

20 Essentials to Getting Your Website Working for You

by Solutions Management

It is essential to learn
how to make sure your
website is productive and
working for your business



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There are now over 888,681,131 people online using the Internet worldwide. In fact as of March 2005, world rankings measured a total of 13,611,665 Internet users here within Australia. (Source: Nielsen Net ratings)

Google now has over 8 billion websites indexed and results indicate that over 67% of searches are from people looking for products and services. There are an amazing 260 million searches per day on the world's biggest search engine, Google.

In a recent article, Internet Marketing Expert Lea-Anne Brighton recently commented, "There is no more cost-effective way to reach your target audience than through using the web. How else can you reach all these people for so little cost, than to use a quality website to market your business".

"The reality is that for every website that is making its business owner "good money", through new customers and repeat sales, there are estimated to be 10 websites that are lying idle and non-productive.

It is essential to learn how to make sure your website is productive and working for your business. Here are 20 tips brought to you by Solutions Management.

1. Determine your Objective for your Website

With any business venue or marketing campaign, you have to clearly outline the objectives for your investment. Likewise it is essential that you determine the goal you have for your website. A good website can perform a number of functions actively working for your business.

Take a minute to look at your objectives. Some of your objectives might include:

- You may need your website to be your “online brochure” to promote your business
- It could be to “save you money”. You might use your website to refer new customers to, instead of printing and posting out costly colour brochures.
- Your website is a great way to establish your business credibility. A website that is reflective of your business professionalism, can clearly differentiate your business from other businesses. Many websites look “shabby and home-grown”, clearly giving a customer the wrong opinion. By setting up a good quality website, you will gain a huge advantage over your competitors.
- Building an “information rich website” can be a real benefit to business, as often people are looking to do their research online. This can help you to attract quality “buying” customers to your business.
- An online store can allow you to sell directly to people while they are “hot” to buy. This can save you time and money.

Most importantly, you need to know exactly what you want your website to do for your business. Too many people just build “10 page websites”. Your objective should not be to have a “10 page website”, it should be to have a website actively working to promote your business to “buying customers”.

Take the time to work out your objective right up front – it will save you time and money.

2. Provide *Useful* Content

Website users are educated, savvy buyers. It is in your best interest to provide them with useful information, pictures and fact sheets about your product or service.

Remember, research shows that in excess of 80% of people are doing their "homework" with a view to selecting which company they will deal with by looking at their websites.

3. Keep it Simple and Professional

The website design should reflect the business. You want your website to look professional and reflect your business success.

People want to deal with credible, professional businesses. They do not want slow downloading "flash" sequences at the beginning. When interviewed 80% said they skip the "flash introduction" and another 10% said they ignore it and wait for the page to download but did not feel it enhanced the business information.

The additional money spent on flash developments simply will not give you the return on investment that a "good-looking, fast downloading website" can provide.

4. Engage a Company with Expertise in Web Marketing

While it is easy enough to use the software packages available today to make a somewhat simple website and get it online, seldom do you get the results you want from such a website. This makes perfect sense – I can't buy an automotive book and become a mechanic in 10 hours nor can I expect the same results from a "Law for Dummies" book as I can from having a professional lawyer help me.

Reality is that you will get what you pay for. In today's world, you need a website that looks professionally designed, you need a simple way to keep the information up-to-date and you need to have it optimised so it works efficiently on the major search engines. Even for professionals – this is not a 10 hour job – it takes time to set up a website that will bring you in "good quality" returns.

Likewise, it is in your best interest to deal with a company that has a proven track record, you don't want to pay while they "learn" at your expense. Their "learning" is likely to cost you leads or sales from prospective customers currently searching from your product on the main search engines.

The reality is that anyone can put up your website – do they know and are they willing to show you how to get it highly listed amongst the top search engines where it will bring you in new business.

5. Emphasize a Unique Aspect of your Practice.

With the huge numbers of people now with websites, and listed with the major search engines, it is essential that you differentiate your business through your website.

The most effective way to do this is to create your website so that it clearly emphasizes what you can offer your prospective buyer. This allows the "browsing and research customers" to clearly see why they should choose your company to deal with.

6. Make your “First Impression” Count

Most of your website visitors will come through your “home page”. It is really your front door to the website browsers. You need to make sure that you put good quality information here so that a person can quickly access if they are at the right location – in other words if you have the products or services that they are looking for.

Quick warning: don’t mix your “good first impression” with flashy graphics – people are there to see what you can offer them. In the same way that people are seldom impressed by an expensive office, they will be looking to see if you are a professional at what you offer, and expect you to have a website that reflects this.

7. People can come from all Different Directions

Many people wrongly assume that people will always come into their website through their “front door” or home page. A good quality website can allow people to very quickly head to the information that best suits their needs or even to click on a link on the search engines or on another website that brings them directly to a “Specific Topic Page”.

Knowing this information, be sure that you make adequate linkages back to your main pages and have a good single layer navigation system with pop out sub-menus’ so that it is easy for your customers to navigate back to your home page if needed.

8. Check out your Competition

It is a good idea before you begin your project to have some idea of what your competitors are doing. These may be people selling your products or services here in Australia or overseas.

A word of caution: Remember that only 1 in every 10 websites is really working for the business owners, so don't become fixated on copying what everyone else is doing. Just because they are doing it does not mean it is working for them.

A good example of this was seen in the 2000 – 2003 when everyone was obsessed with using certain technologies that were popularised at the time. Many people wasted tens of thousands of dollars have sites developed that could not even be found on search engines.

You want to be a leader in your area of business – not a follower.

9. Remember to Invite your Existing Client to come Back to your Website

Your website is a great way to attract new customers, it can also be used to bring repeat business from existing customers.

Remember to consider adding information (content) that will give your customers a reason to visit your website, again and again. You might do this via special offers that you post on the website or having good quality information they may wish to refer to at a later stage.

Remember it is 5 times easier to sell to an existing customer than it is to sell to a new customer. Therefore using your website to help you secure extra business from your existing customers is a smart move.

10. Think about Attracting Local Customers

The "world-wide web" has given many businesses the idea to promote their business, "all over the world". If you are a business that predominately wants to sell and service a local area, then it is essential to make your website focus on attracting local business.

Even as an online store, you may choose to focus on selling to your "own country" as shipping etc is easier, and there is a huge market right here within Australia.

11. Answer your Customer's Enquiries Quickly and Efficiently

It is estimated that there is millions of dollars in business lost each week through businesses not promptly and efficiently dealing with enquires from their websites.

Answering e-mail enquiries can be likened to returning phone calls - you've got to do it, and do it promptly.

No matter what business you have, you need to have a system in place where you respond to each enquiry within 24 hours of receiving it. With wireless technology, all the gadgets, and an abundance of Internet cafes we have these days, this is easy for any business to do.

People know that you are serious about their business if you deal with their enquiries promptly and efficiently.

12. Privacy Statements.

The Privacy Laws within Australia are quite clear in regard to dealing with customer information. We would recommend that you have your privacy statement on your website so that there can be no confusion with how you will be dealing with customer's information.

This is especially the case if you plan to have an interactive, or e-mail marketing system operational within your website.

13. Make your Site "User Friendly"

Your site should be designed to ensure that it is easy to use, for your potential customers and repeat visitors. It is essential that they feel comfortable in "surfing" around your website.

Many sites use hierarchical menu structures that leave people lost and annoyed. You should use a good quality menu system that has pop-out sub-menu's. Programs such as Front Page provide a menu system, where it is very easy for people to become confused and leave your site – costing you money.

Likewise, the overall layout of your information should encourage customers to "stay and look around" rather than annoying or frustrating them. There are specific techniques for doing this, which can also help you to gain better search engine rankings. The International Web Marketing Institute (www.IWMI.com.au) can help you with informative training programs on this.

14. Promote Your Site.

Building your website is only the first stage of getting your website to bring you new business. You need to have a strategy for promoting your website – listing it on search engines, including it within your marketing, and publishing your website address, are all essential to a successful website.

Sadly, many people think that once they build the web site, the new customers will come pouring through the door and begin buying. It is a little bit like building a beautiful billboard advertising your product or service, and then parking this in your garage at home. No one can see it, so it will not generate you any new business.

Thankfully people are starting to wake up to the need for understanding and education about how to get well listed on search engines. I know of many people who are making substantial sales weekly, with new business coming directly from search engines.

Word of Warning: Much of the "free" information that you will see listed on the Internet about how to list on the search engines is both out of date and therefore useless, or worse still, can get you banned from the major search engines. Take care that you work with people who know what they are doing, as it can dramatically affect your business success.

Remember to add your website into your traditional advertising campaign. It should be listed within your other advertisements, on your business cards, stationery and out- going emails.

15. Budget Your Time.

It is essential that you plan to commit some time on a regular basis, to your website. If you are smart, you will secure a “content management system” website whereby it is a simple and time-effective process to keep your website updated.

It is of limited value to build a website and not commit further time to improving and enhancing your content, search engine rankings, and the products and services that you offer.

Allocate between 1- 4 hours per month to working on your website. This time should be spent focused on marketing – not “playing / fighting” with the technology of the site, so ensure that you have a good quality site, that facilitates your time being spent on marketing.

16. Get your Domain Name – it is your Web Address

Your “domain name” is as important to your business as your “business name”. You should secure a “good” domain name as soon as possible.

Depending which name you choose, it will cost you between \$88 to \$140, if it is an “Australian extension” name – ie it has a “.com.au”. See www.domainking.com.au for discount domains or www.melbourneit.com.au for full price names.

US and other extension names are cheaper in many cases. The “.com” names are often difficult to secure as many are already taken. You have options to secure “.info”, “.biz”, “.ws” and many others at cheaper rates.

If you are targeting your local marketing, it is advisable to use the “.com.au” domain name extension, as it will tend to “demonstrate” to your clients, that you are based in Australia, and targeting this market.

17. Keep your Website Content Fresh and Up-to-date

Keep your website content and information up-to-date. No one likes to read yesterdays news. Likewise, no one likes to shop in stores where there is no fresh stock or merchandising.

Your website is a reflection to your potential customers of how you run your business. It is important for your customers to see that your business is professional in its approach to marketing and sharing up-to-date information with them.

As part of your on going marketing strategy, you should be allocating time each week / month to updating the information on your website. This will ensure that at all times your "best image" is projected.

Remember: If you are trying to encourage repeat business from your website and you are actively inviting customers to come back and visit your website again, there should be some fresh and up-to-date information for them to review.

18. Don't forget Your Business

It is easy to get wrapped up in the whole “new technology” and “building websites” scene. There are many accounts of people wasting countless hours trying to master “making a website” for their business.

Many have made the mistake of buying a cheap package, and thinking they will make their own website. The results are common – huge amounts of wasted time, a poor quality website, that gives the wrong impression to clients, and the end result being no new business from a huge time and money investment.

Use a professional company and budget your time accordingly. As a small business owner, your business is about marketing your product or service, selling your product or service and your customer service. Your website needs to be a component of this strategy.

Having said that, it is an essential component as I have seen in many cases, where it has significantly increased the sales. For example, a local car repairer in Melbourne generates \$80,000 plus each year, in additional business from his website. This is the third year of him doing this – the website investment was around \$5,000 and this has netted him to date an additional \$200,000 plus, in new business, plus much more in repeat business. That is a very good return on investment.

19. Don't expect Immediate Results.

One of the key areas of concerns within the website industry is the cowboys promising unobtainable results. You cannot guarantee anyone number one ranking on the main search engines. For starters, Google does not sell its placements.

Likewise, you cannot even guarantee the listing time on most of the main search engines. Sadly, many people have been given false information and therefore have unachievable expectations.

FACTS:

- It takes on average 2-6 weeks to be listed within the search engines under your own website address.
- No one can guarantee any search engine rankings on Google – those that do are in breach of Google guidelines, and should be avoided, as they could get your website address blacklisted for life for breach of Google guidelines for using its service.
- Just because you have a website does not mean it will be listed on the search engines, you need to know the process to submit your site.
- With billions of websites listed, you need to have a good web marketing strategy so that your website is found by the search engines and listed up the top – i.e. page 1- 3 of the search engines.

Warning:

Google can and will blacklist you for "doing the wrong thing". This is a very costly exercise for you, as the only practical way to be re-listed, is to buy a new website address and start again.

Please note: Onus is on you to ensure that your website is not inappropriately used in regard to the search engines. In English, if your web designer does not know or ignores the rule and incorrectly submits your site or breaches guidelines, you are still held responsible, and will be removed from the Search Engines.

While you can appeal, it is a lengthy and often frivolous exercise – you will need to buy a new address. Therefore it is essential that you get good quality information and "stick to the rules".

It will save you wasted time and money, and if you follow the rules, you can get exceptional results – see International Web Marketing Institute www.iwmi.com.au for details

20. Just Do It

To delay further in building, re-building or sorting out your website, is costing you money. There is such a volume of internet users, and so much research pointing the huge numbers using the Internet, to either buy products and services, or to research for an upcoming purchase, that you are crazy to miss this opportunity.

There are many business that are making a fortune through leads and new business generated from their website. This is business that you are missing out on.

Furthermore, if these customers are not coming to your business, then they are going to your opposition – costing your business even further.

Your Website can Make you a Lot of Money

For every one good website that is making money, and working hard for its business owner, there are 10 that are not. Likewise, for every 1 professional website designer, there are 100 cowboys that have no idea about internet or real life marketing, that have simply brought some software and call themselves an expert. If you choose a company like this, you will cost your business money.

It is essential that you work with what will provide you the education and support, that you need to make your Internet marketing a success.

Solutions Management currently works with over 300 small businesses; we lead the world in our education program, and build quality websites that are producing results. Using our services makes the process of getting your website up on the Internet and out there working for you easy.

We share our information with you, so not only can you get a great looking website that you can update yourself, you can access information and Internet marketing secrets that other companies will not share with you.

We have a proven formula for success. It not only fast tracks your results, but gives you clear steps to follow to ensure that you get the results that you want from your website.

Please give our helpful team a call today on 1300 88 68 59.