

Spreading the word online

by Rachel Collinson,
Managing Director, Rechord Ltd (www.rechord.com)

So you've got a website? That's good, but next door's shed does too. (I kid you not- see: www.readersheds.co.uk) So, don't expect floods of visitors without doing something to promote it.

Today almost anyone can have a presence on the web, which unfortunately means that it is increasingly difficult to get noticed online. The chances of someone stumbling across your site by accident are, to put it bluntly, very low, and getting lower by the minute, even if your home page is good enough to win a Bafta.

However, the good news is that there are plenty of ways to promote your charity online, and most of them won't cost you a bean either. Once they have found you, and provided that what is featured on your site is helpful to visitors, they will come back again and again.

One of the first and most advised internet marketing strategies is to send a regular newsletter to a list of subscribers. The idea is that your subscribers will come to look on you as a source of reliable information, and it will remind them to visit your site - or indeed remind them that you still exist.

The only problem with a newsletter is that people must sign up for it, otherwise you're sending out hateful spam. To sign up, in a classic Catch-22, they generally need to visit your site in the first place.

So, what else is there?

The vast majority of people will find your site through search engines, with Google being by far the most popular - accounting for almost half of all searches (and over 80% in the UK).

The first step is to get your site listed on Google. If you're technically proficient, you can submit a Google site map. Another very good start is to link to your site from another which currently appears in Google searches. You could do this if you have a site that's already listed, or you could submit your site details to a free online business directory.

Once you have listed, the second step is to climb the listings. This is made difficult by the fact that search engines closely guard their algorithms. However,

a recent posting by a *Search Engine Optimisation* company hazards a guess at how Google actually works out where sites should go in listings. As you can see from his extensive post, getting your site to the top of the listings is a task only for those with strong stomachs. If the link to it makes you a little light-headed, better ask the professionals for help - see Koded below.

[Google Site Maps](#)

[The Google algorithm](#)

[Koded - Search Engine Specialists](#)

On a basic level, however, at least for Google, the more people who link to your site using certain keywords, the higher up the search rankings it will be.

To facilitate this you can set up link exchanges with other similar sites. If you don't already have one, create a page on your site where you include a link to any sites that agree to reciprocate.

Another way to get more people to visit your site is to use pay per click adverts like Google's AdWords. Your link will then appear in the sponsored links section of the results page when someone searches under your chosen keyword.

Often this means you appear to be first in the listings, in the blue bar at the top (in Google at least). Research shows that only 38% of people know the difference between sponsored links and real, or 'organic' ones; and of that 38%, less than half (47%) are sure they can always tell the difference.

It's easy to keep your advertising budget under control as well, because Google Adwords works like a Pay As You Go mobile phone. You charge up your account with a set amount of money, and every time someone follows your link, a small portion will be debited from your Google account until it's empty. This means you won't spend more than you intended to if you accidentally pick a very popular keyword. The amount per click varies depending on the popularity of the keyword chosen and is determined ad hoc by Google.

For coming to grips with using AdWords campaign take a look at [The Definitive Guide to Google AdWords](#) by Perry Marshall, world expert on Adwords

Rachel will be speaking at our forthcoming seminar on the 23rd of June on how to make your website more compelling and increase the number of visitors and donors. Download the brochure for this event from the events section of: www.mcconkey-johnston.co.uk