

Butting out the online competition

There are not many occasions where you can get away with calling someone a quitter. But when it comes to Smokenders, it's actually their expertise to get people to quit, smoking that is. With a 92% success rate for their program, it's clear that they have a product that will keep the Smokenders name from dissipating into thin air in the Australian marketplace.

Extending their marketing online

With their program being a proven success, the arrival of the Internet presented a challenge to Smokenders and to Philip Feinstein, their National Coordinator, in terms of replicating the success they have achieved onto the Internet. As with most people Feinstein had his initial doubts about using the Internet as a promotional medium. "I've never been a highly technical person, so when the Internet came along and people were saying you need to get yourself onto the Internet, it took us quite a while to get a first website on the Internet," Feinstein revealed.

Smokenders eventually got their first website and even had it made over on one occasion. Feinstein said they were probably getting one or two hits a week via the website in the initial stages.

The search for online customers begins with SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)

As Smokenders did not have many contacts with the IT industry, they didn't really know who to turn to when they decided to trial online marketing. So it's no surprise that they went to the people that first gained their trust in getting a website: their domain name registrar. The consultant at their domain name registrar then went on to debug all the jargon about online marketing to them. He also explained the application of keywords, search engines and website ranking in relation to Search Engine Optimisation in the most accessible way possible.

Feinstein couldn't be more excited about putting away his initial skepticism as the results of their Search Engine Optimisation campaign astounded him. "All of a sudden we were getting one or two [hits] a day, and as of now, we're getting four to five hits a day. In some businesses that's hardly anything, but in this industry, it's a lot. For any smoker to look for help, to get onto our site and press the button, and say "hey, send more info", that takes a lot of guts," said Feinstein.

He elaborated that most of these enquiries were coming from people that found them on the search engines. He is also certain from past experience that the number of hits has gone up a lot as their website is now not only on the first page of search engines, but close to the top spots on Google, Yahoo!7 and ninemsn for the keyword "quit smoking".

For detractors of online marketing that dismiss Search Engine Optimisation for its higher than average spend, Feinstein is also quick to clear the air that the Smokenders program at \$445 (including GST) isn't exactly for the budget conscious. Mind you, they now have a take-home Quit-Kit that retails for \$189 (including GST).

"People have said to me that to quit smoking, they can buy a book or try other quit smoking alternatives that are cheaper or even free. Whether it's to quit smoking or to take up online marketing, it's the end result that counts, meaning you pay for what you get", said Feinstein.

Further online activity

Looking forward, he anticipates greater involvement of the Internet with Smokenders and expects their advertising on the Internet to be four times what it is now in a year's time. Beyond their efforts into Search Engine Optimisation, their recently launched take-home Quit-Kit will let Internet users enjoy all the benefits of their seminars in the comfort of their home, in front of their computer.

The take-home Quit-Kit, which includes a CD and a manual, will be sent out in the mail to those that respond via the Smokenders website. Coupled with telephone support, it has allowed their seminar program to be fully portable to meet the demands of the Internet generation.

Not the last word in their online success story

Despite the results of their online marketing campaign being a huge morale booster, they are not about to give themselves the pat on the back when there are graduates that backslide after their program. According to Feinstein, one out of five of their graduates returns to smoking which effectively brings their long term success rate to 81.25%.

"But of the one in five that go back to smoking, some have willingly come back to us and have paid money to do the program again," he explained how it was bittersweet to see some familiar faces.

Until the day the world is devoid of smokers, it's safe to say that Smokenders as well as Feinstein will not allow themselves to be blown out in puffs. In the meantime, they can look towards Search Engine Optimisation and the Internet to help them achieve continued online success in their efforts to get everyone to butt out.

The Smokenders website is registered with Melbourne IT and they were also responsible for assisting Smokenders commence their Search Engine Optimisation campaigns. Melbourne IT has continued to support Smokenders in their online marketing efforts ever since.

The Smokenders website is www.smokenders.com.au 1800-021-000