



What Your Online Presence Says About Your Business



Highlights

In this digitally connected world, your business is increasingly being judged by its online presence. Without an online presence, you may not even exist in your target markets. With a weak online presence, customers or prospects may not trust you. Businesses that know how to interact with their market online have a clear advantage.

If you have been in business for any length of time, you have an online presence even if you've not managed it. Do an internet search using the name of your business. What comes up? If your business has a website, it should (hopefully) show up on the first page. Maybe you'll see your business's Facebook or LinkedIn page—or a Yelp review. It could also be a news article mentioning the name of your business. The question is whether your online presence is intentional or unintentional. More importantly, who is in control of the first impression people have about your business when they search for it on the internet?

Essentially, your online presence is a compilation of web pages and social media posts that contain any mention of your business's name. If you are in control of it, it can be your greatest asset. But, if you are not in control of it, it could be your worst nightmare. Creating an online presence is

key to establishing the trust and credibility consumers look for when searching for products and services.

Consider the results of the recent Local Consumer Review Survey:

90% of consumers used the internet to find a local business in the last year

33% of consumers look at local businesses online every day

75% of 18-55-year-olds search for businesses online each week

Why Investing in Building a Strong Website Pays Off

- Customers search for businesses online; without a website, you don't have a presence
- Your website provides a window into your business and what makes it unique
- Credibility and quality of your business can be judged by the appearance of your website
- Greater visibility, search engine ratings, new customer traffic and increased visits from existing customers can improve business results

If you don't have a strong online presence, you may not be found. To consumers who use the internet to decide whom to do business with, a lack of presence may mean you don't exist.

Your Business is Judged by its Online Presence

The cold, hard reality in today's digitally wired world is your business is judged by your online presence – or lack of it. A robust online presence projects your business's expertise, reputation, and authority through a quality website, an active blog, published news articles, and your interaction with social media. A weak online presence is a red flag to consumers, who doubt the existence of any business that doesn't show up on the first page of search results.

A High-Quality Website is Your Best Investment

Studies show that most web users make judgments about the credibility and quality of a business based merely on the appearance of its website. The decision to stay a while or move on is often made within a second or two. Even if they linger a bit longer, they will eventually leave if they don't find any value in the content. Far and away, your best marketing investment is creating a high-quality website that offers value-add content consumers want.

If your website is more than a couple of years old, it's probably outdated, which can be a red flag for visitors. Consumers today are used to quality websites with simple but elegant design, efficient and quick navigation, responsiveness (functions well on any type of device), and compelling content.

How to Build Your Online Presence

While it's not inexpensive to build a strong online presence, it can produce your greatest return on investment.

Here are a few ways to find ideas and inspiration for a website design that will elevate your business:

- Google search "website designs for small businesses"
- Search for websites of similar businesses in your industry
- You certainly should know what the websites of your main competitors look like
- If you know someone with a business that has an attractive website, find out who designed the site and have them provide you with ideas for your site

Ultimately, you will need to work with a web designer to build out your site. Your best source for finding a good designer is to get referrals from other businesses that have current and attractive websites. Small businesses typically turn to freelance digital marketing consultants who charge a flat fee to build your online properties and an hourly fee for ongoing support. Some businesses also invest in pay-per-click advertising on Google, but it's important to have a solid online presence in place first to optimize your results.

Social Media to Increase Engagement and Highlight Your Value

Your website should also be your traffic hub—receiving visitors who click through your social media and email posts while sending visitors to your social media sites for more interaction. Active social media engagement—through Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter—not only provides proof of your existence to your target market, but it is also an opportunity to engage with them to build influence and highlight your value to the community. The more engagement you create with your website and social media visitors, the deeper in the funnel they go.

Technology to Capture Data and Leads

Using basic marketing automation software, you can track your visitors—where they go on your website or social media and what content they consume—so you can tailor your approach

to them. With the data you collect, you can hone your message and more efficiently allocate your marketing efforts.

Improved Business Results

In the next decade, building your online presence will be essential if you expect to grow your business with sustainable profits. Business owners who focus on building their online presence report overall improvements in their business performance, including:

- Increased visibility and stature in the community
- Improved relationships with customers
- Improved search engine rankings
- Increased door traffic—new customers
- Increased revenue per customer—more frequent visits

While it's not inexpensive to build a strong online presence, it can produce your greatest return on investment. The good news is you know where your market resides – online. Most businesses are online with a website, and an increasing number are engaging with their market on social media. However, if you really want to gain the full attention and trust of your customers and target market, you need to think strategically about building your online presence and make it the foundation of your marketing efforts. ■



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