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Hot Touchspots in Your Tech Toolbox: Routine Tasks Simplified

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Working in our profession, personal relationships cannot be sacrificed at the altar of technology for the cool factor. That's why when you reach into your personal technology toolbox, the tool you select had better simplify rather than intensify the time you need to execute an action. There are five relatively quiet, newer players on the scene that do simply tasks smarter, and save time.

Targeting Leads: Jigsaw

We've all called around trying to find the right person inside a large organization for business development either for ourselves or our clients. This can be frustrating and time-consuming. Now there are thousands of others who also have had the same experience willing to share their electronic rolodexs with you at Jigsaw (www.jigsaw.com). The system does allow for a trial period to get a "taste" of what is available. When looking for contacts in large corporate environments, such as Google, for instance, there are a number of valuable listings that can assist in that target marketing. It is a salesman's best friend, and the expense structure is attractive. For every verifiable contact name you put in, you get credit to look for your own. Of course, you can pay to assemble what you need as well. They list their objective as, "Aims to increase efficiency in the buying and selling process by providing a collaborative database of business contacts." I say it eliminates headaches, and gets you to target names of real people real fast. 5 million contacts with phone numbers and email addresses available now. Cost: \$25 a month or add 25 contacts a month.

Charitable Giving: Community Plus

If you are working with a non-profit, sign them up to benefit from online shoppers. At this point, there is no avoiding shopping online for every manner of good or service, so if you are going to do it, then do through a site that generates charitable donations with each click to your favorite charity.

This site, www.communityplus.com, allows anyone to create a profile and shop at more than 600 merchants, such as Walmart and The Gap, while giving up to five percent to favorite charities through those regularly-priced purchases. Founder Jeff Tietzer had a simple model of creating a loyalty program for shopping online to benefit nonprofits, proving that one person can make a difference. Each merchant designates the level of giving based on your purchases.

Old-Fashioned Cards: SendOutCards

We all send email now as routinely as waking up in the morning, but remember the days when you used to get greeting cards in the mail? One company has determined a great many people still enjoy opening up snail mail when it's a greeting card or even a postcard. SendOutCards (www.sendoutcards.com) is a new network marketing company that allows you to sign others up and make money on everyone in your line who seamlessly sends out cards to business contacts after events, for special occasions, or just for fun. The system will take excel or Microsoft Outlook databases, for example, and you can set up groups. A record is kept of each card sent. If you gave out wrong information after you assembled a quick mailing, delete the campaign before midnight and it won't go. Cards are batched and go through a Salt Lake City distribution system. Then start with your template and begin again. Once you have contacts in the system, sending the cards is simple, and direct. There is a card catalog or you can upload your own creations for special events, leads generation, or any number of other mailings. The fee structures are based on points. You pay for postage through credit card or Paypal. You can cancel anytime the monthly fee for cards, and you can roll them over to do a large mailing, such as Christmas cards. To get in to the network, you must sign up through another registered user. www.sendoutcards.com/aspectx

Another Toolbar Bringing Community: Conduit

We've all gotten used to Google and Yahoo toolbar technology, and it makes quick work of searching and navigating at will. In the last two years, another toolbar has become the new digital platform for instant community. Conduit (conduit.com) was just recognized for its breakthrough innovation in creating a game-changing, persistent digital media channel by AlwaysOn as a top 100 private company selection. It now has over 12 million users with 130,000 publishers and a new user every 2 seconds. Anyone can create, and instantly launch, their community toolbar. Here is a way to reach people that gives social search mainstream staying power. The operative word is free, so there is nothing to lose in using it to promote even a small business client with this search monetization model. Key players with Conduit include ReMax, Greenpeace, and Major League Baseball.

Pushing Video Ads: AOL/PointRoll Video Advertising

Gannett Co. and AOL with its partner, PointRoll, will develop several versions of ads online being delivered as video exclusively this year. It appears another rendition of popup-style ads with video, where you must watch it, before moving to a news clip, and it will take over our traditional news sites. The deal was announced in March of this year, and should bear fruit shortly.

Whether this is a hot new way to push messaging, or just another stop on the Internet personalization train, remains to be seen. But knowing what is happening, may lead you to opportunities for your clients.

Public relations practitioners operating in the technology sectors are increasingly moving into full integrated communications services. Marrying the best of the technologies that simplistically open up new audiences can be key. Experiment for yourself. Your tech toolbox essentials will continue to grow.

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ASPECTx

ASPECTx, based in Louisville, provides competitive intelligence, public relations, marketing, web consulting, and business development services to companies in growth sectors, particularly high technology and healthcare. The firm works with Fortune 1000 companies as well as startups in the business-to-business sector from strategy through to tactics. www.aspectx.com