



Building a Better Business Starts with Building a Better Brand



ou've probably heard a lot about how important it is to build a strong online brand. While that's certainly true, I understand how difficult it is for shop owners, who have their hands full just running their businesses, to navigate the world of digital communications. Establishing a solid online presence takes time, so before I launch into a lot of tips about how to improve your social media activity or improve your website, I'd like to take a step back.

Before you start developing an online marketing plan, consider two questions: what is your brand and who are your customers? The answers to those two questions will guide all of your online activity and will help you build more effective digital communication strategies. The most successful businesses have a great sense of who they are and who they serve.

So, consider your own shop. How does it look? How does it feel when you walk in the door? What sets you apart from the shop next door? What is your culture? All of those characteristics form your brand, and you need to convey those unique characteristics through your digital platforms. For example, let's say your shop not only offers loaner cars, but loaner bikes as well. Photos of those loaner bikes belong in one of the rotating banners on your website as well as on your social media channels.

Now, think about who you serve. Do a lot of busy moms visit your shop? Are you in a college town and naturally mobbed by Millennials? Or maybe you're located close to a downtown area and get lots of professionals who stop by on their way to work? While you might have one or two demographics that stand out, most shops serve a mix of customers and a mix of generations. Multi-generational marketing can be tricky, but it's worth tailoring your messages to meet the preferences of the various groups you serve and to keep traditional marketing methods in mind.

Now that you have a better handle of who you are and who you want to reach, let's take a look at the strategies you can use to build a stronger relationship with your audiences.



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Search Engine Optimization may still be a foreign term for some shop owners, but many have realized the importance of increasing the online visibility of their websites. After all, the majority of your customers are going to find you after conducting an online search. The way I look at it is, if you build a clear and concise website, then you've done most of what Google wants, and you should see traffic result from your efforts.



As an example, reflect back on those questions you had to ponder to narrow down your brand. Let's say your niche is servicing Subarus and you're located in Salt Lake City. To maximize the chances of someone clicking on your site, you should build landing pages that list the various services you provide for all the various Subaru models you fix. That way, if someone does a Google search on Subaru oil change or Subaru transmission repair, your site should come up.



LEVERAGE SEM TO INCREASE YOUR SEARCH ROI



SEO is a the necessary and important first step, but changes in the way results are presented to your potential customers make it increasingly difficult to stay on top. SEM or Search Engine Marketing campaigns like Google AdWords supplement your efforts and allow you to target certain key terms that your potential customers are searching for. Successfully executed SEM campaigns result in substantial return on investment (ROI) often in the 10 to 1 range.

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USE CONSISTENT DESIGN



Companies that are effective marketers are typically very good at ensuring that consumers can recognize their brand wherever it may appear. If you get an email from Starbucks, chances are it's going to have the same color scheme, font style and imagery as the company's website and social media channels. You need to do the same with your brand, so your customers can easily identify your shop and what you stand for.

Your website should serve as a visual representation of your physical shop. Use images that highlight the characteristics that distinguish you from the competition – whether that's a high-tech waiting room or expert technicians. Think about who your target customer is and be sure to include features that will appeal to them. If your key demographic is young professionals, give them the ability to make appointments online with a click of a button. Make sure you duplicate your website's look, feel and features in all of your online materials, so potential customers can become more and more familiar with your brand and form an allegiance with your shop.









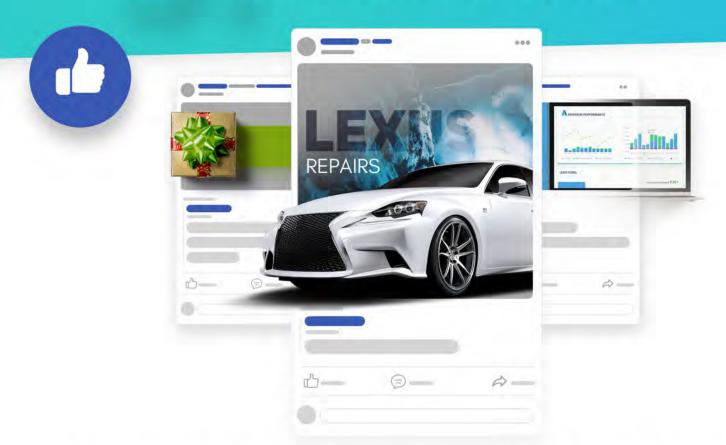
Three quarters of Americans now own a smartphone. If you're not taking advantage of the technology that so many of your customers and potential customers have at their fingertips, you're missing a huge opportunity to raise awareness of your services and build loyalty.

For example, we just added a digital inspection tool to our platform that allows shops to be more transparent with consumers about the repair process. Technicians can use the tool to take pictures and video of affected parts on a customers vehicle. Not just stock photos. Once the inspection is done, the shop can easily email or text the inspection report directly to a customer including all the pictures and explanations. The Customers can then make an educated decision on how to proceed.

And speaking of text, don't be afraid to use texting to communicate with your Millennial customers, who prefer digital messages to phone calls. We would never suggest sending them marketing offers via text, but it's a great way to provide updates on repairs or reminders for appointments.



SOCIAL MEDIA



If you want to stay front of mind, social media is a great tool. Facebook is an especially powerful platform to reach Generation X customers, as two-thirds of that generation is active on that channel. YouTube, on the other hand, appeals to Millennials, with more than half of 18 to 34-year-olds visiting the platform at least once a day. However, building a following from these generations requires a commitment. Don't just open an account and post once a month.

Posting three times a week is what we consider the bare minimum to keep an account active, but communicating daily with a mix of promotions, community posts, information about your employees, and funny happenings in the shop is the way to cultivate viewers and engagement.

There's no doubt that building an online brand takes work. But if you focus your digital marketing efforts on promoting what makes your shop special and craft messages that will compel your target audiences, you'll increase your likelihood of success.

If you would like help building your online brand, Kukui has all the resources and expertise to make yours a celebrity shop.



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