

Online Promotion Aggregators – Friend or Foe?

by Bill Carmody

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So your thinking to yourself, “Wouldn’t it be great if someone figured all this technology stuff out and created a turn-key solution that I could tap into on an as-needed basis?” Then you stumble across one of the many promotional aggregator web sites that have done just that. So now the question is, “What’s the catch?” Why doesn’t everyone flock to technology templates that allow you to set up on online promotion in a matter of minutes?

The truth is, that many do. If you’ve ever had to get an online promotion up and running *quickly*, you know the value of not having to reinvent the wheel. When the program is “down and dirty”, speed counts and often times a promotional template will do the trick. What’s more, online promotion aggregators have done their best to make the price point quite appealing – often a fraction of the cost of an online promotion built to spec.

The challenge with templates is that, at the end of the day, it’s a template. In the hands of the right promotional marketing expert, the end result will not be so obvious that it’s a template. However, the right promotional marketing expert is not often the one filling out the template. Often, it’s the marketing person who’s been asked to throw together “a quick online promotion” as part of some separate initiative and the template provides just enough information to be dangerous.

Official rules, for example, are one component in particular that should *never* be part of a template. While promotions of a similar nature appear to have the same official rules requirements, no two promotions are identical. But even if they were, the legislation that affects the promotion is constantly evolving via new regulations or current regulations being interpreted differently. Just ask any lawyer who works in this industry and he or she will tell you what’s changed even in the last 30 days.

But let’s assume that you have your own in-house (or outside) legal counsel, there are still a few more points to consider. Namely:

- 1. Will the available online promotion templates satisfy your marketing objective?**

In other words, does the template solution provide a fit for your specific needs? In some cases the answer will undoubtedly be “yes”. In other cases, you may be trying to force-fit your marketing objectives to squeeze into the available turnkey solutions. If this is the case, you may end up wasting your marketing dollars and start over to satisfy your objectives.

- 2. Who is providing the strategy for the promotion?**

If it’s you, then great. But if you’ve been handed an assignment to “get it done” without a moment to think about the problem you’re trying to solve, then you may be grasping for a turnkey solution that simply doesn’t exist. Often times the best online promotions have never been done before, or require a new way to doing them (that would not fit in a

standard template).

3. Is there enough flexibility in the standard template to incorporate your own branding requirements?

By its own definition, the word “template” means you have standards from which you must work. In many cases, these standards will allow you to sufficiently incorporate your own look and feel. But, when the template does not allow you to incorporate the look of your brand, then is it really providing you with what you need?

4. Will the existing server farm handle the amount of traffic the advertising is projected drive?

This depends on which aggregator you’re using and how much you’re willing to spend. Many of the larger aggregators charge on a cost per entry basis, and will guarantee whatever bandwidth you require prior to the launch of the promotion. As long as the aggregator knows the volume you’re predicting, then they can usually make it work. But don’t make assumptions. Be sure to share your projections and get an agreement ahead of time that the existing web servers will handle the volume of traffic projected.

5. Does the template reporting structure satisfy your requirements?

This component tends to be less flexible, as it requires additional scripting and/or database work to make significant changes. Therefore, if the standard reporting works, then great. If not, you may have to “deal with it” or come up with your own reporting workaround.

6. How difficult will database integration be after the promotion has ended?

This is usually more a function of your own database requirements rather than that of the aggregator. In most cases, they can provide you with a tab-delimited text file of all data collected on your behalf. The problem, however, is when you attempt to import this data into your own marketing database that has problems reading standard tab-delimited files. You may need to have a program created to “scrub” the data into your company’s standard database format.

7. What follow-up marketing efforts do you have planned?

Before you spend a dime on collecting names from an online promotion, you need to think about what you will do with all those names once you have collected them. In most cases, an aggregator cannot help you with this piece of the marketing puzzle. That’s where your marketing partners come into play.

When all is said and done, an online promotion aggregator can be quite helpful to the experienced promotional marketer – assuming that the template solution fits the problem. Just be aware of the all too common problem of: “when you’re a hammer, everything looks like a nail”. Often in the promotions industry, one size does *not* fit all. If you can tell the difference between a need for a custom solution versus that of an off-the-shelf solution, then online promotions aggregators are indeed your friends.

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