

Prophesying Profit in CyberSpace . . .

By Philippa Gamse

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Business owners can be rushed into creating Web sites, perhaps because "my competition has one", or because "it's the hot thing right now".

But, as with any aspect of your business, some preliminary thinking will help to maximize the return on your investment in this key part of your marketing mix.

Here are seven key issues to consider from the outset:

1. Are your markets online?

Who are your customers, and are they currently using the Internet? Try a customer survey if you don't know the answer to this yet.

Alternatively, there may be new markets that you would like to tap, who are already online.

An excellent Web site for researching Internet demographic information is at:

<http://www.nua.ie/>

2. Where is your geographic focus?

Is your operation confined to a local area, or can it have national or even international appeal?

It is not currently possible to restrict display of Web pages within geographic boundaries (e.g. "only Illinois"). So if your business is only local, or you only serve the U.S., you should state that clearly on the site, otherwise you may receive leads and orders that you can't fulfill.

3. What are the specific goals of your site?

What outcomes do you want from the visitors to your site? Will you be selling product online, or are you generating leads for a product or service? Do you want visitors to leave their contact details? If so, how will you encourage them to do this? Do you have a newsletter that they can subscribe to, or a competition, or a free offer of some kind?

And don't forget your existing customers. Will your site also be providing ongoing support and education for these clients?

4. How will you engage your visitors?

Remember that your Web site may be the first and only contact that a prospect has with your

business. Make their experience as close as possible to actually speaking with you.

Incorporate the questions that are most frequently asked during the buying process, perhaps in an online survey that can be e-mailed to you as a lead.

5. Do you want "hits", or qualified leads?

Decide whether you want as much traffic and as many responses as possible from your site, or whether you would prefer only to hear from serious buyers. A nonprofit organization might want many people to see its message, but most businesses have a specific focus.

If you decide to qualify the responses that you get from the site, how will you do this?

6. Do you have a promotion plan and budget?

Even the best designed Web sites need effective online marketing to generate traffic. You will need a strategy to position your site as well as possible in the Internet search engines and directories.

There are also many ways to promote your site "Beyond the Search Engines" - a tipsheet of ideas for doing this can be requested at <http://www.CyberSpeaker.com/>

Remember that marketing your Web site is an ongoing activity, and allocate time and resources to this.

7. How will you measure your success?

If you have made decisions on all these issues, you will need a way to evaluate the results of your site against the goals and outcomes that you set.

Your traffic analysis reports can provide really valuable information about your visitors. This can be used to improve your Web site, and your marketing (both online and offline).

The reports will tell you how many users come to your site, which search engines and keywords they are using to find you, which pages of your site are the most popular, and which are rarely accessed.

So, think before you leap, and may your business prosper in Cyberspace!

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