

Does My Business Really Need a Website

By Debbie Campbell

Absolutely. Your site provides the first impression many of your customers have! Having your own business website is as essential today as having a telephone or a business card. And recent research shows that between 20 and 35% of search engine queries are now local business searches.

Having a professionally-designed website can make your small business look like a big one. Quality is key when it comes to web site design - it enhances your professional credibility. And obtaining a well-designed site needn't be overly expensive or intimidating.

What can a website help you do?

- Establish a business presence on the Internet
- Sell products or services online
- Help your customers find your physical store
- Save you time by answering your customers' frequent questions
- Provide inexpensive customer service 24/7/365
- Expand to new markets
- Keep up with (or surpass!) your local competitors
- Keep your customers up-to-date on the happenings of your organization
- Provide extra value to your customers by offering online-only specials
- Build a community around your products or services
- Help your business stand out from the crowd

Having a well-crafted web site can help your business grow.

Consider this: how much does it cost you to **not** have a web site? Or to have a badly-designed one? Both can hurt the credibility and image of your business.

Recently, I mentioned that I needed new business cards to a colleague who has some really striking ones. He told me all about a local company that does his printing - raved about the great customer service and reasonable prices, and their fast turnaround time.

They sounded wonderful. I asked if they had a website and they did, so while I was waiting on something else I went to check it out. Their site was full of spelling errors. It had inconsistencies in the navigation on many pages, and it was hard to tell where you were in the site because there were no breadcrumbs. The shopping cart function was reporting cryptic errors, and the entire site had sections of text that were right up against other elements because they hadn't been formatted with white space in between.

If I didn't know that this was a great company (per my colleague), and I saw this website first, I would never contact them. This makes a bad first impression and I don't think too many users, not knowing anything about this business, would go further than a couple of pages on this site. Too many errors and an unprofessional appearance are invitations for your customers to go elsewhere. And this can hurt you even more than not having a website at all.

Ask business colleagues, friends and family for referrals to a reputable designer – this is one of the best ways to find a trustworthy and reliable business partner to help you build your web presence.

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Debbie Campbell is a web developer of 11 years and the owner of Red Kite Creative (formerly Parallax Web Design) - (www.redkitecreative.com). Debbie is passionate about CSS, valid coding and web standards. She creates and redesigns websites for small businesses and encourages her clients to get involved with their customers via their site – launch is the beginning, not the end!