

Websites – Marketing Tool

Do I need a website?

The short answer is yes. Even if it's just a simple description and contact details, having a website is as essential as having a phone number. Without one, many potential customers may simply never find you.

A website can be a full online brochure with all the bells and whistles, or a basic page with an email address and phone number. It can be as cheap or expensive as you like, but it's always worth remembering that a professionally-designed website is a better reflection of a serious business than a DIY effort.

Your website is your greatest selling tool

One of most important sales and marketing tools a business can have is a good website. However, a bad website can have disastrous effects, losing you potential business and even ruining your reputation. Your website is the public face of your business, and should reflect the standards of professionalism and customer service you would give face to face.

First impressions count. If your website looks good, is easy to use and informative, your potential customer will gain a positive impression of your company. Of course, the reverse is also true, and if your website is slow, badly designed, hard to navigate or contains errors like broken links or spelling mistakes, you will put off prospective customers faster than the click of a mouse.

The basic questions that most website users want answered are:

- “Who are you?”
- “What do you do?”
- “How are you different from the next firm?”
- “Why should I care?”

And, if you impress them enough,

- “What do you want me to do about it and how do I do it?”

Make sure your website answers these questions. As long as you include a company description, your key services or products in the form of features and benefits, and plenty of signposts to contact details, then you will have answered most of the basic queries a user will have.

Know your users

To improve the usefulness of your website as a selling tool, you should gather basic data about who is using it. Web statistics software, such as Google Analytics, will provide you with information that can help you improve your sales and increase your reach. Your web host or site designer should offer regular reports on visitor numbers, most popular pages, referring sites (where your visitor came from) and which search engine phrases they used to get to you. In addition, you can also find out where in the country they are, and how often they visit you, plus a lot more. You can usually access web statistics as part of your hosting packaging for little or no extra charge, or use one of the free tools available online.

Is email marketing spam?

The horrors of spam – we all get annoyed by unsolicited emails selling products or services of no interest to us, but email marketing is also a legitimate and useful business tool. The key is to only email groups who may have a requirement for your business. One way of finding them is to purchase email lists, although these go out of date very quickly so caution should be used.

If you want to send marketing emails, do a bit of research about the person or company you are mailing. This is essential for business-to-business emailing, and you can be cheeky enough to say you have identified them as a potential customer and would like to supply a quote.

If someone has come to your company via your website, they have already demonstrated that they like to communicate via the Internet, so by including a simple form whereby users can input their email address for further information, you can build a mailing list and keep in contact. Email provides a fantastic opportunity to reach customers on a regular basis for minimum cost. For example, a quarterly or even monthly newsletter, emailed to customers first and uploaded to your website a few days later, is a great way of ensuring consistent communication and delivering news about new products, services or company achievements.

A newsletter adds value and keeps your name in the radar. Even a basic “hello, remember us” every six months could turn into a sale.

Data protection law states that any marketing email you send must include an opt-out facility, so make sure you include a link or instruction on how the recipient can stop your emails if they choose. It is vital to act immediately on any opt-out request you receive. Remove the customer’s email address from your mailing list database or address book. You can add it to a ‘do not mail’ list if you want to keep the details for reference, but make sure you do not contact the customer with marketing emails again once they have opted out.

In conclusion, the answer is no, email marketing is not spam if done in a considerate, relevant manner. Respect your customers’ privacy, don’t bombard them with emails, and ensure it is easy for them to suppress any mailings from you, and you can take full advantage of the useful and cost-effective tool that is email marketing.

Building website traffic

Once your website is built and online, start promoting it everywhere. Have your stationery and business card re-printed to include the web address, and add it to your email signature so people can access you with one click.

Search engines

Being search engine friendly is an important part of having a visible website. Many people go straight to their favourite search engine to find a company rather than rely on old-fashioned methods like the telephone directory.

Search engines use software called a spider to read your site looking for keywords known as metatags or meta descriptions which are then used to build your search engine ranking.

Be search engine friendly

There’s no point in having a wonderful website if no-one can find you. To be seen on the net, you must become search engine friendly. There are several strategies you can employ to get your site further up the rankings.

1. Identify the keywords and phrases you want to be associated with your business. These should include your business name, your key products and services and your geographic area.
2. Ensure your website text uses these words and phrases as often as possible. This is called your keyword density and is a major factor in search engine optimisation
3. Get linked. The more places on the web you are linked from, the higher up the ranking you will appear on search engines like Google.
4. Avoid all-Flash content. Search engines can't read the content of Flash pages or graphic items unless they are tagged, so keep trendy content to a minimum.
5. Use a professional. Although you don't need to pay for regular search engine optimisation, having your website written and designed by a professional will ensure it has the best chance of being ranked at the top by search engines. You can also pay for one-off search engine registration.

Advertise

You can advertise on other, relevant websites by using a banner ad. This is a graphic with an animation or information about what you do, which takes the user to your site when clicked. Banner ads are best used on sites with an appropriate target market.

Email marketing

Used with caution, email marketing can be an effective way of publicising your website.

Creating reciprocal links

Ask for a link to your website to be put on a relevant website, and offer a link in return. This is a very effective method of driving traffic to your site and increases your search engine visibility.

Tell the world



Don't just talk about your website, shout about it! Make sure the address appears everywhere that your business name does, including your newspaper advertisements, flyers, signage and directory listings.