



# Small Business Web Sites

## The Good, the Bad, and the Useful

### Getting Started

#### Site Construction Do's & Don'ts

#### Site Maintenance Options

#### Site Promotion Options

## MARKETING TIPS

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No matter what type of business you are in, having a web site provides a low-cost, highly effective way to communicate and build relationships with your customers and potential customers. Brushing up on a few web site basics, however, can really boost your company image as well as benefit your bottom line.

### A. Getting Started

Let's start with the basics. If you don't already have a web site for your business, now is the time to get one. A recent survey of 500 Internet users by Millward Brown Interactive found that 69% of those surveyed have a higher opinion of companies with web sites than those without. If you don't have a company web site, let your customers know that it is on the way, and then follow through as soon as you can.

1. **Domain Names-** A domain name is simply your web address, and you should always try to use a registrar service that is separate from your hosting company. Combining domain with hosting limits your control over pricing and makes it complicated to make changes in the future. Also, using a ".com" extension is still the best, most recognizable extension for a domain name.

2. **Hosting Options** - Hosting is where your web site physically "lives" on a server, and hosting services typically include disk space, bandwidth, and email quotas. Look for a hosting company that provides you with account control and statistics monitoring.

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## Getting Started

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## MARKETING TIP:

### “ Make Networking Work Better ”

Think back to the last networking event you attended. Was it a good use of your time? Did you make useful contacts with new people? Were you able to reconnect with contacts that you already knew?

1. Think of the people you met at your last event, and consider ways that you can be helpful to *them*.
2. Remember to introduce the new people you meet at an event to the people you already know.
3. Be intentional about meeting the leaders or hosts of the networking event.
4. Try to be visible. Make an announcement, get mentioned by the speaker, initiate conversation, etc.
5. Always arrive on time. For bonus points, try to get there 15 minutes early.
6. Make sure you have a good supply of business cards and, if appropriate, consider bringing promotional items or brochures to pass out.
7. Look for opportunities to schedule follow-ups while you are still at the event.
8. It's usually a good idea to jot down a few notes or reminders on the back of the business cards you collect to make following-up easier.
9. Concentrate on building relationships. Be a good listener, and find ways to add value to the conversation.
10. After the event, don't forget to call, send thank-you notes or emails, or send brochures and more information to the people you spoke with at the event.

## B. Site Construction Do's and Don'ts

1. **DO custom design your web site** - Using a pre-canned template doesn't project a professional image, and may confuse your message, your branding, and ultimately your customers.
2. **DO purpose-build your web site** - You must analyze and understand the purpose of your web site before you can create it. Only then can you build appropriate navigation and content for the site.
3. **DON'T confuse your customers** - Make sure that your site matches your company image and that it looks and feels like the rest of your marketing collateral. It should be instantly obvious who you are and what you do.
4. **DON'T forget your value proposition** - Make sure your customers quickly know what you have to offer and how it is different or better than your competition.
5. **DO use consistent, easy-to-follow navigation** - Each page of your site should have consistent navigation structure, plus a way to get back to your home page. Your "first-level pages" should make it easy for users to find your main topics and not get lost in too many layers of sub pages .
6. **DO be careful with special effects** - Countless studies have shown that when given the choice, users will click on "skip intro" rather than watch your introductory Flash movie! Avoid moving, blinking, flying, elements. All of these animations increase download time and are distracting and ultimately frustrating to your visitors. Some animation for emphasis is fine, but use it sparingly.
7. **DON'T forget about readability** - Reading information on a computer screen can be difficult. Make sure you follow basic design principles regarding fonts, images, layout, etc. Make sure your content reads appropriately for your target audience.
8. **Don't be hard to find** - Make sure that your contact info is easy to locate on your web site. In addition to an actual "Contact Us" page, consider having your contact information at the bottom of each web page.

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## MARKETING TIP:

### “ Five Ways to Improve Customer Service ”

One of the best ways to turn customers into repeat customers is to provide quality customer service. What can you do to become customer-friendly? These five tips will help you improve your customer service!

#### 1. Commit to Quality Service

Everyone in your company should be devoted to creating a positive experience for the customer.

#### 2. Be Courteous and Respectful

This one seems like a no-brainer, but often people forget how far phrases such as “sorry to keep you waiting,” “thank you for your order,” and “it’s been a pleasure helping you” can go.

#### 3. Keep Your Promises

If you say you will send a replacement part the next day, be sure you do it in a day or less. Failure to meet your word will lose you hard-earned credibility.

#### 4. Put Customers First

Research shows that it is six times more expensive to attract a new customer than to keep an existing one. Take good care of your existing customers!

#### 5. Make it Easy to Buy

The purchasing experience in your store, on your web site, or through your catalog should be as simple and streamlined as possible.

## C. Site Maintenance Options

Once your web site is up and running, you will need a way to make changes and updates to the information on your site. In fact, search engines love “fresh” content, and often ignore or downgrade sites that don’t update information on a regular basis.

1. **Hire it out** - You can hire a web professional to take care of updates for you. Many firms and individuals offer good pricing on web site maintenance, and all you have to do is decide what information to update and hand it off to your web professional. However, watch out for web companies that require you to use their services for maintaining your web site. You should have ownership of your own web pages, and have the flexibility to make decisions based on what is best for your business.

2. **Server-side solutions** - There are programs available that “live with” your web pages on the same server, allowing you to log in from a web browser to make changes to your site. These online editors are typically very easy to use and don’t require web expertise.

3. **Client-side solutions** - There are many, many web editing programs available that can be installed on your own computer. This way, you or your staff can update the web site in-house, especially if you have someone on staff with some web experience.

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### MARKETING TIP:

#### “ Make Advertising Work for You ”

Advertising works, but it works best when you know how to make *it* work for *you*. If you are interested in making your advertising initiatives more effective, follow these guidelines and watch your results improve!

##### Address a Need

Addressing a need will make your product or service appeal to customers because it can offer them something of benefit. Showcase the value of your product, and focus your advertising on why your product is wonderful. Let customers know what you will do for them.

##### Know Your Goal

You may be surprised to know that the goal of advertising isn't to "propose a sale" so much as to establish name and brand recognition for your company. The best way to do this is to associate your name with your ability to meet unique customer needs.

##### Create Credibility

Show your customers that you understand their needs, and that you have a fabulous product/service to meet those needs.

##### Offer Something of Value

People love getting a bargain or something useful for free. Offer your customers discounts or coupons, or provide them with a downloadable whitepaper or article from your web site.

##### Strong Call to Action

Let your customers know what you want them to do in response to your ad. Use phrases like "call today", "quantities are limited", or "offer ends Saturday" to motivate them to take action.

Using these simple guidelines can improve the success of your advertising efforts, while also promoting your company's credibility and expertise. Make sure to focus your ads on meeting your customers' needs or solving their problems. Finding the right message for your audience will help your advertising be more effective, ultimately increasing your sales and your bottom line.

## D. Site Promotion Options

Your web site can bring you lots of traffic and potential business, but only if people know about it! Five Sparrows always recommends a comprehensive approach to promoting your web site, with strategies like:

1. **Traditional Collateral** - Brochures, direct mail pieces, presentations, business cards, etc., should always include your web site address.
2. **Search Engines** - Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can help your web site get listed in search engines like Google, MSN, Yahoo, etc. Placements can be either Global, Local, or both. There are many effective techniques used today and many companies available to help with this. Two of the most important things to remember is that "content is king" and don't do anything tricky.
3. **Click Ads** - Using click ads not only increases the traffic to your web site, but also improves your company name recognition at the same time. And of course, a good ad or coupon leads to new business! These ads can be very cost-effective and increase the number of web searchers that see your ad, recognize your name, and ultimately visit your site.
4. **Inbound link building** - Many search engines determine how "relevant" your site is by the number of links on the web that point to your site. It's not who you link out to, it's who links in to you that matters most!
5. **Directories** - Internet users are turning to the web first when looking for information. Even the yellow pages are losing ground to online directories! When customers are looking for your products & services, make sure you can be found. The general rule here is that when it comes to web listings, more is better.
6. **Press Releases** - Let the public know what's going on with your company, from new staff promotions to new product announcements. Press releases create buzz for your company, and also increase the number of inbound links that point to your site.
7. **Online Ads** - E-Zines (electronic magazines), newsletters, or other complimentary web sites are excellent opportunities to place ads and can be a cost-efficient advertising strategy.
8. **E-Newsletters** - Keeping your name in front of your customers and prospects on a regular basis is a great way to communicate relevant, useful information, but also to keep their mindshare, and remind them that you are an expert in your field.