



Web Strategy - Ryder Cup Case Study

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Introduction

Aonach is a specialist internet consultancy. Our focus is to help businesses get more from their online presence by creating and implementing web strategies. Our consultancy is always confidential as our service is often strategic in nature. This led to the need for a case study where we could freely demonstrate the effect our expertise can have.

Why would you read this case study? Well it is very pertinent if you want to:

1. Compete online
2. Generate qualified traffic to your website
3. Get found on the first page of search engines such as Google
4. Raise the profile of your business online

With a small expert team we took on international brands such as Rolex, NBC, Fox, The Guardian, AIB (and others) and beat them online, achieving some amazing results.

The Problem

The first problem was to define a subject for the case study that would be compelling. In choosing a suitable case study we wanted to target something that would be readily understood and have a wide appeal. People rarely have time to examine how the online intricacies of other businesses could pertain to their own. Our case study therefore needed to be simple and universal. We also wanted something that was of global interest with a global market. Back in May 2006 the 36th Ryder Cup, to be held at the K Club in Ireland, was beginning to generate interest in the media. This was the perfect vehicle for a case study. Some of the aspects which made this a good contender for selection included:

1. There is large national and international general audience for The Ryder Cup.
2. Sport is universal and as a case study would be widely understood.
3. The Ryder Cup is a premium high-cachet event attracting corporate sponsors and partners such as AIB, Bord Bia, Ballygowan, BMW, Budweiser, Allianz, KPMG and O2 amongst others.
4. Online, the Ryder Cup event would be a very competitive marketplace with a wide range of large players. In addition to the official sponsors and partners there was the online offering from the traditional media (Fox, NBC, Guardian, BBC, RTE, Sky) as well as the official PGA site and a number of specialist golf sites.
5. Finally – I knew absolutely nothing about golf! This was the perfect showcase to demonstrate that even starting with a completely blank slate a good internet strategy can put you in the game.

The most common problem that businesses face when they decide to sell online is that in their excitement at the opportunity to sell to a ‘global’ marketplace they have forgotten that they will often have to compete with larger, more technically savvy competitors; competitors who are already established in the marketplace and who are targeting *your* back yard as *their* “global marketplace”.

It’s a common enough tale. The board decides you need a website. You launch your e-commerce programme, you talk to the technical staff (who seem to speak another language), you design your site and you launch it. Then you wait. What happens next? Most often very little. Why? Well online success is all about traffic – traffic quantity and quality. It is a percentages game; you will sell to a percentage of the people who visit your site (assuming that you have a credible product and have got the pricing and logistics correct). The problem is one of scale, as the conversion rates are typically very low you need high volumes of (quality) traffic to your website. Incredibly most businesses still operate on a “build it and they will come” basis.

So how would we compete in a global market place for the Ryder Cup? The opposition were bigger, better funded, had much longer established websites and they probably knew something about golf!

The Plan

If you want to compete online you have to have a plan.

That sounds obvious (it is!) but is still pertinent. If you want to build a successful website you have to know what you are trying to do and why. Amazingly the majority of businesses that “have a website” still have little if any concrete plan driving it.

The first thing to decide is what the function of your site is. Are you trying to:

1. Sell an online service or software with online fulfilment.
2. Sell a product or service online for offline fulfilment.
3. Generate leads to support a more complex sale offline.
4. Support your offline brand.

The next step is to put together a strategy to help you achieve your goals. How do you intend to attract relevant people to your site and convert them into clients?

When you want to sell online you need to attract traffic to your site. This can be done in a number of ways:

1. Pay for traffic through online advertising:
 - a. Search Engine Marketing (Google AdWords, Overture etc)
 - b. Banner Advertising (Double Click, Ad-Tech.com, AdBrite.com etc)
 - c. Pay for links and features on other sites
 - d. Email newsletter campaigns

2. Generate traffic through offline promotion:
 - a. Traditional media advertisements
 - b. Positioning yourself as an expert and being interviewed
 - c. Referencing your site in all printed material you circulate

3. Generate free (organic) online traffic:
 - a. Search traffic
 - b. Blog traffic

Our focus was on the generation of free online traffic. Generating free traffic is the key to offsetting the cost of acquiring customers. Businesses need a multi-track approach to the generation of qualified traffic and the generation of free qualified traffic is the most complex part of this equation. We therefore focused our case study on generating traffic through organic searches, blogs and brand building.

Google is the gatekeeper of internet traffic. Increasingly people use Google exclusively to find sites that offer information, products or services that they are looking for. Our aim was to target the Google search market for all Ryder Cup related topics and to go head to head online with the companies who were spending million euro budgets supporting the event. The goal was to become a recognised trusted provider of information on the Ryder Cup and to create a microbrand online.

The Ryder Diary

The first step was to register a domain that would lend credibility to the site. After some research we decided that RyderDiary.com was a good strong name and would allow us to position ourselves as a source of regular, relevant content for the Ryder Cup. The next step was to design and build a findable site.

Design

There are two primary aspects to the design of a website. First of all there's the technical design. Unfortunately most sites are designed to appeal to the marketing manager, the internet sub-committee and everyone who cares to comment. This is a mistake. The most important visitor to your site is not the people in your organisation but rather the search engine spiders. Your site should be designed to appeal to the spider and to let the spider know what your site is about and what's important on your site. It's important to have a web standards compliant site with an architectural plan designed to reinforce the findability of the site. The trick is to research the market, find out what's missing and reverse engineer your site's architecture and design to service the gap.

The second aspect to the site design is the look and feel. When designing the look and feel of the site it's important to bear in mind that it is a task that is more akin to decorating an investment property for rental rather than designing your dream home. It needs to appeal to a wide audience of potential clients. We chose a simple clean template with a grass theme to visually instantly reinforce the golfing subject matter.

The look and feel is fundamental to reinforcing your credibility. This is a factor that is often overlooked but plays a major role in determining whether a new user landing on your site will delve into the site or hit the back button. The simple, usable design we chose gave us a high number of page views per visit and a large proportion of return traffic.

Build

We chose Wordpress as the platform for our site. Wordpress is one of the most successful blogging platforms as it is both stable and easy to customise. Furthermore, it is web standards compliant, easy to deploy and has a large developer community supporting it with plug-ins and widgets. With the right focus and add-ons and a little effort it can be tuned into a powerful findable platform. We wanted to demonstrate that you don't necessarily need an expensive content management system to compete online. Using Wordpress also allowed us to plug into the social software phenomenon of the blogosphere.

Publish

Publishing regular and relevant content was fundamental to targeting the natural search traffic for Google. Instead of solely concentrating on the well worn topics of the golfing personalities and the course, we targeted articles on the practicalities of the event which were not so well covered; how to get there, how to change your tickets, who was going to make the teams etc. We did a lot of research on the subject and published over 130 Ryder Cup related articles over a period of time. This covered a large amount of the "long tail" of Ryder Cup related searches. This was combined with a content strategy that tied the articles together and presented the site to the search engine spiders in a hierarchical format constantly reinforcing the main topic of the site as "the Ryder Cup".

Measure

To establish the effect of your strategy you have to be able to accurately measure the traffic and user behaviour on the site. There are large differences between the numbers generated by various website measuring tools (see full article [here](#)). We chose Google Analytics as our primary system and configured the site accordingly. This gave us a very fine grained tool to allow us to measure the success of the site.

Promote

We began a concerted campaign to promote the domain online. We first registered with all the major search engines. Next we began a large link strategy to encourage other websites to link to us. Closer to the event this was supported by offline promotion through expert interviews and word of mouth.

Naturally most businesses would promote themselves offline through advertising and brand reinforcement on all printed collateral. RyderDiary.com was promoted almost exclusively online.

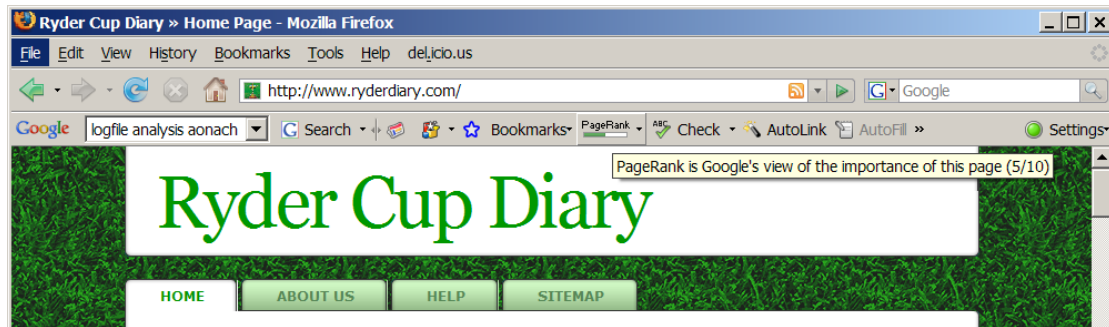
The Results

The results of this case study were startling. Starting from zero with no subject expertise we managed to position ourselves as subject matter experts online within a very short period of time.

This was based on a very simple foundation stone – “If you make money for Google – they will make money for you”. What does this mean? Google makes over \$10Bn a year serving adverts to the people who use their search engine. It needs to perform extremely well in terms of the relevance of its natural results to ensure that those people searching for Product A today will be delighted with the results and come back tomorrow to search for Product B (and be advertised to repeatedly). This is where you can help make money for Google – if you publish regular, relevant content on your site that pertains to the terms you wish to be found for you will support Google with the content it needs to make money from advertising.

Page Rank

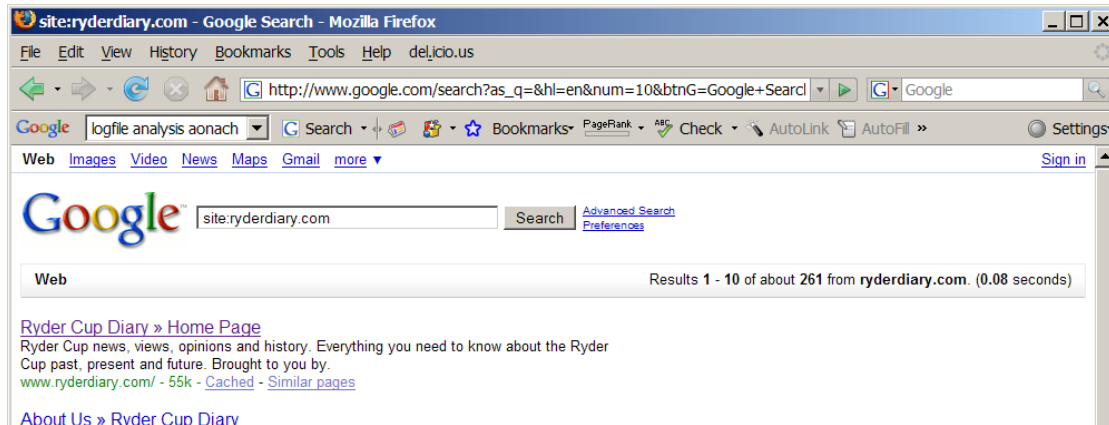
The RyderDiary.com domain has a Google Page Rank of 5. This is a measure of the importance Google attributes to your website. A PR of 0 is poor and a PR of 10 is the preserve of a very select few such as microsoft.com and google.com (it is a logarithmic scale).



To view the Page Rank of your own site, download the Google Toolbar from Google at the following address: <http://www.google.com/options/> click on the Toolbar option – this will download a search toolbar with a Page Rank indicator for your browser.

Content Indexed

The content indexed by Google and available for search is an important factor. As you can see below there are 261 pages indexed for ryderdiary.com. This shows the benefits of designing the architecture of the site for the search engines - to ensure that all your content at all levels of the site's hierarchy are included.



External Links

The number of inbound links you have from external sites is another important factor. As you can see below there are 1875 links to www.Ryderdiary.com

Google Webmaster Tools

Dashboard > http://www.ryderdiary.com/ > Pages with external links >

Diagnostic Statistics **Links** Sitemaps Sites

External links Internal links

Pages with external links [?]

This table provides a list of pages on http://www.ryderdiary.com/ that have links pointing to them from other sites. Click the number in the External links column to see a sample list of links to the page. See [Internal links](#) for internal links and links from subdomains.

1 to 30 of 120 Next

Find a page Items per page: 30

Pages	External links
All pages (total links)	1875
http://www.ryderdiary.com/	1122
http://www.ryderdiary.com/a-close-contest/	4

Search Engine Results Position

There are four main sources of traffic online; direct, paid through advertising, referrals from other sites and search engine generated traffic. Our focus was to target the search engine traffic from the outset and this was borne out with 70-75% of all traffic coming from various search engines. Of these Google was the clear leader comprising of over 80% of the search engine generated traffic.

The initial search term we had targeted was to ensure we were the number one result for our name “Ryder Cup Diary”. This was complicated by the fact that the position was held by the BBC who had previously run an extensive mini-site under the heading Ryder Cup Diary. Once the initial momentum in the search engines began after a period of months RyderDiary.com became established for a very large long tail of search terms for which it performs well (basically Ryder Cup + anything). This is borne out in the site statistics which show a very large number of distinct search terms almost all of which are Ryder Cup related in some form or another (proving the relevancy of the site’s content).

Google Search Results - (Hold down Ctrl and Click the link to view)

Search Term	Page	SERP
Ryder Cup Diary	Page 1	Position No 1
Ryder Cup Books	Page 1	Position No 3
Ryder Cup News	Page 1	Position No 6
Ryder Cup Course Guide	Page 1	Position No 1
Ryder Cup Sponsor	Page 1	Position No 4
Ryder Cup Viewers	Page 1	Position No 1
Ryder Cup Map	Page 1	Position No 5
Ryder Cup Hotel	Page 1	Position No 5
Ryder Cup Corporate Hospitality	Page 1	Position No 6
Ryder Cup K Club	Page 1	Position No 6
Ryder Cup Celtic Manor	Page 1	Position No 6
Ryder Cup Valhalla	Page 1	Position No 7
Tickets for Ryder Cup 2008	Page 1	Position No 3
Ryder Cup	Page 1	Position No 6

Note these results are for searches on the main site Google.com and are correct at the time of writing.

Offline Impact

The site won a huge amount of traffic at the time of the Ryder Cup however more surprisingly we were interviewed by Today FM's "The Last Word" and Newstalk 104 as experts on the Ryder Cup. We were also profiled by the BBC. This boosted Aonach's profile as internet strategists as the site is sponsored by Aonach.com. This was substantiated by the increased traffic experienced on Aonach.com at the same time.

Conclusion

The conclusion is simple. If you have a good strategy and the know how to implement a good findable site it is possible to compete globally, even in the most high profile arenas. In this case a small operation, with no knowledge of the sport, successfully competed online with the large corporate sponsors and partners for the online audience relating to the Ryder Cup.

How?

1. A good web strategy.
2. A suitable content strategy with supporting architecture.
3. A standards compliant website.
4. A linking strategy.
5. A systematic content strategy.
6. A lot of hard work!

The RyderDiary.com was simply an experiment in competing for free global traffic. Online sales are a product of traffic volume, traffic quality and ability to convert to sale. Aonach specialises in all aspects of online business.

Contact [Aonach](#) to find out how we can help your business get more from the internet. If you need help being found, marketing your site or improving your conversion rate, we are the experts.