

What do you gain from a Website?

Here are just a few ways in which your business will benefit from a web site. These are generalisations. There will be more depending on your particular business and the industry. Simply think of these as a starting-off point.

The number one mistake most business owners make when considering their investment on the web is to treat it like any other advertising medium. Yes, the Web is an advertising medium, but it is much more than that. It is capable of functioning as a branch office of your business - a place where business is conducted. Develop it and use it as your branch office. You will reap rich rewards.

Your web site reflects your business in many ways. It will brand your company with a unique identity. It is also a very powerful, evolving marketing tool that will be the first point of contact with many of your clients.

It is a branch office that is open 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week. Customers can come in, browse through your offerings, brochures, look at product photos, read the FAQs and the technical specifications, send a message to you, ask questions, and satisfy themselves that you are for real. Then they will do business with you either online or offline.

How much does it cost to open and run such a branch office? Today, a small business site can be developed and hosted with a domain name registered under \$1000 - and that is Australian dollars. That works out to just under \$20 per week. Even with a redesign thrown in every year or so, the cost of running this branch office should not make a hole in your budget. Could you think of a better reason to get on the Web?

Sell more Products & Services

The main purpose of your web site should be to entice prospective customers to buy from you. The World Wide Web is undoubtedly the most powerful marketing tool ever devised. The fact is that customers can find you, review your information in text, pictures, sound and even video, contact your sales staff and place an order from their desks within minutes, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, no matter where in the world they are. No other form of business communication provides this degree of sales support.

Over time, your web site will become the best marketing tool available to you

The Yellow Pages directory used to be the first choice for people looking to buy a product or service. Now they turn to an internet search engine. Today most search engines have localised versions - in Australia [Google](#), [Yahoo](#) & [Alta Vista](#). If your business does not have a web site, you will not be found by millions of prospective customers on the web. Unlike your local Yellow Pages directory, the web can reach the entire globe and provide much more information than a single print advertisement can hold.

Imagine an advertisement in which you can include virtually unlimited information, illustrations and photographs of products and/or services you provide, testimonials from happy customers, along with interactive features, audio and video. You could even have an electronic catalogue and order forms so that orders could be placed online and payment made online. The information on your web site is dynamic - it can be updated whenever you want. You could connect it to a live database or provide information of time sensitive specials, press releases and announcements.

When the site is correctly marked up with keywords, descriptions and meta tags, and submitted to Internet search engines and optimised, it has the potential to be a very powerful marketing tool.

Augment traditional promotional methods

The power of the web site can be well and truly unleashed by using it in conjunction with other marketing tools such as business cards, print ads, brochures, radio, television, billboards etc. It is like enclosing a brochure with all business stationery, print, radio and TV ads. By including your web address, that's exactly what you will do.

A web address is small enough to fit anywhere, yet it provides instant access to your entire sales and marketing presentation. Email response methods can be built into the web pages to interact with prospects while questions are still fresh in their minds. The cost, the effort and the time lag is negligible, when compared to other methods of traditional customer service.

If you speak to a customer on the phone, who is after some product information, by all means provide that information to the best of your ability. But direct him or her to your web site for more information. You should have product brochures in easily downloadable PDF (portable document format) on your site.

Print your web address on your brochures, press ads, company vehicles, all stationery and promotional material. Have it displayed in newspaper and magazine ads, and feature it in radio and television ads. Remember, your site can be much more than just a static electronic brochure. You can have sounds, animations and even small movies to bring to life your sales message. Make your business grow by incorporating your web site into your overall marketing strategy, that way you will get more "bang for the buck".

Build stronger relationships with your customers

We all know that it is cheaper and easier to sell to an existing customer than to a new one. Your web site can play a key roll in keeping in touch with your customers.

Use your web site to keep an open line of communication with your customers. Whenever you introduce a new product or a service, have a special offer or open a new branch, make sure that you inform the existing clients. Point them to the web site for more information.

You should email a regular newsletter to your customers - make it interesting, informative and brief. This kind of email marketing is not spam (junk email) because they have an existing business relationship with you or have indicated that they wish to receive your newsletter. It is a good idea to archive the newsletters on your web site so that prospective customers can read them as well. It will display your expertise in your industry, commitment to customer service, and dedication to your business.

You could use the web site to provide after sales service and technical support. By using a combination of online forms, database of technical documents, FAQ's etc., backed by email support you could build up a solid support system. This will clearly demonstrate to your prospective customers that your business believes in excellent customer service.

Reduce marketing and promotional costs

You will be able to save on printing, promotional, courier and postage charges by directing prospective customers to your web site where price lists, newsletters, brochures etc., can be made available for download.

Your web site can act as your branch office, electronic brochure, online store and communication medium all at the same time. You might be tempted to think that the initial cost of establishing a web site is high. If you promote it right, the cost per person viewing your web site will be a fraction of what needs to be spent using other promotional methods. This is because of the fact that on the web there is no restriction on the amount of information you can deliver (no space or time restrictions). Through effective use of search engine submission techniques and keyword indexing your business can be pitched at your niche market no matter where in the world they are.

By including your catalogue complete with colour photographs on the web site, you could drastically reduce printing and mailing costs. Even if you don't want to create an online version of your catalogue, by using mass emailing techniques to send out an electronic version to your customers would save you a lot of money and save some trees too. With increased environmental awareness in recent years, there is a lot more acceptance of electronic document delivery. Ask us about converting your existing documents such as price lists, brochures, and technical manuals to Portable Document Format (PDF) to be distributed via the Web. Such documents can be read by anyone with the free Adobe Acrobat reader software which is now included in all recent versions of web browsers.

Overcome geographical boundaries

A typical local business used to have a market reach of around 25-50km radius. Not anymore, not if that business has a web site. Any small business can have a global reach, provided the product or service offered lends itself to a global market.

More than half the population and more than three quarter of the businesses in Australia has access to the Internet. More importantly millions of people worldwide are getting connected everyday. There are many products and services sold in Australia, that are not available in their countries. With a web site, even the smallest home based businesses can reach customers across Australia and around the world.

Digital information has little respect for international boundary lines. Markets that may have once been too difficult to approach can now be very profitable. Bear in mind that in the same way that you reach across international boundaries, your competitors elsewhere can grab your customers. You can establish a rapport with your customers who are connected to the Net and establish customer loyalty through your web site.

Reach a niche market

If your product or service is highly specialised, you will be hard pressed to find enough customers using traditional methods. Provided your web site is properly optimised for major search engines, you can be assured of an audience for the most obscure project or service. The sheer number of people online makes this possible.