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A GUIDE TO PLANNING YOUR WEBSITE

A 'Must Read' if you're a small to medium size business planning your presence online and want some basic up-front guidance.

Doing business on the web has become an accepted practice, as evidenced by the almost three quarters of America's small to medium size business community members making their presence known on the internet. This guide is meant to answer some commonly asked questions and serve as somewhat of a blueprint for the nearly thirty percent of those still undecided.

The most frequent question entrepreneurs ask is whether they really need to be represented by a website. My answer, when they ask that question is to answer with a question of my own: "Do you search for products or services online or do you search through the yellow pages or newspaper? Invariably, their answer is a 'yes' for doing an online search. Then I ask, "So don't you think your potential customers will do the same?"

It just makes perfect sense; if you're not on the internet, it's likely your competition is. Therefore, if someone is searching in the category of what you have to offer, your name won't surface on any search if you're not a part of the online population. But fear not, if you want to make your presence known, it doesn't have to be a daunting process or even a costly one for that matter, because if you just do some simple planning, you'll discover that the process can be inexpensive, easy, and enjoyable, and you can end up owning a functioning website in just a couple of weeks. Read on.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING ONLINE

According to a Small Business Survey conducted in 2009 by a major player in the online printing scene, 32% of small business owners responding said they would work on web development if they had more time or money to devote to the pursuit. If you just take a moment and try to come up with the name of any major company in any industry that doesn't make its presence known on the internet, my guess is that you'll come up with a big fat zero. That's because there are some really valuable benefits for representation online whether you're a huge conglomerate or an individual service provider.

The web gives you a level playing field no matter how small you are. This is your opportunity to give the impression that you're as big as you feel. You can design a website to impress, and convince. Am I writing this column from my corporate headquarters located here on Madison Avenue in New York City, or am I sitting in my underwear here at my computer at home? You'll never know. That's the basic incentive for the design of your site. You might be small and lack the funds to afford an impressive brick and mortar location, but on the internet, good design and good

CREATE YOUR WEBSITE

The first step is to plan and execute your site. It doesn't have to be fancy, just informative. It doesn't have to be overly sophisticated because you're not online to compete with IBM. What you should concentrate on is your look, your connection to the potential customer, and their ease in reaching out to you for your product or service. People respond to intelligently crafted sites that are easy to use and informative. Keep it simple but attractive. Simplicity goes a long way in making the visitor comfortable. Once you're up and running, it's easy to add things later on, like analytics that track your visitor's demographics and other useful aids. However, to get started, you just need a few pages with an attractive representation of your offerings and a way for them to make contact.

KEEP IT CURRENT

Once you have a Domain Name (easy and inexpensive to obtain) and once you have selected a host that will keep your site running, a maintenance person to keep it current (also, both easy and inexpensive), the rest is easy. Always keep your site current, update your information if it becomes necessary to do so, and add pages as your business increases and your menu of offerings grow. If you want to create a survey on your site to find out what improvements your visitors would like to see, do so. Most importantly, don't create a monster going in. If you make a bigger site than you're capable of maintaining, it will show. Start small and grow at your own pace.

YOU'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN

Finally, A whole world of e-tools await you (many of them free). I can show you how to add analytics to your site so you can track visitors and their demographics, without any cost to you. I can also show you how I can design and maintain an email campaign for you that links to the major social media sites--cheaply, of course. Once you're online and various needs arise, you'll become more internet savvy and learn how to track down all the shareware there is in abundance. In fact, I'll give you a head start on what you want to learn and steer you in the right direction. All you have to do is ask--for free of course. I hope this brief guide has been helpful in getting you started. Contact me if you need help at any time. *Barry*



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Why leave me a message if I don't answer? Because I might be on the phone, out on an appointment, or "indisposed". I will definitely get back to you. Don't miss an opportunity that will surely benefit us both.

