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Seven Keys to Successful Websites for Businesses



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Websites are the best, most affordable, yet underused marketing tool for small businesses.

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Introduction: Three Key Characteristics of Great Business Websites

We, at WebDesign.com, think websites are the best, most affordable, yet underused marketing tool for small businesses. I built my own business around this idea, hoping to help small businesses make the web work for them. But the web can only work for small businesses if their websites are **affordable**, **attractive** and **effective**.

Let's start by addressing those biases for what business websites should be:

Affordable

Custom web design usually costs thousands of dollars. Some of the best web development companies charge on average \$3,000-5,000 just to start talking. Many charge a lot more. That's hardly affordable for most small businesses. We think web design should be affordable.

Attractive

An affordable website shouldn't mean an ugly website. You should be proud of your site —proud enough to make it your number one marketing tool. It should be attractive, appealing and representative of who you and your business are. It should give customers confidence and not leave people rolling their eyes at outdated styles.

Effective

A pretty website is nothing if it isn't effective. If all you have is eye candy, you're wasting your time. We wholeheartedly and fundamentally believe that your website should *do* something for your business. A lot of beautiful websites with music and fancy graphics have won awards, but those sites are useless if you can't find information and accomplish something. Small businesses can't afford to have websites that don't deliver.

With that foundation in mind, let's move on to the seven keys to successful business web sites.

1. Get a Website You Can Control

We talk to a lot of business owners who already have websites and there's often one common complaint: **they can't change their own website**. They either don't have the power, access or skill to make changes and updates. (Yes, some simply don't want to change their sites but I think they are really missing a huge opportunity.)

So let me say it like this: **You should have the keys to your own website.**

Meaning you should have both the access and ability to change your own website whenever you want—24 hours a day, 7 days a week, from anywhere in the world with web access.

The easiest way to get control of your website is with a **content management system** (CMS)—fancy web lingo for web-based software that lets you easily manage and change your website. It gives you the power to do things like add new pages, upload photos, change text and more.

If another software system prompts stress and worry, never fear. If you can operate Microsoft Word, you can use most content management systems, including the one offered by WebDesign.com.

The best content management systems have simple interfaces that allow you to bold, italicize and align text like you do in Microsoft Word or any other popular word processor.

The **primary reason** you need to have the keys to your own website (through a great CMS) is that **you**—not someone else—**can change your website whenever you want**. You're not waiting on someone else to make changes to your site. You're not double-checking to make sure that someone made the changes and did them right. The power is in your hands!

And having the power to change your own website opens the door to everything else we're going to talk about and make your website an overwhelming success for your business' bottom line.

Now, with saying all this, some people simply don't want to mess with changing their own website. Maybe you don't have the time to maintain your site yourself. You want to focus on doing what you do best -- your business expertise -- and want to leave the rest to professionals. No worries! Most web firms offer professionally managed sites and packages for this so you can keep doing what do best!

But I'll just add ... that you should at least have the option to change your own site if you wanted to!

2. Start Talking to Google

Google is not just a multi-billion dollar company and amazing search engine—**Google has now become a verb for searching online.**

Millions of people each day go to Google to find products, articles, photos, news and more. And some of those people are looking for the product or service you offer.

So as a business owner with a product or service to sell—**you want your website and business to be listed on the first page in Google's search results.**

To see what I mean take a quick trip over to your web browser and enter Google.com right now, then type in the product or service you offer.

What results show up?

Where is your business listed in those results?

Google uses mathematical algorithms to determine who gets ranked highly in their search results and it's based on a number of factors including keywords that appear on your site, links from other websites and other reasons.

You can boost where your site appears in search engine results by positioning your site to take advantage of these factors. It's a process called search engine optimization (SEO).

Simply put, it means optimizing your website's content so that you serve it on a golden platter to Google.

One of the best ways to do that is by providing a sitemap, which is like a road map to all your website's pages for the search engines to use.

Another good way to boost your search engine ranking is to figure out what keywords people search to find the products and services you offer and then make sure you include optimize those keywords in your site's text and HTML code (without going overboard). That will help Google figure out what your site is all about.

There are other factors that can help, but those are some of the basics for connecting your site to Google. Optimizing your website for search engines is an easy way to market your business online.

3. Get Blogging

A few years back blogging was the big buzzword as these newfangled keyboard jockeys were making major waves, from exposing Dan Rather to forcing Trent Lott to step down. Blogging has taken a backseat publicity-wise as newer technologies like Twitter and Facebook (more on them later) have hogged the headlines. But the simple power of blogging is still going strong and it's something you can easily harness for your business.

Here are a couple of reasons why blogging can boost your business:

Google and the Search Engines Love Blogs

Search engines love blogs. We talked before about the importance of optimizing your website for search engines, and blogs make it even easier. Having a blog usually means frequently updated content, which means more for a search engine to find. It also tells the search engines that your website is kept up to date—it's active and not dormant.

Develop a Readership and Following Online

Just like an email newsletter or even a newspaper, if you've got an active blog, with useful information about the products and services your prospective customers may be looking for, they will be more apt to return to your site ... and even buy from you.

Teach and Share Your Expertise

A blog can be an easy tool for you to share your insights, opinions and expertise in your industry or field. It can also be a powerful way to do educational marketing—teaching clients how to use your products or showing the solution to their problems through your services. In short, blogging gives you a platform to show why you're good at what you do.

Blogs are Interactive and Make Your Business More Personal

Most blogs have a comment feature that invites readers to respond and share their opinion. That kind of open and public interaction can be scary, but it also opens the door to be more personal and connect with your customers. That personal connection can be a way to better answer customer questions, get ideas and feedback for improvement, and ultimately lead to more sales.

4. Help Customers Easily Contact You

Having a website means your customers can find you and get their questions answered 24/7. But not every question can be answered on your site and sometimes your product or service requires making contact.

Your website should make it easy for customers to get in touch with you.

Posting your phone number is a no-brainer, but some customers are reluctant to pick up the phone. They'd rather have an unobtrusive way to ask questions and get answers. An online contact form is an easy and effective solution.

The best part about an online form is you can gather whatever information you need and direct it to whomever in your organization should be responding to it.

In my experience, adding a simple contact form increased inquiries for my products and services dramatically. As a result, I honed a process for responding to those potential customers and eventually turning them into paying clients.

5. Build a Following

Just like you've worked hard to build a customer base offline, you shouldn't neglect the great opportunity you have to build an online following or audience for your business.

As we've touched on, a blog is a great way to begin building readership and return visits to your website.

But there are other ways to build a following through hot social media sites like Facebook and Twitter—two free places that people use to network with each other, share interesting (or useless) stuff and just be entertained. Simply making sure your website and social media profiles are connected is an easy way to build a following.

You can and should also use the tried-and-true email newsletter. Put an opt-in subscription form on your site and offer special discounts, announcements and even free offers for your products.

Your website should be a central clearinghouse for all these ways of connecting with your customers. **Once you're connected, make sure you maintain those relationships.**

6. Motivate Actions

Business websites should not be static. They shouldn't just sit there, passively letting web surfers absorb information and move on. Your website should *do* something for your business.

Your site should be persuading potential customers to do whatever it is you want them to do. Maybe you want them to contact you. Maybe it's clicking a 'buy it now' button on your site. Maybe it's printing off a coupon and coming to your store. Maybe it's spreading the word about your services. Simply put, your site needs to prompt action.

If your site has no call to action, then what's it doing? If there's no call to action then your site is just taking up cyberspace and won't be any help to your business. Make sure your site pushes people to *do* something.

And whatever action you want people to take, be sure your site steers them to that response easily and simply, with minimal effort needed from them. It should be immediately clear how someone can take action. If the contact form is the call to action, don't bury it. Put a link to the form front and center. Whatever it is you want people to do, make sure there's no way they can miss it. Because if they miss it, you're the one who misses out.

7. Evaluate and Refine

The best thing about the Internet is that just about anything can be tracked and by its very nature it's always changing. Those are two very big bonuses when it comes to a business website. **It means you can figure out what's working, what isn't and make changes to improve.**

A free stat program like Google's Analytics is a good place to start. It lets you track keywords, what sites link to you and even the location of visitors to your site. It offers loads of information you can comb through to figure out if you're reaching the people you need to reach, if they're finding what they need on your site, if they're actually doing what you want them to do.

You need to be tracking your website's stats so you can refine and improve the site and continue getting the results you want. It offers a clear picture of return on investment. And if it's not working? Try something else. The ever-changing nature of the Internet means you can tweak and change your site until you find the magic combination that works.

Conclusion

There you have it: The seven keys to successful websites for businesses. Remember that above all we think business websites need to be **affordable**, **attractive** and **effective**. With those ideals as a starting point, you need to follow these key insights:

1. Get a website you can control: You need the keys to your site.
2. Start talking to Google: Take advantage of the search engines.
3. Get blogging: Content connects.
4. Help customers easily contact you: Add a contact form to make it easier to connect.
5. Build a following: Make sure people who visit your site stay connected.
6. Motivate actions: Get visitors to your site to do something.
7. Evaluate and refine: Discover what works, what doesn't and then make it better.

Business websites can be the best and most affordable marketing tool at your disposal, but only if you take advantage of them.

**Ready for an affordable, attractive, and effective website?
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Contact our team to set-up a FREE 30 minute consultation to discuss your website needs and to gain valuable advice to get you on the World Wide Web. There is absolutely no obligation to hire WebDesign.com -- we simply want to give you professional input to make the best decision for your company or organization, even if you choose to use a competitor.

If you are ready to get launched today, all the better! We have a great package we would love to share with you. Contact us today by phone or e-mail to start getting what you deserve from the Internet.

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