

2010 Website Design Guide for Small Business Owners



Your Website Is the Jumping Off Point of ALL Your Marketing Efforts



46% of Small Business Owners did not have a website in 2009

(<http://www.ad-ology.com> survey)

45% of Small Business Owners think it's a myth that they even need a website

([http://www.discovercard.com/business/watch poll](http://www.discovercard.com/business/watch_poll))

Only Half of Small Business Owners who DO have a website are tracking their marketing efforts

(<http://www.vistaprint.com> study)



What are small business owners losing by not having a website?

Customers.

Won't customers find you in the phone books?

Despite the protests of your yellow pages sales rep, the answer is NO.

"These things keep showing up on my doorstep and more often than not don't even make it into the house but rather right to the trash. I don't need it anymore and I wish I could figure out how to stop them from showing up." -Shannon

"Every year the delivery person comes and tosses two telephone books down at the end of my driveway. And every year I walk down to the end of the driveway and kick them to the curb so that I can place them in the recycle bin on trash day." -David

"Yellow Books... are those things still around?" -Homer Simpson

*"I'm not suggesting that all these businesses need to actually transact business online. I'm only saying that everyone listed in yesterday's Yellow Pages needs to also be available on the internet today--it's where your customers expect to find you." -Roy H. Williams, *Entrepreneur magazine* 2005*



Is it possible to have a web presence on social networking sites without having a website?



Yes.

Who controls how you interact with those potential customers and how you deliver content to them?

Not you.

Without a real website, small business owners lose the ability to:

- Differentiate yourself from your competition.
- Create authority with your customers.
- Take advantage of organic search rankings.
- Benefit from search engine local results
- Share your company story and information
- Build your own prospect list
- Answer frequently asked questions
- Provide dynamic, intuitive content

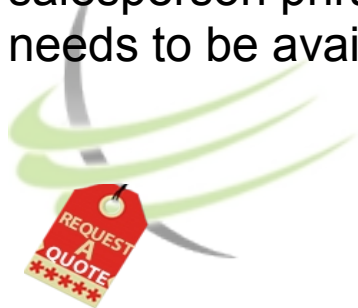


Still don't think you need a website?

Consider this. Your website is the most important marketing tool you have. A well-put-together website will allow you to get found by more prospects and convert more prospects into leads and customers. Asking "Should I have a business website?" is like asking "Should I have a business phone?" Since many consumers now search for information online prior to making a purchase at a brick-and-mortar store, your site may be the first chance you have at making a good impression on a potential buyer. Besides prospects, leads and customers, potential employees, business partners and even investors may be looking for your website.

Level Playing Field. The internet levels the playing field for many small business owners. Your thoughtfully designed website has equal chance of competing with your big competitor across town or with a major brand.

Best Foot Forward. Properly constructed, a website allows your prospects to gather the information they need from the privacy of their own computer monitors. What are the questions your salespeople answer virtually every day? And how, exactly, would your best salesperson phrase those answers on his or her best day? This is the information that needs to be available 24/7 on your site.



The Only Exception. It's actually better to have no website at all than to have one that makes your business look unprofessional and inept, so...

Where should a small business owner begin when building a website?

What's your goal? Not all websites are created equal. Some are simple online brochures which showcase your products or services, give contact information, hours of operation, introduce you and your employees, etc. Some websites make online purchase of products and services available to your customers. These are known as e-commerce sites. Give some thought to what you want to accomplish with your website, whether it's bringing you qualified leads, or building greater community between yourself and your customers.

Domain Registration & Hosting. Domain registration gives you ownership over the address (or URL) of your website, often a www dot com address. Think of it like the title to a mobile home. Once you register your domain, you must have a place for it to live. Think of this like a concrete pad at a mobile home park. Some people choose to register and host their domain with the same company, and this is fine. Some may register one place, and later, for whatever reason, move the domain so that it lives on another company's server. This is fine too. Whomever you choose to host your website should provide secure, reliable hosting, in addition to other services. Some hosting companies are do-it-yourself types, and some may provide full-service hosting where you can call support on the phone or drop them an email and get assistance doing things on your website.



Hire a Designer. You don't need to come out of the gate with an over-the-top website in order to promote your small business on the web, but you do need one that looks professional. If you can't do it yourself, hire an experienced web designer to give you a hand. It is well worth the small investment on the front end. Also, a good designer will create a site that will grow with you as you add more content.

Content is King. You don't need a huge website overflowing with content to get started, but you do need thoughtful content that gives prospects information which will hopefully convert them into leads and those leads into customers. In fact, quality content is of greater importance than fancy design.

Get Local. Get Listed. The newest search engine formulas favor local listings at the top of the search results page. So if you live in St. Louis, and you search for pizza, you'll see listings for the top local pizza joints in your area at the top of the results page. See how your business is listed at Google, Yahoo, and other top local search engines on www.getlisted.org.

Marketing. Once you have a website set up, you must market that site. This includes everything from listing your new website address (URL) on your business cards, flyers, billboards, side of your truck, back window of your SUV, to setting up pages for your business on those social networking sites we talked about earlier. If you feel overwhelmed and unsure about where to begin your marketing efforts, get some professional help to create a marketing plan and social media road map.



So, how do you make your website work FOR you?

While the number of Small Business owners creating Web sites is up 36 percent over the past two years, that number really needs to grow. The search engines' obsession with local has made your Web site an even bigger part of your business and marketing plan. Make sure you're treating as such.



5 Website Marketing Goals:

Goal 1: Visitors and Leads

The reason you're establishing a website is to have a positive impact on your business, so focus on the results you want - more visitors, leads and customers. Every decision you make should be with that goal in mind. Visual elements are nice, and you can spend weeks deciding on just the right shade of red, but what really matters are the elements that will convert visitors to customers.

Goal 2: Content that Converts

Getting visitors to your website is one thing, but converting them from visitors to leads and from leads to customers is a bigger animal. You want content that works for you to draw visitors in, give them clear calls to action and deliver leads to your inbox.

Goal 3: Ongoing Content Building

Millions of pages on the internet compete for your customer's attention every day. You need to set down a plan for creating new, engaging content for your website on a regular basis. Hundreds, if not thousands, of blogs are started every day, only to be abandoned by their authors. If you don't think you can keep up with regular blog writing, you may want to consider hiring out your content creation.

Goal 4: Connect with Your Customers

Setting up Facebook pages and Twitter feeds is one thing, but monitoring and engaging with your leads and customers on an ongoing basis is another. You must monitor your social network profiles and pages, respond in a timely manner to customer's comments and requests, and post new engaging content. If this seems a bit overwhelming, consider hiring out your social network management, or at least hire a professional to assist you with setup and help you develop a social media plan.

Goal 5: Gather and Analyze Data

This is the most important goal of all. You must monitor the performance of your website to know whether your marketing efforts are paying off. Return on Investment (ROI) is critical. Using tools like Google Analytics, Hubspot, Facebook Insights and more, you can determine what content on your site is driving the most leads and conversions, where your traffic is coming from, and what they are doing once they get to your site. You can even use services like UserTesting.com to help you learn how visitors navigate thru your website and respond to different elements.



20 Easy Ways to Build Brand Awareness for Your Website:

1. Put up a placeholder page on your website with basic information and an expected launch date.
2. Add the link to your email signature.
3. Get a promo blurb put in your industry newsletter and / or local paper.
4. Join your Chamber of Commerce and participate in business after hours events for networking
5. Get your local Chamber of Commerce to link to your site in their member listing.
6. Put your new website (URL) on business cards and hand them out to people you meet and post to bulletin boards and drop in fish bowls at restaurants.
7. Write a press release and send to your local media and promote online via newswire sites like PRNewswire.com
8. Stop by other local businesses and let them know about what you're doing - leaves stacks of your cards on counters (with permission). Create joint deals that passes business back and forth. (e.g. if you offer car detailing service, talk to local mechanics about sending you referrals and vice versa)
9. Get magnetic signs made with your Business name, website address and phone number, and put them on the sides of your vehicle(s).
10. Have your local sign shop make vinyl lettering / logo decals to place on the back and/or side glass of your vehicle



11. If your local news-talk radio station has a live morning show, offer to do a free giveaway on air in exchange for a short plug or interview either over the phone or in studio.
12. Volunteer - giving your time and talents to worthy causes in your community is a great way to not only get the word out about your business, but to build credibility and respect.
13. Get social. Blogging and creating Facebook fan pages are easy wins for small businesses.
14. Network with other bloggers and facebookers related to your industry. If you are a wedding planner, create relationships with caterers and florists to cross-promote your businesses
15. Create linkable video content. Use your webcam or digital video cam to record yourself discussing topics related to your business. Post these short, informative videos on your website, as well as YouTube and other video sharing sites.
16. Sponsor a local sports team or club. Every child has a parent or parents who appreciate businesses who support children's activities in the community.
17. Teach a local class related to your area of expertise.
18. Speak at local events
19. Donate your services to local events and fundraisers
20. Use other local vendors when possible to build community



Website Marketing Resources

Website Grader (www.websitegrader.com) -- Useful tool for measuring the marketing effectiveness of your website, get a free custom report in seconds with advice for your website

AS Marketing Center (www.asmarketingcenter.com) -- Proven marketing, and brand-building services for your website and business.

Get Listed (www.getlisted.org) -- See how your business is listed at Google, Yahoo, and other top local search engines.

PRNewswire (www.prnewswire.com) -- The top press release distribution service in the country, and the only one used by ASMarketingCenter.com

User Testing (www.usertesting.com) -- The fastest, cheapest way to find out why users leave your website.

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