

A Beginner's Guide to Building a Web Presence:

6 Steps for Getting Your Small Business Online and In Front of Customers

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Is this eBook for You?

Are you a startup taking your first steps into the online space? Do you have a small business that's been operating without a website? Or do you have a website that isn't driving the sales you want?

Then this eBook is for you. We'll take you through the basics of getting online and in front of customers with a site that will:

- Help customers, prospects and potential employees and partners find your business
- Provide clear information about your products and services
- Persuade people to do business with you
- Generate sales

We'll take you through the basics of getting online and in front of customers.



STEP 1

Naming the Baby: Choosing & Registering Your Domain Name



Step 1 – Naming the Baby:

Choosing & Registering Your Domain Name

You've conceived and developed your business idea and committed the time and resources to start making it a reality. Now it's time to give your business its online name – a name that will be spoken, linked to, searched for, printed and displayed in a variety of ways throughout the life of your business. Choose wisely.

Make Your Domain Simple and Memorable

Keeping your domain name simple will help people remember it and make it easier to find.

- Try for your exact business name or a shortened variation.
- Make sure it's easy to spell, but also register a few potential misspellings (for example, www.google.com or www.amazon.com).

Take Advantage of Longer Registrations

Register your domain name for 2, 5 or even 10 years.

- Longer registrations usually mean better pricing.
- Save yourself the headache of dealing with an expired domain every year.
- Expired domains are eventually re-opened to the public for purchase – don't lose your name!



Step 1 – Naming the Baby:

Choosing & Registering Your Domain Name

Use Your Domain for Your Email

Your domain name can function as more than just your website address.

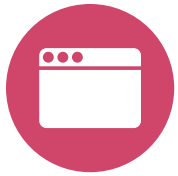
- A branded email address appears more credible than a free email (such as bob.smith@bobsbiz.com vs. bob@gmail.com).
- Keeping a consistent naming convention for all employee emails makes it easier for people to contact you.

More Quick Tips for Domains

- Don't use hyphens or numbers
- Consider multiple top level domains (TLDs): .com, .net, .biz
- Check copyright.gov to make sure your domain name doesn't infringe on an existing copyright

STEP 2

Creating the Experience: Writing & Building Your Website



Step 2 – Creating the Experience:

Writing & Building Your Website

So now you have a domain name, but what will people find when they visit it? Creating a clear, user-friendly website sounds easy, but it takes planning. Make sure your goals for the site are clear as you begin writing your content and creating the design.

Decide What Type of Site You Need

- **Informational:** Do you want a website that simply allows customers to find you and learn more about your business? If so, all you'll need is a few web pages with content and graphics.
- **Ecommerce:** Do you want people to be able to purchase from your website? You'll need content that drives people toward a shopping cart function.

Decide What Extras You Want

There are several general pages that most websites include (see common website pages, right), but do you want any extras?

- Blog
- Event Calendar
- Support Info

Common Website Pages

Informational

- Home page – the main entryway to your website
- Services page – what are you selling or offering?
- About page – who are you?
- Contact page – how do customers reach you?

Ecommerce

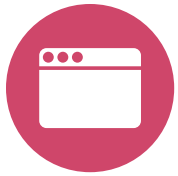
- Home page – the main entryway to your website
- Product page – what are you selling?
 - Consider adding multiple pages per product or an overview page if you have more than 10
- Reviews/testimonials page – what do people say about your products?
- About page – who are you?
- Contact page – how do customers reach you?



Building a Website

- Hire someone to create it for you
- Build it yourself using a template or a 3rd party design tool
- Write the programming yourself (if you understand HTML)





Step 2 – Creating the Experience:

Writing & Building Your Website

Motivate Visitors to Act

The goal of every page is to drive your prospect to purchase.

Website content should follow some tried and true guidelines to engage and motivate your visitors to take action:

- Include clear, persuasive calls to action on every page. Make it easy for the readers to move through your site and always direct them toward a way to purchase, e.g. “Buy Now”, “Subscribe Now”, or “Sign Up”
- Keep it simple. Write clearly and concisely, avoiding or defining technical jargon.
- Break the content into short sections for easy scanning.
- Use descriptive headings and subheadings.
- Use bulleted lists to showcase long inventory lists or service features.
- Look up popular searches related to your topic and include keywords (see Choosing Your Keywords on page 13 for more information).
- Don’t forget that page titles and meta descriptions should also be clear, brief and include keywords (see Moving Higher in the Search Results on page 14).

Go through your site, imagining you’re a prospect with a particular need. Ask friends and family to do the same and provide their feedback on the experience.

- Does the content make sense and provide the information you need?
- Does it lead you down a logical path, ending with a way to take action (purchase or contact)?

STEP 3

Getting Found: Making Your Site Google-Friendly



Step 3 – Getting Found:

Making Your Site Google-Friendly

No matter how much time you spend creating a beautiful, functional website, it's of no value if it can't be found. Search engines, such as Google, Bing and Yahoo! act like customized online directories, pointing the user to websites matching the terms the users used in their search.

How Google and Other Search Engines Work

Using software robots called spiders, search engines "crawl" through websites to analyze content and determine what the site is about and how valuable its information is. Among other things, the spiders note:

- What keywords are used within the web pages and where – see Choosing Your Keywords for more information
- What other sites link to the website – links to your site from reputable or well-established websites can help improve your ranking
- How recently the site's content has been updated – spiders like content to be fresh and constantly updated





Step 3 – Getting Found:

Making Your Site Google-Friendly

Submitting to Search Engines

First things, first. To get your website on the list you have to tell the search engines that it's there. You can do this yourself, or use a search engine submission service. Submission services will take care of submitting your site to each major search engine and can also provide you with reports, tips for increasing search engine rankings, and a keyword suggestion tool.

Choosing Your Keywords

What Are Keywords?

Keywords are words used within the content of your site that help search engines identify what the site is about. They usually relate to your industry, your products and services, your location and anything else a customer might search for when trying to find a business like yours.

Identifying Keywords

Google offers a free keyword tool at www.google.com/adwords where you can enter words related to your company to see how often they're searched.

- Create a list of often-searched terms and work them into your website content where you can (these are called "short-tail search terms").
- Then, create a list of more specific terms or phrases related to your company and work them in as well (these less-searched, but more specific terms are called "long-tail search terms").



Step 3 – Getting Found:

Making Your Site Google-Friendly

Move Higher in the Search Results

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can help your site rank higher in search results. While writing content that is relevant and engaging has a positive effect on ranking, so does writing based on a plan for keywords and links:

- Develop a logical sitemap and simple navigation.
- Define your keywords – see Choosing Your Keywords box for more information
- Use your keywords in your:
 - Page titles – the text you see at the top of your browser window
 - Content – what you read on the pages themselves
 - Meta descriptions – the short description you see in search results (also indexed by spiders)
- Meta tags – what the spiders pay extra attention to when crawling your website
- Link your own web pages to each other where appropriate.
- Have other relevant, credible sites link to your website with text links using your keywords.

STEP 4

Engaging in the Conversation: Building Your Community with Social Media



Step 4 – Engaging in the Conversation:

Building Your Community with Social Media

Your site is up and running, you're creating content, you're marketing online to your customers – do you REALLY need to spend time on social media? Yes. The reality of today's culture is that whether you choose to participate in social media or not, customers and prospects WILL talk about you online. Being part of the conversation gives you the opportunity to change perceptions, create loyalty and win sales.

Monitoring the Conversation

Before you begin posting on social media, it's vital that you have tools in place to monitor what's being said about your business.

- Positive feedback helps you identify which products and services your customers value.
- Negative feedback can be key in identifying areas that need improvement.
- In addition, customers often post customer service complaints online – monitoring social media for mentions of your company gives you an opportunity to respond to these and resolve situations you might not know about otherwise.

To set up a monitoring program:

- Sign up for a social media monitoring tool, such as Hootsuite, Tweetdeck or one of the other available online.
- To get started, just enter the terms you want to monitor on Twitter and Facebook, making sure to include your company name, industry key words, competitor names, etc.
- The monitoring service will then send you notifications anytime those terms are used.



Step 4 – Engaging in the Conversation:

Building Your Community with Social Media

Which Social Media Platforms Should I Use?

Twitter posts are limited to 140 characters, so most businesses use Twitter for sharing links to company news and announcements, “retweeting” (sharing) other announcements from the industry, responding to customer mentions and support questions.

Facebook has good tools in place for running contests, posting photos or videos and writing longer posts.

LinkedIn is great for connecting with other businesses, joining educational groups related to your industry and posting job openings.

FourSquare is good for restaurants, stores, and other businesses with physical locations. Customers can “check in” on FourSquare to tell their friends/followers where they are at the moment. You can create a FourSquare profile for your business so anyone seeing that check in can learn more about you. Some businesses also offer customers rewards for having the most check-ins, etc.

Whichever platform you choose, be sure to add buttons on your website encouraging people to follow you, like you, or connect with you. You can download these free from AddThis.com.





Step 4 – Engaging in the Conversation:

Building Your Community with Social Media

Strategize Before Clicking ‘Post’

Now that you’re monitoring conversations about your business and industry, you can consider what type of information you want to post on your social media accounts. Unlike direct marketing, social media is a two-way conversation between you and your customers/prospects about your brand. While on the surface social media platforms can seem informal, remember that you are representing your business brand, so post carefully.

- **What to Post:** Social media is a very ‘in the moment’ platform. Write content that is timely and current. Make posts about new product launches and important company news but also current events outside your company.
- **Just Say Hello:** Let conversations happen – if you post something and someone responds, feel free to respond back. Not only is it polite, you are building connections with your readers.
- **Responding to Problems:** For better or for worse, these days businesses are expected to provide support and assistance through their social media platforms. Be sure you have a plan in place to address customers who bring support concerns to you – do not ignore them and do not delete them, except in the instance of profanity or other blatant abuse.
- **When to Post:** The timing is all up to you. A good rule of thumb is to be consistent, so if you post once a day, try to maintain that momentum. No one wants to interact with a stagnant brand.



Step 4 – Engaging in the Conversation:

Building Your Community with Social Media

Other Quick Tips for Promoting Your Site Through Social Media

- Announce a referral program. Provide prizes and /or discounts for customers who mentioned they were referred through social media.
- Create a brand ambassador program. Get your customers promoting your brand for you.
- Provide incentives for customers who post reviews via social media.
- Create a loyalty program. Hold special promotions for customers based on their buying habits and referral frequency.
- Reward your followers. Offer special promotion codes, discounts or other rewards only available to your fans and followers.

STEP 5

Taking It to the Next Level: Engaging with Your Community



Step 5 – Taking It to the Next Level:

Engaging with Your Community

Now you have your site up and running and are ready to begin driving people to it. Because of the way search engines find information (see *How Google and Other Search Engines Work* on page 14), the more updated, relevant content you have on your site, the more your site will show up in search results.

Share Ideas & News with a Blog

Blogging is an informal and personal way to attract visitors to your website and promote your industry expertise.

- Set up a blog using an online blogging service, such as Blogger, Joomla, or Wordpress. Add a link to your blog on your homepage. You also have the options of “mapping” the blog to your website so it appears as a part of your site — ask your blogging service provider about how to do this and whether there’s an extra charge.
- Assign time for yourself to create posts about product features, business news and commentary on what’s happening in your industry.
- Sort your posts by category, so visitors can easily find the topics that interest them the most.



Step 5 – Taking It to the Next Level:

Engaging with Your Community

Bring the Content to Your Audience with a Newsletter

As you add customers, collect their email addresses so you can drive traffic back to your website with a monthly email newsletter. As your newsletter list grows, so will your ability to attract new visitors—just remember that the goal is always to include links to your web pages within your content to drive leads and sales on your site. Newsletters can highlight:

- New products/services
- Interesting industry news
- Educational tips for your customers
- Sales and special promotions
- Change in hours of location
- Custom testimonials or success stories
- Survey or request for feedback

Short on Time? Let Your Customers Be the Authors

Search engines and customers look for fresh, updated content – if you don't have time create new content, why not let your customers create it for you?

- Add an FAQ page: List out common questions your customers ask, along with your answers.
- Have customers post reviews: Allow your customers to comment on your blog posts or add a review feature to your site

Hot Newsletter Tip:

Create newsletter section on your website that archives past issues, which is great for SEO.

STEP 6

Trying New Things: Analyzing & Improving Your Website



Step 6 – Trying New Things:

Analyzing & Improving Your Website

You have your domain name, you've established your web presence, your social media is up and running, and you're seeing traffic – now what? Find out what you're doing right and what you can do better by using a statistics and analytics package to identify, track and help you learn more about who is visiting your website.

Identify the Source

Using your statistics and/or analytics software to figure out where your visitors are coming from can give you a good idea of which marketing efforts are working:

- Direct entry (they typed your domain name into their browser address bar)
- Inbound links (clicking a link to your website from another website)
- Search results (finding your website via a search engine)



Step 6 – Trying New Things:

Analyzing & Improving Your Website

Make Improvements

Analytics can tell you a great deal about features and pages of your site that are and aren't working.

- Find out which pages are the most common “exit points.” If a large number of visitors consistently leave your site when they reach a certain page, examine the content – Is there a clear call to action? Why might visitors be leaving?
- Where are the most common “entry points”? See where the traffic to those pages is coming from, and make sure the pages' content makes sense to someone entering your site at that page.

Conclusion

While the setup phase will probably be the most consecutive time you spend on your website, the reality is that your site will never be “finished.” Maintaining and updating the content will be necessary as long as your company exists. But your site will also be one of your most cost-effective sales tools and the first touchpoint for many customers. So make time to make it good – it's your company's home base and face to the world. **Good luck!**



Step 6 – Trying New Things:

Analyzing & Improving Your Website

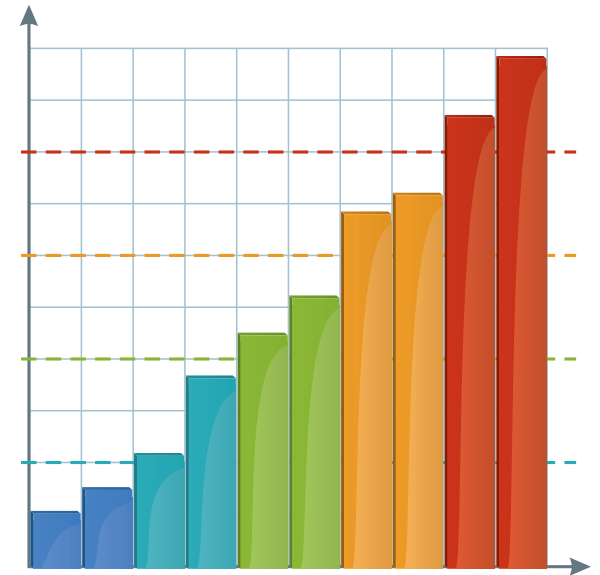
Choose Your Analytics Tool

When looking for analytics software, there are two types: free and paid.

Free – Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a clear leader within the free analytics tools and will support your website performance analysis with:

- Custom variables to help you define and segment your users based on criteria of your choosing, such as age, location, etc.
- Rich reports on who has accessed various parts of your site and what they did while there (Stayed on the page for 5 minutes and left? Made a purchase?)
- Custom control panels so you can interact with the information in the way that's easiest for you



Paid – Omniture, Web Trends, CoreMetrics

If you decide to upgrade to a paid analytics tool down the road, these three are among the most popular. They can provide you with more in-depth information and reports, but for someone new to the web, they might be more than is needed.

Glossary of Common Web Terms

Bandwidth

Bandwidth refers to the incoming and outgoing data transfer from your website. Web hosts usually set limits on bandwidth based on amount and speed.

Blog

An online journal where you can publish articles, videos, pictures and content of your choosing.

Domain Name

The name you choose to represent your site's IP address (its physical location on the Internet). For example, Google's domain name is google.com.

Ecommerce

The virtual version of commerce, selling goods and services, online. Visitors can add items to an online shopping cart and purchase them from your website.

Hosting

Provided by web hosting providers, hosting allows individuals, organizations and businesses to make their websites available on the World Wide Web.

HTML (HyperText Markup Language)

A standardized computer language to achieve font, color, graphic, and hyperlink effects on web pages.

Keyword

A word used to identify information that will be relevant to what a user has typed into a search engine.

Meta Tags

Meta tags refer to code that users cannot see but is used by search engines to determine the topic of a web page. Web design tools generally offer the option of entering meta tags.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Refers to the practice of incorporating commonly-searched-for terms into your content to make search engines, such as Google, rank your site closer to the top of search results.

Shopping Cart

A program designed to handle the eCommerce section of a web site. Shopping cart software lets users browse for and purchase products online.

Sitemap

A listing or map of all the pages on a website.

WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get)

A user interface for entering information into a website where "What You See Is What You Get", as opposed to interfaces that use obscure commands which do not result in immediate visual feedback.