

## ITNEA Discussion Paper:

# The Non Executive Director and On line Web Site Marketing

by [David Tebbs](#)

**Objective:** *Encourage more, relevant visitors to your website, to promote your business.*

**By:** *Making it easier to find your web site whether they are looking for it or searching on a related topic.*

**The Paper:** *Seeks to help directors, NEDs and senior managers understand more what can be done and facilitate discussion with those responsible for managing the site.*

**Success can be:** *Wider relevant market exposure for limited extra cost and effort.*

### Introduction

As a non-executive director on the boards of TMT and other companies, it is interesting to occasionally ask questions on “what is being done to market / promote the company’s web site?” Clearly there are TMT businesses that are highly web based and have clear answers but this paper is more addressed at a company’s use of their web site as part of their overall promotion and communication. When I ask board colleagues “what is done to maximise the number of relevant people who will visit the web site?”, often replies are related to the elegance of the site design and content and to the publication of the web address in printed materials such as letter heads, brochures and advertising and as email footers.

While each of these topics are important in exploiting a successful web site there are many other techniques concerned with promotion in the web and too often they have had a low priority and even in medium and small companies have no visibility at board or even business level. This paper focuses on the use of web based promotion of professional company web sites and will cover both retail and focused B2B businesses.

While not a common NED topic it is worth checking that this is a field well addressed by your company. This paper aims to help non-executives better appreciate the topic and help in their questioning on such company activity. The last time I raised this matter in a well established business that had earlier integrated with technology business I had personally found it very difficult to reach the site via any relevant searches on multiple search engines.

### Objectives

The objective of the promotion is to increase awareness of the company in:

Customers/Buyers

Potential buyers

Decision makers

Decision influencers

Advisors

Investors

Potential employees

whether these individuals and organisations are directly visible to the company's sales and marketing team, or not. The aim is that decision makers and direct influencers should be positively aware of the company and never have a friend, colleague or business acquaintance saying

**“who?, never heard of them”**

While this paper is written in terms of communicating with prospects and customers the same thinking can be and should be applied to shareholders and other stakeholders. The objective is to make it easy for them to find the company's web site whether **they know of its existence and need help finding the site, or are using search engines/directories, or topic directories or visiting the site of an associate with an interest potentially served by the company.**

Remember the web potentially reaches relevant parts of the market and decision influencers that you have not yet considered as such and which your direct communications do not reach.

### **On-Line Marketing the Web Site**

The broad content and elegance of the web site **is important**, but that is reasonably well recognised (if not always applied) and therefore not covered in this paper. Another topic of note - but not covered here is the creation of a web site **in a form that is easy for the business to maintain up to date**. The company can promote its web site through leveraging other communications (e.g. making sure the address – url - is well publicised and included in all relevant documents, emails, advertisements and publications). While important that is not online which is the focus of this paper.

On line web promotion can include pro active approaches such as banner advertisements on other sites and proactive emailing and more passive processes involved in gaining access from others researching a relevant topic. This paper is mainly about the latter and focuses on the valuable techniques than can be economically applied by most businesses rather than on high spend solutions. While NEDs may not be expected to be familiar with all the web jargon, some is used below to help you in raising and testing awareness in those who should know.

If we are to attract relevant potential viewers when they are on the web we need to consider how we address the process at two levels.

#### **First at a business level**

The first aim is to understand one's target audience and how they may be searching (explicitly or implicitly) when we seek to have them steered to our site. Who are the targets in the range of decision makers, recommenders and influencers? What are the topics, keywords and key phrases that a searcher may use that is relevant to lead to the company. Are the potential key words and phrases too general (e.g. “software”) leading to wasted hits and poor (competitive) search engine rankings or too focused (e.g. “London foreign equity investment IT consultancy”) and unlikely to catch attention? Where is the balance?

Are there key words/phrases that might help those who remember a related fact but forget the company name, e.g. a location, a product set.

The selection of such keywords is business rather than technology based and may need some research and experimentation as well as initial input from the company's marketers and sales team.

How do each of these key words/phrases best relate to the web site or part there of? E.g. searching for "City Shirts", it is better to be directed to XYZ Retailer's "Shirts" page rather than to their company home page.

What are the company's priorities for different key word/phrases? Budget levels and objectives?

### **Secondly at a technical level.**

The practical application is concerned with techniques and actions to gain a high search engine rating in most relevant search engines and registration in relevant trade and topic directories. (The latter is often supportive of search engine rating and thus has a use even if no prospect accesses the site that way).

To start most companies need some external expertise, particularly as specialist tend to have the relevant tools alongside their experience. Internally, a staff member focusing on this area and learning through the application, participation in the process and reading related material can form the bridge between marketers and the external team while leaning much of the art.

### **Techniques**

The content of the site is important for both the target audience and for search engine rating. Setting the best approach for search engines is somewhat search engine related. However important common areas are:

**Data visible to most viewers:** Use of key words and phrases in the text relevant to the search targets for that page, use of alt key wording (words that appear when the cursor is moved over a picture) to enhance the above, use of extra text – usually not viewed as scrolled well down to support the above.

**Partially hidden data - Meta tags:** (Meta tags are headers in the underlying HTML for web pages. They can be seen by viewers using the browser's View tab.) It is important to set up meta title, descriptions and keywords with search engines in mind. There are many accessible guides on good practice on how to populate these partially hidden tags. This is a matter of having the right keywords and titles and descriptions, giving priority to those most important to the business and not making them search engine unfriendly by being too long or too repetitive.

**Hidden data by use of doorway pages** to enhance search engine appeal. This is more advanced and means most users cannot see what you are doing. For example some suppliers provide a service focused on selected keywords held in a doorway page that enhances search engine appeal through heavy cross referencing in the doorways across its client base. This can be particularly helpful where the viewer centric approach of the web site design creates a fine site but one that is not search engine friendly. Equally with time such techniques can be invalidated by changing search engine practices,

### **Leverage on Associates, subsidiaries, sister and parent companies**

Encourage all relevant sites to cross reference to your site. This increases ratings in many engines as well as directly generating some traffic. The doorway above works on this principal. This can be reinforced across multi sites that the company might own. Proactively register with all geography and topic directories. This latter step is mainly manual but in some areas can be very effective.

When contributing to conferences most speakers insist on their company name being included in the conference literature, but should we not ask for the web address to be included especially on the conference web site. The same may be considered for published papers including web published papers.

### **Search engine registration**

Register the site and selected pages (as alternative entry points) with as many search engines as possible. Increasingly engines charge but wide cover can still be achieved for a modest sum. Even with small sites this is best done through an automated service, perhaps enhanced manually. Recommended frequency seems to vary from weeks to bi monthly. There are many offering this service and a sample of those those seen (but not all regularly tested) include:

<http://www.ineedhits.com>

<http://www.bcentral.com/products/si/pricing.asp>

### **Achieving Results**

Any on line web marketing can be measured in three parts:

Have we progressed in relevant search engine and directory registration? That is: are we registered under relevant key words in “important search engines” and how close to the top of the list do we appear? Page x is of limited use where x is much above 1.

Are the hit rates on our site increasing?

Is the rate of **relevant** hits increasing?

The first two are straightforward to answer but the third needs addressing with time. Initially monitoring hit rates and their link to marketing activity validates the gross attention gained. There seem to be no simple solutions to judge the quality of hits without encouraging registration. However there are tools to determine the probable sources at a company level.

Following the application of active on line marketing of a site, alongside its printed promotions, I have seen substantial measurable improvements in the first two measures and extrapolated improvements in the improvement of quality hits. In one case it was possible to determine from enquiries directly from the web site and many enquires through other routes whether the enquirer had visited the site.

### **Asking the Questions**

For the non executive director, the first step is to identify who in the board takes a real responsibility for this field of promotion. Beyond that much depends on the organisation. However it is important to determine whether these forms of promotion are being used and whether there is anyone within the company with relevant responsibility and with a good understanding of the options and their use in the business. If third parties are used to access their particular skills or tools is there

someone internally who understands the topic sufficiently to manage them? Finally is an extended use of these techniques of potential value in the business?

I raise these questions because the answer is often not as positive as one would like.

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My thanks to several members who have commented on earlier versions

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