

by Kim Katwijk and Barbara Cooke

# Market Your Deck Business

Get noticed online and in the media



**DECK BUILDERS**  
ARTISTRY • IN • DECKS

- Home
- Contractor
- Designing
- Materials
- Construction
- Covers/Enclosures
- Q & A
- Contact Us

**Your Dream Deck Awaits...**

**Fine Homebuilding.com**  
Picture a beautifully designed custom deck as the centerpiece of your outdoor entertaining. Relax and unwind on a sun-warmed deck. Imagine the fun times you and your family will spend in the fresh air.

**Winner of 'Our Deck Contest'**  
**CLICK FOR DETAILS!**

You can expect more from Olympia's finest deck builder. Rest assured that with Deck Builders, Inc. your new deck is built to last. Using the best decking and railing materials, the goal of our talented deck artisans is to build you a backyard paradise! We'll create an

**GET TO KNOW US**  
WATCH OUR YouTube VIDEO DEMONSTRATION  
VIEW OUR PHOTO SLIDESHOW

One of the greatest challenges of running a small business is standing out from the crowd. Whether your competition is other small businesses or larger companies, you need to differentiate yourself through well-planned marketing.

The first step is to focus your marketing efforts where your customers will see them. The old standbys — newspaper ads, direct mail, and Yellow Page listings — are not as effective as they were in pre-Internet times. Internet has become king, and if potential customers can't find you online, you're missing a great opportunity.

Complementing Internet marketing is guerilla marketing — getting your name in the media, from newspapers and magazines to radio and TV. This sort of publicity has built-in credibility, and apart from the time it takes to gain the recognition, it's free.

## **A Compelling Web Site**

In the book “Outrageous Advertising That’s Outrageously Successful,” author Bill Glazer offers the following advice, which you can apply to your Web site to lure viewers in:

1. Grab attention by using a great photo, the more memorable or outrageous the better.
2. Use a catchy headline to reel people in. Also, use subheadings to direct a viewer’s attention through your Web pages. Since people don’t so much read anymore as they gulp snippets of information, help them get the message through headlines, text that’s set apart in boxes, and pull-out quotes or testimonials.
3. Make an offer so viewers have a reason to contact you. It can be as subtle as setting yourself up as an expert who can meet every need, or as direct as offering a free estimate or consultation.
4. Make it easy for customers to contact you. Your name, phone number, and e-mail address should appear on every page of your Web site so customers don’t have to search for this information. You should also have a “contact us” page.

Design your Web site to be aesthetically pleasing to your target market so they’ll want to spend time browsing it. My target market is women between the ages of 40 and 60, and I think that’s typical for deck builders. Select

colors, shapes, and design elements that are feminine in nature, instead of what you’d use if you were targeting men. Eliminate as much clutter as you can — when it comes to Web design, less is often more.

## **Optimize Your Web Site**

Everyone who has a Web site wants to be listed on the first page of search engine (like Google) query results. This doesn’t just happen when you launch your site; you need to use search engine optimization (SEO) techniques.

For instance, search engines track the length of time a Web site is active. The longer you have had the domain name and paid for its use, the higher your site will be ranked by search engines. If you’re paying for your domain name on an annual basis, consider converting to a longer time commitment, such as 10 years.

Also, get people to link to your Web site, because that will raise your standing on search engines.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to obtain a high ranking, although it takes time and testing, is to embed keywords and meta tags (bits of hidden HTML code that describe your site to search engines) in your copy and in the HTML language running your site. Ask your Web designer to include these. You need to use

the right words — like “deck builder” and “composite decking,” for example, and the names of locations you do business in — or the chances of potential clients finding you are slim.

You can get ideas by looking at the keywords and meta tags on competitors’ Web sites — go to

the highest ranking ones, which will be at the top of a Google or Bing search. Once you are on a site, you will almost always be able to “view” the “source” documentation through your browser’s pull-down menu (**Figure 1**). It may initially look like gibberish, but take your time. Search for “keywords,” “title,” and “headline” and incorporate some of the words and phrases you find into your own Web site. Another tactic is to use online programs to see what terms people use when searching for deck builders (Wordtracker, at wordtracker.com, and Google Analytics, at google.com/analytics, are two examples).

## Dynamic Videos

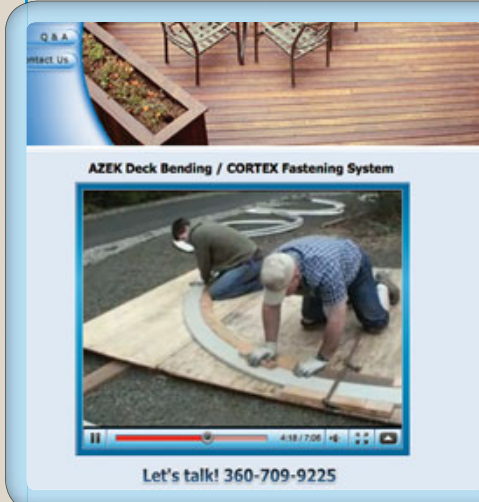
In his book, “The Ultimate Marketing Plan,” marketing guru Dan S. Kennedy writes that more people will listen to a message than will read one, and that it’s important to provide potential customers with this option. Adding a visual aspect to an audio message is even better, as more people are likely to respond to a video than to something they listen to. According to Bitemark, a Web marketing agency (conversion rate.com.au), conversion rates are higher when people are able to watch videos of what they’re looking for, so seriously consider this killer technique to gain business.

You can take advantage of this dynamic medium — and so establish a relationship with your potential customers before you even talk with them — by creating multiple 30- to 120-second videos about you and your business (**Figure 2**). Whether you shoot the footage yourself or hire a videographer to shoot and edit the video for you, start with a script or an outline so you’re clear on exactly what you’re selling and the impression you want to make. For content, show your construction techniques, like how you use a certain bit to rout or edge a deck — details you can’t show in any other way. Feature finished decks with comments from satisfied customers or provide mini infomercials. And be sure to create a “personality” video, which is your opportunity to show viewers you are likable and trustworthy, two of the top reasons people choose a particular deck builder.

A couple of technical suggestions: Filming on a lightly clouded day tends to knock out harsh shadows and provide better results. And



**Figure 1.** Search engines like Google and Bing focus on “keywords” in the text, and on “meta tags” (circled), which are behind-the-scene blts of HTML code on a Web site.



**Figure 2.** Adding video to your Web site makes it more interesting to potential customers and keeps them there longer.



if you're doing your own filming, don't depend on the camera's microphone. Buy one that clips onto the subject and plugs into the camera.

Add your videos to your Web site or launch them separately on YouTube (**Figure 3**). Either should generate more traffic to your site, and people will linger longer. According to Comscore, a Web research company, Americans viewed more than 16 billion videos online during a single month in 2009, and each unique viewer watched slightly more than 110 videos.

So take that leap out of the ocean of boring Web sites and get noticed. Be bold. Use creativity. And most important, tell a compelling story that includes a call to action — give potential customers several reasons to contact you to build their deck.

### Become a Recognized Expert

Recognized experts are respected and sought after, and their reputations bring in work. Dan Kennedy writes that being an expert is a great way “to get favorable media attention and

publicity.” Becoming an expert takes time and requires personal commitment. The idea is to share as much information as you can with as many people as possible, which may take you out of your comfort zone, but when people turn to you for answers, they become your greatest proponents and best salespeople.

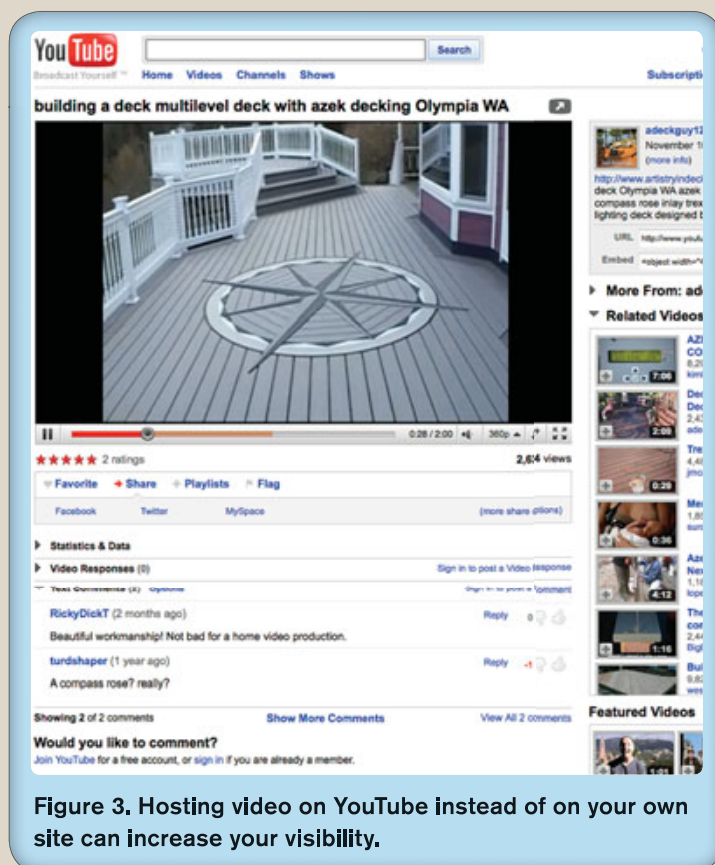
### Blog Your Way to Fame

One way to be seen as an expert — and get free publicity — is through a company blog attached to your Web site. An easy-to-set-up blog will provide you with a public forum to share your expertise about decks. Select topics that will interest your customer base, such as statistics on how a deck increases the value of a home, maintenance for different kinds of decks, safety issues, new deck building techniques, or improvements to decks (adding covers, creating multiseason rooms, and the like). Posts (or individual messages) on your blog don't need to be long, just interesting and informative. A well-written post should engage readers so they will respond to your messages, thereby opening a dialog and creating a following.

Companies that use blogs generate business through them, and the more active the blog, the higher the conversion rate. Research published by Hubspot.com, a Web site consulting company, indicates that to be effective, a blog should have at least one post per week; daily posts result in even higher conversion rates. When you establish your blog, be sure to include an RSS link to allow your regular readers to subscribe and automatically be informed every time you add a post. This builds a following, which contributes to your image of being an expert. An added benefit of a blog is that search engine Web crawlers go through blogs and give sites with blogs higher rankings.

### Getting Free Publicity

Newspapers, magazines, and trade journals are also excellent at generating free publicity, providing widespread exposure, and building your reputation as an expert. Most of these have online versions, too, which often offer features and information not found in the print counterparts. According to the Pew Research Center, 2009 saw the Internet overtake newspapers



**Figure 3.** Hosting video on YouTube instead of on your own site can increase your visibility.

as the primary place people go to get news. Though the statistics are age-driven, with those under 35 being the major Internet news users, even those over 35 turn to online newspapers for up-to-the-minute news and more-detailed feature stories.

The key to getting published in these media, whether print or online, is to develop a relationship with the editors and reporters who are most likely to print articles about your services or products. According to Dan Kennedy, one way you can do this is to send them news releases. For example, if you are a NADRA member, you can forward information on Deck Safety Month, or if your local chapter has a decks-for-soldiers program, forward that information. This shows you are plugged in and can provide valuable ideas for potential stories.

You should also check whether the newspapers or magazines have editorial calendars or schedules for special editions. In a home or landscape architecture issue, an article about decks could add to the richness of the overall publication content. Be aware that magazines work on content three to six months ahead of publication, and newspaper supplements begin their writing weeks before printing. If you want

to write for a specific issue, plan ahead and begin your pitch early to even be considered. Also, when pitching your idea, focus on the value of the topic to the reader, not on yourself or your work. Depending on the story idea, however, there may be opportunities to include examples of your work or that of associates.

As you develop relationships with key editors and reporters, it's critical to provide value; do not contact them just to keep your name in front of them (it's easy to cross the line between being helpful and being a nuisance, so be careful). In time, journalists will begin to equate you with the deck construction industry, and when questions arise about decks, they'll think of you first and contact you for comments.

Once you've been recognized as an expert, the door will open for you to appear on radio talk shows or TV programs. Before you pitch an idea, make sure you are familiar with the program you would like to be on. Know who the host is, what his or her interview style is like, and what types of stories are covered. Tailor your idea to the program's format. Provide information about your qualifications, including anything you've had published and any speaking or teaching engagements you've had; these last demonstrate your ability to work or perform before crowds.

### How Do Customers Find You?

Record how people found you, whether it was through an Internet search, a YouTube video, the Yellow Pages, or a referral. Ask for this information on your Web site's contact page and on the phone every time a potential customer calls (**Figure 4**). Also, track the quality of your calls. You'll probably find that you convert three out of four leads from referrals, and maybe one of five from the old standby marketing media. Regardless of what you find, the resulting information will be invaluable for calculating your return on investment and determining where to spend your marketing dollars so they have the most impact. ♦

*Kim Katwijk builds decks in Olympia, Wash., and is a principal at DeckEngineering.com. Barbara Cooke is a freelance writer.*

**Contact Us**

- By Phone: (360) 709-9225
- By Email: artistryindecks@gmail.com

Your Name

Your Email Address

Telephone

Briefly Describe Your Project In Mind

How Did You Hear About Us

**Figure 4.** Make sure your site has a detailed contact form. Asking how potential customers heard of you helps you determine what form of advertising is working best.