

7 Keys To Successful Forum Marketing

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Forum marketing has recently been touted as a type of free, organic marketing. But because many marketers go into forums purely with the intention of marketing, their actions and attitude unwittingly causes exactly the opposite to its desired effect. Forums, after all, are not marketplaces. But when used as such, the marketers' actions become offensive and will only inspire the wrath of fellow members and marketers, not to mention the moderators.

Before a marketer can effectively market on forums, they must first understand that this type of marketing -- in order to be effective -- carries a certain degree of commitment, responsibility and respect. To successfully market on any forum, the first requirement is to take a personal interest in the main topic of the forum. Not only does that mean visiting it regularly, but also developing a good relationship with both other members and the moderators, as well as taking an active interest in helping others. And, of course, it means abiding by any and all rules that exist. By doing this, one develops a reputation and, since it is human nature to work with a trusted colleague, business will naturally develop from this.

Because this type of marketing has already suffered some abuse, many forums have recently (and rightfully) developed stringent rules designed to protect their members from abusive or overly-aggressive marketing tactics. One forum, for instance, grants .sig files only after a member has created 100 valid posts; another has disallowed ads in sig files altogether.

Marketers must respect that the purpose of a forum is to be a platform to exchange ideas on a given topic, NOT merely to advertise their wares. And, contrary to what might be thought, this is especially true in marketing forums, where EVERYONE has something to advertise. But by focusing on the topic and posting responsible questions and answers, a marketer's reputation will grow. From this, the potential sales/sign-ups will naturally follow. Also, there are different types of forums, beyond the obvious topical types, of "marketing" or "special interest", etc.

These are examples of one type of forum, referred to as "open forums." But there are also business and professional forums, which do not operate under the same rules and, more often than not, disallow any and all types of advertising or self-promotion. Forums created to support the membership of a particular program are especially adamant on this topic and often request that all members check their adverts at the door. They ask this because advertising other programs -- especially to newer marketers -- can often compromise the very program the the forum was created to support.

With all that said, it is still possible to successfully market on forums. But in all cases, a pre-requisite for success is developing a good reputation and a good relationship and maintaining both. So, while this is a free form of advertising, it does require a certain amount of investment as far as time and energy are concerned, not to mention subtlety and finesse. Below are seven practical suggestions to successfully market on forums.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK Prior to joining any forums a certain amount of research is required.

1. Join relevant forums or forums that are in some way related to the promotion's primary sales market. For someone involved with a health related product, for instance, many types of forums -- from holistic medicine to mom's at home -- could apply. But to join a forum about punk music, for instance, would not be very productive.
2. Choose popular forums. Page ranking and the amount of active members are two good ways to check for this. This ensures that the forum will have enough members to remain active. Because forum marketing requires a certain amount of time invested, this also ensures that it will be there beyond tomorrow.
3. Choose forums that allow sig tags. If it's possible read the rules before joining and pay close attention to them. Your time is important, too. It is better to discover if a forum does not allow posts of any kind prior to joining. **YOUR FIRST DAY**
4. Read and follow the rules. Every forum is different. Some allow links only to your own website. Others only allow a certain number of links. One forum allows no more than five lines in a sig file, for instance. Beyond .sig files, respect all the rules and be a model member. Complaints will also give you a bad reputation, whether you're aware of it or not.
5. Keep your signature tag short and update it regularly. Ideally, limit yourself to one link, preferably to your main website. It presents a much more professional appearance and is less offensive to members and the moderators.
6. NEVER, EVER create posts that are nothing more than an advertisement. This is an all-but universal rule and only displays the marketers lack of experience. At best, the post will soon be edited, and, if left on the forum (although an

author can always delete their own posts), will only serve to hurt the marketer's reputation. At worst, it could be grounds for being banned. Some forums have a special Advertisement Section, an area where all members can post ads, though they are usually limited to no more than one per day. If no such section exists, after being a member for at least a few weeks, a marketer can send a Private Message (PM) to the moderator(s) and politely suggest that an advertising section be added. Point out that this would mollify any members from putting links in their .sig files, while allowing them a place to post their link. And, too, the advertising could become a service, since it would be at the members' discretion to view them. Of course, they may refuse, but at least you made the attempt.

7. Work the (for)room. That is, be an active member on the forum. Plan to spend at least an hour each day there and take the time to get to know the issues and other members. Depending on the forum's topic, both new and experienced marketers can introduce themselves well with intelligent questions. As a marketer becomes a regular member, they will develop a (hopefully) good reputation and, without saying a word about their promotion, those interested in their product or promotion will approach THEM.

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