Chapter 11
E-Marketing

Nuno Manarte
University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

Mário Sérgio Teixeira
University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we will present e-marketing and the channels, tools, and techniques that can be used by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), so that they can optimize the benefits of an online presence.

Knowing its customers is the starting point for any firm's marketing activity, so we will start by presenting some concepts that are related to the process of gathering information about e-customers.

The company website is the gateway to Internet marketing, so it is important to promote it in a variety of ways that will be explained later. Selling online can be an interesting option, but this decision should only be taken after considering the pros and cons that it involves. To conclude, we will talk about the e-marketing plan, which should guarantee that the objectives, strategies, and actions of online marketing are coherently integrated with the offline marketing plan.

INTRODUCTION

E-marketing can be defined as "achieving marketing objectives through use of electronic communications technology" (Chaffey & Smith, 2008, p. 489). In this day and age, electronic marketing is mainstream marketing (Hughes, 2006) and even SMEs should be involved.

The company website can be used as a customer information source, as a communication and promotion medium and/or as a sales and distribution channel for its products and services. It may also allow firms to reach new and broader markets, in a faster and cheaper way than through traditional means, something of particular importance for SMEs.

The internet is a level playing field for companies of all sizes, giving SMEs the chance to

compete globally. One of the reasons for this is that large corporations cannot use their budgets to prevent small firms from having a relevant share of voice. In fact, online customers control communication and target companies, as opposed to more traditional channels in which these roles are reversed.

Throughout the chapter we will present the website's role in the company's e-marketing strategy. In order to fulfill its potential there is a range of options a SME can implement, which we will explore in some detail. As more and more people use smart phones and other mobile phones with internet capability, it is also important to prepare websites for compatibility with these handheld devices.

Knowing e-customers, their needs, perceptions, behaviors and profile, is the first step to prepare an e-marketing program. The conception of an e-marketing plan will involve a number of actions that must be integrated in a way that enables them to exploit synergies and ensure the plan's global consistency.

Promoting SMEs online presence is an e-marketing imperative, which requires the use of several techniques.

Selling online can be an option for firms to explore new markets and reduce distribution costs that can be implemented in a variety of ways.

These are some of the subjects that will be approached in this chapter. There are entire books written on some of the subjects that will be addressed, so the reader is not expected to get an in depth knowledge of all of them. Many of the subjects had to be simplified so that a larger number of concepts could be explained within the confines of one chapter. The goal of this chapter is to provide a broad understanding of key internet marketing concepts and to present the company website as a marketing tool, in a way that can be used by SMEs to improve their online marketing effectiveness.

THE WEBSITE AS A MARKETING TOOL

A website can be created to fulfill many different functions, supporting communication, sales and other kinds of customer interaction, such as (Carrera, 2009):

- **Institutional communication:** It's a website used by almost every company aimed at presenting the company and what it can do. It also works as a business card and an online communication tool;
- **Selling products and services:** the website can also enable e-commerce by creating an online shop which sells products and services using different means of payment.
- **Other types of customer interaction:** the website can also permit other types of customer interaction such as technical and commercial support.

Online registry of customers into a database gives firms the chance to know the history of interactions with customers, which can be very useful in understanding customer behavior and defining the customer's profile, both individually and by customer segment. Whether they are creating a site for business-to-business (B2B) or business-to-consumer (B2C), or both, companies should build it based on their customers' needs and not on what they want to sell. Some firms even have different websites for different kinds of customers.

This enables the use of one-to-one marketing techniques that allow individual marketing actions according to a customer's shopping behavior or search for information in the company's website.

On the other hand, with the Web 2.0 and collaborative content creation, the company's website can be built with the help of its users who can also be responsible for the creation of new content and functionalities. This proximity between customers and company helps strengthen the bonds

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