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Are Discount-Promoting Sites Right For Your Business?



Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, south-east Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

You've undoubtedly heard about Groupon, the Internet company that sells discount coupons for everything from spa visits to cosmetic

surgery. Their IPO last November was the largest since Google, and raised about \$700 million.

You might wonder if adding a Groupon or Groupon-like promotion to your marketing mix makes sense.

There are dozens of companies that provide these types of promotions (Groupon isn't the only game in town), including our local newspaper – see <http://dailydeals.monroenews.com> (offered as illustration only, and not endorsement).

Personally, I'm skeptical of both the marketing value and the business model. Don't get me wrong! As a small business owner, I'm not really a fan of discounting, but I understand that it can be a power-

fully effective marketing tool. I do, however, question its viability when used on a mass scale for new customer acquisition.

The Groupon model

Groupon's model, in particular, has some quirks that make me skeptical.

After a deal goes out and coupon buyers pay for the deal upfront, Groupon doesn't pay out the merchant's portion immediately.

Instead, it pays out in three equal installments over a period of up to 60 days.

In contrast, Living Social and Amazon's Local service pay out 100% to merchants within 15 days. Google's service, Google Offers, pays 80% within four days and the rest within 90 days.

Smaller businesses that are always concerned about cash flow can really get into a bind, since they have to honor the coupons immediately and then wait to collect their portion from Groupon.

The whole "I take your money now, and I'll give you your cut later" thing strikes me as a bit Ponzi-like,

especially since almost two months go by before the merchant is paid.

Mass discounting

It makes sense to take a step back and examine discounting and coupon in the larger context of a small business marketing plan.

The first consideration, of course, is targeting. Small companies don't have the budgets or luxuries afforded to large companies. Food manufacturers, for example, are very effective at using coupons, the Sunday paper being a perfect example.

The reasons they're effective are mass distribution - they print hundreds of thousands of coupons, offering untold amounts of cash discounts – and mass appeal. Their target market is essentially anyone that goes to the grocery store or buys food.

Small business promotion

Discount promotions like Groupon are quite a bit different when used by a small company. You don't have the option to target your audience, and targeting is the most important

"The concern, particularly for smaller, locally-based businesses, is that you attract not only customers that really aren't right for your business, but the type of consumer that is only motivated by price slashing."

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SPAM Filtering

Most of our managed services plans include our Experts Total Spam Defense email filtering service, which virtually eliminates SPAM from your mailbox.

Compliance Archiving

Email archiving provides a secure, long term storage, recovery and eDiscovery system that assures compliance with regulatory requirements established by IRS, HIPAA, SOX and SEC.

Email has taken over faxes and phone calls as the leading communications platform and the importance of keeping a record of all the email communications is catching the scrutiny of local and federal government agencies.

Why Make The Move To Managed Services?

If you are one of our clients, chances are you've heard us talk about "managed services." However, you might not know what the term means.

In a nutshell, a managed services plan provides you with unlimited, comprehensive technical support and network management for a low, fixed monthly fee.

It gets the most out of the IT services you pay for, and eliminates the "Oh my gosh, we're down" problems and costs for a small business.

A managed services plan lets you get a handle on your IT costs, usually at a fixed monthly fee, and also provides you with a much more comprehensive and up-to-date IT system.

Managed services delivers a network and computer system that's dependable, stable and allows you to comply with regulatory compliances.

Control costs

In any business, it's important to be as cost-effective as possible. IT costs are especially important, since poorly managed systems cost way more than they're worth.

It's essential to have a system that works with your budget, but doesn't compromise on quality.

Managed services is the most feasible and practical way to accomplish that, especially in the long term.

Manage complexity

The constant evolution of hardware and software used in your business can really impact your bottom line. Companies with limited resources may very well find themselves left

Companies run the risk of stretching resources too thinly, which can compromise the quality of your service or products.

Managed services provides you with a stable and dependable computing infrastructure that's dedicated to meeting your specific needs in a cost-effective manner.



Maintaining compliance

With the marketplace becoming more and more competitive, meeting different regulatory compliances has become a fundamental need.

From Sarbanes-Oxley to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), smaller companies can often find themselves lost. It's managed services that helps these companies not only fully understand the requirements of these regulations, but also comply with them.

behind as technology moves ahead.

With Managed Services, you are able to enjoy the advantages of the latest IT solutions at a fraction of the cost – enabling you to provide the best possible service to your clients.

More dependable infrastructure

For a small business, maintaining an in house IT system can be tedious and time consuming.

With limited staff, the business owner or owners typically get stuck being the "computer guy" for the company - robbing the business of the owner's talents for sales, marketing and customer service.

Small companies typically don't have the resources to research what their requirements are for email archiving, for example. Under a managed services plan, services such as email filtering and archiving are included in the monthly cost.

If you want to know more about how managed services can directly benefit your day to day operations, please do not hesitate to give us a call – we'd be happy to sit down and discuss a custom solution that works for you.

*Feature article by:
Frank Wright*



Six Ways To Ensure Your Email Gets Read

If you're like a lot of us, you get so much email every day that you might spend as little as 15 seconds scanning a message to determine how it applies to you.

Now, imagine that other people are reading your email the same way. If they can't quickly identify the purpose of your message, they'll probably delete it or leave it in the Inbox for "later" - if later ever comes.

Here are some tips to ensure that your email messages are read and get the attention they deserve.

Have a clear purpose

When recipients receive your email message, they should be able to see at a quick glance how the message relates to them and why it's important.

They may be looking at a preview of your message in Microsoft Outlook or on a smart phone. Or they may see only subject lines in their inbox. If your subject line is confusing and irrelevant, your email will surely get deleted in a hurry.

Here are some things you can include in subject lines to make sure the reader opens your mail:

A standard subject heading such as "Action Requested," "Response Requested," "FYI," or "Read Only."

The meaningful objective or supporting project that the message relates to, for example, "FY '05 budget forecasting."

The required action if applicable, for example, "Consolidate departmental budget spreadsheets." The due date if applicable, for example, "Due by July 7."

An example of an effective Subject line is "Action Requested—Consolidate all department spreadsheets for FY '06 budget and return to me by June 15th."

Tell them what to do

Be completely clear about the actions you want the recipients to take.

Be specific and put all the material that is related to an action in one place. To get even faster responses, talk about how the action relates to the recipient's objectives, and always give due dates.

It's also important to clarify what you want the recipient to do. There are basically four types of actions you could request:

Action: The recipient needs to perform an action. For example, "Provide a proposal for a 5% reduction in travel expenses."

Respond: The recipient needs to respond to your message with specific information. For example, "Let me know if you can attend the staff meeting at 9am Friday."

Read only: The recipient needs to read your message, and no response is necessary. For example, "Please read the attached sales plan before the staff meeting on August 12th."

FYI only: The recipient should file your message for future reference. In fact, even reading the message is optional. For example, "Enclosed for your records are your completed expense reports."

Give them all of the data

Make sure you give recipients all of the information they need to complete an action or respond successfully to your request.

Your co-workers shouldn't have to come back to you asking for



information, whether it is a supporting document or a link to a file on a shared website.

You can include supporting information in the body of the message, in an attached file, or in an attached email.

Send only to necessary people

Target your message to the appropriate audience. Only people who have to complete an action on the Subject line should receive your message. Be thoughtful and respectful when you enter names on the To line. People observe your thoughtfulness and the results are more effective.

No forwards!

While everyone appreciates a little humor and a sanity break at the office, save the funny forwards, jokes, and cute pictures for personal email.

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Work/Life Balance: The Issue Of Technology

Technology and easy Internet access can be both a blessing and a curse, giving us remote access to email, smartphones, Skype and other tools.

In theory at least, this gives us the ability to be able to work from home and achieve a better work/life balance, and yet in some cases all it has actually done is increase the number of hours that we spend working.

One way to win back some work/life balance is to negotiate the time spent working from home.

Not only does working from home save a lot of time you would otherwise spend commuting back and forth to work, it also means you

save money on both transportation and food, and it gives you more time to develop an exercise routine. There can be problems with work-



ing from home, however, such as lack of discipline and motivation as well as overwork.

The solution is to make certain that your work stays within the time period of a normal working day and does not add further hours to that workload.

Some time-management techniques include creating to-do lists, managing your expectations, prioritizing your workload, learning to delegate, and making sure that you have regular meetings and catch-up sessions with colleagues.

It is also important to set boundaries with colleagues to respect your personal time. Set an expectation that you're "not available" during non-work hours. Switching off your cell phone and not checking emails during non-working hours is also a good idea.

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part of a promotion when budgets are low and risks are high. I don't think you'd argue that a 50% discount is a potentially high risk marketing expense.

laser targeted promotions to your ideal type of customer. Easy and cheap marketing is rarely the profitable marketing.

Groupon's emails go out to everyone in a specific geographic area, and you have no ability to target your reach.

The concern, particularly for smaller, locally-based businesses, is that you attract not only customers that really aren't right for your business, but the type of consumer that is only motivated by price slashing.

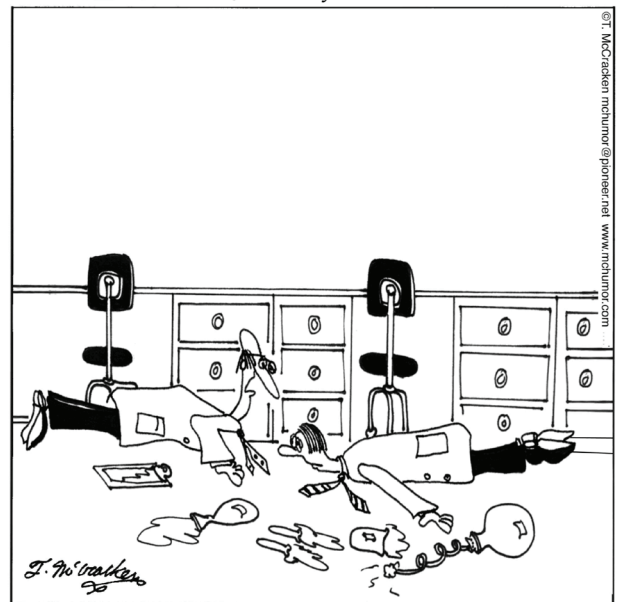
The Bottom Line

Be very careful about using daily deal mass discounting to acquire new customers.

Think about how it can downgrade the image of your company to your current clients, damage your brand, and attract a group of clients whose only interest is in a "deal."

You can quite likely do much better with

MCHUMOR.com by T. McCracken



"There's an air of gravity around the lab today."