



## Why Have a Web Site

This is part of a series of primers about websites for small business owners. This document discussed the reason for a small business to have a website, and some of the business logic involved in understanding the potential value a website can offer your business (or not).

*Legal disclaimer: This is not legal or professional advice and we encourage you to do your own research and validate the opinions of the author contained herein.*

### Reasons

It is important to clearly understand the reason(s) you have a website, as that will guide your decisions on how you set it up, how you use it, and what you invest in it.

The most common reasons for a small business to have a website (in order of increasing complexity) are:

1. Be Found and Provide Basic Info About The Business
2. Establish Image and Credibility
3. Provide Information About Products & Services
4. Educate Prospective Customers
5. Build a Community
6. Make Sales
7. Provide Online Services

We will group these a little in this discussion since many of these reasons have sliding ranges and are not clearly distinct from each other.

### **As a Business Card**

The most basic reason to have a website is to be found by someone who is actively looking for your business, and provide them with your name, description of what you offer, your location, contact information, and your business hours.

What used to be the yellow pages has moved to the internet, and in this day of smart phones people are increasingly looking for services near their current location. Being found this way, may be what you want in your site. For this purpose, a simple listing may be sufficient, in combination with some good references on social media sites (like Yelp) for people to find you.

### **As a Brochure**

The most common use of websites today by small businesses is as a brochure. The site provides the business card information, but also more information about your business, its history, your products and services, and any unique aspects of which you are proud.

When used this way, the site presents an image of your business to the visitor and lets you provide some information to tell your story.

### **As an Instructor/Guide**

A very useful function that your website can provide is information. The content of this information can be educational (about your products/services) or advocacy (say about a cause if that is what drives your business).

If you think of your website as an instructor, you can use it to educate your customers about your products and services. How can they pick the ones that best meet their needs? How to know when to buy the better one vs. the cheaper one? What are the benefits of the product? Which features should they consider for which purposed? Why is your business philosophy based on a cause? Which product do you recommend because of that? Provide how-to instructions for using your products.

In other words, you website can educate your visitors to be better consumers of your products and services. They will know more about why they want to buy from you, and what things they want. This type of site often includes providing electronic documents (white papers, brochures, catalogs, check lists) and because of its content will typically fare well with search engines.

### **As a Sales Person**

If you are interested in e-commerce, you need to view your site as if it was a sales person. That means you need more than just a catalog, you will need the entire process of marketing, pre-qualifying leads, catalog, questions/reference/recommendation information, shopping cart, transaction processing, order fulfillment, and follow-up customer support.

Many small business sites have some success using just portions of this process, but many sites do not meet the business expectations because part is lacking.

### **As a Support Person**

Increasingly, we will see small businesses able to provide services via their website (to employees, customers, or both). Some capabilities that are used by small business are: appointment calendars, product manual libraries, customer surveys, and staff time cards. We will not discuss this much here as these will be specific to your situation.

## Value

Depending on the reason above, you should be able to place a financial value on your website.

If the purpose is to establish an appropriate business image, then the value is easy to determine. It is simply the answer to the question of "How much is it worth to you?" (There is no right or wrong answer other than your answer.)

If the purpose is to make sales, the value is also easy to determine. The value equals the number of sales made x the net profit of each sale.

However, since most small business web sites are for marketing and providing information, it is difficult to quantify the value. In fact, most small businesses just want more visitors to their website believing that this will increase business at their physical location – similar to the value placed on having a larger sign for the business. Not only is this not true, it can lead you to making some bad investments in website promotion.

## Understanding Website Visitors

The nature of the internet is that virtually everyone in the world is connected to it, and can get to your website. In contrast to the prevailing wisdom that more traffic to your site is better, our philosophy is that you want to create a website that appeals to your target market, and helps visitors not likely to need your wares to quickly move on with a good impression.

You are likely to get many visitors who are not interested in you. Your website is not going to convince them otherwise.

So, build it around visitors who are interested in what you offer. They will find you by search for some specific things (what are they?). What do they want when they find you (give it to them). There is a general expectation that things on the web are free (so give them some).

Use your site to establish credibility that you are a reputable business, you know what you are talking about, you can help them with their needs. Moreover, you can use your site to pre-screen visitors a little (offer different options) and to build some community/relationships (i.e. newsletter).

This leads into the entire topic of website visitor metrics, which is beyond this discussion. However, if you are ready for that, it means you have a good grasp on "Why have a web site?"