

Research Shows Human Resource Buyers Use Internet as Primary Source for Gathering Product Information

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Readership of print media outlets is plummeting, HR decision makers are inundated with emails and, like the rest of the population, are exposed to thousands of advertisements and marketing messages daily. In order to evade the inundation of marketing messaging and find authentic information, consumers are going online.

According to a recent study by eMarketer, more than half of American Internet users said that the Internet is their primary source for information about products and services they purchase (and nearly 70% with household incomes of \$75K+), whether they're buying a car or an applicant tracking system. Yet, most HR suppliers have not responded with the appropriate online marketing tactics. In fact, spending on print advertising (53%) and events (57%) is increasing relative to some form of online marketing (26%).

By re-allocating how they spend their marketing and PR dollars, HR suppliers can increase their online presence and the chances of being found when potential customers are ready to buy.

An entire generation will soon be transitioning to leadership positions in corporate America and begin making purchasing decisions—including buying HR products and services. We are already seeing research that shows consumers often start with the Internet when researching

products/services they may purchase. While much of the research on purchasing behavior is limited

Current allocations vs. expectations

- 82% of HR suppliers surveyed expect more leads from email marketing, but only 39% are spending more on email marketing tactics.
- 50% expect more leads from SEO, but only 39% are spending more on SEO.

Expectations are rapidly outpacing spending by HR suppliers. For more about trends in online advertising in the HR marketplace, read the "Q2 Trends in HR Marketing" report, available exclusively through HRmarketer.

Where do people get their news?

Print Media Outlets

- Among 18-29-year-olds, only 16 percent read a newspaper daily in 2000.
- Less than 50 percent will read a newspaper "regularly."
- Between 1972 and 1998, the percentage of people between the ages of 30 and 40 who read a newspaper everyday dropped from 73 percent to 30 percent.

Online search

- Over 30 million Americans a month use Yahoo News or Google News (Source: Nielsen//NetRatings).
- Over 130 million American adults go online
- 84% Americans use a search engine to find information, products and services.
- 72% Americans use a search engine to get news.

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to consumer goods, parallels can be drawn to the B2B world of how human resource professionals make their purchasing decisions. If you are an HR supplier, your marketing and PR campaigns must accommodate your online prospects as they search for research, best practices, news and product information. Do prospects find your company's name at every Internet crossroads or only on your website?

As the Internet plays a greater role in your prospects' purchasing behavior, you must reach out to meet them through Marketing PR, strategic online offers and SEO.

Marketing PR: Get them to the crossroads

Marketing PR offers your company the ability to arrive at every search and keyword link first, thus capturing your prospects' attention. For example, if your prospect is searching for a firm with the latest HR technology, does your name come up in Google on the first few pages, or at all? A successful Marketing PR program, combined with a simple and well-maintained SEO program, can help ensure you're on that first page.

Marketing PR is the combination of two traditionally separate departments (PR and marketing) to form one united front whereby all marketing and PR tactics support lead generation versus media placements alone (traditional PR metric). Marketing PR allows you to create relevant messaging for your prospects; you can craft articles that respond to their business pain and post these online. When they are searching for a solution to that pain point, there you are.

Create tangible results

1. Create a white paper or other offer that resonates with your buyers.
2. Write two press releases that announce the availability of the article and how to get the free download. One press release is written for the media and will be distributed (along with a well written "pitch") to a targeted list of journalists with the goal of securing a placement in print and online media outlets. The second press release will be written for your buyers, search engine optimized and distributed online only.
3. Create a website data capture form to intercept all requests for the "article" (and capture leads).
4. Consider sponsoring a popular eNewsletter that your buyers read to promote the availability of the article and/or renting a targeted online list for a dedicated direct marketing campaign that announces the availability of the download.
5. Edit the article to 800 - 1,000 words and place it as a byline piece in a publication that accepts such submissions.
6. Each quarter, repeat the process.

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Following the principles of Marketing PR leads to online visibility, which in turn generates sales leads, while traditional PR and media relations will facilitate print visibility. Effective Marketing PR requires a compelling and newsworthy offer that engages prospects and a website experience that capitalizes on this interest.

Compelling Offers: Bring them where you want to go

Once you've enticed the prospect with a marketing press release, you must deliver relevant information that provides the big picture benefits (NOT product specific information) of your category of solution. Ideally, your offer (white paper, webinar, podcast, article, etc.) will be compelling to your reader and offer them strategic or tactical information that they need to succeed regardless of whether they purchase a solution from you or not.

These offers will be marketed through your Marketing PR program and placed on your website. The final component or touch point for your buyer is your website, and it's where your strategic marketing plan comes to fruition.

A Search Optimized Website: The destination

Having a "great" website is no longer enough—your website must be search engine optimized (SEO) and include landing pages for the offers you've advertised online, your Marketing PR deliverables and links to other websites and online media outlets. People increasingly navigate the web via search and rarely navigate the web by entering a specific website URL— as searches continue to grow in popularity, companies continue to tweak their process so that searchers are delivered to the information they want faster.

While most websites are designed to capture buyer information, 90 percent of consumers don't use the website as intended, according to Marketing Sherpa. To get your buyers to complete a form on a landing page, you must provide enough content and creative to capture their interest and make the experience both simple and valuable.

With the tremendous growth in the number of HR suppliers as well as the interest in HR outsourced solutions from companies of all sizes and industries, the marketplace is more competitive, with more revenue at stake, than ever before. The combination of Marketing PR, compelling offers and search optimization allows HR suppliers to create an online marketing presence that will both attract and inform prospects. Marketers must be ready to accommodate prospects' needs and meet them where they are.

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This way, leading-edge HR providers will capture prospects early in the buying process and maintain this top-of-mind position throughout the buying process. This crucial positioning will help them generate revenue and close more deals—because they were the initial point of contact during their online search for information.

About HR Marketer

HRmarketer.com is a service of Fisher Vista LLC, a marketing and information services firm focusing exclusively on the human capital industry. The company services over 300 HR service providers, employee benefit brokers and consultants, helping them increase their visibility and generate sales leads.

For a free, 20 minute demonstration on marketing PR best practices email cbedard@hrmarketer.com