



Driving the traffic

Does your site get a good flow of traffic? If not, could social media oil the wheels? **Sheila Manchester** asked the experts.



Chris Haines, Evolvin



Mike Day, Integra



Elliot Rowland, Webdadi



Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile



Q: I am an estate agent who has had a website for five years. It gets very little traffic, why?

► **Chris Haines, Evolvin**

Websites don't generate traffic on their own – you need to drive traffic to them – regularly. This may be via direct marketing, email signature links and so on, or from search engine optimisation (SEO) and online marketing.

Search engine ranking is highly complex, (and secretive), but your site will perform less well if your content is not optimised for your targeted keywords, your load time is slow, the level of deemed interest is low, or you have a low number of links from other well placed sites. Maybe you have a low social presence, ie you are not embracing all of the social networks, and people are not liking, following or talking about you.

► **Mike Day, Integra**

Website traffic generation is largely driven by other online and offline promotion, links to the website from other sites, the 'freshness' of content and the quality, in terms of matching likely search terms used by potential customers and clients. If a website is attracting low volumes of traffic it is likely to be deficient in some or all of these factors.

► **Elliot Rowland, Webdadi**

The number one way people will find your site is through Google. If your site has poor SEO, it will not rank highly for various searches associated with your business.

You have to assess what you are doing to ensure that people visit your website. If you're not doing much, it will be very hard for you to generate a large amount of traffic. Your website should appear on all communication; emails, window cards or brochures. It is a facility where people can find out more about your business.

All agency websites provide property information so it's important to ensure that your site is accurate, useful and accessible to search engines and potential customers. However, it has to offer more than that to give visitors a reason to choose your site. It should also be frequently updated.

► **Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile**

There could be a number of reasons. The number of properties you list, the structure of the website, your geographical area, the number of external websites that link to your site, or it may be that your site could do with a little SEO work.

Q: I need to raise my profile, be up there in the Google rankings, be the top name in my area, but how?

► **Chris Haines, Evolvin**

The most important thing is to develop an online marketing strategy which should highlight your geography, market type, competition, and your typical clients; the marketing for an executive lettings agent in London will be very different to a residential sales agent in a seaside town.

Introduce a schedule of regular content

generated and distributed by your key staff. This content should be optimised for your identified keywords and audience, and then published to your website, blog, social media sites, trade sites (such as www.propertydrum.com and www.the-negotiator.co.uk) and local forums (local press, Gumtree etc).

If you are looking for landlords or investors then LinkedIn is useful, start with a professionally written LinkedIn profile for all key staff, targeted to your business and sector.

You must also make sure your website is optimised so it loads quickly, doesn't use old technology like Iframes for your property results, has well written copy, page titles, meta-tags, internal links and well formatted HTML.

► **Mike Day, Integra**

Make sure people know that your website exists. Use and promote the URL extensively. Many agents have a Rightmove sticker on their window yet no reference to their own website!

Ensure the content on the site is regularly updated, fresh and interesting. News articles are great but not if the last piece posted talks about the relief of Mafeking!

Take an holistic approach to marketing including social media and e-marketing whereby these media link back to your website to drive traffic.

Consider pay per click promotion targeted at your required demographic. This could be on Google or Facebook.



Track and monitor responses.

Ensure the content on your website 'does what it says on the tin'. If you are an estate agent in xyz town, make sure that your copy reflects that and will be picked up by keyword searching.

► **Elliot Rowland Webdadi**

Provide content that cannot be found anywhere else. Perhaps you specialise in a certain sector or area, do you have expertise and insights which other agents cannot offer? This information builds your reputation and increases traffic and your customer base.

Effective social media use is also a simple and cheap way method of raising your company profile. Thousands of potential clients will be using these social mediums. Generating fans, followers and 'likes' through Facebook and Twitter exposes your brand and builds reputation.

However, it's important to understand the context of these social media sites. Posting purely commercial content will not

engage potential clients. Posting information that will be of interest – local or industry news is far more likely to engage potential customers.

► **Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile**

Having a website isn't enough. Use all the web services available to you. Web, mobile web, social media (Google +, Facebook, Twitter) etc. Make sure you're connected to the portals. The more links you have to your site from external sites the greater your traffic will be and the better your site will perform in internet searches.

Q: So even understanding why there is little traffic, how come social media is the answer? Isn't it just a chatting thing?

► **Chris Haines, Evolvin**

People buy from people. It is that simple. Social media allows you to engage with your audience in a much more effective way than posting leaflets through doors.

Potential clients can read about your business, get to know the staff, see the sort of property you offer, share and comment. You are also able to reach a much bigger audience compared to traditional marketing; within three steps of separation you are connected to nearly everyone in the UK on Facebook! Studies also show that loyalty comes as part of a good engaging social media strategy.

► **Mike Day, Integra**

Social media isn't the complete answer but it can certainly be part of the answer in an holistic strategy. The ability to reach people through engagement is key and then benefit from your followers, friends and fans distributing interesting material to their contacts can be hugely successful. Social media is online networking – like attending a dinner party except there is no dinner! Most relationships – business or pleasure start by 'chatting'.

► **Elliot Rowland Webdadi**

The nature of social media has changed. ►

“ Make sure people know your website exists! Use and promote the URL (address) wherever possible.”





Posting property alerts on your LinkedIn account, for example, would be rather futile.'

Elliot Rowland **Webdadi**

It was a method of connecting family and friends, now it is far more complex, with vast opportunities for business.

Many household brands now use Facebook to attract fans. In TV adverts, companies ask viewers to find their Facebook page, and post links to their social networking sites rather than their website. Companies are promoting their social networking pages above their website; a huge shift in behaviour.

This is because word of mouth advertising has always been a powerful tool; an opinion from a trusted source is worth infinitely more than an advertisement. Generating a 'like' on Facebook will instantly communicate this action to all of that person's friends and family online who could further recommend your brand. The exponential growth nature of social media can mean a recommendation is soon communicated to thousands of people, any of whom could be a potential client.

A person visiting your website is a single, independent act, which, whilst useful, will not generate the same level of recommendation as social media sites can.

► Ian Laverty, **Intelligent Mobile**

Social Media is not the answer. It is, however, a part of it. As I mentioned before, the more places where people can find relevant content that links to you and your services the better your website will perform. It's about social media, it's about mobile web, it's about portal sites – it's all of them together not a pick and mix. If you only use some of the services available to you, you will only get some of the traffic.

Q: But there are so many social media sites – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Mumsnet, for goodness sake, it will take all my time, how do I choose the best ones?

► Chris Haines, **Evolvin**

Your strategy will identify the best social sites for your target audiences, although the solution will likely encompass publishing content to several social sites on a regular basis; you will get out what you put in.

You can save some of your time by outsourcing your online marketing to an agency, or try using some of the tools like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite, which allow you to publish to more than one site at the same time.

► Mike Day, **Integra**

Study the demographics and develop a strategy based on what you want to achieve. 50 per cent plus of the UK population is on Facebook which is the largest B2C platform. Twitter and LinkedIn are more B32B orientated. All are valuable but, like not being a bore at a party – it is about two way dialogue, not about being on 'transmit only'.

► Elliot Rowland **Webdadi**

Updating your social media networks needn't take up so much time. Websites such as www.hootsuite.com allow you to control all your sites from one source, as well as pre loading tweets and other content that will be posted for you at a later date.

It is important to remember the context of each social media network, recognising how people interact and use them, and tailor your activity accordingly. LinkedIn is a more professional, business community. Posting property alerts on your LinkedIn account would be rather futile.

Similarly, Mumsnet appeals, unsurprisingly, to mothers. To appeal to this audience, post useful information about good local schools and amenities. This will give you a reputation as an expert within your local area.

Facebook and Twitter are by far the most popular of the social networking sites and should be the main focus. A well managed Facebook profile will eventually give you lots of additional contact information in the form of Friends and 'likes'.

Twitter is more of a soup of information and opinions, which each user filters by deciding who to 'follow'. Having a large number of followers here is a good sign you are reaching a lot of people beyond your own customer base.

► Ian Laverty, **Intelligent Mobile**

This is the hottest debate in social media. Google + would be my recommendation for improving internet search performance in 2012 – Google uses Google + in its search results more than it does the other social networks. Facebook and Twitter are a must if you can – the sheer number of users means they're too big to ignore. Start with those three if you're new but make sure it's relevant content and that it links to your own website – that's what drives your traffic.

Q: Who will it bring to my site? Weirdos, timewasters or real clients?

► Chris Haines, **Evolvin**

If devised and implemented in the correct way you will be engaging, monitoring and building relationships with your targeted niche communities, therefore potential and real clients. Certainly our experience is that you will generate more traffic to your website, and build a separate online community on the social sites, all of which are interested in engaging with you.

► Mike Day, **Integra**

Maybe all of those but who walks in your office or phones now – weirdos, timewasters or real clients? Through engagement with social media you will help identify prospects from suspects and deal accordingly. Better to have that opportunity than to be ignored.

► Elliot Rowland **Webdadi**

Fans and followers will actively choose to engage with you. Twitter followers only ►



You can use new tools like Tweetdeck or Hootsuite to publish to several sites at once.'

Chris Haines, **Evolvin**



follow who they choose to follow. Similarly, Facebook fans actively make a decision to like your page.

It is precisely because of this active decision by the user that your social media followers will be far more likely to engage with your business.

As with any aspect of your business, there is no way of avoiding the occasional time waster. However, given that social media is the 6th largest lead generator for business, it will give you genuine business results.

► **Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile**

The answer is all of the above... it's no different to your website. But... potential clients will be part of the traffic, and by controlling the content and reviewing, you can dismiss the timewasters.

Q: Can someone else do all this for me while I sell houses? I suppose it will cost a fortune.

► **Chris Haines, Evolvin**

Most definitely, and they will likely bring a wealth of expertise in the sector with them. A fully managed online marketing package can start as low as £500 per month and would typically include setting out a strategy, building an online community, copy writing and publishing to your social sites, monitoring activity and engaging with the responses.

The best part is that you will receive monthly reports which show you how your social sites are working and benefiting your brand and website traffic. It is also possible to measure income growth against marketing activity over time.



It's about Social Media, mobile web, portal sites; it's all of them together.'

Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile



Social Media can reinforce brand values, raise profile and demonstrate expertise.'

Mike Day, Integra

► **Mike Day, Integra**

Integra (and others!) provide business mentoring, social media, web and e-marketing services; the cost can vary from perhaps £100 a month to sky's-the-limit dependent upon the amount of time and effort expended. Good use of e-marketing can help customer retention and relationship management and build measurable outcomes.

► **Elliot Rowland Webdadi**

Apps (that don't cost the earth) such as PropertyPage, allow visitors into your Facebook page to search and share your properties. This is an easy way for visitors to interact and engage with your page, and expose your instructions to thousands of people online. It will also automatically add new properties as soon as they become available, so there is no input needed from you.

► **Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile**

You can do it yourself and for small businesses that's what we recommend. A Twitter or Facebook pages are simple to set up and to use. Look at what other agents are doing. The best small business I've seen using Twitter and Facebook in the Property Sector are Fitzgibbon. It's simple, it's not too time consuming, and it's effective.

Q: Tell me three things to convince me that Social Media will really help me.

► **Chris Haines, Evolvin**

a) A strategic social media marketing campaign will increase website traffic substantially, and create an online

community with a real interest in your company.

b) Whether you like it or not people are talking about your brand, reading online reviews and posting comments about your business; it is far better that you are in control of at least some of this activity.

c) With social media marketing you are able to monitor and report on activity and response to justify your expenditure; something you can't do very well with traditional marketing.

► **Mike Day, Integra**

a) It can raise profile, reinforce brand and brand values and demonstrate expertise and knowledge. Take control, people are talking about you now, make sure you are part of that conversation.

b) It can be used as part of your overall marketing mix to drive traffic and enquiries. It has the viral ability to reach thousands in a matter of minutes.

c) Over 50 per cent of your customers are using social media now on a daily basis and want to engage through these channels. If you are not there they will engage with the businesses that are –more messages are sent via Facebook than email.

► **Elliot Rowland Webdadi**

a) Social media extends the reach of word of mouth advertising, which is arguably your most effective tool in promoting your business and attracting clients, allowing it to be spread to thousands of people in a short time.

b) It's free to use, and requires just a small portion of your time to make sure it is working effectively.

c) 26 million people (roughly a third of the UK population) are on Facebook, 81 per cent of whom are over 18. With such a large audience of potential clients using social media, can you afford not to?

► **Ian Laverty, Intelligent Mobile**

a) It will help to drive additional traffic and may improve your SEO.

b) The more places your properties are detailed the more chance there are that someone will see them.

c) Compared to the price of advertising in print or on the web it's a cost effective solution for reaching a wider audience.

For more information:

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