

Having an effective website is paramount to the success of your business online. As the World Wide Web evolves to a global village, every business that is serious about harnessing the power of the internet to tap into a greater market niche as availed by the internet must meticulously plan for their online presence.

In this first installment of Getting Your Business Online series, we will

talk about how to create an effective website. Building an effective websites may seem like a daunting task but it need not be. The following points will help you to make a success of your internet campaign.

### **1. Choosing a web designer**

This is perhaps one of the most important decisions that you will make when considering to hire a web designer or agency. An effective website that really works is a result of experience, skill and creativity. The designer should have a thorough knowledge of internet technologies and web standards. A designer worth their salt will have a portfolio and it should give you a glimpse of their strengths and weaknesses if any. It is imperative that the designer be able to listen to your needs and articulate them into an effective website that will help you achieve your goals. There are many qualities that one should look for but all in all you should look for an experienced designer, a graphic design expert, competent technical skills, a good portfolio and site management abilities.

### **2. Decisions, decisions.**

You need to ask yourself what do I want my website to do for me? There are different types of websites, static, dynamic, e-commerce driven and blogs. Static as the name implies are well.....static mostly text, graphics and images. Dynamic however are interactive either with user input or with a database. Information is stored on a database and the output is determined to a large extent by the user input. E-commerce are for selling products and services. Blog are interactive websites allowing for user input via comments section, these are very useful for learning about the needs of your clients and meeting them satisfactorily. Blogs can be developed as entire websites or as plug-ins or a section on a website.

### **3. Aesthetics**

Now let get into the fun part, your website should be visually appealing to your visitors. Remember that the goal of your website is to inform the visitors not annoy them with flashy graphics and screaming colors, so keep the graphics to a minimum. Use simple and clean layouts throughout the site that will enhance the presentation of your content and that will enable the visitor quickly find the information they are looking for before they get annoyed and move on. Now, balance is the key here and not eliminating graphics altogether. Using bland layouts that are boring will have the same effect as over usage.

### **4. Content Presentation**

The visitor is looking for information and how easy they get it is determined by the presentation. **Be clear and concise** that one is able to decide if what you are offering is the service or product they are looking for. Use titles and headings in your content to help your visitors scan for the details they are looking for. Keep the content fresh and updated to win the confidence of the visitor. Provide useful content to the visitor that calls them to action, provide solutions to their problems and they will definitely come back for more. Refrain from duplicating your website with your brochure, use a personal language that shows them exactly what they will get from your site. Marketing jargon and vague descriptions is a no-no, you should use a conversational language because your visitors have come for details.

### 5. Navigation

Navigation in your site is a road map with clear landmarks, roads that intersect and even suggested routes. Keep in mind that your visitors don't necessarily come through the homepage since they can come through search engines, bookmarks, links from other websites and so on. Make sure that you carry your navigation element uniformly in your site lest they get that feeling of 'lostness' and move on to another site never to come back. Remember that your visitors need to know *where* they are, where they *can* go and *how* to go back to their entry point. If your visitor has to stop and ask for directions then chances are they will never get to where they are going in your site.

### 6. Search Engines

From the onset make sure that search engine optimization is catered for in the design process not an after thought. It is important that your site is 'found' by search engines. This is done by optimizing your pages to be indexed by search engine robots. A few techniques used are; do a keyword research (words or phrases used by users to look for a service or product) then use the keywords in titles, links and in the content. Use 'alt tags' for images and then make sure you have good quality content. We will talk in detail about search engine optimization in this series make sure to stay tuned.

### 7. Loading times

Graphics are awesome if they enhance the visitors experience or add to the content but are a turn-off if the visitor has to wait for the pages to load for long. Your aim should be to retain visitors once they visit your site and slow loading pages will definitely drive them away. Keep the graphics to a minimum and stay away from unnecessary scripts as a rule of the thumb.

[Click here for a more detailed article on creating fast loading sites](#)

### 8. E-Commerce

If you are intending to sell your products and services through your website, then you need to plan this before hand. Ecommerce is a great way of increasing sales and exposing your products and services to a global audience. There are various ways that you can accept payments online these include, bank transfers, credit cards, online checks, and so on.

That sums up our first installment in this series. Keep an eye on the next one where we will look at getting your own domain name. If you have any comments please feel free to comment below.