

Mistake to Avoid

Ignoring Business Opportunities on the Internet

The Internet is changing the way we live, communicate and buy. It has quickly become the communication of choice for many consumers and many businesses. While not every business needs an Internet presence, more and more businesses are using websites as an integral part of how they do business. This article is meant to provide some ideas to consider as you think about a new or enhanced Internet presence.

What are you trying to accomplish?

Most business websites fall into one of four categories – basic information about your business, information on your products or services, electronic commerce or communication channel (email). One of the attractive aspects of the Internet is the ease with which changes can be made. As such, many businesses are regularly modifying their websites as they find out what works and what doesn't work. If you are considering establishing a website, remember that you will probably want to change it often. If you already have a site, don't forget to evaluate it periodically and enhance it as the market or your business changes.

Basic information

Be sure to include information about your business. This should include making it easy to find phone and fax numbers, your address and probably some information on the principals of the business. Many consumers and business prospects use the Internet instead of a phone book. It is easier and often more convenient.

Product or service information

Tell web visitors what you offer. With the difficulty of making actual phone contact, enabling a customer or prospect to learn about your products at your website saves time and frustration. Most product descriptions on the Internet are relatively basic. They don't have to include everything you would normally include in an actual presentation. A visitor should be able to determine if the product or service is likely to meet his or her needs. Most websites do not include pricing, especially if the product is higher priced or has some pricing flexibility.

Electronic commerce

More and more business websites are incorporating the actual sales process. They are becoming somewhat like catalogs, only faster. There are services available that can enable this with "shopping carts" and credit card processing. However, most small businesses usually do not have the volume to make this feasible.

Communication channel

An Internet website can generate leads effectively. Many businesses are finding that by including a "Contact Us" section, they are getting more leads than by direct mail. The key is to follow-up quickly on these leads. Including an "Email Us" section also is highly advisable. Visitors often use this email function to provide information, request calls or simply to communicate because it is the easiest way to send email. Be sure to check your incoming email frequently.

Attracting visitors

Be sure to include your website address on all your materials. This includes business cards, sales literature and other advertising. Another way to attract visitors is through listings in online directories. Many trade associations and commercial entities offer directories. Sometimes they are even free of charge for basic listings. Be sure to be included in those directories that your customers and prospects are most likely to use. For websites aimed at consumers, your website designer may be able to use special "meta-tags" to make your site more likely to be shown in various search engines.

Web design and hosting

This often the most intimidating part of the process for those considering establishing a website. Using an outside service to create, manage and host your site probably makes sense when you first start. You can find many such services by just asking others or by searching the Internet. As you get more comfortable with the entire online process, you may want to take over the managing of your site.

Summary

A presence on the Internet is fast becoming a necessity for most businesses. The sooner you get started by looking at your competitors' sites and considering what you wish to accomplish, the sooner you can start enjoying the rewards of Internet marketing.