

How to design effective websites

Why develop an online presence!

To succeed in today's business environment Small to Medium business Enterprises (SME) need to set up an efficient and effective online presence. A smart way to jump start and build your web marketing strategy is to develop an online presence, whether it is a new website or a re-fresh your existing one.

People in today's society are craving new ideas and knowledge and generating Business to Business (B2B) contacts and sales leads is critical. Setting up an effective website is also critical. This article will outline some of the tips and strategies you need to design an effective website and get your SME message in front of qualified prospects and help your business grow.

why go online?

According to the latest statistics provided by Internet World Stats, there are now over 1.5 billion people using the Internet and this figure shows a ten fold increase over the last ten years. Similarly, the Internet advertising bureau presents figures that state internet advertising revenues are rapidly rising above the \$21billion mark with consumer related advertisers accounting for over 50% and search revenues over 45% and growing rapidly

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) latest figures highlight that over 65% of Australians now have a computer and over 75% have internet access. Additionally over 70% of the 5.5 million internet users now have broadband and advertising revenue is rising at a rapid rate increase of 30% per annum to figures above the \$385million mark, according to Price Waterhouse Coopers

what's in it for you as a SME

There are numerous ways that an online presence through a website can be of benefit to your SME. These are as follows:

- interaction with the global community 24/7 and indefinitely
- employs a 'long tail' business relationship model
- B2B alliances are easy to form and allows for customer contributions

effective website characteristics

The successful SME's amongst us understand that a website needs to be clearly defined and its customers need to clearly grasp what its brand stands for. The key components of an effective website are as follows:

- simplicity: *there is a point of view being expressed by the SME*
- functionality: *there is a connection with consumer opinion or a synergy exists*
- information rich: *the consumer experiences or observes what you say or portray*

Top ten tips for 'designing an effective' website

There is no doubt that the internet is having a dramatic effects on the B2B relationship and promotion and advertising its product and services. SME's need to become smart and adapt quickly to this rapidly growing medium and move the majority of its lead generation to the internet.

The following strategies will assist your SME to attract new and ongoing customers:

1. *identify your target market and its needs*

invest some time in researching who your target market will be and try to ascertain how many people are likely to want and seek your product or service online. A key word phrase entered into Google can give you some 'search volume' indicators related to your type of business and will also tell you how many people are looking for that particular topic

2. *design effective page copy*

follow the Keep it Simple Stupid (KISS) philosophy. If you are a new start up or a SME, your page design elements should follow three basic core principles. Utilise a headline and ensure you outline the main benefits of your product/service. In the main body, highlight what's in it for the consumer and ensure a call to action. Minimal clutter, higher response

3. *follow certain core design elements*

most SME's need to follow certain rules when designing their websites. Certain design elements produce higher responses from visitors. It is important for fonts to be readable, large enough to read and dark on a light background. Web page dimensions are easier to read if they are at least 1024 x 768 with standard blue hyperlinks and always use images

4. *include testimonials of satisfied customers*

testimonials build credibility and get your clients to present you with a short sentence or two outlining their experience of doing business with you. Pictures are also a useful visual tool to give your prospects confidence before further engagement. Ensure you place relevant contact details, preferably an address and telephone number to call for action

5. *gather research feedback about your website*

continually research your competitors or other successful SME's and analyse what they are doing and keep on top of the latest web design trends. Think of your website as a shop-front to your business and make it appealing to visit and functional. Ask your customers for their feedback regularly and ascertain your website's strengths and weaknesses

6. *get your online message in front of qualified prospects*

getting people or 'traffic' to visit your website is the key to success. Adopting methods such as Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising is useful and you can utilise key words through Google or Yahoo search engines to find what people want. Then you can adopt your website to suit key search words to get your search ranking up. Additionally, you can advertise on other business websites that offer complimentary services

7. *ensure you engage a 'tracking' process*

it is important to track whatever aspects of the internet you adopt for your website, as it can be an important tool in gauging what pages are being visited by your visitors and where they come from and how long they spend visiting your website. Free software program is available online from <http://www.google.com/analytics>

8. *build a database*

continually build a data base of your contacts and customers. To achieve this, your SME could offer something of value in order to connect with your prospects to allow them to opt in. This may be a free newsletter, discount coupons, a free trial or free information. People crave knowledge so why not give it to them and exchange it for their contact details

9. *take advantage of automated email marketing*

critical to your SME's online success is email marketing. Sending about three to four emails a month is a good gauge and allows you to stay in touch and is virtually free. Ensure you adopt an opt out mechanism to alleviate potential spam and relationship problems. To help establish credibility source and engage auto email auto responder tools for efficient reply

10. *build relationships with your prospects*

continually follow up with your contacts and build relationships with them. E-mail marketing is a good way to stay in touch, but find a happy medium as to how many emails you send and how often, beware of the irritation point. Over time and if done correctly, to avoid potential spam issues, you can build your credibility and educate your clients regularly

Think investment, not expense

No matter what advancements in technology are appearing there is always a basic underlying business need to invest. The question you need to ask yourself as a SME proprietor is how can I invest my money wisely and become smarter with my marketing decisions

My advice is don't waste your money on traditional advertising methods such as newspapers or magazines, take the steps outlined above and start to generate your exposure and profits through the internet. Once your business establishes a presence it becomes totally automatic and will continue to produce 24/7, not just a once off advert in a rag. It's a win-win so start now!

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