

## Reach prospective customers through online marketing

Digital marketing is the fastest growing area for advertising today and is expected to dominate by 2010.

Through online search engines and mmconnect, you are already receiving leads generated online. Merry Maids' National Ad Fund (NAF) pays for premium placement on most of the major search engines such as Google and Yahoo, so there's no reason to waste your advertising dollars with the big names.

But there are various opportunities to increase your business' visibility in the online marketplace at the local level, and many are free. We will provide an overview of some of the top sites and then offer some tips for maximizing your digital marketing and creating an e-mail policy.

The first step to making the most of your online marketing is to check that your local page at merrymaids.com is updated and contains the most useful information to guide potential customers or employees to your business. Through mmlink account management, you may customize your local page to offer promotions, to accept online applications, to list industry recognition or awards and to sell your services.

By creating links with local partners, you can increase your visibility in search engines. For example if your office supports the high school booster club, or the local chamber, you may add links to their website on your local page and request that they do the same for you.

Once you're satisfied that your local page is the best it can be, then you can sign up for local business directories to expand your online visibility and guide potential customers to your local Merry Maids site.

In each market, business directories may be offered by newspapers, TV or radio stations and local city guides. Although some directories may offer free listings, others may charge a premium, a per-click price or may be offered as a value-added service if you advertise in the company's primary marketing vehicle, like the newspaper or radio station.

Typically, if the listing is free, you would benefit by increasing your online visibility. Be careful with some sites, like

Yelp.com or Craigslist.org, because, as community-based sites, you open yourself up to user comments, which can often be negative. Many sites now offer the function to add a user review. If you find that your office is already receiving negative reviews at Yahoo or other sites, you may invite satisfied customers to post a review, but you should never respond to a negative review in an online forum.

There are some national websites that offer local listings, many of which already list your business. Since many sites do charge to update your information, but many will allow you to suggest changes

at no charge.

If your listing includes a link to merrymaids.com you may drive prospective customers directly to your local page by copying the url from the address bar. Having a direct link to your local page will increase your visibility in searches.

Once you increase your online presence, you may want to establish an e-mail policy in the office to ensure consistent communication. And remember that many Internet users will perform initial research online, but will follow-up with phone calls.

"With strong growth in online display ads and paid search advertising, investment bank Jefferies & Co. is predicting that online advertising will surpass \$60 billion by 2010."

— BizReport.com

"We're actually pretty confident that by 2010, the majority of our media mix (\$945 million) will shift to digital."

— Mich Matthews,  
Microsoft V.P.  
central marketing group

"Average spending on online advertising, as a percentage of the total media budget, is anticipated to increase from 15 percent in 2005 to 20 percent in 2006, and forecasted to reach 32 percent by 2010."

— American Advertising  
Federation survey results

## With increasing web traffic generating leads

for your office, it is important to establish a policy for e-mail etiquette so that your online responses are equally as professional and helpful as your telephone responses. An internal e-mail policy will:

- Ensure that you consistently convey a professional image;
- Offer efficient and effective communication resources for your employees;
- Protect you from liability

## 10 Tips for good “Netiquette”

**Reply within 24 hours whenever possible.** If no one will be checking e-mails over the weekend or at night, consider creating an out-of-office reply that can be turned on after business hours. The reply could generate a message that tells prospective or current customers when you reply and include alternative ways to reach you after hours.

**Answer the question clearly and concisely** when you reply to a client’s request. Even if you can’t provide an estimate without seeing the home, provide general information about the pricing process.

**All Caps is the equivalent of yelling.** You wouldn’t yell at customers who call, so don’t respond to e-mails in all caps.

**Grammar is essential to proper business communication.** When dash-ing off a quick e-mail, even the most astute writers can make mistakes. Create a “script” with responses to the most common e-mail questions, so that anyone can copy and paste answers into the reply. This will save you from embarrassing typos, and it will save time.

**Abbreviations or text lingo** might be okay for 13-year-olds sending messages in class, but “B4 U” hit send, think of your audience. Are you communicating professionally?

**Personalize your e-mail response** by using the person’s name just as you would in a telephone conversation.

**Identify yourself to the customer** and provide options to reply back to you.

**Add disclaimers to protect your business from liability.** Typical disclaimers warn the recipient to scan e-mails for viruses, confidentiality, or that employees are expressly required not to make defamatory statements.

**Use gender neutral language** such as “the typical customer,” “our clients” or “a Merry Maids team member/associate” or sparingly – “he or she.”

**Write respectfully** and never make any libelous, sexist or racially discriminating comments in an e-mail, even if it is intended to be a joke. Humor doesn’t convey as well in writing as it does in conversation.



MerchantCircle is one of the fastest growing online business directories. Founded a little more than a year ago, the number of

businesses that have accepted the free listing has grown from 5,000 to 85,000 in the last six months. In addition to offering free listings, you may create a customized “web page” to include logos, graphics and details. One feature that’s drawing a lot of attention to the San Francisco-based business is the ability to manage, monitor and control your business’ online reputation. “Our software continually searches other sites for any mention of your business, so you know what people are saying about you,” said Kevin Leu, community relations manager for MerchantCircle. Each Merry Maids office is already listed in MerchantCircle, but you may “claim” your listing to take advantage of the free features, such as a blog, newsletter-sending feature, coupons and more.

While YP.com and Verizon’s super-pages used to offer free listing to advertisers, it is increasingly common to pay for internet Yellow Page (iYP) listings. When you advertise in the Yellow Pages, you will automatically get a basic listing, but you may also elect to upgrade through your YPMG representative. This is a very important tool for your business as statistics show that the number of consumers using iYP continues to grow. “In July 2006, 68 million Internet users in the U.S. conducted searches at iYP sites,” according to comScore Networks, a digital research group. “These searches represented a 46 percent increase over the same period in 2005.”



Hello Metro is another emerging free small business directory that offers a local

“web page” that can be customized to include a company profile, images and coupons. Though the basic package is free, the main thrust for this company is its paid advertising through banner placement.

Yahoo Local probably already lists your business if you are advertising with Yellow Pages — as do many national merchant directories — and you may sign up for a free listing. However most expanded listings at Yahoo Local do cost. Advertisers may select from flat-rate, per-click or per-call packages, but it would be a wasted expense. Instead, we recommend that you simply check your listing to confirm the information is correct.

