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CASE STUDY

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Fractional Digital Marketing Team Drives Seasonal Online Business

Growing any online business is challenging, but for one that is focused on selling individually customized, seasonal gift items, it requires a consistent and deliberate digital marketing approach to reach and retain customers.

More than that, it takes digital strategies that can flex and re-engage at a moment's notice, and production processes that accommodate the special attention each order demands.

From Mall Kiosk to Nationwide Online E-Tailer

Like most businesses, this one started with a great idea and a lot of hard work. The owner began over 20 years ago, selling personalized, custom items from a kiosk in a regional mall. Items were (and still are) produced and customized one at a time according to customers' specifications. Today, this nationwide e-tailer delivers hundreds of thousands of personalized keepsakes to customers every year, many of whom make these highly customized creations a part of their annual family traditions.

Over twenty years, the home-grown business had reached a point where existing manual and digital resources could no longer keep up with demand. While they were indeed the experts when it came to creating their personalized items, this e-tailer needed a little help to refine their digital marketing strategies and tactics to help bring their business to the next level. They called periscopeUP.



Understanding the Business From the Inside Out

Picture an online marketplace that offers thousands of iterations of a hand-assembled product that can be customized to order. Thousands of SKUs, item descriptions, and variable options created ordering, production, and fulfillment challenges that were beginning to impact the e-tailer's ability to meet demand, much less scale the business for growth.

But that was just a small piece of the challenge ahead. All orders and activity were generated from a website that could no longer support the volume of ongoing edits and customization needed to manage product listings, customer orders, and demand. The increased order volume and the in-house team's ability to fulfill orders didn't always line up. This created a situation where staff had to work long hours to meet demand or create unhappy customers who had become accustomed to prompt, reliable delivery. Neither option was desirable or sustainable for a business that prides itself on a family-oriented workplace and 100% customer satisfaction.

Before undertaking any digital improvement efforts, the periscopeUP team worked as a fractional digital consultant directly with the e-tailer to understand every step of the business' production and delivery model – from the moment a potential customer searched online, through product selection, ordering, and fulfillment. Considerations such as ticketing, payment systems, and batch order processing were all subject to improvement and were a part of the overall plan.

A New WordPress Website and Technical SEO

After gaining a deep understanding of the business, one of the first major lifts involved migrating the client's aging website to a WordPress platform. The team carried over as much of the content and product information as possible, then set out to improve how the site operated for both e-tail staff and customers. As part of this process, customized order, SKU, and ticketing features were added to enhance flexibility, efficiency, and the resulting customer experience.

In tandem with the website rebuild was a deliberate focus on technical SEO, to ensure the site delivered on its organic search potential. Aside from using a reliable WordPress foundation, this process involved attention to important elements such as crawling, indexing, rendering, and overall web architecture.

Leveraging Website Analytics

With an optimized WordPress site and careful technical SEO strategies in place, the next area of focus was to take advantage of the rich website analytics that had been gathered before and after these digital marketing improvement efforts.

Results showed that the new website came at an opportune time and proved to be a game-changer for the business. COVID19 created unique demand for personalized items for medical care staff and others impacted by the pandemic. While many businesses were suffering lost revenue, this e-tailer's overall revenue increased 6.5% between 2019 and 2020. The gain was attributed to the 437% gain in organic traffic that resulted from having an updated and SEO-optimized new website.





GAINS FOLLOWING DIGITAL EFFORTS

OVERALL REVENUE
(2019-2020)

↑ 6.5%

ORGANIC
TRAFFIC

437% ↑

Fine-Tuning PPC Advertising

The periscopeUP team also refined and implemented paid search strategies to help the e-tailer manage order volume at sustainable rates. Now, the team, which includes periscopeUP's paid ad specialists, can ramp search ads up or down at a moment's notice, based on time of year, order volume, or other time-related influences on order demand (such as "Christmas in July" or other special promotions).

Much like the customized items being sold, this e-tailer's paid search advertising plan required tailored bidding strategies. The periscopeUP team stayed away from Google's AI-based bidding resources and instead focused on manual bidding efforts to best drive search results.

Initially, the client set a goal of a \$7 return on ad spend (ROAS). Paid search ROAS was \$10.50 (50% higher than the targeted goal) for 2019 paid search campaigns. Achieving positive results (more sales for a reduced ad budget) was made possible in part by focusing only on those keywords that were most likely to convert into sales and the ongoing management of negative match keyword terms.



*2019 Return on Ad Spend (ROAS)



Experimenting with Integrated Marketing and Outreach

With a new site, digital marketing tactics, and order volumes better managed, the periscopeUP team looked for additional ways to help online shoppers find this e-tailer's unique products in advance of the busy holiday season to come.

Several "niche" outreach opportunities were explored with the end goal of building relationships with bloggers or online influencers who might in turn drive awareness and future orders. Focus was given to very specific online communities that were well-suited for the products being sold (such as "mommy bloggers, military families, and families with children/new babies).

These efforts led to a substantial pool of potential promoters. Incentives such as gift certificates and complimentary custom products were offered via email outreach campaigns. In the end, the need for this kind of outreach was helpful, but not entirely necessary because order volumes continued to increase organically and in response to the targeted PPC tactics in place.

With the help of periscopeUP's fractional digital marketing services, this nationwide e-tailer can get back to creating the customized keepsakes that were the original focus on day one. Staff enjoys a more optimized, manageable approach to incoming orders and benefits from the refined processes that create a finely-tuned balance between ramping up for the busy season and dialing back during slower times of the year.

Fractional Digital Marketing From periscopeUP Was the difference-maker

- Understanding business goals and digital needs
- Migrating website to optimized WordPress platform
- Technical SEO & Analytics
- PPC Advertising with tailored bidding strategies
- Integrated Marketing and Outreach

How can periscopeUP help your business grow?

Does your business have growing pains? It may be time to look at the ways digital marketing experts can help you get to the next level.

Our fractional digital marketing team brings years of expertise to the kinds of problems that may be holding your business back. Issues like aging websites that are difficult to update and maintain, technical SEO problems, making the most of paid search dollars, and using integrated marketing campaigns to help you grow and scale your business – it's what we do.