

Focus on Small Business

INSIGHTS AND INFORMATION FROM TD CANADA TRUST SMALL BUSINESS BANKING

A well-designed, user-friendly website will attract new customers, and keep existing ones coming back.

The benefits of an online presence for your business

These days, just about everybody is online. Your customers and potential customers expect to find you there too. So if your company's Internet presence is lacking, you could be losing business.

A good website can work wonders for business. It is a key channel of communication with customers and often a direct route to sales.

An effective Internet presence

Here is what you need to know about an effective Internet presence:

- ▶ **Even a basic website can help.** A simple website can serve as a digital showcase of products and services, and a way for customers to obtain information. It can tell people about your company, how to contact you and where to find you.
- ▶ **Customers can post questions.** Existing and potential customers can contact your company with questions and feedback. And replying to their questions and feedback online can help reduce telephone-related costs and the expenses of printing and distributing literature.
- ▶ **You can sell online.** A website that allows online purchases enables your business to be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you deal with customers around the world, your site becomes a global store. It may turn out to be the easiest way for customers to make a purchase, at the same time reducing your company's processing costs.
- ▶ **Know customers better.** Market research can be conducted online. Forums can promote discussions of products and services. A website can even offer existing customers a quick route to assistance and service.
- ▶ **Enhance branding, marketing and PR.** Through your website, existing and potential customers can better understand your company. You can detail your vision and mission. You can post company news or public relations information about community involvement, charitable support and environmental initiatives. Creativity can make your website a great advertising tool.

Content and functionality

For an effective presence, your website must be professional, well designed, and easy to use, and provide visitors with what they need.

- ▶ **Easy navigation.** A company website must work smoothly, and not frustrate users. It should be polished and easy to navigate. Internet surfers often visit many sites each week, and have little patience for a poorly designed web presence. If they are discouraged, they may never return.

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- ▶ **Up-to-date information.** A website must always be up to date. Outdated information or product descriptions practically guarantee that visitors will not return. Keep your site current and add fresh content regularly.
- ▶ **Attractive design.** Once you know what your website needs, tap the talents of those who can get the job done. Often, that involves hiring consulting companies that specialize in website design.
- ▶ **Search engine optimization.** Another key element in website success is search engine optimization (SEO). This is a strategy to improve your site's rankings in popular Internet search engines. The goal is to make the site appear at the top, or at least near the top, of search results when Internet users enter keywords related to your business or products.

Most businesses focus on "organic" SEO. This means your site will show up as the "natural" result of a search, rather than as a paid advertisement or "sponsored link" alongside genuine search results.

Organic SEO involves complex techniques such as editing content, embedding keywords, using proper coding and optimizing the structure of the site.

Measure website effectiveness

Once your company website is out there for the digital world to see, be sure to regularly gauge its effectiveness. Measure traffic, monitor search engines regularly to see how you rank and determine how your site stacks up against competitors' sites.

And, finally, make sure your website remains an integral part of your business strategy. After all, it is the road to the future. ●

