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Lessons Learned in a Shifting Digital Marketplace

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Without question, the economic pressures of 2009 have forced businesses to take a serious look at how they maneuver within the evolving digital marketplace. Many of our most fundamental beliefs concerning how the Internet influences and enhances common business practices that were firmly held only months ago, now seem far less definitive or even counter-productive. Today's modern business environment is changing, and it is changing a lot faster than most of us have anticipated.

What lessons have we learned so far this year regarding adapting our business to succeed within the quickly evolving online arena? To remain competitive, we must recognize how today's business model is changing and adopt new methods that can ensure our continued success. **Think "Digital Shift."**

Lesson 1. It's all digital... Once considered only a supplemental communication channel, the Internet is now the preferred and dominant tool used to conduct day-to-day business activity. Websites have largely replaced sales brochures. Email has replaced the need for faxed documents and most mailed correspondence. Listings on Google.com overshadow the need for traditional telephone book advertising. In short, if your business is not yet fully leveraging the efficiencies of the digital world, you are not connecting with the vast majority of those customers and associates who are already online.

Lesson 2. Your online presence is your most important "first impression..." Even with traditional advertising, sales and marketing support, a modern customer's perception about your business will be first defined (and later reinforced) by what you present online. Your website, email, storefront, search engine and banner advertising introduces you to your customer at the most critical point of initial interactive contact, a moment that sets the tone for the future buyer-seller relationship. Competitors who neglect their online presence are quickly passed over by today's digital prospect.

Lesson 3. Get out of the way... With the greater availability of do-it-yourself online interactive tools, customers are demanding the opportunity to serve themselves, working at their own pace and the time of their choosing, while gaining a sense of immediate gratification in the process. By feeding this demand, businesses assume the role of a supportive "partner" or "resource," rather than just a "pitchman" or "salesman." Place service documents, instructional videos, product demonstrations, case studies, product reviews and other tools right at the consumers' fingertips. Offer Ecommerce options. Provide "hands-on" capability for customers to manage their accounts, pay invoices, schedule service calls, configure products, or qualify for buyer incentives. Empowering your customers to do more themselves will increase their ability to purchase, refine, utilize and retain your services.

For more digital marketplace lessons, visit www.cccommunications.com/bizXperts/.

About the author:

As one of the region's earliest pioneers in the field of online communications, *Kip Cozart*, along with CC Communications owner/partners *Russ Husky* and *Loretta Cozart*, have consulted with hundreds of businesses and organizations to enhance and produce effective web, email, multimedia marketing initiatives and business process improvements for more than fourteen years. Contact kcozart@cccommunications.com or call CC Communications at 704-543-1171.