

YOUR BUSINESS ON THE WEB? YOU BET!

In today's world of technology, it's hard to believe that some businesses still don't utilize one of the fastest growing, cost efficient, self promoting marketing tool we call the Internet. The Internet is now a type of second home to over 158 million Americans who use it daily. Your business on the Internet can literally be seen by all those people. But, for the small business owner, that may not matter. All business owners want to do is reach the local community that is closest to them. And with the Internet, it doesn't matter if your business is small or if it's a major corporation, having a website for your business can prove to be the marketing tool you will soon not be able to live without.

With the Internet and the world wide web being so easily accessible to so many people nowadays, getting your business on the web has never been more important. In some cases, getting your business on the web may not be vital to your business. There may not be any cost benefit to go that route; but then again, maybe there is. If you do decide to get on the web, or if you're already there, there are some key factors to making your site successful that will help your business tremendously.

TO GO, OR NOT TO GO... THAT IS THE QUESTION

Is your business ready to go on the Internet? This question is often asked by many a business owner, and the answer is usually made clear by how the business is doing. The business owner that is content with the way his business is growing may not think there are any benefits to going online. Or the business owner that relies on the customer that is only walking or driving by may not see any benefits to going online. But with evolving technology, people with handheld devices and GPS systems with integrated Internet access walking by or driving by your business may already know where they're going and completely ignore those businesses not located by their devices.

I'm not going to say being online is for everyone. But the way the Internet is now being utilized by so many people, it's pretty hard to see why you wouldn't want your business to be online. Let's use a couple of fictitious stores using the above scenarios to see how being on the Internet would benefit their business:

	Not On The Web	On The Web
Jack's Taco Stand Located on a main street in a small town, he gets most of his business from people driving through town on their way to the large city, about an hour away.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of his customers are driving by • 15% of his customers are local • Of the 1000 cars that drive by, 100 stop each day (10%) • 100 drive by customers, 15 local • \$700/day in gross sales (based on a \$6 sale per person) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 1000 cars driving by, half are using their GPS to find a place to eat. They locate Jack's on their GPS increasing Jack's business from 100/day to 250/day. • Jack runs an online coupon to save 10% on all orders with the ad increasing his local market to 25/day. • \$1700/day in gross sales (based on a \$6 sale per person) • 140% increase in sales

<p>Ann's Art Gallery Located off the main road, Ann relies on word of mouth, local customers, and her weekly ad that runs in the local newspaper to draw in her customers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets about 25 customers a week • Makes an average of 1 sale a day • Averages \$250/day in gross sales • Quarterly gallery showings averages 10 people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets about 10 customers a day • Averages 2 sales a day thanks to the online coupon • Averages \$500/day in gross sales • 100% increase in sales • Quarterly gallery showings now averages 25 – 50 people since they are able to view some art pieces online to see a preview of the art work.
--	---	---

Both of these examples are fictitious and only meant to be examples of how the Internet can help your business. But it's easy to see how the web can help even the smallest local business do better. If your business is doing "just fine," why don't you want it to be doing better? Are you in business because you want to do "just fine." Or are you in business to provide your services or sell your goods to as many people as you can?

MY OPINION... Go!

There are several reasons to get your business on the Internet. If for no other reason, it's because your competition may already be there. But here are some others:

Sell	A business is in business to sell. Sure, you may enjoy what you do. But I enjoy drinking beer and if I could get paid for it, I'd be drinking a lot more beer. So imagine being able to increase your potential customer market from your local area to something much larger. Once you're on the web, your customers can be anywhere in the world.
Persuade	Are you happy with your products? Sure you are. So how can you show your prospective customers that what you sell is, or can be, just what they are looking for? With so many people using the Internet to research products and services before they buy, having a website can help persuade those customers to use you and your products or services.
Inform	Your customers, or potential customers, are looking for information. Other than the face to face interaction you can give your customer, there's no better place to give your customers the information they need to make an informed decision on what they're buying. When people are looking for information on products and services, the Internet is quickly becoming the main source of information.
Leads	Your website can easily give people the information they're looking for. Or, even information on products and services they may need later. Visitors can sign up for a newsletter or to get on a mailing list while on your website, a great way to get leads and convert those leads into sales later on.
Orders/Bookings	Your customers can place orders online, or book your services, with a simple click of a button. Doing this will give your customers the convenience of using the Internet and your website to make it easier for them to reorder and return to use your business again and again.
Brand	A well designed website will give your business a positive branding effect on your business. People will be able to recognize your business name and logo simply from remembering it from your website.
Promote	A website is an excellent way to promote your business. Letting new visitors to your site know about your business or by using your site to run special promotions for your existing

customers, a website is an excellent way to promote your business.

It's easy to see how a website can help your business. Whether you're trying to get more customers or keep your existing customers, being on the internet can prove to be one of the most cost efficient ways to market your business.

SO YOU'RE ALREADY ON THE WEB...

If your business is already on the web, you have already taken that step to making your business a more recognizable company, not only in your community, but all over the world. But, having a website, as you may already know, does not guarantee instant success. If the site is not designed right, it may be doing more harm than good.

Here are some things to think about when you have a website that can either make you successful or make you that "other guy:"

Informative	Make sure your website provides the information your customers are looking for. Provide the information that is most asked to you by your customers. The idea of your website is to sell your business. When people find your site, you want to make sure they can get the information they need. And, be able to find that information easily.
Entertaining	A well designed site is not only providing information, but it's also making sure that when someone visits your website, they stay. You have approximately two seconds to grab the attention of your visitor and keep them interested in your site. If your visitors don't get the "eye candy" to keep them entertained, they may not want to come back.
Ever Changing	A website that remains the same time after time, can easily be seen as a site with the same information. The visitor will tend to think, "this is the same stuff I've seen or read before" and then move on to another site. You want to keep the information fresh and new. When your visitor arrives at your website, you want to grab their attention and keep it. You won't be able to do that with the same pictures and content over and over again.
Fast	Have you ever been to a website that takes time to load? Or you're greeted with a single word of frustration... "Loading..."? There are times when you will want to use a Flash home page and it will need a few seconds to load. But when you're trying to convert that visitor of your website to a sale, making that potential customer wait is not the smartest thing to do. It's just like a customer at your store waiting for someone to help them. If they wait too long, they leave. It's the same on the Internet.
Locatable	If your site is on the Internet, don't assume that people will be able to find it. There are ways to improve your site to make it more visible on the Internet: it's called Search Engine Optimization, or SEO. SEO is very important to those businesses that rely on online sales. That's why there are entire companies that are devoted to nothing but SEO. If your business relies on online customers, SEO may be what you're looking for.

Having a website is a great first step. But once you have that site, keep in mind that there are ways to make it better. A good website designer or developer can help you optimize your site so it will work to improve your business.

Do It!

If you're still wondering if you need to get your business on the Internet, I think it's time that you do your own research. Talk to other business owners that are already online with their websites. Find out how their site has worked to improve their business. And if you find out that their website isn't working for them, maybe you should give them this article and point them to the section just above.

Having a website will help your business grow. It should help your business grow. If you're not on the web, my advice is to just do it. Find yourself a web designer and get the information you need to get online. If you're already online but your site just doesn't seem to be working for you, maybe it's time that you get in touch with a web designer that can help make the changes to your site to get it working for you.