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## MAXIMIZING Your Internet Presence

BY STEVE ANDERSON

In my January editorial, I covered trends for 2011 and introduced the concept of Internet presence. To refresh your memory, here is what I said:

*For the last two years, I have talked about the social web and how agencies should experiment with these new communication tools. This year people will stop using social web tools to simply talk about social web tools and they will increasingly use these tools to get their jobs done, with greater efficiency, more effectiveness, and with a broader reach. The social web is being used increasingly by everyday people to do their jobs and stay in touch with people in their lives.*

*In 2011, the experiments that some agencies have implemented over the last few years will evolve into best practices. The debate over whether the social web belongs in an insurance organization will*

*start to be answered. It will become more obvious that these conversational tools belong everywhere.*

*Agencies will also begin to realize that being found on the Web involves much more than just using social tools. Enhancing an agency's overall Internet presence will become much more important than just being on Facebook and having a LinkedIn profile.*

*A few agencies are starting to learn about local search and are claiming their Google and Facebook places. They are rethinking their website strategy to include multiple websites, an agency blog, a YouTube channel, as well as pictures, audio, and video. Agencies are beginning to use search engine marketing and pay-for-click advertising to bring buyers to their newly developed sales websites.*

“An agency website is still the cornerstone of your Internet presence, but it is no longer nearly enough.

Maximizing Your Internet Presence cont.

### Increasing your Internet presence

In this article, I will explain “Internet presence” in more detail and I’ll provide some initial steps you can take in order to maximize your organization’s Internet presence.

In the past, being visible on an Internet search results page required a fairly decent website and some basic knowledge about search engine optimization. An agency website is still the cornerstone of your Internet presence, but it is no longer nearly enough. In today’s interconnected world, being visible to prospects who are searching for insurance information requires a much broader Internet presence than a website.

Following is a list of some of the areas that every organization should begin to explore in order to expand and become “findable” on the Internet.

#### ▲ Agency website(s)

As just mentioned, an agency website is a cornerstone of your strategy. But, having a single site is no longer enough. You need to start thinking about creating multiple agency websites. Your existing website should be



transformed into a customer service portal specifically designed for current clients. All of your prospecting and marketing website activity needs to be on separate website(s) that are designed for the type of business or line of coverage you are marketing.

I envision agencies having 5, 10, 20, or more different niche websites. These websites would all be linked together providing significant search engine optimization benefits.

#### ▲ Search findability (SEO)

All standard search engine optimization practices need to be implemented for every Internet presence you maintain.



#### ▲ Agency blog

Every agency needs to have an active blog as part of their existing Web presence or at a separate website location. I know what some of you are thinking: How can I write a blog? When will I have the time? I can assure you that creating and maintaining a blog is much easier than you think.

“I envision agencies having 5, 10, 20, or more different niche websites. These websites would all be linked together providing significant search engine optimization benefits.”

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I just received an agency e-mail newsletter that included lots of really good information. However, like most people, I didn't have time to read the entire newsletter in one sitting, so I'll miss out on some of the benefits included in the information. Each article in the newsletter could have been repurposed as a blog post. Blog posts allow your clients to consume the information in an easier and timelier format.

Blogs also help increase your findability on search engines. Search engines like fresh and constantly updated content and they reward you with a higher possibility of showing up on a search engine results page. A blog allows you to easily maximize your search engine presence.

### ▲ Local search

Insurance search terms are in the top three most expensive paid terms on Google. Most organizations simply can't compete with the advertising budgets of the Progressives and Geicos of the world. But any organization can compete when they maximize their local search presence. Every agency with a physical location needs to claim their Google Place and Facebook Place. The process is simple and it's free. For Google, simply go to <http://places.google.com/business> to begin the process of claiming your listing.



### ▲ Facebook



We have written in previous articles (see June, July, August 2010 issues) about how to create a Facebook page for your agency. This is an important first step. Facebook advertising should also become a vital part of your advertising.

### ▲ LinkedIn

LinkedIn is Facebook for business. Successful producers know that the core of their success is based on being able to network effectively. LinkedIn provides a platform that allows you to network with other business owners, just as you do with Rotary or Chamber meetings. Just like there are best practices for traditional face-to-face networking, there are best practices that can be implemented to help a producer connect with and build relationships with business owners with the ultimate goal of meeting them face to face. Every person in your agency should have a LinkedIn profile.



### ▲ Twitter

I don't care what people are having for lunch either—but Twitter has become much more than a narcissistic listing of the details of your lives. For me, it has become another research tool. If someone I trust tweets information about an article they found helpful, I'm more likely to read that article. Search



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engines also have begun indexing tweets in real time. Tweets will help increase your Internet presence.

### ▲ YouTube

Video is big—really big. Thirty-five hours of new video are added to YouTube.com every minute. YouTube is a great site to help you build your video presence. In late January, Anson Thompson of the Thompson Group in Parker City, Indiana, created a two-minute video about how to prepare for the snow and ice storm that was predicted to race across the Midwest. He recommended specific coverages that every personal and commercial lines client should make sure they have. He said the agency would go on emergency status and gave an 800

number that clients could call at any time to ask questions or for help. He ended by asking, “If you don’t work with our agency, is your current insurance provider doing this for you?” Very powerful.



### ▲ Mobile

“There’s an app for that” is a phrase everyone is hearing more and more. Add to this the dramatic increase in tablet platforms like the Apple iPad and the Motorola Xoom. Mobile is big and will just get bigger. Your agency needs a customized app.



### ▲ Text

The average teenager sends over 4,000 text messages a month. Text is how a growing percentage of your prospect and clients communicate—not just with friends but with everyone. What are you doing to make text a communication option for your clients?



### ▲ Ratings and reviews



This option makes most agency owners very nervous. “What if someone gives us a bad review?” is a question I hear often. A negative review is your opportunity to know about a problem, take steps to try to correct the problem, and then let others know how you handled the issue. A negative review is your opportunity to shine. If you receive a lot of negative reviews, then you have other problems that management must address.

The reality is that today’s consumer has a voice like never before. Do you even know if someone has already reviewed your agency? Agencies have always asked for ratings and reviews—they are called testimonials. Take these testimonials and make sure they are published on various platforms. There are a number of places to publish and seek testimonials (ratings and reviews): Google Places, your Facebook page, and ratings and review sites like *Yelp.com*. You should have a presence on each of them.

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### Feeling overwhelmed?

We recommend that you spend 15 to 30 minutes each day working on maximizing your Internet presence. Decide what is the most important for your agency and simply begin. It is more important for you to start than to worry about making everything perfect. You will make mistakes. Some items won't work well for you. That's OK. Learn and keep moving forward.

Keep in mind that maximizing your Internet presence is not a project that you complete; it's a process that you need to build into your marketing, sales, and customer service strategy. ☐

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