

From first click to multiple hits – find out how long it takes to build up the traffic to your web site

When you are planning a new web site, part of your thinking should include a strategy for building traffic and realistic time scales and budgets for doing it. Be prepared to wait several months for your traffic to build, unless, of course, you have the budget for some instant advertising.

There are essentially five key elements of traffic building:

- Pay-per-click' (PPC) advertising
- Email marketing
- Search engine and directory submissions
- Link building
- Traditional marketing

'Pay per click' advertising

Time scale: instant.

Costs: potentially high, but you can set ceilings, for example as low as £1 per day, depending on how much competition you have.

When to start: the day that your site is ready for public viewing.

More info: If you want instant visitors then, unless you are very lucky (or very smart), you will have to pay for them by running a pay-per-click (PPC) campaign. A combination of Google Adwords and an Overture campaign will get your site advertised on most of the major search engines immediately. The amount of traffic that these ads generate depends partly on how much you can afford to pay compared to other sites that are competing for the same visitors. You will have to put some thought into the keywords that your ads should target and, of course, the wording is very important. (See article: introduction to keywords.)

However, this is just a quick fix – when your budget runs out the ads will disappear and so will your visitor numbers. Also, remember that around 60% of searchers often ignore the ad section of the results pages entirely so your longer term aim must be to get your site visible within the natural or 'organic' listings.

Email marketing

Time scale: potentially instant.

Costs: low, if you have the time to do it yourself and a small existing mailing list, or you can pay a consultant and buy a mailing list, prices will vary.

When to start: the day that your site is ready for public viewing.

More info: this method of promotion can be controversial, but can also be very effective when it's done well. There are a variety of legal, technical and marketing issues to consider and, if this is your first mailing, do plenty of research first or enlist professional help. As well as sending out your own mailing, look into the possibilities for advertising within other organisation's email newsletters.

Use email to encourage repeat visits to the site - send out regular mailings with news of additions to the site, new products, services or special offers and keep your mailing list growing with a 'subscribe' option within the site.

Search engine and directory submissions

Time scale: average of 4 to 8 weeks, longer in some cases.

Costs: low – a small investment in time, many web designers include it as part of their service (as we do at DesignSpring).

When to start: when all of the content is in place, before the public launch, if feasible.

More info: Getting your site listed with all of the major search engines and directories is essential for building traffic. It is a relatively simple process – in most cases you can just fill in a simple form and sit back and wait. In fact, with many search engines, if you are running a link building campaign (see below) you won't even have to submit your site – they will find you eventually just by following links from the other sites that they already have listed.

Some search engines offer an 'express submit' option where you can get listed more quickly by paying for the privilege. It is usually not worth the money when your site will get listed for free within a few weeks anyway. See our article on how to get listed.

Link building

Time scale: allow at least 6 months.

Costs: low, if you have the time to do it yourself, or you can pay a consultant. Prices will vary but may be around £500 to £1000 for a 6 to 12 month campaign, depending on the number of links.

When to start: when a significant part of the content is in place and before the public launch, if feasible.

More info: This is the key to building lasting long-term traffic to your web site. It works in two ways –

Links from other sites that already have high visitor levels will naturally lead some of those visitors in your direction.

Search engines such as Google see links from other sites as a vote of confidence in your site and will boost its position in their search engine results accordingly.

Find out more about the process of building inbound links in our article on link popularity. Acquiring links from other sites is a slow process and requires a much organised approach. On the plus side, running a link building campaign means that you are not solely relying on search engines to bring you visitors. Also, if you pick your sites carefully, they will be putting your name in front of a highly targeted market.

Tip:

You can accelerate this process slightly if you are able (and willing) to allow outsiders access to your web site whilst it is under development. If that is the case, then you can start approaching other sites to request links and let them see your unfinished site so that they are ready to set up the link at around the time that you are ready to launch to the public.

Traditional marketing

Time scale: varies according to media, should be ongoing.

Costs: vary (spend as much as your budget will bear).

When to start: as soon as you have a realistic launch date - start letting people know that your site is on its way.

More info: Remember to use all your usual forms of marketing to announce your web site and provide incentives for people to visit it. Make sure the address appears on all of your business stationery, is mentioned in your brochures, newsletters, magazines or catalogues. Consider sending out a mailing or using posters or leaflet drops to announce it – whatever is appropriate for your target market. Some organisations hold launch parties or other events to announce the site.

Keep this marketing activity going – let people know when new information, facilities or products are added to your site. For example, we produce small simple flyers to announce new articles on the Jellyfish site that we can hand out at networking events.

If you have built a genuinely interesting, useful, engaging and attractive site then it should be easy to persuade people to visit it. And once they realise what a great resource it is they will tell other people and so your traffic will start to build. For more information on building an engaging web site see our article on content.