

Using The Internet To Promote your Business:

Prepared for the Easton Chamber of Commerce

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Using The Internet To Promote your Business:

Who is out there?

Some statistics

"About 63% of American adults go online.

That translates into approximately 128 million people.

For those that do go online 78% have researched a product or service before buying it."

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A non-profit research center studying the social effects of the Internet on Americans.
1100 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 710, Washington, DC 20036

If you don't have an Internet presence chances are you are missing business opportunities. At the very least the 78% of people who go "Online" are not finding you when they use the Internet to research a product or service before buying it.

This is compelling data and one that businesses should use to their advantage. You may not be ready (or ever able) conduct transactions online but you sure can use the Internet to help build your business. We will look at some ways to do that.

Get a Domain Name (run don't walk)

What is a domain name?

Most people know what a domain name is. Specifically defined a domain name is:

The unique name that identifies an Internet site. Domain names always have two or more parts, separated by dots. The part on the left is the most specific, and the part on the right is the most general. A given machine may have more than one domain name but a given domain name points to only one machine.

Examples would be:

Tkrose.com

Easton-chamber.com

Google.com

Amazon.com

Bankofeaston.com

By definition domain names are unique. If you have one that you want, you should grab it now before someone else does. As soon as it is taken, it is gone.

TIP: Choose a domain name that is short and easy to remember. Long or complicated domains are hard to type and not easily remembered.

HORROR STORY

I had a client who was interested in having a web site. He had just started his business. He had left a job working for someone in the same industry to start his own company. He took no clients

or business away from his previous employer. He wrote a business plan, gained financing and incorporated. He did everything right.

He told me the domain name that he wanted and said that he would take care of securing it. The domain name was very long and so custom to his business name that I did not think that he would have a problem. After some time, he approached me to get his domain name (he was too busy to do this on his own) and set up his web site. I went to secure the domain name and it was already taken (had not been a few weeks ago). We found out after doing some research that his old employer saw the domain he wanted painted on the side of his trucks, checked it's availability and registered it. My client was out of luck. This is a very unusual story but illustrates that if a domain name is available today, it may not be tomorrow.

A DOMAIN NAME COSTS AROUND \$10 a year to register. Best \$10 you will spend.

A domain name is so inexpensive that I can't think of a reason not to get one.

Now that I have a domain name, how can I start to use it?

There are about three levels of use for a domain name. One is a custom e-mail address, the next a starter web site, and then a professionally designed web site that has specific goals and incorporates interaction with your clients or potential clients.

Custom E-mail address:

Even if you do not have a web site a domain name is useful. Consider this. You are meeting a perspective client and you hand them a business card. It essentially states a company name, your contact information and an e-mail address. Which is more impressive?

Tkr77@hotmail.com

Or

tk@tkrose.com

A domain name alone is not enough to show that you are part of a stable business but it does seem a bit more established than a free web mail account. Having your own domain name with e-mail service provides you with an e-mail address that will not change. No matter who you have your e-mail service, your connection or your web site with, your e-mail address will not change. An example of how this can change: mediaone.net > attbi.com > Comcast.net.

E-mail Marketing:

Even though you don't have a web site you can use e-mail to market directly to your clients. Newsletters, client messages, specials and promotions can be sent to your clients. This is cheaper than doing a mailing or any other printed or posted marketing.

NOTE: WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT SPAM.

Send only to e-mail addresses that your clients supply.

Ask your clients for their e-mail addresses to be added to your mailing list. You might offer as an incentive, specials that arrive only by this method. Be methodical about keeping your list. If someone wants off, make sure you remove them. Do not share your list.

BCC: your list (Blind Carbon Copy).

Many people will send to their list from an e-mail program (Outlook, Eudora, some other mail client). To protect your list send all e-mail marketing to yourself and enter your list in the BCC: Field. This will hid your list from the other recipients you are sending it to, protecting your clients from unintended use.

To: tk@tkrose.com
From: tk@tkrose.com
Subject: February Special
Cc:
Bcc: (ENTER YOUR LIST HERE)

Keep the messages simple

It is a good idea to keep the e-mail simple and not load it down with heavy graphics or long text. A paragraph, two at the most should deliver you message. If you want to tell them more, refer them to your web site

A Web Site:

What do I need for a web site? (Basic Requirements)

Web Site Requirements:

Domain Name:

Every web site needs a unique name. Domain names are registered yearly and generally cost around \$10/year. Domain names should be short and easy to remember.

Web Site Hosting:

Web pages need to reside on a computer that is connected to the Internet. Unless your requirements are fairly intensive a shared hosting account is the most cost effective option. A shared hosting account is space on a computer that is shared with other web sites. This is maintained by a company offering web hosting usually referred to as an ISP (Internet Service Provider). The space is password protected and comes with varying options and capabilities. The cost of a shared hosting account is generally in direct proportion to the accounts capabilities. Choosing a reliable host is important because it is directly related to your web sites availability and performance. A good hosting account generally costs around \$15 a month but there are some for less.

Be educated before you pick a host. Generally you get what you pay for. I have found that accounts that are less than \$15 come with some trade-offs. The trade-offs might include:

- **No guarantee for up time** (this means there is likely to be a time when your web site is off line)

- **E-mail load balancing.** Some providers cut their costs by limiting their bandwidth. The most common way to do this is by sending large e-mail messages at off peak times or delaying all mail until off peak times when traffic is particularly high.
- **Limited capabilities.** You should not buy what you don't need but make sure that you buy what you need.

These less expensive packages might be a good fit for you. Just make sure you understand the trade-offs before you take the leap.

Different Levels of Web Sites:

A Template Based Starter Web Site

There are packaged deals out there that offer hosting, domain registration and e-mail services and template based web site creation tools fairly inexpensively. These are Do It Yourself solutions are a quick, inexpensive way to build a web site. These types of web sites can deliver an online businesscard/brochure with e-mail contact information fairly successfully.

Advantages:

Inexpensive

You are in control (creating and updating the web site)

Quick Development

Disadvantages:

You are in control (requires some learning of their tool)

Limited navigation and pages

Sub professional or not unique design

TIP: Do not deviate from template layout. Make content work with template structure. Keep information on the web site short and sweet.

Professionally Designed Web Site

This level of web site is custom to your business and goals for your web site. Design of a custom web site can be economical or very expensive depending on what you want to do with it and how you want it to look. Pricing for developers varies so shop around.

If you are ready for this level of web site you will want to be ready with your content and ideas before you go to get a web designer/developer. Set goals, have an idea about how you will meet those goals, be committed to maintaining your web site.

Web Site Goals? (set them before you build)

Think about how a web site can benefit your business. What do you want to accomplish with a web site? What do you want your clients to get from the web site? What do you want to get from your customers through the web site?

The better you can articulate these types of questions the more likely you are to benefit from your web site.

A web designer/developer should be interested in this information from your company and should be able to help you develop some of it. It will be a more productive meeting with a web professional if you have done some front work. Things to be thinking about.

Company details:

Current Details, Industry, demographics of your market, why a customer would choose you over other competition, your main competition (their web site), how is business generally generated.

Site objectives (might be):

- Establish a web presence, increase marketing and branding
- Increase sales
- Generate business leads
- Increase international presence
- Generate requests for information
- Support existing advertising, promotion
- Offer customer service
- Build store (sell product) or business traffic (registrations or non transactional orders)
- Provided latest product/service/sales/special promotions etc
- Build a database for emailings
- Position the company as technologically advanced
- Provide directions to customers
- Survey customers/prospects
- Recruit new employees
- Provide a sample portfolio or case library

Content

Make an outline of the content that you will need to accomplish your established goals. Think about what your clients need to know about your business, products and or services. Keep the content short and sweet. Summarize and offer ways the customer can find out more if a short description is not enough. Have others look at your outline. Share your goals and how you think they will be accomplished. Fresh eyes will point out things that you have not thought of.

TIP: Content creation is one of the hardest parts of developing a web site. Start this before you engage your developer.

Maintenance:

Develop a clear maintenance plan with your designer/developer. Your designer/developer should be able to make it so you can edit the web site yourself if you want to. You might

also contract with your web developer to maintain the web site for you. Keeping the content correct and up to date is crucial.

Promote your web site.

Let people know that you have a web site. Put the address on your letterhead, business card and other stationary. Include it in any promotional opportunity that you have. Ask organizations that you belong to if they can list you and link to your web site. Get listed on community or business portals. Try to exchange links with companies that you have synergy with.

Make sure your developer/designer optimizes your web page for search engines. To find out more about this topic visit the resources below.

Other resources on web site promotion:

Search Engine Submission

SearchWatch

Search Engine Submission Tips:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/webmasters/>

Searchengines.com

Search Engines 101

<http://www.searchengines.com/>