

Web Site Advice for Door Dealers

Expert Shares Inside Secrets of Winning Web Sites



Editor's Note:

This story is an interview with someone who has excellent credentials to provide valuable Web guidance to door and access systems dealers. We generally like to get input from more than one expert, but we couldn't find anyone with the credentials of Brian Kraff.

Take a look:

- He is the CEO of Market Hardware of Washington, D.C., started in 2003 by a team with extensive experience in Web marketing, technology, and small businesses.
- Market Hardware specializes in specialty contractor businesses and has provided Web design or Web marketing services to almost 50 garage door companies.
- Kraff's firm focuses on designing effective Web sites for small businesses, then driving customers to those businesses through pay-per-click (PPC), pay-per-lead (PPL), and other customized Web marketing techniques.
- He presented a Web seminar at the International Garage Door Expo in 2009 and has been invited to speak again at Expo 2010 in Las Vegas.
- Before founding Market Hardware, in 1998 Kraff was the founder and CEO of eStudentLoan, the world's largest online marketplace for student loans. The site served more than one million users and won several "Best of the Web" awards.
- He holds a B.A. degree from Cornell University and an M.B.A. from Columbia Business School.



If you've already worked with almost 50 door dealers, you probably know something about our industry.

Before we started serving your industry, we did our homework on garage doors – the business, the services, and the types of marketing your customers respond to. Our goal is to not only be experts in Web sites and search engines, but in garage doors, too.

Many door dealers are getting online through their Yellow Pages sales reps. What are the drawbacks to this?

Well, being listed on sites like yellowpages.com or even citysearch.com is good, but having a Web site designed by yellowpages.com may put you at a competitive disadvantage.

The mass-produced sites they crank out don't stand out and don't compel many potential clients. If your market is not competitive or if you are the only game in town, then you can live with it.

But, generally speaking, you need to have a professionally designed site. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it needs to be of a high quality – both in appearance and functionality – so customers can find you and be convinced you're the quality company they should call.

Most important, the site needs to be differentiated from everyone else's cookie-cutter site. The most differentiated site wins the phone call.

Is it worthwhile to purchase an online ad on Yellowpages.com or the other directory sites?

It's worthwhile to spend some time or money getting a complete and optimized business profile listing on the major sites. These local listings present a real opportunity.

But when it comes to allocating ad dollars, I would focus on doing "pay per click" or search engine ads on Google, Yahoo, and Bing. You'll spend less, you can optimize those campaigns over time, and you can track your inbound calls.

Paying for one banner ad on yellowpages.com is not the worst choice you could make, but there are a lot better things on the menu. For example, I'd rather see every reader try a lead-generation service like ServiceMagic, which has a definite return on investment.

Our surveys indicate that customers looking for garage door services are using the Yellow Pages less and increasingly turning to the Internet. Do you think this trend will continue?

Yes. The phone book and newspapers are dying a slow death.

"Google" is not only the name of the most powerful advertising company today, it's a verb. Ask a friend how to find a garage door company. He'll surely say, "Google it."

The penetration of high-speed Internet access, the big switch in consumer behavior to turn to the Internet for information, the increase in the number of phones that can access the Web, and the vast

improvement in quality search returns for local business info – all these factors look like they will drive Internet usage up. We'll keep on seeing fewer and fewer fingers doing the walking.

Many door dealers realize they need to get an online presence, but they don't know where to turn. How do they find a competent, trustworthy advisor who will give them good information and not take advantage of them?

Most important is to find a company that understands their industry. Ask your peers or your industry association for a recommendation. Ask to see some samples and ask what experience they have in your industry.

Make sure you look for a site that has a design optimized to convert site visitors to callers. If the company can't explain how they do that, then I would run away.

Be willing to invest a 30- to 45-minute phone call to give a Web design shop a chance to explain their service and their process, answer all your questions intelligently, and describe the benefits of Web marketing beyond just designing the site.

I've seen a growing emphasis on local businesses taking advantage of Google Local and Bing Local. What's going on? And how can dealers take advantage of this new trend?

Right. These are the 21st century versions of the phonebook white pages, but not in alphabetical order. It's free to be in these local areas.

Getting properly listed in local search directories like Google Local (aka Google Maps) and Bing Local is a no-brainer. Ask your Web site provider about getting your business profile submitted and then optimized on all the major sites that have local listings. Most important is Google Local optimization.

You can do this yourself but it takes some time. Readers can ask us for more info at Expo or give us a call to explain how it works.

Google has been running a \$100 discount offer for the Google AdWords program. Should door and gate dealers be using Google AdWords?

It depends on the dealer. If he's Web and marketing savvy and has time to manage the

campaigns, AdWords is a fine "do-it-yourself" way to advertise on Google. They give you some guidance on their site.

But, frankly, most of our clients hire us to do it for them because we're experienced. Getting the lowest cost per lead does require some "nerd work."

Google is the most-visited search engine (it gets about 65 percent of the traffic) and their ad network is strong. So they are the best place to start for search engine marketing campaigns.

The \$100 deal is a ploy to bring new clients – \$100 for free is nice and better than zero, but it's not a realistic budget.

You have to spend money to make money. In our experience, to advertise on search engines and actually generate additional business, a realistic budget for garage door dealers in medium to large markets is \$600 to \$900 per month.

Compare that to Yellow Pages. It's a steal.

When a door dealer optimizes his Web site for the search engines, what search engines are currently the most important?

Google, Google, Google, Google, and Google. And Yahoo and Bing (that's part of MSN). Did I mention Google?

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HOT TOPIC: Brian Kraff speaks to a packed seminar room at Expo 2009 in Nashville. His topic was "Getting #1 on Google: Growing Your Business on the Net."



Top 10 Questions to Ask a Prospective Web Site Company

- 1. How long have you been building Web sites? (Ask for local references.)**
- 2. How long will it take to get my site completely built?**
- 3. What is the total cost to get my complete site up and running?**
- 4. What input will you need from me to get it done right?**
- 5. How will I update my site and add content over time?**
- 6. What do you do to make my site easy for search engines to index?**
- 7. What do you do to maximize my ranking on the major search engines?**
- 8. Will I get monthly reports of traffic to my site? (Ask for a sample report.)**
- 9. How much will I pay for Web hosting?**
- 10. What will my Web site's hosting firm do to prevent downtime?**

**The million dollar question is,
“How can I get the top listing on
Google or on any search engine?”
How would you briefly answer
that question?**

I can't briefly answer that question! The only short answer is to pay. Advertising is the only way to get instant, guaranteed, page-one rank on Google, Yahoo, and Bing.

Some firms out there will say you can just do Search Engine Optimization to get and stay on top, but that's true only if you are the only door dealer in Cody, Wyoming. If you have any competition and you want to stay on top, start a “pay per click” (PPC) search engine ad campaign and maintain it with a moderate ad budget. It works.

What are the top five factors that help increase a local business's ranking on the most popular search engines?

There's a lot of “secret sauce” in answering that question. But here are a few things I can share.

Have a local phone number on your site, not just an 800 number. And make sure that phone number can be “read” by the search engines. Don't use an image to display it, use text.

Keep your content fresh on your site. Add a link to your professional association and make sure they have a link on their site that includes your Web address.

Describe or list the areas you service. Don't try any tricks like stuffing keywords onto your page or using link farms; they can count against you.

You talk about setting up your Web page properly. What are the key elements of doing that?

We give this answer in detail to every dealer that calls for free Web site marketing consultation. Here's the short version.

Your Web site has 15 seconds to describe visually and in text (1) what you do, (2) where you do it, (3) why you do it better, and (4) how to contact you. All of those elements must be prominent on the first page. The graphics, photos, and text must look sharp, crisp, and clear.

When a door or gate business gets a great Web site up and running, what are some key internal issues they must address?

Make sure someone is designated to review the site completely every quarter. Seasonal services should be highlighted appropriately, and the references to any dates should be correct. If you change some aspect of your business, like adding key personnel or a new service area, that needs to be reflected on your site.

And you need to keep track of where traffic is going or not going. Tracking that helps you build a better Web site over time.

What are some of the biggest mistakes you see in Web sites for retail businesses in the door and access systems industry?

The biggest mistake is building a site that does not look competitive compared with the best



companies in the industry. Garage doors are expensive items. Customers buying high-ticket items will tend to avoid businesses that don't look professional online.

Too many small businesses throw up a one- or two-page site, or they purchase an expanded listing on yellowpages.com and believe they have checked the box, "My business is online."

The other big mistake is not telling a concise story of why customers should call you and not the other guy. If your business is run by a trusty-looking industry veteran who has been doing this for 40 years, a photo and a short explanation will make your phone ring.

Give people a reason to stop looking at other companies and call you.

What is the biggest Web site scam right now that door/gate businesses should be wary of?

Search Engine Optimization. SEO is the practice of manipulating your Web site to 'trick' Google into giving you a better ranking.

Every business gets spam e-mail for this service every day. Unfortunately, 9 out of 10 companies are selling snake oil. These companies sell their service for as much as \$1,000 per month with no guarantee of success.

If they're ethical and good at their trade, it will take them 2-6 months to get you results. Then, snap! Google changes its formula for how it ranks Web sites and you are gone. Money lost.

If you're serious about being on page one, you need to pay Google, not trick Google. The tricks don't work for very long. Google does catch and ban sites that play this game.

If my door company does about a million dollars in business annually, what is a reasonable amount that I should be spending on my Web site (for initial setup and for ongoing maintenance)?

Any business operating at \$1 million is pretty in tune with marketing. They want a Web presence that properly reflects the quality of their business. A realistic budget to design/build a great Web site is \$3,000 to \$6,000.

If you want a 'best in market' Web site, a realistic budget is \$10,000 to \$20,000. It's a great investment in a tool that sells for you 24/7. ■

For more about Brian Kraft and Market Hardware, go to www.markethardware.com or e-mail him at brian@markethardware.com. To comment on this story, send an e-mail to trw@tomwadsworth.com.



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