



## A New Year's Resolution - Stop Reflex Spending on Yellow Pages *5 Ways to Put Yellow Page Dollars to Better (and Greener) Use*

By Drew Zagorski  
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I have a lot of conversations about the Yellow Pages. Many clients and other folks I know continue to spend hundreds, if not thousands of dollars a month on yellow page advertising. I don't believe it's based on any strong results they're getting - they tell me as much - but that it's a reflex at this point. That, or fear that competitors are going to be in the book or online yellow pages and they won't. Well, here's the big question - why spend money to be where nobody's going?

Last month's LinkedIn poll shows that the vast majority of people (68% from our poll) don't use the 'book' anymore. And there are countless studies that say the same. So why waste your money. The yellow pages are dead. And as far as their online components go, they don't have it figured out yet. Here are two examples, typical of online yellow page results...

**Example 1** - One of my clients - I'm naming them Oregon City Widgets for the purpose of this example - had been advertising in the Dex book and used the Dex online as well. When it came time to renew, I was asked to deal with the Dex people, who were putting the full court press on. Now Oregon City Widgets hadn't gotten any significant response from this advertising they'd paid for - sure, one or two clients called them during the year, but certainly nowhere near enough to even come close to breaking even on the expense.

So the Dex guy and I are on the phone. He's telling me about how great the Dex Online directory is. So, I asked him to do one simple search for me. I asked him to search for Oregon City Widgets and to specify Oregon City as the location for the search. Then I asked him to tell me what page in the Dex Online results my client appeared. I heard him tapping keys entering the search... followed by several seconds of quiet.

"Hello?," I said. "Ummm...," came the Dex guy's response. "Well, what page are they on?," I asked. Turned out the search for Oregon City Widgets in Oregon City placed them at the bottom of page 4 of the Dex Online results. Inexcusable. I understand that the top listings are paid, but even still, inexcusable. I know many people who have gotten these same unacceptable results.

**Example 2** - This example is a bit shorter, and came from the comments on the poll question. One respondent said that they went to the online yellow pages to find a number for a local business. Their search presented incorrect results. Again, another common problem I've heard people complain about.

So, there are two common situations. Also, many studies show that when searching, people want to click directly to a relevant web site or business, so they completely disregard the yellow page entries. Why? Experience has taught them that when they go there, they land in yet another directory that has far less relevance to search results than what Google, Bing or Yahoo present.

By making sure your web site is optimized to perform well in organic listings and that you're listed properly with Google and Yahoo local, you'll be doing more for your exposure than any amount of cash spent in yellow page advertising will ever provide.

So, now that you've resolved to kick the 'yp' habit, how can you use that budget surplus effectively (and maybe even put a chunk straight back into your own pocket)? Here are 5 great ways to put those dollars to work.

**1. Email Campaign** - Most small businesses have email lists with fewer than 500 addresses on them. The remainder range somewhere between 501 and 2500 addresses. I've seen only a couple that have lists that are larger. For about \$10 a month, you can send an email to everyone (if 500 or fewer, about \$30 for 501-2500) on your list. In your email you can offer useful information, coupons, a list of upcoming events, whatever. You can and should use the email to drive people to your web site. That inbound traffic is good for you! And, after sending the email, you'll be able to see reports that show who clicked on what, who's email bounced, etc. There are several vendors out there, but my favorite is Vertical Response ([www.verticalresponse.com](http://www.verticalresponse.com)) for ease of use and reporting. A note on email campaigns - don't get caught up in the number of people actually opening and clicking through. What this is about is being seen and getting in front of your audience regularly. Whether they open it or not, when your email lands in the inbox, the recipient will see your business name - it's all about impressions.

**2. Radio** - Yes, radio. Consider how many people listen to the radio. Even with the explosion of ipods



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and mp players, radio still dominates. Even for a small business, radio can be a viable and cost effective medium. Even less than what you may be currently spending on yellow pages. Depending on the station and day part you target, you can get something as basic as a traffic report sponsorship for about \$200-300 a month. Of course, you can roll that budget up as high as you want if you choose to go with 30 or 60 second spots. But that's not economically realistic for many small businesses. I will say this... if you are a small business spending more than \$1000 a month on yellow pages, consider putting all of that cash into a well optimized web site and a radio campaign. You'll get more for your marketing dollar that way.

**3. Website & SEO** - Your website is your first - and sometimes only - impression you make on people. Make sure you do it right. If you're not a web designer or developer there are some decent do-it-yourself tools out there that allow you to manage and edit your own site if that's important to you. If not, invest in getting a professional to build and optimize your site for you. Just remember that do-it-yourself often looks like do-it-yourself, or 'good enough.' If that's not the image you want to project, hire someone. Make sure that whoever you hire can do both optimization and design. I've seen many breathtakingly beautiful web sites that don't have any optimization under the hood. So, they're essentially neutered in terms of helping the business to be found online. With regard to SEO, it's also a good idea to work with professionals because they will provide an objective perspective for you. As a business owner, you search for and think about your web site differently than the people who might seek you out will. An outside perspective will be able to work with you to understand industry lingo and bring tools to bear for creating your keyword list that account for the 'civilian' take on how you are searched for.

**4. Adwords** - Adwords can be a good use of cash as long as you're using keywords that are relevant and map to how people actually search for you. Adword campaigns will place you in the "Sponsored Links" sections at the top and sides of search results. Running multiple adwords campaigns can take a good bit of time, and your costs will always vary based on the bidding for keywords. If you're in a highly populated segment - say, plumbers - your adwords will be pricey because so many bidders are going for them. With adwords campaigns, you can get some

very good results, but it does take time to manage, so factor that in. There are a couple services who will create and manage campaigns for you. One is called Reach Local ([www.reachlocal.com](http://www.reachlocal.com)) and the other is Big Local ([www.biglocal.com](http://www.biglocal.com)). Reach Local has a much higher price point (about \$700 a month for starters) and has some slick back end reporting tools such as recording incoming calls, so you can listen to them and track your conversion rate and ROI. I've seen some folks do very well with this vendor and others have struggled. My guess is that it's based on the competitive nature of your space. If you're a beauty salon, you'll struggle, simply because of the crowded field. Big Local is much lower in cost (ranges from \$80-100 a month) and I've heard a lot of good things about them from some folks, though I don't have any firsthand experience with them.

**5. Chambers, Associations, Networks** - If you're not a member of key industry association, your local chamber or other networks, become one and be active in it. Just joining won't make a big difference. You need to attend meetings and events. Get out there and be seen. If you've been spending a couple hundred a month on yellow pages, move those dollars over to these groups and you'll even come out with cash in your pocket. Chambers are an especially good avenue for small, local businesses to connect with other like businesses. If you're looking to score clients like Nike or Intel, the Chamber isn't necessarily the place for that. But if you want to do business with a local dentist, attorney, retailer or consultant, the Chamber is it. The costs of joining will vary based on the group, but once you join and people get accustomed to seeing your face, business opportunities will follow.

### THE GREENER CHOICE

Opting out of yellow page advertising is a green choice. If being an environmentally friendly business is important to you, then you should drop out of the book. Depending on the research or survey, upwards of 80-85% of people receiving paper phone books put them straight into the trash. That's a lot of landfill, and a lot of trees. Despite what the phone book companies tout as their green practices, many watchdog groups have found information that is contrary to their claims. Bottom line is, you can see how much paper goes into one book. Multiply that by every home or business on the block and that's one big load



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of pulp. If you choose to advertise in the book, you're adding to it.

And, if you're one of those folks - like me - who throw the book straight in the trash - you don't have to keep receiving it. If you don't want to receive phone books, there are ways to opt out. Here are some numbers you'll want to call to do that...

Idearc (Verizon book) - 800-888-8448, select Option 2 (February 2010 the next publish date, so now's the time to opt out if that's your choice)

Dex / Qwest - 800-422-8793

Yellow Book USA - 800-929-3556, Option 3

A note about third party petitions. If you've added your name to a list on sites such as [yellowpagesgoesgreen.org](http://yellowpagesgoesgreen.org) it's important to know that third parties cannot request your removal for you. You need to make the request yourself.

### TAKE YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER OUT TO DINNER

So, with all that cash you'll save, move some of it to more viable marketing activities - ones that can actually produce results. And with the extra left over, take someone you love out for a nice dinner to celebrate the new year!

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