

The Best of **EVERGREEN MARKETING** *Let's Grow!*

*Practical marketing tips for
garden industry companies*



Creating Engaging Social Media Content: An Easy Formula

What's your approach to social media marketing? Do you have specific goals and a systematic plan? Or is it something you tinker with every now and then when you have time? Have you handed it off to employees, with little direction to guide them?

Like so many things in life, what you put into your social media marketing determines what you get out of it. Having a well-thought-out plan makes the process both easier and more successful.

For purposes of illustration, I'll discuss Facebook here, as it accounts for the vast majority of social media marketing. The same principles can be adapted for virtually any social media content.

Establish a Framework. Start by thinking about what you'll post, as well as when.

What. When considering what to post, start by establishing broad categories such as:

- Best sellers
- New products
- Behind the scenes
- Customer testimonials
- Cross-pollinating other platforms
- Frequently asked questions
- How-to information
- Special offers

When. It's easy to find out when your fans tend to be on Facebook, which will help you maximize your reach. Go to your Facebook page and click on Insights (top navigation), then Posts (left column), then When Your Fans Are Online (top navigation). You'll see data by day of week and time of day.



Bear in mind that Facebook distributes posts gradually as engagement rises, with the bulk of distribution occurring within the first day or two. Don't write as if people are reading your post in real time.

Post with a frequency you can sustain, considering both available content and time. Consistency is more important than frequency.

Develop a Calendar. Once you've created editorial "buckets" and post frequency, block out a calendar. Rotate the various topic categories to ensure variety. Then fill in the concepts, choose appropriate images, and write the copy. Keep it short, include appropriate links and work in a soft sell message whenever possible.

Read Results. Every month or two, step back and look at the results of your efforts. Compile a report showing engagement not just by post, but also by editorial category and day of the week. Look for patterns. Do more of what's working, less of what isn't.

Pay attention to the type of engagement each post generates. Shares, link clicks, comments and page likes demonstrate a higher level of engagement than post likes. Shares will broaden your reach. Link clicks will increase your traffic. Comments provide customer insight. And page likes allow you to continue to market to an engaged prospect or customer.

When a post performs exceptionally well, make the most of it by paying to distribute it to a wider audience. For just \$5 or \$10 per day, you can easily push out popular content to more customers and prospects.

Structure and Strategy. Adding structure to your editorial calendar makes it easy to post regularly without agonizing over "What can I say?" every time. When you establish editorial buckets, filling them with engaging content becomes routine.

Like any other marketing, keep your goals top of mind, analyze your results and follow your winners. Apply these techniques consistently, and watch your fans and engagement grow.



5 of the Best Ways to Use Facebook Advertising

Facebook advertising offers several big benefits:

Superb Targeting. Not only can you select your audience by interests, demographics, and geography, but you can also target your own customers, as well as prospects who are similar to your own customers.

Affordable. The average cost per click is just \$0.28, far less than Google Adwords. Lower per click costs mean it's possible to get meaningful results on a small budget -- often as little as \$10 per day.

Versatile. Facebook ads can be used to reach a wide variety of goals. While it's not always the best vehicle for direct sales, here are 5 other objectives for which Facebook advertising is ideal:

1. Growing Your Fan Base. If you're already spending time maintaining your Facebook page, get more for your effort by growing your fan base. For starters, you can upload your customer list and advertise to any Facebook users on the list who aren't already fans. Then run a separate campaign that targets people who are similar to your best buyers.

2. Adding Enewsletter Subscribers. Facebook "lead ads" are ideal for developing relationships with new prospects. One way to do so is by running ads to grow your list of enewsletter subscribers. Offering a premium or discount as a "thank you" for subscribing generally improves response.

3. Generating Catalog Requests. Facebook lead ads are also great for getting catalog requests from qualified prospects. See our article on *How and Why to Use Facebook Lead Ads* at the end of this report for more details.



4. Remarketing to Website Visitors. Another often-overlooked way to use Facebook ads is remarketing to people who visit your website. Just add the Facebook remarketing code to your website, and Facebook can serve ads to previous site visitors. If you're already using Google remarketing, this is an easy way to expand your remarketing efforts.

5. Increasing Nursery or Event Traffic. If you have a retail presence or host periodic nursery events, Facebook is a great way to boost traffic on a small budget. Geographic targeting can be as narrow or as broad as you like, and can be used in conjunction with other types of targeting.

As you can see, Facebook advertising offers plenty of opportunity for many different purposes.

Given the limited availability of Facebook ad space, costs are likely to rise as more and more advertisers jump on board. The sooner you give it a try, the more opportunity you'll have to learn what works best while costs are still quite low. Consider which goals suit your needs and give it a try!





Why and How to Run an Online Photo Contest

Do you find yourself constantly scrambling for good customer photos to use on social media, in catalogs, or in your enewsletter? A well-executed online photo contest can provide fodder for future marketing, while boosting engagement and growing your prospect list as well. Here's what's involved:

Determine the Details. Start by establishing the contest details, such as:

Categories. Will all photos be judged together, or will there be different categories, such as landscapes and individual plants? Running contests with 3 to 5 categories makes entrants feel they have a greater chance of winning, and may encourage more participation.

Entry requirements. Is there a limit on the number of photos participants can submit? Must the photos be of plants purchased from your nursery? Must participants be Facebook fans? Think through all the particulars you'll want to include in your contest description.

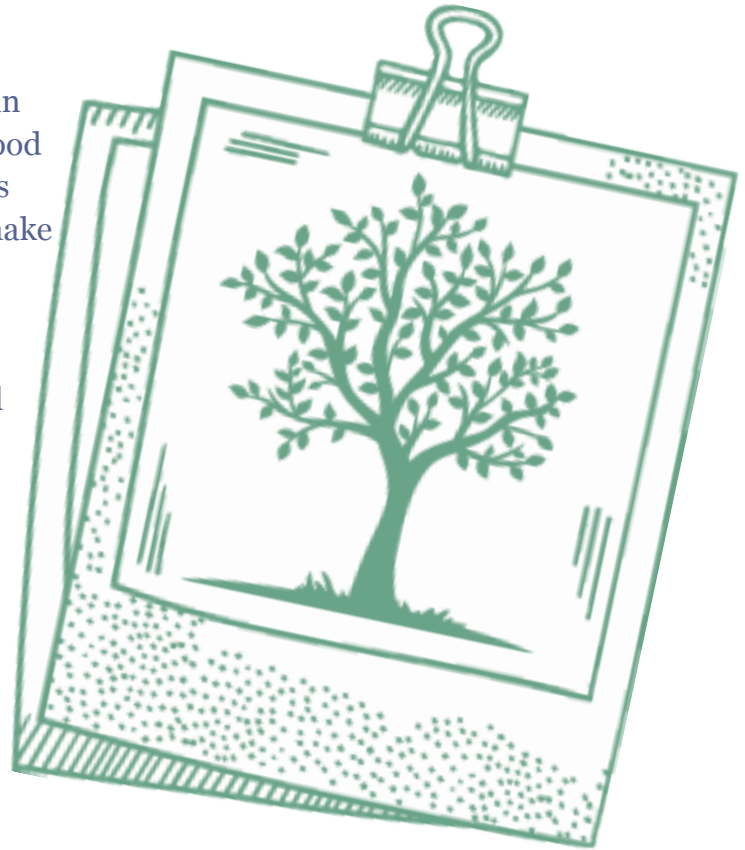
Also consider what information you'll collect from entrants, such as name, address and email address. The less information you request, the more entries you'll receive.



Contest Length. While a far-off deadline can often result in procrastination, it's usually a good idea in the case of live plants. Growing seasons vary from place to place and year to year, so make sure your contest timing is adequate for the types of photos you expect to receive.

Prizes. To attract the best entries, it's critical that prizes directly relate to gardening. If you sell plants, there's no better prize than a gift certificate for your product.

How much should prizes be worth? Top prizes for photo contests are often valued at \$100 or \$200. Offering second and third prizes in lower amounts is also advisable. The more prizes offered, the more entries you'll tend to receive.



Judging. How will the winners be determined? Will you be the judge, or will you allow your community voting, thereby increasing engagement? You may want to select semi-finalists by community vote, and you choose the finalists.

Choose a Vendor. Implementing contests through an outside vendor specializing in them will simplify the process and assure regulatory compliance. Companies to consider include Shortstack, Votigo, Woobox and Wishpond, among others. Pricing varies depending on the number of contest entrants allowed and available features. Choose one that offers mobile-friendly apps that can be customized with your branding.

Prices generally range from \$29 to \$99 per month for the duration of your contest. Don't overpay for features you don't need.

Execute and Promote. Once you've chosen a vendor, you'll have access to customizable forms for your contest page and lead capture forms. Developing contest graphics will help brand your promotion across all the channels where you promote it.

It's helpful to include a few tips on taking good photographs. If you prefer photos that include people or pets, say so.



Be sure to include a provision specifying that by submitting photos to the contest, entrants are giving permission for you to use photos in advertising, on your website, and in social media.

The more extensively you promote your contest, the more successful you'll be. Places to feature your contest include:

- Your Facebook news feed
- Your Facebook cover photo
- On your website
- In your newsletter or other emails
- In your email signature
- On your packing slips
- In Facebook posts that you boost for more distribution
- In Facebook ads targeting customers who aren't yet fans
- If the contest length permits, in your catalog

Not only will you want to remind people to enter the contest, but if finalists or semi-finalists are chosen by popular vote, you'll want to encourage participation in that as well.

Notify Winners. Naturally, you'll need to notify winners and distribute prizes after the contest ends. But don't stop there -- create a little fanfare, too! Share the winning photos on as many channels as you can. Gardeners are always inspired by the results of other people's gardening efforts, and love seeing their photos.

Another nice touch is to send all your entrants an email thanking them for entering the contest, and giving them a coupon code good for a discount or bonus on a future order. It creates good will, encourages participation in future contests, and generates more business, too!

Start Early. Photo contests can create tremendous engagement, and provide great content and new prospects for future marketing. As you can see, a well-run contest takes some thought and pre-planning. Get the pieces in place now, before you're in the midst of busy season, and you'll reap many rewards in the months to come.



Where to Put Your Marketing Budget

How do you decide where to put your marketing budget each year? No single approach to marketing works for every company. How do you determine what's best for you?

Here's a 5-step process that can point you in a solid direction that's tailored to your needs:

Review Results. Start by looking back at your past marketing. Divide it into three groups:

1) It worked great! Naturally, you want to do more of same.

2) It was a bust. Consider it a learning experience. Pinpoint the elements you want to avoid in the future.

3) It was mediocre. Focus hard on this group. Figure out what changes might make it better. Often, a series of 5% improvements can turn a mediocre marketing effort into a winner.

When considering ways to tweak a campaign, think about three elements individually:

- **Media.** Are you reaching the right audience? Can you refine your targeting to focus more precisely on your most qualified prospects?
- **Offer.** While price is important, that's only one component of an offer. It includes other elements such as guarantees, gifts with purchase, terms, and direct sales vs. lead-to-sales. Consider ways to make your offers more attractive.
- **Message.** What you say, how you say it, and what your message looks like all impact your sales. How can you change your sales message to make it more powerful?

Note Trends. The only constant is change, and change impacts your marketing decisions. What changes are having the biggest impact on your business right now?

Are you selling to older buyers who are downsizing? Do you have a growing number of younger customers who are looking for different products, or need more guidance in their purchase decisions? Is the increasing prevalence of voice search affecting your



SEO or PPC efforts? Have you seen shifts in seasonal buying patterns?

Consider how the world is changing in ways that may impact future results.

Explore Opportunities. As the world of marketing changes, it keeps presenting us with opportunities. From live video to Instagram, new possibilities abound that didn't exist just a few years ago.

Keep abreast of what's getting traction and note the type of companies it seems to be working for. Don't jump in just because everyone else is doing it. But if a new approach appears to be a good fit for your business, learn more and wade in.

Follow Your Strengths. Following your strengths means more than how you position your products in the marketplace. It also applies to the marketing methods you choose.

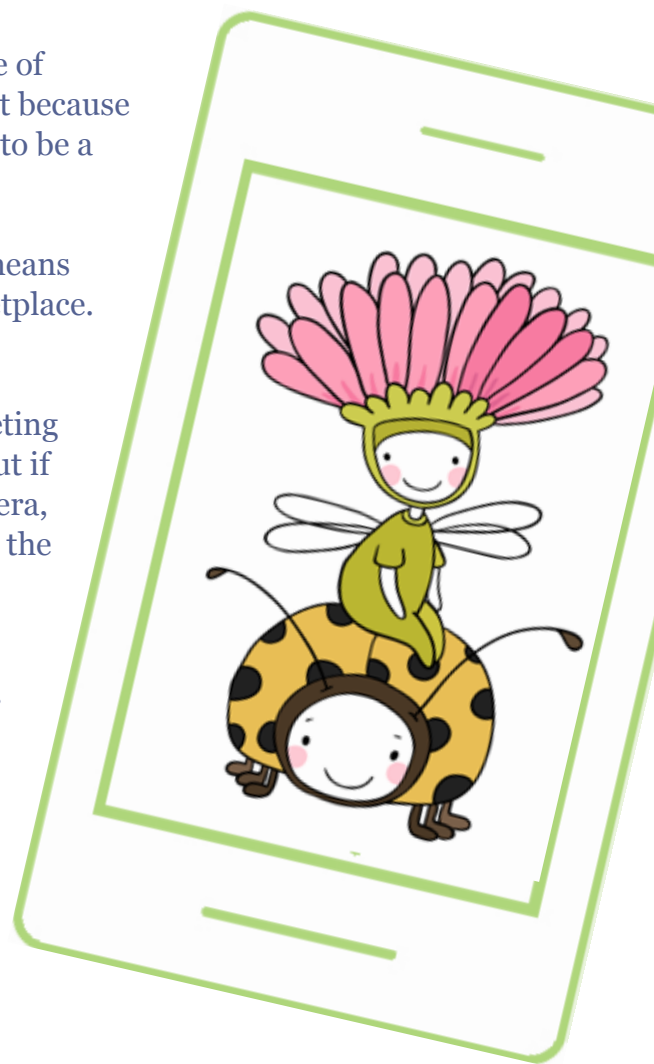
For instance, you may be thinking of trying video marketing because you know it's enormously popular right now. But if everyone in your company hates being in front of a camera, you don't know any good videographers, and don't have the budget to hire them -- forget video!

You don't have to try every new marketing method that comes along, no matter how popular or effective it is for other companies. You DO have to be proficient in the methods that you rely on. Figure out what you and your team are good at, and play to your strengths.

Always Test. Unless you try new things, your marketing stagnates. What works today eventually wears out. The world changes and you get left behind if you haven't kept up.

While trying new things is vital to a healthy marketing program, it's just as critical to test methodically. Devote 20% to 30% of your budget to testing, and keep the rest on what's proven. Keep trying to improve and expand on what's working, but do so without risking your core business.

Follow these 5 steps, and you'll have a sensible strategy for keeping your business thriving for years to come.



5 Tips for More Powerful Testimonials



Without a doubt, testimonials sell. Some do so better than others. Which do you think is more convincing:

“This greenhouse is great!” reports one satisfied user.

Or *“I was surprised at how easy the greenhouse was to assemble. Now it’s a thrill to be harvesting fresh vegetables in the middle of February.”*

- Jane Gardener, Moose Lake, MN.

What makes some testimonials more effective than others? How can you ensure that yours do some heavy lifting? Here are a few elements of great testimonials:

Specifics. Ask a satisfied customer how they liked our product, and they’ll probably reply, “Great.” Ask them why, and you’ll elicit specific details that convince. In the example above, “easy to assemble” and “fresh vegetables in February” are two specifics that bring the example to life.

When requesting testimonials, probe a little deeper. Ask what the customer’s situation was before using your product, and how it changed afterwards. Did it save them time or money? What was the single biggest benefit the product provided?

Emotion. How did the results of using your product make your customer feel? In the example above, “I was surprised” and “it’s a thrill” add emotion that bring the testimonial to life.

Visuals. A relevant photo enhances a testimonial. It could be of your customer, or better yet, a customer using your product.

Judicious Editing. Edit for clarity or brevity. Don’t edit for grammar. Capturing the customer’s actual wording, bad grammar and all, contributes to authenticity.

Attribution. While it’s easier to use a customer’s initials or a catchphrase like “a satisfied customer,” a full attribution, including name and location, add credibility. Always ask permission before using those specifics.

Ask the Right Questions. Customer testimonials can provide powerful marketing content. When you solicit them, ask for specific details, images, and permission to use full names. Those extra steps will give you some of the most persuasive content around.



The Quickest Path to a Buying Decision

In 1995, a Columbia University professor conducted a study on choice that bears remembering amid today's information overload. In a California gourmet store, Professor Sheena Iyengar set up a booth offering samples of premium jams. The display was periodically switched from a selection of 24 jams to a choice of 6. Tasters were offered a coupon for \$1 off a purchase.

Not surprisingly, more people were drawn to the larger display: 60% of shoppers stopped to sample when 24 choices were offered, vs. 40% for the smaller selection.

The shocker came in the sales figures. When only six choices were offered, 30% of the those who sampled the jams purchased. Given 24 choices, the percent of people who purchased dropped to just 3%.

For every 100 people who walked through the door, the 24-jam display yielded 1.8 sales. By contrast, the 6-jam display produced 12 sales -- an enormous difference!

How Much is Too Much? Many similar studies have been conducted in the decades since, and the same principle still holds true. The tricky part is that the optimum number of choices varies with many factors, such as how different the choices are, and how much importance is attached to the outcome of each choice.

There's no right answer to the question of how much choice is too much. You need to test to see what works best for your business. No matter how many products you sell, what's most important is helping customers to reach a buying decision quickly, before decision overwhelm kicks in. There are many ways to accomplish this:

1. Robust, Prominent Search Filters. If you sell hundreds of products, the ability to search by multiple variables simultaneously is mandatory. Then, make sure your Plant Finder or other search filter is prominently featured on your website. All too often, companies provide great search filters, but don't highlight them on their websites.



2. Best Sellers and Top-Rated Products. What other customers think -- as evidenced by both ratings and sales -- carries a lot of weight with shoppers. The ability to sort product by ratings or popularity helps them narrow product choices. “Top 10” lists serve a similar function.

3. Good-Better-Best Comparisons. If you sell hard goods, comparing good, better and best options can help customers decide which selections best suit their needs. This works well when you’re selling several products that serve similar functions, but that have different features.

4. Limited Product Selection. One of our clients is the largest seller of onion plants in the country. You might expect them to sell every known variety of onion plants, but that’s not their approach.

Shoppers need only answer two questions: 1) Which geographic region am I growing in? and 2) Do I want to grow yellow, white, or red onions? That narrows the options to just two or three, a very manageable number to consider. I believe that the limited selection contributes a great deal to their enviable conversion rate.

5. Fewer Search Results. As daunting as shopping on a desktop can sometimes be, shopping on a mobile device can be 10 times worse. You may find that offering fewer products to mobile shoppers may yield more sales. As mobile traffic increases, you need to consider whether it pays to customize the mobile shopping experience by offering a more curated product selection.

While no single approach works for every company, every marketer needs to be mindful of the paradox of choice. Helping your customers reach a buying decision as quickly as possible will both reduce their stress and raise your profits.



Free and Low-Cost Ways to Promote Online and Offline Events

Holding an event, whether online or off, can be one of the best ways to introduce new customers to your business. With the help of Facebook Events, they can be very easy to promote.

What's a Facebook Event? Despite the name, a Facebook Event isn't an event held on Facebook, but rather a way to use Facebook to promote an event out in the "real world."

Creating a Facebook Event gives you a dedicated page on which to post details about an upcoming occasion. At a minimum, the page includes the name and description of the event, as well as the date, time and location. A representative image is also highly recommended.

Visitors to the page can respond with "coming" or "interested." Responding to either option will trigger reminders from Facebook as the event gets closer. Likewise, respondents' Facebook friends will see notices saying something like, "Jane Greenthumb is attending Beautiful Gardens Open Days" -- spreading awareness to a wider audience.

In addition to the organic reach a Facebook Event page receives, Facebook ads can spread the word even more widely to a targeted audience. The cost to do so is quite low, giving you a pretty big bang for the buck.

Setting Up an Event. Setting up a Facebook Event is both easy and intuitive. From the News Feed for your page, click Events in the left column menu. Then click the blue +Create Event button towards the center left of the screen.

The Event page opens with fields for event name, description, location, and date/time. You can also upload a photo, which Facebook will adjust to display at 1920 x 1080 pixels.



You'll find some other optional fields, all of which are self-explanatory. At the end, you can either hit "Save Draft" or "Publish."

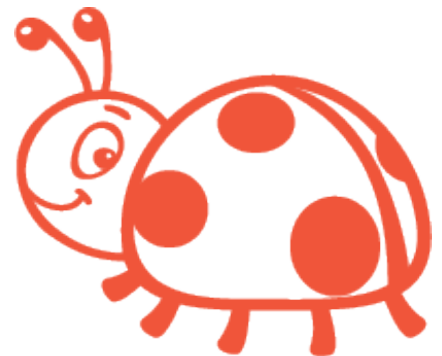
You can make your Event page more robust by adding more photos or videos and allowing comments and questions on the page.

Promoting Your Event. Once your Facebook Event is set up, you need to promote it. Start by sharing the event on your Facebook timeline, and in other social media.

You can also boost your event, turning it into an ad to get wider distribution. You can target your Facebook fans, your customers, or a "lookalike audience" of your customers. Targeting by interests, demographics, and/or geographic location is also possible. Set budgets at whatever level you like, starting as low as \$1 per day.

Facebook helps promote your event other ways. For instance, when people click on "Explore Events" in Facebook navigation, your Event may be suggested to an audience that Facebook deems appropriate. In addition, when someone responds that they're going to an event, or are interested in it, Facebook automatically lets their friends know, which spreads the word further. What's more, as your event date nears, Facebook repeatedly reminds respondents that they have an upcoming event.

Low-Cost, Long-Lasting Promotion. If your customers and prospects are Facebook users, there's no easier way to get the word out to them about your next event. Create an event and boost it on a minimal budget, and Facebook will help you spread the word far and wide.



3 Low-Cost Strategies to Generate Better PPC Results

When most companies try to generate more traffic from a pay-per-click campaign, their first move -- and often only one -- is usually to bump up their bids and budgets. Not so fast! Before you go there, try these three strategies to get more mileage out of your existing budget:

Test Ads. Always test two ads against each other for Ad Groups with significant volume. Not only will you optimize performance, but you'll learn which appeals work best -- information that can be useful in other marketing.

What's more, regular testing prevents ads from fatiguing and depressing results.

Change your settings to "rotate ads evenly," or you'll only get a short, possibly inconclusive test before the "better" ad is the only one running.



REFINE

Make sure you have at least 50 clicks, and preferably 100, for each ad before making any changes. That way, you'll be sure your decision is based on statistically valid results.

You'll often find a difference of 10% or more in click-through rates between one ad and another. Through a series of incremental changes, ad testing alone can often double your click-through rates over time.

Refine Keywords. When you use Broad Match (the default option) or Phrase Match, your ads can be shown when people search on a phrase that includes the keywords you bid on.

Many people don't realize that it's possible to see the exact phrases that triggered all your ads. This knowledge can provide a great deal of guidance in refining your keywords.

To see all searches that triggered your ads in Google Ads, click on the Keywords tab in the center of the Campaigns screen. Then go to the Details button that appears above the list of keywords you've bid on. Click on the down arrow next to it. On the dropdown menu, click the first All option, which is in the Search Terms section. That will display a table showing every search term that triggered your ad for the specified time period, with statistics on each.



From there, I find it easiest to download the report into an Excel spreadsheet; you'll find the download button just above the Match Type column.

How do you use this information? First, look through the list for any search terms that are generating unqualified traffic. For instance, if you're bidding on *dahlia*, your ad may be displayed to people searching for *black dahlia murder mystery*.

Adding a negative match for *black*, *murder* or *mystery* will eliminate those unqualified searches. Even if the mystery readers don't click on your ad, eliminating impressions from unqualified prospects will raise your click-through rate, which will boost your ranking without any change in budget. Next, focus on the remaining search terms that get a lot of impressions. Add the ones that aren't listed as Exact Match to your keyword list.

For instance, if you bid on *peony plants* as Phrase Match, your ad will be shown to people who search on *peony plants for sale*. By adding *peony plants for sale* to your keyword list, you'll get more exact matches, which will boost your ranking without bidding higher.

Review Landing Pages. Always try to get PPC visitors to their desired destination with the minimum number of clicks. Don't automatically send everyone to your home page, leaving them to search for what they want. If you're advertising a particular variety, send them to the page for that variety.

Not only will this help increase sales, but it will improve your landing page relevance, a key ingredient in determining your ranking. Creating better landing page relevance is yet another technique to boost your ranking without bidding more.

The Circular Path to Better Results. Both Google Ads and Bing Ads rely on what's called a Quality Score to help determine your ranking.

A number from 1 to 10 (10 being the best), your Quality Score is determined by landing page relevance, your historic click-through rate, and the speed with which your landing page loads. Improve any one of those variables, and you can rank higher without increasing costs.

The higher your Quality Score, the better your ranking. The better your ranking, the higher your click-through rate. The higher your click-through rate, the better your Quality Score.

Since so few advertisers pay attention to the details of their pay-per-click campaigns, it's often easier than you think to raise your rank without increasing your bids or budget by a single cent. Give it a try!



How and Why to Use Facebook Lead Ads



Facebook advertising has soared in the last couple years, growing 63% in the first half of 2016 alone. It's not surprising: qualified prospects are easy to pinpoint, rates are affordable, and testing is simple. You might call it a direct marketer's dream.

For a great way to find and nurture qualified prospects, consider the Facebook lead ads. Their huge advantage is that they eliminate the need for respondents to type, a big plus for mobile users.

Instead, with one click, a lead form appears, pre-populated with information from the respondent's Facebook account. The advertiser can specify how much or little information to ask for, and the prospect can edit the responses before submitting them.

Here are a few tips to make the most of this new vehicle:

Use Lookalike Audiences. When you upload your customer list to Facebook and specify "lookalike audience" targeting, Facebook will show your ads to people who are similar to your existing customers. Lookalike audiences can be used alone or in combination with other targeting methods.

Make an Offer. State clearly what your prospects will receive when they respond to your ad. Use an appropriate "call to action" button, such as Subscribe for newsletter sign-ups or Sign Up to receive a free catalog.

Test Ads. As with any pay-per-click advertising, continuously testing one ad against another will help you optimize your results and ensure that your creative always stays fresh.

Automate Record Transfers. One weak link of Facebook lead ads is that Facebook only provides leads through a manual download of a CSV file. However, outside vendors such as Zapier or Leadsbridge can automatically sync your leads with Constant Contact, Mailchimp, or many other databases.

Follow Up. Have a follow-up system that works like clockwork. If respondents signed up for an newsletter, send an automated welcome series that introduces them to your company and website, and encourages them to order. If they requested a catalog, make sure they receive it promptly, perhaps with an introductory offer.

Facebook lead ads can provide fertile ground for developing new relationships. They're easy to test and can be scaled to any budget. Why not give them a try?



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