

Wild Bird Expo presentation by Diana Ratliff, YourFriendontheWeb.com:

How to Persuade People Online to Visit Your Store Offline

I'm going to ask you to do something that very few speakers will do – pull out your smartphones. That small device represents both the cause and the solution to the dilemma of getting prospective customers to walk into your wild bird store.

I'll explain in just a minute – but while you have your phones out, please visit my website and sign up to get my NOTES from this presentation. A shortcut is bit.ly/wildbirdexpo; the direct link is YourFriendontheWeb.com/wildbirdexpo

That way you won't have to write anything down - I'll send it all to you after the show.

While you're doing that, I'll tell you a little about myself.

My name is Diana Ratliff, and I've been helping business owners turn websites into profits for 18 years. I do speaking, writing and consulting as Your Friend on the Web (yourfriendontheweb.com).



I partner with SearchworxX (searchworxx.com), a digital marketing agency in Allentown PA, to build websites and offer online marketing services.

CEO Marcus Cudd and I have been working together for more than 7 years; he and his team are experts in generating sales and leads, not just building websites or running ads. I function as the company's Business Development director.

We have done websites and digital marketing for a diverse range of local and national clients. Much of our work involves ecommerce site design and marketing, and we offer a full range of digital marketing services such as sales funnel development, SEO, FB advertising, marketing automation and retargeting.

Personally, while I CAN build a website and market it, and did that for many years, I much prefer talking strategy with business owners – it's a lot of fun and I do hope to visit with many of you during the show.

In the next 20 minutes or I'm going to show you how to use the Internet to persuade wild bird lovers to FLOCK to your store. I'll explain the underlying principles and give you some specific tips.

So, here's why what I'm saying is important – and why I had you pull out your smartphones!

Easy, 24/7 access to the Internet has caused a monumental shift in how consumers buy.

I'm not referring to the explosion of ecommerce. Only about 10% of retail purchases are COMPLETED online, although that percentage is growing. But online is where they START.

According to Social Media Today's 2017 study, 81% of shoppers research a product online before they buy. According to Google, it's 88%.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, the buying process was completely different. We got our marketing messages from TV, radio, print and word-of-mouth. When something appealed or we felt a need, we'd go directly to the source to get our questions answered– we'd visit the store, talk to the car dealer or the realtor or make an appointment with the doctor.

TODAY – consumers aren't going to the store and talking to a salesperson, first. They're going ONLINE, first.

What this means is that birders and nature lovers near you read reviews, compare brands, talk to friends on social media, watch videos, search in Google, and visit store and brand websites – BEFORE they walk into your store.

In fact, they're using this online research to decide whether they want to visit your store at all. If you don't want to ignore 80+ percent of your potential buyers - you need to attract their attention ONLINE. Your web marketing and branding efforts are more important than they've ever been.

The way to persuade online prospects to visit your offline store depends on having a VIP web presence.

Visible – Informative – Persuasive

By Visible: I mean that YOUR shop can be found online when people are looking for what you offer, and that your info is in a format people can use.

By Informative: that you are seen as an authority on wild bird related products and services.

By Persuasive: that your web assets convince people to DO something. Your primary goal might be to convert site traffic into foot traffic. Your secondary goal might be to stay in touch online using email or retargeting.

A VIP web presence will help you generate leads and sales. Let's look at some of those attributes and strategies to make them happen.

Visible

You need to be where the world is going, and that's Google, if they're looking for answers.

Tip #1 is to make sure you optimize your FREE Google listing, which you can find at google.com/business. This is where you enter info that shows up on Google Search and Maps. It's where you add your store hours and your address and your phone number. It's where people leave reviews.

What most business owners don't think about is that you can update this as often as you want. You can put photos and videos on it. You can post daily specials, even events like birdwatching trips!

Approximately 30% of online searches DON'T result in a visit to a website, because people find the info they need in Google itself. Make sure the listing for your store is correct and complete and see what happens if you start updating it often!

Second – does your website rank well in Google? When people look for wild bird food or hummingbird feeders or bluebird houses in your area – does a page from your website show up in the search results? There are free tools such as Traffic Travis (trafficttravis.com) that will help you keep track of rankings for the keywords that are important to you.

Of course, you can search whenever you want – just make sure you're logged out of all your Google accounts, since Google remembers your preferences and will show you sites you visit often.

Hopefully when your site was built your "onsite SEO" was well done by your web designer; this makes it easy for the search engines to tell what each page is about.

And hopefully you add content to your site often, which also gives Google a reason to show your pages.

Frankly, adding content – typically in the form of a blog – is the single biggest thing you can do to help yourself. Blogging makes Google sit up and take notice of your site, it helps your site rank better for the topics you write about, and it helps the prospective customers who are doing research.

I'll talk more about Blogging in the section on being "Informative."

But if your site does not rank well in Google, you'll need to rely on advertising.

For the search engines, that means SEO or PPC.

Being #1 in Google may be the Holy Grail of Internet Marketing but it's not always possible, easy or fast to get and stay in that position. SEO or search engine optimization is the art and science of making this happen. Because Google's algorithms are constantly changing, I recommend hiring an SEO expert to help you with this. For example, mobile-friendliness and

site load speed are more important than they used to be. And think of SEO as a long-term strategy.

For more immediate results, Google AdWords – where you Pay Per Clicks on your ad (that’s where PPC comes from) – is the medium of choice. PPC offers many advantages. You can set a budget, you can turn it on and turn it off, you can focus on a specific product if you want, and if you’re willing to outspend your competitors – you can be right up at the very top of Google TODAY.

AdWords can also be a good way to test offers and products before launching larger campaigns. We sometimes use PPC to determine which keywords persuade people to buy, so we know what keywords to focus on for SEO.

However, you can also lose your shirt if you don’t know what you’re doing and monitor what’s going on, so it’s helpful to at least get your ad campaigns set up and have some initial monitoring done by an expert.

Visible tip #3: Make sure your site is user-friendly on all devices, especially mobile phones. Google has a free mobile-friendly test tool – <https://search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly>

Even if your site passes Google’s mobile-friendly test – remember that’s automated, it’s looking at code not content. So, does your mobile page make sense when people read it? Is the most important information easy to see?

If your website isn’t easy to read on a phone, it will cost you sales. Showing up is half the battle, but if users are put off by content that is not optimized for their device, you may lose the chance to close the deal.

Informative

By informative I mean that people see you as an authoritative resource when they’re researching online. They can tell that YOU know wild birds, so they believe it’s worth talking to you and coming into your store.

You prove your expertise by sharing content – but a lot of business owners have a hard time coming up with topic ideas. SO, let’s cover that first.

One strategy is the “Top 10 Question” method. What are the top 10 questions people ask about wild birds or bird food or bird houses? And what are the Top 10 questions people SHOULD ask, but do not? Answer ‘em!

For more ideas, a great content generator tool is AnswerThePublic.com. It aggregates popular searches that other people have done. You can enter a keyword and it will give you common questions people ask. I typed “bird feeder” into the search field and got 88 questions!

Another good place to look for ideas is BuzzSumo.com. Type in a keyword or topic idea and you'll see the most popular articles that have been written about it.

For example, National Geographic recently featured Top 25 Wild Bird Photographs of the Week on Facebook, and it got more than 7000 Facebook engagements – no you're not National Geographic, but you could do something like that in your community. It's obvious that people like to take and share their photos of wild birds.

Specific tips about being informative – I mentioned the first, earlier, which is to BLOG.

Make it easy to search (use keywords in titles) and remember that you can add audio and video to it too, not just written content.

Informative Tip #2: Offer an email newsletter. Email is still highly effective and is very much a preferred communication method – just make sure you do it well!

You'll get more subscribers if you make your sign up form easy to see (not buried at the bottom of the page) and if you give people an incentive, a reason to subscribe. They get first access to new products. Early sign up for events. Special offers or discounts. Membership in a Bird Watcher's Club.

And while it's certainly okay to pitch your products in emails, only do that occasionally – make sure you offer people a lot of valuable information before asking them to buy.

If you haven't chosen email newsletter software yet, consider MailChimp.com – which is easy to use and free for up to 2000 subscribers. And if you don't want to completely redesign your site to move the signup form, add an action bar to your header. Hello Bar is probably the most well-known, but a free WordPress Plugin called Icegram got really good reviews too.

Informative Tip #3 is to get active on Facebook. Now remember, Facebook is a very different beast than Google and should be treated that way. People go to Google for information; they go to Facebook to socialize!

While they may click on an ad for something that interests them, they're not on Facebook to shop, they don't want to be bombarded with ads, they don't want YOU to be too salesy, and they may be higher up in the sales funnel than someone who is actively searching for a solution.

So, your Facebook presence should inform in a lighter, more friendly and casual way. The info that is most often shared on Facebook makes people laugh or entertains them. Use Facebook to ask for opinions or share news and encourage interaction. And be authentic.

Show your personality - demonstrate how friendly you are by responding to all comments. Maybe introduce who's speaking when you post - "Hi this is Birdman Mel".

Use Facebook to foster community – you could even create an online group for area birders, not just a company page.

Use it to introduce products. You might even use your smartphone and record videos of your staff members describing a favorite product. These “staff pick videos” could become a regular feature.

In fact, if you’re comfortable with video, create a YouTube channel (which is also free) and start uploading! YouTube is also great for Visibility, especially if you add good titles and tags to your videos, since Google owns YouTube and loves to feature video content in the search engine results pages.

Whatever type of content you create, it’s smart to distribute it as widely as possible – and a cool way to do THAT is by using task automation software such as IFTTT (ifttt.com - stands for If This Then That) or Zapier (zapier.com). This software links applications and automates actions.

For example, if you have a YouTube channel, you can set it so that all new videos are posted to your Facebook page, automatically. You can link your website to Facebook to show all blog posts, automatically. You can have Google Calendar Events automatically tweeted to your list.

It is AMAZING what these tools can do to streamline workflows – just go to their websites and look around for ideas! IFTTT is free; Zapier has free and paid options.

SO – assuming people can find you, and that you have answers to their questions – how do you demonstrate your uniqueness and appeal, enough to get them to take the next step and walk into your store? **How are you PERSUASIVE?**

The hub of your online presence is your website. Most of the advertising you do (in print and online) and most of the searches other do, leads people HERE. Your site offers you more room, more flexibility, and more control over the amount and type of content you include, than any other online resource.

Today’s consumers expect businesses they patronize to have modern, fast-loading, updated, mobile friendly websites. That’s not just my opinion. A recent survey by Yodle, a local business marketing platform, asked consumers why they shop locally. They found that the #1 change consumers want from local businesses is “website improvements.”

According to Vistaprint Digital’s survey earlier this year, nearly 63% of people are unlikely to even visit a small business if it has a poorly designed or unprofessional website.

Those are sobering stats.

And even if your website looks attractive and functions well – if it doesn’t SELL - well, it’s like spending a lot of money for a birding expedition to Maine. You make plans and buy some cool

new equipment, maybe a spotting scope and weatherproof notebook – but when you arrive, you never go any further than the hotel parking lot to look for birds!

Your website is supposed to look for birds.

What are some changes you might make to your website, to make more persuasive? Well let's take a quick look at a couple of websites.

(NOTE: After my presentation, a couple of people asked me to share a site that I did NOT like. So I did. Both of the sites, below, are those of companies mentioned in Keynote speaker Pamela Danziger's **Shops That Pop** book. By the way, if you did not attend her presentation, read her book!)

When looking at the screenshots of the home pages below – which one do you think is more attractive to people who have NEVER visit their physical stores? Which does a better job of conveying what is special and why you should check out this company?

Each is obviously doing something in-store very well, or they would not have been featured in Ms. Danziger's book.

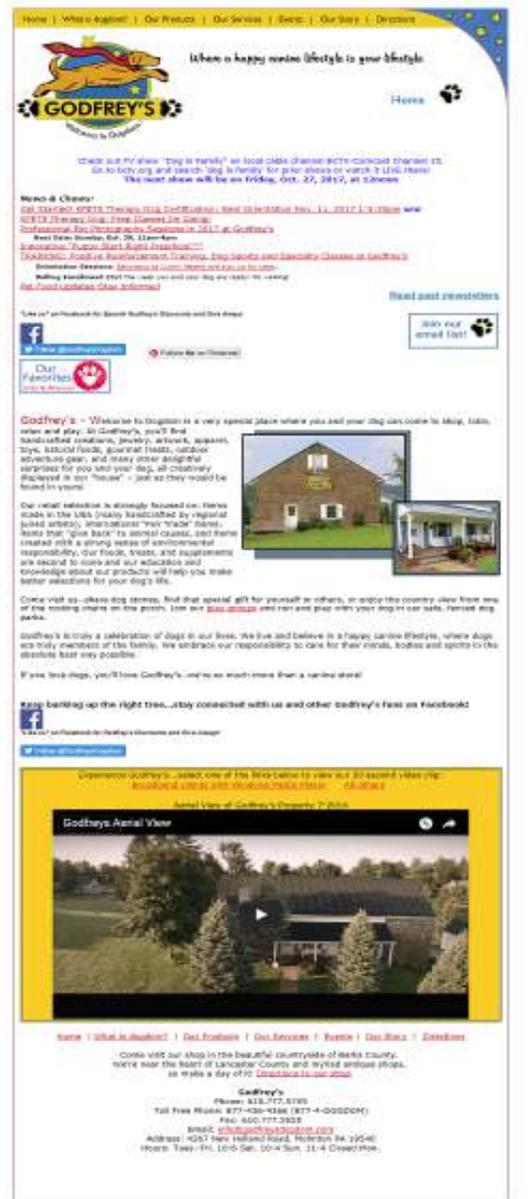
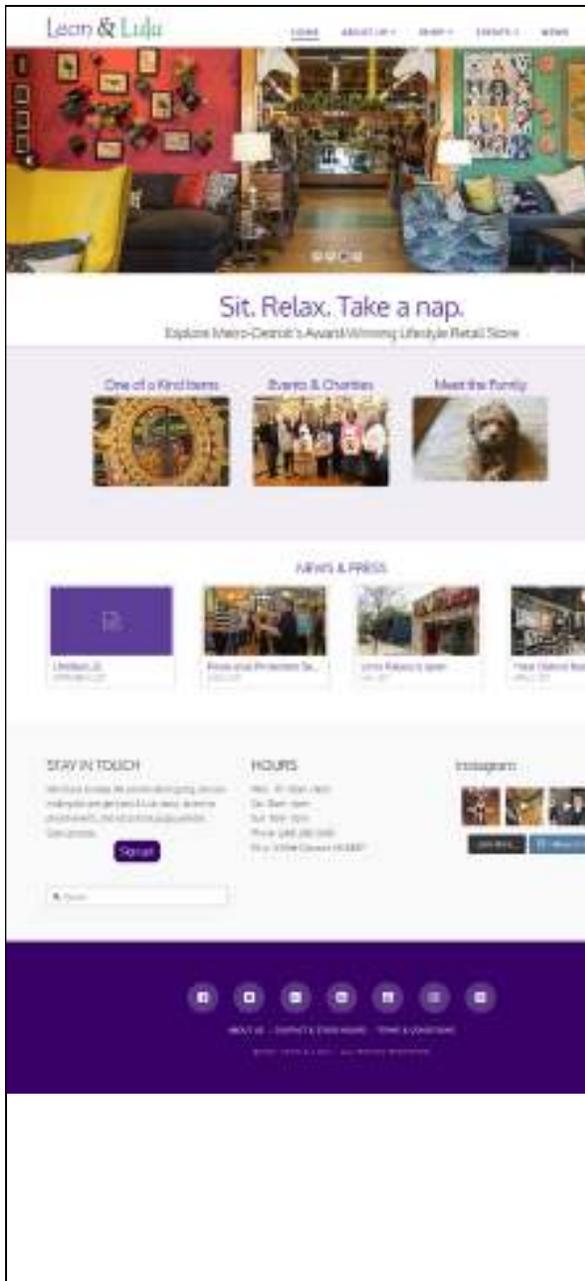
The site on the left – for furniture store Leon and Lulu (leonandlulu.com) - makes you want to VISIT THE STORE, does it not?

It LOOKS as if there's a lot of cool stuff to see. They could have easily shown stock photos of the brands they sell – but anyone can do that. They are displaying what makes them special.

I like the inviting headline – not a generic "Welcome" – but action words that make you FEEL welcome. That evoke a sense of home and comfort.

I clicked on the Events tab too - it looks like there's a lot going on and that I'd have some fun if I grabbed my sisters and headed over there to do some shopping!

The website for the other store looks dated and much less appealing. Doesn't pass Google's mobile-friendly-test either. I hope a website redesign is in the works, because this site is hurting them.



This isn't a website design presentation and there's no time to cover everything you might do on your own website, but here are some suggestions to consider.

- Use a prominent section of your homepage to showcase your store. Use it to introduce new product lines, announce events or feature testimonials. Change it often.
- If key PEOPLE are part of your branding, feature them. Maybe include a brief note from them in a sidebar – and again, change it periodically.

- When you highlight bestselling products, TELL PEOPLE TO VISIT YOUR STORE for more products like it! You can also create urgency on your site too, by telling people if you're about to run out of stock.
- Use action words and calls-to-action – such as Explore our Store, Shop Now, Plan Your Trip, Join Our Loyalty Program, and so on. Tell people what you want them to do!
- Offer more support through your website especially during busy times – additional phone operators, live chat or chatbots.
- Link your online and offline storefronts as much as you can.

For example, offer free shipping when online orders are picked up at the store. (40+% of people who come into a store just to pick up an order buy something else as well.)

Similarly, offer online or mobile coupons that must be redeemed in-store.

You might offer special seasonal Gift Baskets, and let people order online for instore pickup.

In short, if you have a SHOP that POPs (to use Pam's phrase) – or you intend to – make sure your website REFLECTS that.

If you don't now have a VIP web presence, a tool that effectively sells for you 24/7, hire an online marketing expert to get that going for you.

Unfortunately, many websites are built by people who know software, not people who know marketing. They are not designed to persuade - which costs you money in the long run. So how do you recognize a person or company who will generate leads and sales for you, not just build you a pretty site?

You'll recognize a good web marketing partner by the questions they ask. They'll want to know about your business, customers, product lines and previous marketing, not just how many pages you want.

I suggest working with a company that offers digital marketing as well as site design. That is usually much less hassle than hiring multiple companies, it's less expensive, and you can ensure that everything works well together. For example, we tested a new soap brand and ran three different ads. It was quickly evident which ad (benefit) was appealing to consumers, so it was easy for us to change the website and the product copy to reflect what we'd learned.

I also suggest working with a company that builds sites that YOU can edit, so you can make the updates I mentioned anytime you want, without paying anything extra.

My company typically uses WordPress to build custom sites. Then we teach clients how to make simple changes – they just have us do major changes or updates. WordPress is easy to learn and if you ever want to add an ecommerce section, that's very do-able.

And yes, I'd love to speak with any of you about your website or your online marketing!

Another important “persuader” online is REVIEWS.

Make an effort to GET good reviews and testimonials from your fans. Software such as Get Five Stars (getfivestars.com), which starts at about \$40/month, will alert you to negative feedback, automatically display testimonials on your site and integrate with dozens of online review sites.

But you can also do something like this. Put up a Reviews page on your website and on that page, link directly to your business listing on review sites. Share that page with the people who are most inclined to say something good about you.

How? Create business cards that give the URL to your review page, keep them at the checkout counter, and train your staff to offer these cards to happy customers. You are not supposed to ask for a positive review – but you can certainly ask for a review from a positive customer!

And stay on top of what people are saying about you online, and respond to it. Most people don’t expect or trust all “five star” reviews – they realize no business is perfect and that you can’t please everyone – but if you offer a calm, professional explanation or apology, they will respect you.

The very best way to handle negative reviews, by the way – is to bury them with more recent, GOOD reviews!

In conclusion – in many ways, the customer journey is nothing new. We’ve always sought information and weighed our options, especially for major purchases. Marketing and advertising isn’t new either.

What has changed is how well-informed people are before they walk into your store. The Internet and mobile devices have streamlined access to information. Consumers want facts, figures and opinions, they want them right away, and it is now easy for them to get.

I know it sounds counter-intuitive, but as I’ve explained – if you want birding enthusiasts in your town, state, or even nationally, to know how awesome your store is, or how innovative your products are – your ONLINE marketing is how to spread the message.

Thank you so much!

###

Diana Ratliff

573.289.7376

diana@yourfriendontheweb.com

diana.ratliff@searchworxx.com

<http://YourFriendontheWeb.com>

<http://SearchworxX.com>