contribute. That is why showing the number of reviews and reviews of reviews work.

Clearly this form of marketing is quite different to traditional marketing. It is much more focussed on marketing to what we call the long-tail, that is to your niche. I conceptualise it as actually going out, identifying the people you want to view your message and targeting that message to suit them. Cliche: fish where the fish are.

For example, a project I am working on presently involves a new tour operator that is starting up in China. Their first trip is in October and they came to me for a strategy to get them off the ground. My plan is to produce lots of travel articles that I will subsequently use my contacts to get published across all the leading online travel sites including Matador, Simon Seeks, Tumbrella, and Travel Generation. The goal is to create these guys as experts on travelling in China. Likewise, they will share loads of videos and images across YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Picassa and Facebook. We will then use Twitter and Facebook to alert the broader market of this content and advertise through banner on popular travel sites with similar purpose. My team will be active in forums and question and answer websites being influencers and directing conversation toward this content. The whole strategy is create these guys as the experts in travelling China - they will be your first port of call when considering a tour in China.

Another project I am working on involves Tourism Australia and the World Youth Student Travel Conference in Manchester. Here we are planning to send me up there with all the Australian companies that are going to produce social media in real time. The idea is to turn what normally is a trade show into a consumer show through the Internet. I will blog

twice daily of what the Australians are doing at the show, their new products, specials etc; I will produce regular podcasts as I interview those that are there and once daily we are planning a live 15 minute show on UStream. The idea is to produce content aimed at the traveller from within the trade show.

So clearly social media is here to stay. Customers almost automatically go online to interact with their chosen companies. Companies that simply ignore social media and the blogosphere do so at their peril - they risk a PR nightmare blowing up outside their company. Here is a prime example of a disaster:

Oz Experience.

Such disasters can be avoided through the early detection of such problems. Google alerts for one is invaluable. Professional social media specialists such as Xebidy are on the look out for such bad news on behalf of our clients.

Finally, let me wrap up with a little insight into the future. I believe that the natural progression in the web is that content will become increasingly transportable. We call it creating a mash-up, where we use data from numerous sources to create something new. Applying points on a Google map being the most obvious one that you see everyday. At Xebidy we have been working on Travel Generation which we believe is an example of the next generation of websites. Travel Generation is ultimately a travel planning website. However, a travel planning website is only as good as it's database of products. Not at Travel Generation. We use a unique technology we have developed based on social bookmarking functionality. Users of TG traverse the Internet visiting any website - using a link in their bookmarks toolbar they can then choose to save that page to their TG travel planning space. We spider the page pulling in the content from that page. The user can then schedule that onto trips building up an itinerary which they can share through friends and family, on Facebook or through to the Outlook, calendars, phones etc. We are building a travel planning website without a database of products. Ultimately, it is our hope that travel websites we realise that their customers are using this for travel planning and add the bookmarking functionality to their own websites to make it easier for their users to save the site to TG.