

1 – Increase New Business

If you needed a plumber or electrician you would probably start your search online rather than thumbing through the yellow pages. It's so much easier to simply type 'plumber' into a search engine. With ever more people turning to the Internet in search of even local services, rest assured your main competitors will either have a web site or be considering one.

2 – Save Money

Advertisements in papers, magazines and other traditional offline media generally cost far more than advertising online and for many businesses are something of a law of diminishing returns as, again, more people turn to the web. Even businesses that simply use their web sites as an online brochure rather than necessarily attracting traffic directly should still see significant cost savings when factoring in printing costs -- and of course electronic media are widely held to be better for the environment.

3 – Provide Information

Web sites can be set up to provide the exact information your customers need. Some businesses simply need a basic business description, address and phone details. Others add testimonials, photographs and other detailed information which, if correctly constructed, can inspire a level of confidence in your company that can be hard to achieve offline. A well designed web site allows the user to quickly navigate to the product or service information that interests them most - often far more so than the equivalent printed brochure. Naturally the information can be kept completely up to date, further providing peace of mind and improving consumer confidence.

4 – Beat the Competition

If you have lots of competitors, how many of them have good web sites? Or indeed how many have a web site at all? By creating an online presence which is better presented and better marketed than theirs, you can gain market share at the expense of your competition.

5 – Attract a New Type of Customer

Following on from the new business theme above, more and more people are now using mobile phones, PDAs and other hand held devices to access the Internet. Some of them may be in demographic groups that you have not previously been able to reach or effectively target. With the right web presence you are suddenly propelled into their world.

6 – Get Interactive Feedback

Modern web sites are something of a multimedia affair. You can add a blog and perhaps include videos, audio, live chat, forums, RSS feeds and even podcasts. All these elements can attract customers and create interest. You can offer advice on your subject of expertise and communicate directly with potential customers, building a reputation as you go. By entering into a dialogue with your customers and potential customers this way, you can solicit the kind of detailed feedback that offline marketers can only dream of.

7 – Develop a Brand

All big companies have a recognizable brand. Whilst Coca-Cola is the best known brand globally, most of us operate on a more modest scale. That said, the global reach of the Internet allows small business to build reputation and brand at a speed and within a cost framework that would be simply impossible offline. Business that have never previously considered "brand" or "brand values" are now able to leverage these to full effect in gaining mind share and thus market share. A well conceived and well constructed web site is the starting point.

8 – Create Return Business

Anyone can easily lose a business card or forget the name of a builder they spotted in the local phone book. However, if they have a web site stored in their web browser's "favorites", they can return to your site whenever they need more information or indeed help. Once again, the use of interactive media, helpful information, questions & answers and forum software can maintain a high level of dialogue and thus help in securing customer loyalty.

9 – Provide Guidance and Information

In an offline world, you may regularly have had a great idea or some information that would be extremely useful to your client base. However, sitting down and creating a letter or postal mail shot to keep them up to date would have been nigh on impossible: after all, you have a business to run. Now, with a decent web site, you can add the information directly to the site and notify your subscribers pretty much in the time it takes to write down the information itself. Fresh, relevant information will not only keep your clients returning to the site but will also help to convince the search engines that you deserve high placement for relevant search terms, thus driving further traffic and potential new business. It should also help to persuade potential customers that you're the best firm for the product or service in question.

10 – Create Privileged Connections

With modern Internet security, not only can payments be taken online securely but other information can be passed between computers safely too. You can, for example, create passwords to allow entry to restricted areas of your web site. Many site owners do this to create a VIP section, perhaps for strategic business partners or major clients, further reinforcing the relationship.

With online spend continuing to grow even in the face of (or in some cases because of) the current economic climate, there has never been a better time to consider an online presence.