



Marketing Your Business on the Web – An Overview

Why use the web to market your business?

One reason is that the web is here to stay, so why not use it? A more compelling reason is that today's business world gets more competitive every day and customers are increasingly using the web to find the products and services they need. Whether they are looking for local services, products, or information, it is important that they be able to find you. If you are not present on the web, you may be overlooked.

Each individual business needs to determine how to use the web to enhance their business. Determining the right approach and implementing a plan can make a big difference in a business' bottom line. Today there are easy to use tools that put web capabilities within anyone's reach. Choosing not to use the web is probably a choice to leave money on the table.

Websites are the cornerstone of web marketing today.

A website is a bridge between the entire world and YOU. Websites can range from a single page, to hundreds of pages. They are iterative. Starting small and adding content and capabilities over time is a manageable and usually smart way to begin.

Starting with the basics allows a business to evaluate what is working and then expand on that. Be clear about the goals of the site before determining what to include and how to organize it. Above all else, include contact information throughout the site.

Websites can be used to:

- Provide information on who you are
- Provide directions and maps to your location(s)
- Provide product and service information (an online brochure or ad)
- Backup print ads or brochures with additional information
- Let customers know how to contact you
- Support sales calls
- Make products orderable online

Determining the right functions for a site depend on the nature of the business. A retail business trying to draw new customers to their bricks and mortar store would want directions to the store and information about what is available at the store. Reflecting the same feel and character of the store experience would help draw the right customers to visit the store.

A consultant might want to share and communicate about their capabilities and experience. Using case studies or offering white papers can demonstrate their knowledge and skills. A resume could be a good idea or list of former clients. The goal of a consultant's site is to build credibility and explain their area of expertise.

A local heating and air conditioning company might drive their traffic to the site via advertising in the local newspaper or television ads. They could communicate their services, area of coverage, provide some education about why it's important to have a furnace checked over periodically, and allow people to request checkups or estimates online. The company's history and experience would be good to share if the company has been in business a long time and has a good reputation.

Again, the design and content of the site need to represent and support the purpose of the site, and that purpose is unique to each business and their situation. Once the site is live, there are services, also used as appropriate, that can help achieve the goals for the site.

It is possible to track traffic at the site. It can be valuable to know how many visitors have been to the site, how long they stayed and what pages they visited. That information can show what's working and provide insight for planning.

If the website is trying to pull visitors from the World Wide Web, optimizing the site is crucial to driving traffic to the site. Tools are available that can assist with the process and guide the site owner through the steps. It requires some discipline and making updates to the site on a regular basis to keep the site at the top of search engine results. The only alternative is to hire a service group to do that work.

Information on the web is immediate and always open for business (24/7/365). Using a website in the ways mentioned above can save on the cost of conventional print tools. It's also easier, quicker, and less expensive to update. It's important to review existing marketing tools and decide where to publish the website address.

Enhance customer relationships with Email Direct Marketing

Like a website, email marketing can be used in a variety of ways to connect with a specific audience. With existing customers email marketing is a good way to stay in touch and build a stronger relationship. With new customers it's a good way to share what you have to offer. It's important to use email marketing properly though, so it doesn't become annoying (spam), vs. something a customer *wants* to see in their inbox.

There are very cost effective and easy to use Email direct marketing tools available today. These tools allow the user to apply templates and add content, upload a mailing list, and after being sent, track the number of emails opened.

Email direct marketing can be used to:

- Send newsletters
- Invite people to events
- Advertise sales
- Conduct surveys
- Make announcements
- Send reminders
- Say thank you

The most difficult part of email direct marketing is probably collecting the email addresses. Most tools for email marketing require compliance with Anti-Spam laws requiring the recipient to “opt in” or choose to receive the emails. It also requires the ability to “opt out” or stop receiving emails. Most tools have that process built in which makes it easy to comply.

Blogs can be more than personal diaries.

This tool has become very popular for sharing in a less formal way. The term “blog” is a derivative on “web log”. In September 2007, the search engine *Technorati* was tracking more than 106 million blogs, according to *Wikipedia*.

Add popular blogs and that they can be part of a website or published independently...

Blogs can be used for business purposes, but if the sell gets too blatant, the blog may become known as a “splog” or “slog”. Text, photos, and video can all be used within a blog and there is software available to help publish blogs.

The web isn't mysterious or all that complicated when you break it down.

Implementing and using these tools is not as mysterious or difficult as it might seem. With sensible planning and a step-by-step process for implementation, anyone can launch a marketing plan on the web.

Setting goals and planning will give you a head start on success.

Planning is the first step to successful online marketing. It's important to identify what you specifically want to achieve with web marketing. Doing the proper planning up front will save both time and money once you begin implementation.

Here are some questions to think about as part of the planning process.

What tactics would work for this business?

- Website
- Website with online store
- Direct eMail Marketing
- Blog

What kinds of content would be useful to website visitors?

- Product information
- Service information
- Map to location
- How to contact
- History and capabilities of company
- Information about the people
- Examples of work or projects

For more information on websites see Website FAQs at www.EasyWebStudio.com

What would make a good domain name?

- Short
- Meaningful
- Be close to existing business name (if there is an established reputation)
- Appropriate extension (.com = commercial, .org = organization, .net = network of people, etc.)

Also see the Domain Name FAQs at www.EasyWebStudio.com

To find out if a domain name is available, use the search feature at www.EasyWebStudio.com

How will people become aware of the website or blog?

- Referred by advertising
- See web address on vehicles and signage
- Via search engines
- From personal business cards

What tactics would be best for driving web traffic to the site?

- Website Optimization
- Business Registration
- Pay per click advertising
- Direct eMail Marketing
- Linking to/from other sites

Also see the Website Optimization FAQs and eMail Direct Marketing FAQs at www.EasyWebStudio.com

What about current marketing tools?

- Should they be updated to include the website address?
- Can the content be reduced if it's on the website?
- Can any tools be eliminated?
- Can any functions/notifications be transferred to email?

It's Time to Get Started.

Once there is a clear direction established for developing a web presence, there's a series of steps to follow to implement the plan. The first step is to research, select and register the domain name or names if it makes sense to register more than one. Many companies purchase names close to theirs to keep the competition from buying them, so easy misspelled names will still find the site, or if their business is referred to in more than one way (Kentucky Fried Chicken can be accessed via www.kentuckyfriedchicken.com and www.kfc.com).

Once the domain name(s) are established, organizing and building a website is probably the next step. The site can be built using software tools (e.g. Frontpage from Microsoft). With these tools the site is built locally on a computer and then transferred to a hosting server through a process called FTP.

The other popular way to produce a site is to use online tools for that process. The hosting is built in and all the files are automatically backed up so losing files isn't an issue. Usually the process starts by selecting a template, then the user adds the text, images, and other files to the site. Once it's ready they click publish and they are online.

After the site is launched it's time to think about how much of the traffic and potential customers will be found via the web. If that number is any significant percentage of the sites visitors, optimizing the site is almost required to have people find the site.

There are ongoing things that can enhance the site in search engine rankings. One thing that helps a site ranking is updating. The more often changes occur the higher the ranking. Links to and from the site also make a difference. So if there are other business sites, organizations, chamber of commerce sites, etc. that can provide links to the site, it can also increase the search engine rankings.

So, using the web can be of great value. As time goes on, not using the web will be similar to not using the telephone to conduct business. Beginning the journey now can help keep your business competitive and broaden your reach for customers.

To find out more about the tools offered by EasyWebStudio visit our website at www.EasyWebStudio.com.