

Does Your Business Really Need a Web Presence? Frequently Asked Questions

After years of helping entrepreneurs and businesses develop marketing strategies, many do not have Web sites. Here are the ten of the **most common questions and concerns** entrepreneurs and business owners posed about getting a Web site.

QUESTION 1: Does my company really need a Web site

The answer to this question could be yes or could be no. Only the business owner can answer it.

Recently I went to a popular restaurant in Columbia county to try and sell the owners a Web site. The restaurant was located right on the waterfront overlooking the Hudson River. I went just before lunchtime in the dead of winter on a weekday. I figured business would be slow and I could chat briefly with the owner.

The owner was gracious and allowed me to run through the basic benefits giving me her full attention even taking a few notes. I figured I had a good chance of closing this deal. I finally said, "Do you think a Web site is something you'd be interested in hearing more about?"

This was her reply: "We opened this place as a bait and tackle shop. Then people wanted coffee so we provided that. Then some asked for sandwiches, so we provided that. Later they wanted a few tables where they could sit and chat while they ate their sandwiches, so we got tables and chairs and began doing lunches. That led to dinners. Then we didn't have enough room so we added the screened in porch for the summer. People loved the porch so much that we winterized for the colder months. Now that it's January, we thought we might be able to close one day a week and get some time off. But we can't. We're too busy. We've

never advertised and we're tired. If a Web site is going to bring more people in here no thanks!"

This business does not need a Web site.

Only you can determine if your company needs a Web site. While making the determination, you want to consider that a Web site is multi-functional, and is a communication tool not an advertisement. If your business is organized, all of your clientele is local and you have a back-log of customers waiting to be serviced (and they will never go to a competing business), you may not need a Web site.

If you often wish you could communicate effectively with a wider range of clients/customers, publicly post answers to frequently asked questions, attract new business, break in to new markets and take the market share from your competitors... then **a Web site is a must!**

A Web site is like your giant public bulletin board where people can get information on how to find you, where you are located, what you have to offer, why your service is unique and what's new in your company. It also is easily updated and changed frequently, and is a communication forum through which your customers can communicate back to you with questions, concerns and feedback on their needs.

QUESTION 2: What is the cost involved?

Having a Web site involves three basic costs: The development of the site itself, hosting the site and registering the domain name.

The development of the site is the actual “building” or putting the graphics, text, links and codes all together so you have web pages that look good and are informative when you see the site on the computer. This is the largest of the three costs and can range in price from \$500 to \$2000 typically. However, the cost of getting a functioning Web site is generally the same as putting a color ad insert into your local paper once or twice a year. That ad is seen and then gone. The cost of your Web site is a one-time investment for a tool you own and can continue to use for communication and marketing indefinitely. **It is always up and always accessible.**

Hosting the site means the Web site files are put on a large server so the general public can access your site by clicking through the Internet. Hosting costs vary but average around \$10 to \$20 per month, based on the Web site functionality and the hosting provider. Service varies widely as well. The ideal host will offer several services bundled together for one affordable price. Look for these services in a hosting package:

- The space provided for your site on the server should have ample room for high traffic (bandwidth). When a site doesn't have enough bandwidth, the Web visitor finds the site slow loading and difficult to access.
- The hosting package should have at least five email addresses that can be accessed through the web.
- The hosting package should have a reliable track record of maintaining high dependability. When your server goes down, your Web site and associated email is unavailable.

Registering the domain name involves reserving a unique Web address where users find your Web site (www.yourcompany.com). This is done through a public registry service and the cost is typically \$35 per year.

I tell clients that getting a Web site is like getting a telephone. They both have similar cost structures. The Web site cost is like the cost of the phone and installation. You pay one time and the equipment is yours. The hosting cost is similar to your monthly phone bill — you own the equipment but you pay for the service of being able to use it. The domain name registry is like the phone number — a unique way to get in touch with only you.

Additional Costs can include:

1. Email services with multiple email accounts.
2. Internet marketing services researching how best to promote your site and get the maximum visibility, drawing more visitors to your site.
3. Maintenance services updating the site continually, making changes, adding pages, delivering web statistic reports, and more.

QUESTION 3: I already have a Web page on someone else's Web site. Why do I need two?

If you have a Web page with your Chamber of Commerce or with a listing service in your industry or parent company (e.g. realtor.com, Teleflora, bbonline, etc.), that is a good thing! However, that is not a Web site. It more than likely only offers contact information and a brief description of what your offer. It lumps you into a wide category that generally includes your competitors, and in many cases, it doesn't offer the interaction with the public that your own Web site would offer. Finally you don't own the site or have control over it.

Your Web site brands you as unique and reveals your identity. The good news is that having that page with the Chamber or other listing service will **enhance and empower your new Web site**. It will drive more traffic to your site and put you one step ahead of the marketing game.

Think about it. If a visitor is looking for a florist on Teleflora and finds five listings close to home and one of the listings has a link to its own Web site that visitor is going to go one click further and click on that florist's Web site. When scanning a list, people always want to know more. Your link gives them that opportunity.

QUESTION 4: I don't sell merchandise on-line. Why would I need a Web site?

You may not sell merchandise on-line, but do you sell something special that people are looking for? Do you ever have a customer say I came here because you sell _____. For example, a store that sells a line of products or brands that are highly sought after by a faithful following, (e.g. Dept. 56, Boyd's Bears, Hallmark Cards, Red Wing Shoes, certain lines of animal products, clothing and accessories, tools) is going to have potential customers that search the Internet to find out who sells those brands in their local area. Will you be on the search results? Will your competitor be?

The same applies to restaurants and lodging. People are visiting a certain area. **Over 70% of travelers in the United States and Europe use the Internet** to set travel itineraries and those itineraries include restaurants, accommodations and shopping. Will you be among the choices found when they search the Internet?

If you offer something that people are looking for, a large portion of people (perhaps a market unknown to you thus far) will search the Internet, because its fast, its easy, its global and its private. A Web site will put you in the running with others on the Internet.

QUESTION 5: I don't even use a computer. I can't maintain a Web site.

Using the computer is like playing the piano. You can play Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star or a Sonata by Chopin. Either way, you're getting a tune out. To maintain a Web site you should have a computer, and you or someone in your company should be able to send and receive email. Your Web developer can help you with maintenance, changes and updates, which is generally simple and affordable.

QUESTION 6: Our customers like the personal touch and most aren't computer users.

Your current customers may not use the computer as much as is possible.

A worthy concern should be about the potential customers that do use the computer and **can't find your business**. Statistics prove that 65% of the population in rural areas uses a computer at least once per week and 85% in metropolitan areas use a computer. These percentages have never decreased. It is likely that they will continue to increase. A Web site keeps you in sync with this trend.

Another interesting statistic:

The fastest growing sector of the American population getting computer literate is between the ages of 50 and 75. This sector also includes those with the highest percentage of disposable income. A Web site helps you target and stay connected to that demographic.

Another thing to think about... **75 years ago, the American population felt that the telephone was an expensive luxury and not crucial to business growth**. That sentiment continued for 30 years. As social communication trends changed and expenses decreased, businesses changed to insure profitability. Use of the Internet will only increase in the next ten years.

QUESTION 7: I have a cousin who can make Web sites. I've already promised him that she/he can do ours.

Is your cousin a qualified Web developer? If so, you're the lucky one. Be sure to impart a sense of urgency in getting the site completed. If he or she makes Web sites as a hobby, you'll want to consider the following:

1. A Web site can be compared to modes of transportation. You could ride a bicycle or drive a Mercedes, either way you can get around town. But one is more efficient, will take you farther faster and will be a more comfortable ride.
2. The flashy graphics and catchy text you see on Web sites is only about 20% of what goes into developing the site. Behind all those pretty pages are codes and tags, specifically written to **attain a higher placement in search engines**, make the pages load faster and be more user friendly. Most beginners and hobbyists lack knowledge in the proper usage of codes,

scripts, tags and **search engine optimization**. If you have a pretty Web site, but no one can find it, you lose enormous marketing power.

QUESTION 8: Our upcoming advertising commitments will use all our marketing money.

It is important to recognize that a Web site is not an advertising investment. It compliments and empowers your advertising efforts. Ads are the property of the advertising vendor and are a revolving cost to a company. You buy an ad for a specific amount of time and then the ad is gone.

A Web site is a marketing and communication tool that belongs to you. You control it and you can use it continually. It is a company asset similar to a telephone or fax machine. **You buy it one time** and only pay for the service to use it. Web sites reach a growing customer base that up until now has remained hidden to you. It also services your current customer base, giving them more options to communicate with you.

Once you have a Web site, you can include your Web address on all of your advertising, offering potential customers and clients **an opportunity to find out more**. A Web site in today's world is also a stamp of credibility to the public that hasn't yet met you.

The following quote is an **excerpt from Small Business Magazine**: Customers and other people who come in contact with your business expect to find a reputable businesses on the Web, so don't risk your credibility by not being present.

QUESTION 9: A Web site seems so sterile and impersonal. It won't add to "our kind" of customer base that was built on personal relationship.

This statement is commonly made by specialty shop owners and real estate agents. Real estate agents will add "I already invest high dollars in space advertising." This is probably one of the most frustrating objections for me because all kinds of people use the internet to access information. The internet, unlike advertising mediums, does not target a set demographic. Magazines, newspapers, television and radio are all demo-

graphically based. Family Circle will always target women between the ages of 25 and 35 that have young children. Country music radio stations target a specific audience as do Cable news programs or shows like Sesame Street.

The Internet gives everyone access, targeting no one in particular. **The Internet user chooses where to look**, just as they choose what newspaper to buy or what television program to watch. If your business is not there, it won't be found.

There are over 8 billion Web pages indexed in the Google search engine. The top three commercial markets on the web are technology, real estate and travel. Technology businesses know they need a Web site. If you're in real estate (even an individual agent) **you need a Web site**. If your business markets to travelers accommodations, restaurant, specialty shopping, tickets, travel wear, recreational products, travel gear, animal care, children's activities... **you need a Web site**. Statistics show that 7 out of 10 people will go to the Internet for information before they purchase real estate or set a travel itinerary.

A Web site usually is rather impersonal and that's a good thing. When people use the internet they want information not a personal relationship. **The information will bring them to you. You create the relationship.**

A Web site gives you a higher number of potential customers to create a relationship with. If internet users don't find you on the web, they'll seek out your competitors who have Web sites.

QUESTION 10: I wouldn't know what to do with a Web site if I had one.

Your Web developer is a trained professional and can assist you with maintaining and handling your Web site.

Summary

A Web site is a marketing tool that costs you one time and continues to pay you back. It expands your customer base, conveys a professional image, strengthens your advertising and marketing efforts and gives your business a mark of credibility.

A Web site at its basic level tells millions of Internet users:

- Who you are, how you began, successes you've had, your reputation in the community
- Special offers and upcoming promotions, additions to products and services, new hires, etc.
- What products and services your business has to offer
- The latest news about your company
- How to find your location
- What others are saying about you, client/customer testimonials.
- The different ways to contact you (telephone and fax numbers, emails, physical address)

When you consider the continual growth in numbers of Internet users and the growth of companies that are on the Internet, some of which may be your competitors... not having a distinctive and informative Web site will cost you more than having one.

Remember: Internet users find you, you don't find them. They will either search for you because they've heard your name or search for a product/service you're selling. If your business is not listed, it doesn't exist to an Internet user.

Get started today!

Be more competitive.

Let us send you a **FREE QUOTE** for creating your Web site.

Visit our Web site and complete our Web Project questionnaire.

Use promo code FAQ and receive a special discount.