

# 8 Reasons To Get Your Local Business Online

By Sharon Fling

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Sharon Fling  
lbp@localbizpromo.com

How To Promote Your Local Business On th <http://www.localbizpromo.com>

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If you're a local business owner, you've probably been wondering what to do about the Internet. Maybe you have already have a website, but it's taken more money out of your pocket than it's put in it.

You might be thinking you should get online...but you've heard it takes too much time and money. It's tempting to ignore the issue and hope it goes away, but there are some very good reasons to get moving - and here are 8 of them:

### 1. GEOGRAPHIC TARGETING.

The ability to target online users by geography has improved, and it's a lot cheaper now. Local advertisers can now be sure that only local eyeballs will see their ad. The targeting capabilities and options are endless. It's also become more affordable for small businesses. For example:

For less than \$10 per day, you can drive traffic to your website and build leads for your business.

\* Target your campaign to local audiences or to our entire audience.

\* Pricing plans range from \$304 per month to \$2,535 per month.

\* Plan sizes range from 25,000 impressions per month to 200,000 impressions per month.

### 2. IT'S PRACTICALLY FREE

It's so cheap to have a website now, why wouldn't you? You can get a domain name for \$10, get an account with website building software, and you're in business for \$49.95/mo.

Compare that to the outrageous prices charged for yellow page ads, which can range in price from \$1,000 to over \$100,000 per year.

Combine this with the fact that a growing percentage of the population is turning to the web for information every day and you have a powerful marketing tool.

And as I mentioned earlier, there are tools available now that will allow you to build your own website just by pointing and clicking. So you no longer have to pay a web developer hundreds or thousands of dollars to get a great looking website.

These aren't tacky looking cookie-cutter websites -- they're very professional looking, and actually look better than a lot of websites built by "professionals." And as your business grows, your website can too -- add new pages, a message board, email marketing, ecommerce capability and more. You can add any or all of these features quickly and easily...all at the click of a mouse.

### 3. IT'S A GREAT COMMUNICATIONS TOOL

The Internet is the ultimate communications tool - fast and cheap. You can use it to communicate with suppliers, resellers, and of course, your customers. Some uses include:

- \* Send discount coupons by email, reducing direct mail costs
- \* Get customer feedback through email or feedback form on website -- it's quick and it's easy, so you're more likely to get customers to participate
- \* Send product information or announcements
- \* Send periodic newsletters with useful information and special offers
- \* Put your brochure or catalog online, reducing printing costs

For some businesses, simply putting their catalog online has saved them thousands of dollars a year in printing and mailing costs.

Of course there will always be people who want printed

catalogs, and not every customer will have email. But in terms of cost, you simply cannot beat the economics.

To follow up with 1,000 customers through direct mail will cost \$340 or more just for the postage...but with email it's virtually free. And being able to interact directly with a customer on a regular basis is priceless.

#### 4. TO MAKE CONNECTIONS

There are lots of business people online, including people from your local community. People from the same communities have a way of finding each other online... and as always, it's not what you know, but who.

Just as you might pass out your card at a local chamber meeting, you can do the same thing online with your signature file - and a lot more people will see it.

It's also a lot more time-effective than face-to-face networking. Rather than driving somewhere and sitting through another boring chicken dinner, you can get online and meet prospects and colleagues at any time of the day or night.

And you can develop a reputation very quickly online, adding to your credibility and opening even more doors for yourself - all without setting foot outside the house.

#### 5. TO SERVE YOUR LOCAL CUSTOMERS.

A website can be a worthwhile investment even if it's just an electronic version of the Yellow Pages: street address, phone number, business hours, forms of payment accepted, contact information. Except...what happens if you move, or your area code changes, or your hours, or anything else that's printed in the Yellow Pages? You know the answer to that one.

But a website is dynamic -- information can be updated at any time, plus you're not limited to 2 or 3 lines worth of information. Plus there are so many ways to interact with your customer, which is a lot more interesting for them and potentially very valuable to you. Here are some very low-tech examples, very easily added to your website:

#### \* FAQ

Frequently Asked Questions or FAQ, is a popular term on the Internet. And in real life, there are always questions you hear over and over from your customers. These are the questions people have about doing business with you, and you certainly want to make it as easy as possible. Why not

save everybody some time and post often asked questions - and their answers - on your website?

#### \* Visitor Polls

Invite your customers to give their opinion about something of interest. For example, a business that caters to parents who home school their children posed the question: "Which question are YOU asked the \*Most\* about home schooling?" This question is relevant to the target market and something they most likely have experienced. It invites them to participate and along the way, give their opinion about something.

But most important to the business owner, it can be a source of incredibly valuable information about the customer - and it's free. It also makes your website more interesting (as long as the poll changes often enough).

#### \* Discount Coupons

What better incentive for someone to visit your website than to save money? Customers love getting a bargain, and the great thing about coupons is the customer usually has to buy something to get whatever goodies the coupon offers.

Your coupon will especially motivate the prospect that was already thinking of doing business with you. If you're using a website building tool, it can easily be added at the click of a mouse, and unlike a yellow page coupon, you can change it anytime.

These are a few simple examples, and this list can easily be expanded: order status, press releases, product information, a searchable product database. Again, the possibilities are endless.

## 6. TO GET PUBLICITY

Every business needs exposure, and one of the best kinds is media attention. If your business is something new and different, send out a press release that includes your URL -- you could get written up in the local paper.

Even an ordinary business can get media coverage if you can come up with the right angle - perhaps a follow-up to a previous article? A human interest story? The media is always looking for interesting stories and if you're creative enough, maybe yours could be one of them. And what better place for the public to get more information than from your website?

Perhaps you could sponsor a local event, or do some

volunteer work. Your business will get the credit, along with a mention of the website URL.

The more places the public can find information about your company, the better off you'll be. In our increasingly wired society, having a website makes it easy for more people to get information about your company. And they can get it more quickly and easily online.

## 7. BECAUSE YOUR CUSTOMERS ARE ONLINE

Did you know that 40-48 million adults went online last year looking for local content? The average local user is college educated, makes good money, and likes shopping online. They are more likely to make purchases than non-users of local content, either online or offline. This demographic market is every business owner's dream.

As more local information becomes available online, people are starting to look at the Internet as something useful instead of a passing fad. Consumers are getting online in record numbers, resulting in a critical mass of local users in top markets, and spreading across communities of all sizes.

Chances are a number of your local prospects and customers are part of this desirable demographic - and that number will only increase.

## 8. SO IS YOUR COMPETITION

Seventy-eight percent (78%) of all U.S. small businesses are connected to the Internet, and nearly 50% will continue to maintain active, purposeful Web sites this year.

Analysts at [www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com) have predicted that 72% of small businesses will engage in e-commerce by 2002, racking up an impressive \$230 billion in total revenues.

Maybe you think nobody in your industry is using the Internet. But I guarantee you...whatever your business, one of your competitors is successfully using the Internet to promote their business - perhaps not locally yet, but it's just a matter of time. If your competition is there, you should be too.

So there you have it - 8 good reasons to get your local business on the Web. Notice I didn't include the reason "to sell something". Too many people have made that mistake - going online with the attitude of "if I build it, they will come" - slapping up a website and expecting the masses to beat a path to their door, credit cards in hand.

It doesn't work that way on the Web. A website is not like a Yellow Page ad, where just by having a listing, people will see it and show up.

Many small businesses have had problems adapting to the Web. Fear, confusion, and business pressures have kept many owners from embracing the Net.

For those that have tried, failure to understand the culture of the Web has often led to disappointment at the lack of results. To make matters worse, aggressive marketing by big brands is steadily eroding small business market share across many industries.

If small business is to survive, business owners must learn to harness the power of the Internet...or risk losing their remaining market share to competitors that "get" technology. For those who choose to ignore the "elephant in the living room", hoping the Internet will go away, it's only going to get worse in the days ahead.

What's the answer?

Make the decision to get started, then start small. Use do-it-yourself tools to build a little website, then add on. Let it reflect your personality and creativity.

Use the kind of strategies you'll find in "How to Promote Your Local Business On The Internet" to reach out to your target market and build relationships. Network with other local business owners.

Do these things with confidence and excellence...and online success will be yours.

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