

# How to get your business online

By Peter Simmons

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This article is for all those who have asked "how do I get my business online?" or have just plain been putting it off because you don't know where to start or who can help or how much it will cost.

Why should I put my business online? Well, there are several reasons why you should.

Firstly, it's a great 'connection point' between you and your customers or partners. They can visit your website at anytime that suits them to find out more about you, your products, ordering, or just get more information. Previously they would have had to physically visit you or use the telephone and actually speak to you. They can contact you with questions, complaints, recommendations or just to gauge how helpful/efficient you are at anytime without speaking to you or being face-to-face with you. It's another way to deal, communicate and interact with you. It puts the emphasis on the customer and their needs and removes the pushy salesman from the process. This level of anonymity encourages the customer to get what they want more than ever before or go somewhere else where they will get it.

Secondly, the Internet enables the customer to shop around much more easily and cheaply than ever before. It is as easy to research and buy a product that is sold in another country as it is to do it for one in your own country and all for the cost of a local call. Timezones are largely irrelevant on the Internet.

Thirdly, a website is entirely flexible and can be designed from scratch specifically for your business and customers, regardless of the industry you are in and the size of your business.

Fourth, it is low cost. You can build a website to meet your budget.

What do you need to do?

Get a web address - often called a domain name/URL. When someone types in your web address i.e. [www.youraddress.com](http://www.youraddress.com) into their Internet enabled computer, they see your website. Get a name that is easily remembered by your customers. You'll need to renew it regularly to keep the name.

Get some web space - often called hosting. A company (the host) will rent you space on its computer. You store your website in that space. Your web address will point here so that when the web address is typed in by the customer, they will be directed to your website automatically. Make sure you get a fast and reliable host and therefore your website is always available and quickly. Read host reviews or ask people you know to recommend a host.

Research - before doing anything else do some research. Look at other websites, styles, navigation, content, functions, etc. What do you like? What don't you like? What do your customers want? What don't they want? What are your competitors doing? What aren't they doing? Set some clear objectives for your site. Write them down in order of priority and work towards them throughout the project.

Content - The most important of all. Whether it's text, images, functions, data or anything else, spend some time getting it right. It must, of course, all meet your clear objectives.

Design and build your website - you can do this yourself but I don't recommend it unless you are confident you can do it well and have enough time to do it. Hire someone to do it all for you. Make sure you are happy to deal with them and that they don't just want to design a pretty website for their portfolio. They should make all the right noises about how the website will fit into your business and how your customers will benefit from it. Again, remember your clear objectives.

Evaluation - check your website meets all your objectives. Check everything works as it should and is easy to understand and use by your customers. Do you need to make any improvements/changes?

Publish - put your new website into your web space. Congratulations your business is online!

Finally, review your website initially and regularly thereafter to make sure it is still meeting your customers requirements and to see if it can be improved or developed further.

Good luck and don't forget to let me know how you get on.

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