



Your Guide to Web Success

A Website Primer for Small Businesses



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FIRST THINGS FIRST. Do you really need a website?

It is rare today to find someone who doesn't use the Internet to find information or to shop for personal or business needs. But does this necessarily mean your business needs a Web presence? Consider this: According to a study by the Graphics, Visualization, and Usability Center, nearly three-quarters of all US households have Internet access, and more than 85% of users say they find new businesses through Internet search engines. Even if your customers are local or the business you're in requires personal relationships with your customers, the statistics don't lie: a professional website is a must today for any business!

What do other businesses say about how websites support their business?

Websites are no longer "nice-to-haves." A recent Web.com small business survey reveals some persuasive figures about how much importance small businesses attach to their websites:

- 78% of respondents indicated that their company benefits from having a website.
- 56% of respondents attributed some portion of their annual sales to their online presence.
- 38% of respondents said that they are unlikely to do business with companies that do not have a website.

So, now that you understand what a professionally designed website can do for your business, let's get started. No matter who you choose to help with the design and marketing of your site, there are some basic steps you should follow to ensure that your site is a success.

Here are just a few of the ways our customers are getting great returns from their website investment:

Acquiring new customers. Since most people first search for a product or service on the Internet, having a Web presence is critical to ensure that potential customers find you. A website can help you stay on the customer's short list and win business. It can be your online business card, brochure, and lead-generation/qualification tool. A business website is also a convenient way for your current customers to refer you to others. An easy-to-remember Website address makes it easier for your customers to recommend you to their friends and colleagues.

Providing better customer service. With competition tougher than ever before, the difference between you and a competitor could be better customer service. Not only do you want to respond to customers in a timely manner, but you also want to maintain a proactive relationship with them for future sales. A website can help you do both, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Finding new ways to sell. A website can assist you in creating new sales channels; in fact, it's a new sales channel in itself. You can easily and inexpensively create online catalogs to present your company's products and services. These new ways to sell add another dimension to your business without forcing you to change the way you do business. If you have a storefront, you can still have an online store or offer an online catalog. Any way you slice it, you give customers an easy way to contact you.

Lowering costs. Marketing costs can be expensive. Printing brochures is costly, and they can quickly become obsolete. A website, however, can be updated easily and quickly at any time, which not only saves you printing and postage costs, but it gets up-to-date information to your prospects quickly. And whether you're selling online or just providing information, websites can help do the work of administrative staff, order processing personnel, and sales people. With an effective website, you can actually do more work with fewer resources!

1. Plan Your Site.

Planning your site involves creating the blueprint for the site: where it will reside, what it is supposed to accomplish, and how it will look.

Define your goals and objectives for the site. Think in terms of action verbs here: what do you want your site to do for new and existing customers, as well as other visitors? What services (such as e-commerce or scheduling) or interactions (such as forms or weblogs) do you want to include? It helps to take a look at the competition to see what they're providing.

Determine the look and feel of the site. Your site should reflect your other marketing materials, including colors, logos, layout, writing style, and even the style of type you use. The more consistent, the better, because people remember visually. Colors, logos, and the overall look and feel of your marketing materials are important and should be professional. When thinking about the look of your website, do your homework. First, spend some time thinking about how you want to be thought of by your customers and prospects. This decision will affect all of your choices. No matter what you choose, create a brand that will appeal to your audience.

Brainstorm ideas for a website address. Your company's online presence begins with your website address, which

can also be used in your e-mail addresses. Most importantly, your website address should reflect the name of your business, like www.web.com. However, sometimes the website address you really want is already taken and creativity comes into play. Whatever name you choose, make sure it's easy to remember and easy to spell.

Choose an experienced website partner you can trust. Your website partner should be an expert in design and technology, so that you don't have to be. After all, you have a business to run! Also, make sure the company you choose is established and reputable—don't be afraid to ask for client references and samples of sites they've created. Just as importantly, be sure it provides you with a reasonable way to update your site after it's published. You shouldn't be charged a large fee every time you need to update your site; in fact, you should be given the ability to do at least some simple updating yourself. Your website creator will be your partner for a long time, so do your homework before signing someone on. Saving money now by having a neighbor or family member build your site could cost you big down the road if this person loses interest in your project!

2. Create Your Site.

As you create your site, make sure it's attractive, readable, efficient, and easy to navigate. Regardless of whether you create a site yourself or have someone do it for you, keep the following best practices in mind:

Use an attractive, professional-looking design. Your site reflects directly on your business.

Include photos. Not only can photos help visitors see your products and services, but they can help reflect your company's culture, your staff, and other aspects of your business. Photos can be warm and familiar, conservative and business-like, or fun and trendy, depending on your desired image.

Avoid verbose text. People are turned off by text-heavy sites, so get to the point.

Use clear, fast-loading pictures. In particular, avoid high-resolution pictures, which take a long time to load.

Avoid animated introduction pages. Pages created with Macromedia® Flash® (a Web-authoring tool that provides text animation effects) can be distracting, or even problematic to load. Display your home page as quickly as possible.

Remember the 3-click rule. It should take visitors no more than three clicks to get to the information they're looking for.

Don't include a counter on your site. Counters tend to look unprofessional, so invite interaction in other ways.

Test your site on a dial-up line. There are still many people out there using dial-up connections, which are slower.

3. Prepare Your Content.

Content is the most important aspect of your website. Regardless of your business, remember the goal of your website: to communicate who you are, what you offer, and how to contact you. If you effectively represent your company, goods, and services, you will capture the attention of prospects and win their business. Spend some time thinking about exactly why you think someone should choose you over a competitor. Then, using the following list of elements as a framework, you can create an informative website.

Basic elements of a website:

Home page. This page is the entry point to the rest of the site. The first goal of the home page is to describe your business and what you offer. Keep the description brief but informative—approximately 200 – 300 words is usually a good length. At a minimum, your home page provides a brief description of your company, how your business is unique or different from your competition and possibly a company history or information about key personnel.

Goods and services page(s). This area provides a description of your company’s goods and services. It might also provide links to an online catalog where customers can buy products, make appointments or reservations, etc. Depending on your business and the breadth of what you offer, you may need more than one page to cover all the important details about your goods and services.

Contact Information. You’d be surprised at how many websites don’t provide the most basic information. Even if you have an online business only, include your address,

phone number, at least one contact e-mail address, your hours of operation, and directions to your company (preferably a map).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs). Not only can your website attract new business, but it can help you manage your existing business more efficiently. By including an FAQ section to handle commonly asked questions, you can save time and allow your customers to help themselves—whenever and wherever they happen to be online

What’s New? Keep your website visitors informed through your What’s New page. In addition to promoting special events or promotions, this page can also give you the opportunity to recognize outstanding employee performance, announce new company incentives, or congratulate specific goal achievement. Being your own Web editor comes in especially handy with this page, so you can make sure the information on this page is definitely “new” news.

Other Tips for Creating Good Content

Take the time to add extra touches that will improve your website content.

Personalize your business. Customers who do business with small companies prefer the sort of high-touch, personal relationship they don’t find with larger companies. Including personalized information about your business, such as your history, your commitment to the community, staff bios, and so on, can create more of a bond with customers.

Show your successes. Websites are the primary resource for people investigating businesses. Your site can keep their attention - or even close the sale - through content such as a portfolio of past projects, testimonials from happy customers, certification logos from professional organizations, and lists of awards.

Cross-sell products and services. The next time you visit Amazon.com and buy a book, notice that the site suggests other books that you might like. This is a perfect example of cross-selling. You can cross-sell, too. For example, if you’re a CPA, break clients out of the “my CPA only does my taxes” mindset by introducing the other services you provide. If you own a hair salon, put information about the products you sell in the salon on your site, so people can read about them in advance and purchase when they come in to your store.

Empower customers by inviting interaction. As we’ve said before, many customers prefer to do business with smaller companies, in part because they feel they get more

personal attention. Your website can be the ideal tool to help you keep in touch with your customers. For example, posting a feedback form or an online survey is an excellent way to allow customers to feel they are being heard.

Keep your content current. One of biggest mistakes that small businesses make on their websites is not keeping the site current. After all, if customers return and see that nothing's changed since their last visit, why would they rush

to come back? Since many details about your business don't change very often, a great way to keep your site feeling fresh is to include recent news, customer success stories, interesting articles, etc. By updating your website at least once each week, you help maintain site traffic and keep your customers coming back for more!

4. Promote Your Site.

OK, so you've built a terrific website—the design looks great and the content is right on target. Your next step is to make sure your prospects find it. Websites are passive, but website marketing is not. Here are three tried-and-true ways to create an effective promotional campaign that seeks out your best prospects and draws them to your site.

Search Engine Marketing. According to a study by the Graphics, Visualization, and Usability Center, more than 85% of users find a website through a search engine. You should optimize your site for search engines and even consider a pay-per-click advertising campaign with a major search engine like Google or Yahoo! These programs are great for businesses of all sizes because you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad and visits your website. At a cost of about 15 cents to a dollar or two per click, you can choose as many keywords as you like and your listing will appear each time someone searches on them. With tools like Web.com's MyEzClicks, creating a search engine marketing program that guarantees traffic to your website, you'll find that search engine marketing is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to promote your small business.

E-mail Marketing. E-mail marketing is an enormous opportunity for most businesses. Whether you send an e-mail newsletter to your customer database or rent opt-in e-mail

lists to reach prospects, you'll be rewarded with increased traffic and repeat visitors. The advantages of e-mail marketing over traditional direct mail include lower costs, reduced turnaround time, and the potential for higher response rates. E-mail tools like Web.com's E-mail Marketer offer a substantial savings by eliminating the cost of printing and postage, and a campaign can be executed in about two weeks from start to finish, versus three times that for traditional direct mail. What's most compelling is that effective e-mail communications can drive site traffic and sales, enhance customer relationships, and increase brand awareness. While most e-mail campaigns produce an average return of one percent, some marketers report results as high as eight percent or more!

Offline Promotion. Put your website address on all business-related materials, including business cards, print advertisements, brochures, appointment-reminder postcards, invoices, coupons, flyers, and promotional materials.

5. Once you publish your site, invite feedback.

Even before your site "goes live," ask people you trust to review it. You might also ask a customer you trust to try it. Is there anything that confuses them? Can they find what they're looking for? Correct these issues before publishing the site. If you include a comments form on your site, you might also get some suggestions for improvement to the site itself. Pay close attention to these, and be sure to send appreciative reply e-mail.

6. Consider establishing an Intranet.

In addition to attracting new customers, a website is also a way to facilitate the internal aspects of your business. A company Intranet is a section of your website that is private and made available only to employees who have an Intranet password. Intranets provide great opportunities for employees to collaborate, streamline business processes, and increase effective communication. Creating a password-protected Intranet allows you to post company documentation, such as employee handbooks, policies, etc., online so that employees can access them from anywhere—plus you save on paper and printing expenses. Similarly, employees working collaboratively can share documents for important projects and access them remotely, whether they're working from home or on the road!

The Bottom Line...

We won't lie to you. Building a compelling, interactive website takes a lot of thought and work. For most small businesses, the first question is "Where do I start?" The great news is that you've already got the help of one of the biggest, most experienced website companies in the country. In fact, Web.com has built or hosted over 4 million websites! Simply put, no one else in the industry can match our experience in serving the online needs of small business customers. Just by taking the time to read this guide, you're already heading in the right direction. We're confident you'll find that investing in a professionally designed website is one of the smartest and most cost-effective things you can do to grow your business.

Remember this Website Checklist:

What's in it for me?	Always ensure your home page contains statements that directly target your customers' needs. If the customer doesn't understand what's in it for them, your site isn't as effective as it could be.
Always call for action.	Every page on your site should give subtle clues as to what the customer should do. If your goal is to sell, your site should hold the customer's attention until he or she is persuaded to buy.
Make the choices clear.	If you have multiple products or services with similar features, be sure you clearly distinguish the differences. If you provide alternate choices, be sure you explain which choice is right for whomever chooses it.
Make information complete.	Be sure you provide all the information about a product or service. Incomplete information on products or services can cause frustration and damage the customer's relationship with you.
Make it fast!	If you build your website with SiteBuilder, you can be sure your site will load quickly, with properly sized graphics and images optimized for the Web. Use Flash® and video sparingly, since they can significantly slow down your website. Since the average Internet user dials in at speeds well under 56K, slow loading time will drastically reduce the effectiveness of even a well-designed site.
Share in the risk.	Offers that supply a money-back guarantee, replacement guarantees, and warranty information make the purchasing decision easier.

• **READY TO CONNECT?**

With so many possibilities to use the Internet to grow your network or your business, there's no reason not to get started today.

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