

Immigration Law Firm | GUCL: Updating Traditional Marketing and Combining SEO to Broaden Reach

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Immigration Law Firm | GUCL: Updating Traditional Marketing and Combining with SEO to Broaden Reach

Some say that online marketing is not for every business. Businesses that provide services conducted under a high degree of privacy might view customer acquisition through in-person interactions as more effective. Immigration Law Firm | GUCL (GUCL), a firm providing highly customized and private services, proved that this may not always be the case.

For the past 30 years, GUCL had been providing full-service professional legal advice and representation for immigrant or non-immigrant visa needs. Its customers included professional workers, students, foreign or domestic businesses seeking to place employees in the U.S., refugees, investors and entrepreneurs. GUCL continuously sought new ways to maximize its reach to grow its business. Michael Pollak, its marketing consultant, learned about inbound marketing in March 2009 and decided to integrate online marketing with effective offline marketing strategies to reinforce its brand. Since it implemented online marketing strategies in July 2009, its website traffic grew by 3900% from 50 to over 2,500 website visitors per month. In addition, it had been achieving its essential goal of a strengthened brand and reach—the diversity of its online audiences had expanded to 70 countries. With an increasingly effective and affordable online marketing campaign, GUCL demonstrated that service companies did not have to solely rely on traditional marketing and could leverage online marketing to broaden a company's reach and enhance visibility.

The Beginning: Lacking an Integrated Approach with Traditional Marketing

GUCL previously invested in speaking engagements; guest articles to be published in bar journals, magazines, or books; TV and radio advertisements; and most of all, word-of-mouth promotion. Pollak recalled that speaking engagements were especially effective at generating leads and potential customers. The size of audiences GUCL could reach through seminars and word-of-mouth was nonetheless limited. If it could reach a broader audience and engage prospects on a one-to-many basis, it could increase the number of potential customers without having to invest a huge amount of time. In other words, Pollak saw an opportunity to expand the business by adding an alternative marketing approach.

Like many others, GUCL heard of the increasingly popular online marketing tactics, especially those involving search engines such as Google. At the time, however, it didn't know how to be found on search engines, not to mention how to rank well. Exploring organic search visibility led GUCL to discover a new way of online marketing—search engine optimization.

First Step: Creating Valuable Content

GUCL learned that to optimize search rankings, it needed to first create something worthy of searches—that is, helpful content. What could an immigration law firm write about that its potential customers—existing or prospective immigrants—would find engaging? Pollak

brainstormed blog article topics and soon came up with many ideas. Besides legal information surrounding visa or citizenship application, immigrants would like to explore different aspects of life in a foreign country before moving. Choosing to move to the U.S. was an important decision; it implied abandoning a familiar living environment, lifestyle, and culture in expectation of everything new. For example, finding a new school for children, searching for jobs, or picking a community to live in could be difficult since immigrants had no previous exposure to the living environment. Even though these topics were not directly related to GUCL's services, they did occupy its potential customers' interests. GUCL had received numerous inquiries on pre-immigration planning and, to engage prospects, decided to answer them by blogging. Employees wrote 3 posts on average per week, focused on unique long-tail keyword phrases in each post, and published content on GUCL's business pages on YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Having established and promoted substantial content on various social media sites, GUCL acquired a solid foundation for generating organic search traffic.

While its organic search was gathering momentum, GUCL knew that it could take some time before the new content would improve its organic search ranking. As a result, it targeted paid search as a short-term solution to gain a presence on Google. It simultaneously launched organic and paid search campaigns to send traffic to its landing pages. As GUCL employees became more proficient at using Google AdWords and getting found for certain keywords, its marketing budget decreased by 66% while its marketing effectiveness increased.

Paid search was also more effective at generating leads than radio and TV advertisements. Paid search supported GUCL's business growth in two important ways. First, it lowered the overall marketing budget. While GUCL's investment in speaking events and TV advertisements remained constant, paid search cost less over time. After experimenting with different times of day, geographical areas, and keyword phrases, GUCL also optimized its landing page conversion rate by using combinations of these ad elements. By matching keywords used in an ad campaign and the content of a landing page, GUCL signaled to Google that its site visitors would be relatively satisfied with the landing page and thus generate qualified traffic. Since Google favors qualified traffic (that's how it maintains a credible search engine and makes money), it rewarded GUCL by charging less money on its PPC campaigns.

The second advantage of using paid search was its supply of website traffic while the company was steadily improving its rankings in organic search. In other words, paid search sustained GUCL's reach to online audiences while the impact of organic search was relatively small and needed cultivation. Since organic search held the opportunity to send more traffic, cost less, and yield higher conversion, GUCL planned to incrementally reduce its reliance on paid search just as it did more traditional and costly marketing techniques. While GUCL still employed paid search, however, Pollak made sure to maximize the value of every dollar spent on PPC by continuously executing best practices in running ad campaigns.

Besides blogging, Pollak learned of other ways to optimize GUCL's website for organic search. That was when Pollak started tackling the more technical aspects of search engine optimization—website design.

Second Step: Optimizing Keywords on the Website & Acquiring Inbound Links

Pollak changed multiple elements of GUCL's website to help search engines such as Google and Bing rank their website for specific keywords. Pollak made sure that the page title, meta description, and heading summary contained specific and consistent keywords for every page. For instance, instead of "Home" or "Untitled," the title for a page on immigrant visa was "immigrant visas | permanent green card | ask questions here." Providing a meta description, on the other hand, gave search engines a summary of the content on a page. By closely matching a meta description with a page title, GUCL's website reaffirmed the keywords for a page and enhanced the likelihood of ranking for them. Pollak also simplified navigation on the website: he divided a page with multiple types of content into several pages, each with a focus on a specific topic and call-to-action. With more pages available for search, GUCL's website had more opportunities to be found on search engines. In addition, Pollak was able to devote different pages to unique keyword phrases. Doing so enabled different pages to focus on specific keywords and together optimize search rankings of GUCL's website for a wide range of keywords. The sitemap was clearer, making it more convenient for search engines to crawl new content.

Pollak also developed a local search strategy to create more opportunities to get found on search engines. In his words, "local search was the low-hanging fruit." For example, if GUCL optimized a particular page for information about Dallas, Texas, its website would have a larger chance of being found by someone searching for Dallas immigration lawyers. For more general keyword searches, GUCL faced more competitions but still retained an advantage in search ranking, thanks to keyword-focused blogging. The advantage grew as GUCL's blog grew in the number of blog articles and impact. With consistent sharing of immigration-related advice, GUCL accrued more subscribers and generated organic discussions among blog readers.

GUCL's increasingly popular blog also helped with off-page SEO, or the accrual of inbound links. Besides using valuable content to solicit inbound links, GUCL also registered in general and legal service directories, which directed more inbound links to GUCL's website. Within 12 months, GUCL accrued 1,726 inbound links from more than 190 third-party websites and 930 monthly blog page views. Inbound links reaffirmed the quality of content on GUCL's website and further enhanced its ability to rank high and generate more traffic on search engines.

Step 3: Updating Television Advertisement Using Google TV Ads

While its SEO and blogging strategies were starting to return results, GUCL continued investing in some traditional marketing techniques. Given the nature of its services, Pollak believed that in-person discussions during speaking events or private consultations were effective in creating trust in potential customers. Other businesses may view speaking one-on-one with clients as an ineffective use of time, but for immigration service providers, one-on-one consultation was often needed before a prospect showed any intent of hiring GUCL lawyers. From GUCL's perspective, then, offline marketing was important—if not indispensable—to cultivating potential customers and expanding its business. GUCL's speaking engagements were, however, similar to its online marketing strategies. Instead of explicitly promoting itself, GUCL

shared helpful legal information as it did through blogging, and it answered individual inquiries just like it responded to comments to blog posts. What differentiated the two was merely that one was conducted offline and the other online. In other words, Pollak integrated online marketing into GUCL's overall marketing strategy to broaden reach. Although investment in online marketing increased as that in offline marketing decreased, GUCL retained effective offline marketing techniques to yield trust from and nurture leads.

Pollak also found a way to integrate TV advertisement with web technology. Using Google TV ads, GUCL was able to display TV commercials at affordable rates. Google TV Ads provided an interface to bid on the ad space for respective networks the same way a business would bid for keywords on Google AdWords. Pollak possessed complete control over the budget and were allowed to bid in smaller increments—that is, on a program by program basis with no long-term commitments. Pollak was also able to measure TV impressions and resulting website traffic data to see how its TV commercial drove business results. The cost per lead was approximately 60 dollars and GUCL obtained several customers from this channel. “We plan to create a new ad and run additional campaigns as the existing one more than paid for itself,” said Pollak. GUCL’s adoption of Google TV Ads was another indicator of the parallelism between its offline and online marketing strategies and reaffirmed that employing both strategies would effectively drive sustained business growth.

Measuring Results

GUCL updated its traditional marketing techniques, adopted novel online marketing ones, and consistently employed both. With incremental revisions, GUCL saw significant results over the past year. It grew online monthly leads from less than 10 to 180 and monthly lead conversion rate to 7%. It accrued 287 subscribers and 1,828 friends on YouTube, 380 followers on Twitter, and 50 clients. In addition, it expanded its international footprint to over 70 countries including South Africa, Algeria, and Israel. Its goal of growing organic search and lessening reliance on paid search was also coming to realization. From its previous rate of 40 monthly visits, GUCL grew its organic search traffic by 2,500% to 1,000 per month, and reached a 7.6% lead conversion rate for competitive keywords such as “immigration” on Bing.

Pollak's ultimate goal was to strengthen GUCL's online brand and acquire enough reach and visibility through organic search to further reduce GUCL's reliance on traditional marketing. “We are not quite there yet,” said Pollak, “but with our current level of investment in inbound marketing, we believe we will get there in the near future.”

Appendix

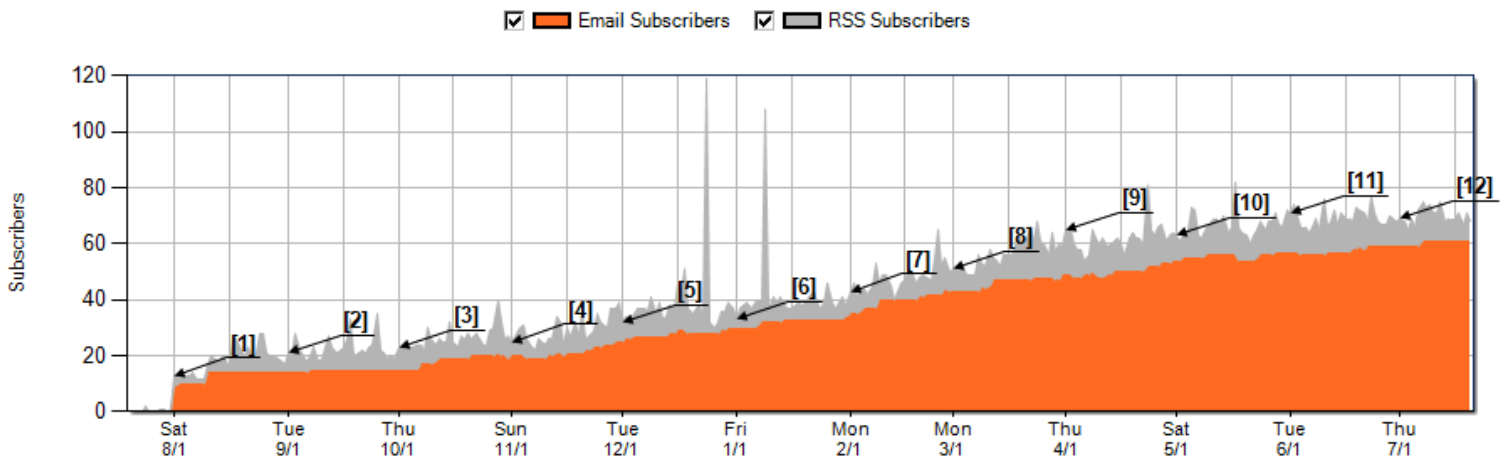


Figure 1.1 Subscribers to GUCL's Blog from August 2009 to July 2010

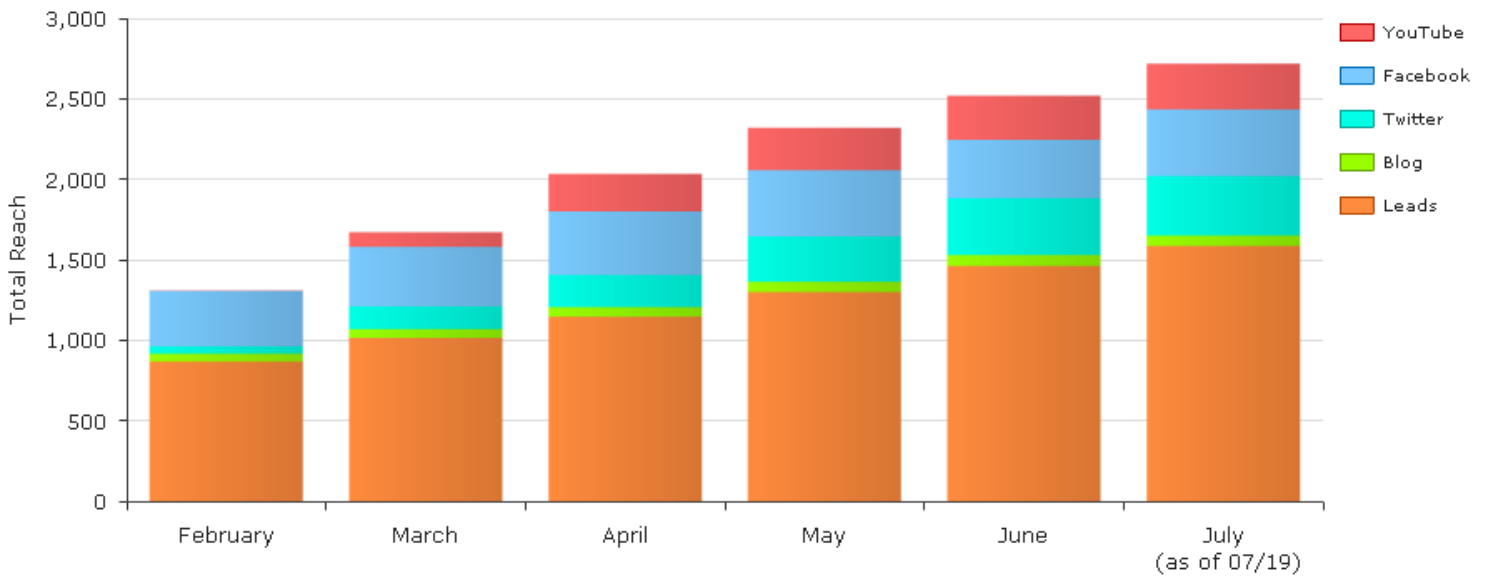


Figure 1.2 Size of Reach on Social Media Sites from February 2010 to July 2010

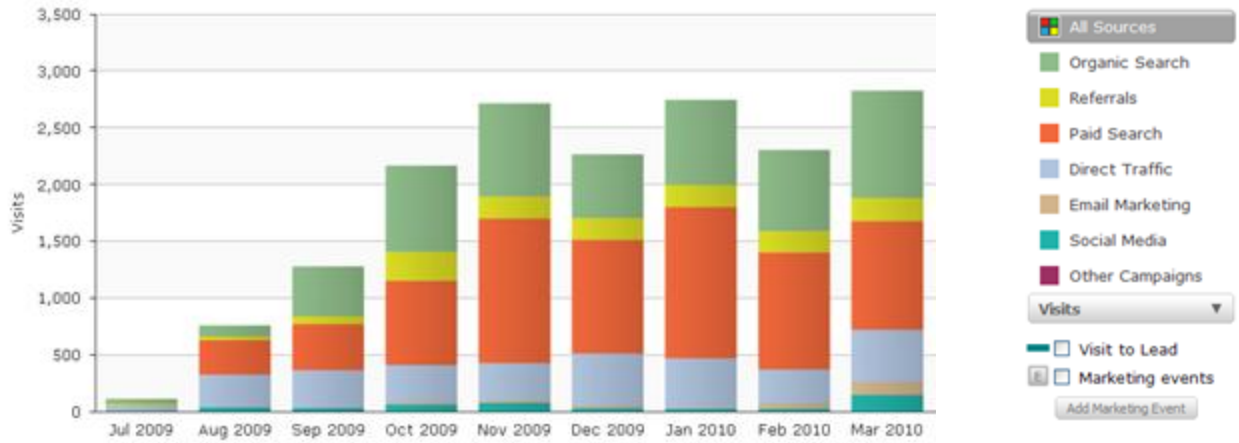


Figure 1.3 Sources and Volume of Website Traffic from July 2009 to March 2010