



marketing mix

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Your customer contact portal

DRIVE CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS TO YOUR WEBSITE, NOT YOUR OFFICE

Some consumers may still think of propane companies as throwbacks to the days when most customer relations were conducted over the counter at a propane office.

But the internet and social media have changed that for most businesses, including propane retailers. Many propane companies no longer have offices open to the public, and the services available are limited to cylinder and autogas refills only. Propane retailers are now much less dependent on walk-in consumer traffic to gain and retain delivered propane business.

Younger generations are looking for goods, services and information online in your virtual office, and they don't expect to make a visit to a physical location to get answers to their questions about things like propane usage, safety and choosing a delivered propane provider. Those consumers are looking for information on the internet with their smartphones and laptops.

Whether you have a physical office open to the public or not, your website and accompanying social media platform are far more important as a virtual office, serving as a primary customer and prospect contact portal open 24 hours a day.

Assuming all the propane competitors in your marketing area also have varying quality websites, the challenge for you as a propane retailer is to make sure your website is the easiest to find

and establishes you as a propane expert. You can do this with high-quality content that can answer most customers' questions online, including sign-up for delivered propane service. A click-to-call feature should also be incorporated into your website as a backup for consumers wanting to talk with a live representative to get additional information.

Designing and implementing a highly effective website depends on having a qualified website developer, but that is only the beginning of having a virtual office that distinguishes you from your propane competitors. You want consumers to be able to find you first when they search for propane information. Consider that your propane virtual office is in the same small town – the internet – where all your propane competitors are located, too. Instead of going to Google Maps to find your physical office location, consumers looking for propane answers go to Google Search or a similar search engine to find your virtual office location. Google and other search engines have algorithms that reward websites that have ongoing new content and rank them higher in search results.

For example, if a website has not added new content in three years, it will be outranked by a site that regularly updates its content. Fresh content that uses keywords that people type into the search bar and the volume of traffic a website gets are both part of the algorithm that search engines use to rank your website. Having a higher-ranking website means consumers will find your virtual office before they find your competitors' offices.

One of the better ways for propane companies to introduce new content

to their websites is to post periodic blogs, either in written or video format (vlogs), to establish themselves as experts in the field, distinguishing themselves from competitors. Blog content should be created to match what consumers are seeking.

For example, a consumer inquiry could be: "What size propane tank do I need?" A blog about tank sizing helps establish a company as an expert in the field and improves search engine rankings. This blog approach ensures the content is relevant and useful to the audience. Searchers are likely to stay longer and explore more pages on your website, which also positively impacts the website ranking.

Blog posts on your website should concentrate on search-driven content, while social media posts such as Facebook should highlight company news, customer appreciation events, and community involvement. Facebook posts may include a link to a blog on the company's website, which can attract users to click and read the full article, again increasing website traffic.

No matter what business model you choose for your propane company, do not neglect your virtual office. Your website and supporting social media platforms are your most important portals for interaction with your customers and prospects. Is the content fresh and relevant? Customers finding you first in that same small town, the internet, depends on it. **LPG**

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