

An Introduction to Promoting a Business Website

Business Information Factsheet
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Introduction

Whatever type of business you own, a website is an essential tool for promoting your products or services and communicating with prospects and customers.

This factsheet introduces some simple methods of promoting your website, attracting visitors and encouraging them to keep coming back. It covers issues such as producing relevant, engaging content, search engine optimisation, pay-per-click advertising, social media, blogging and PR.

Promote your website address

It is important to promote your website address as widely as possible. Make sure that you remind your current customers, suppliers and other contacts about your website, and how to access it. Include your website address on your marketing materials, advertising, letterheads, business cards, compliment slips, catalogues and van liveries. Add it to all e-mail signatures for your business.

Provide relevant content

You can attract visitors to your website by providing relevant, useful, authoritative content that isn't available elsewhere. However, it is important to make sure that all of the content on your website is relevant to your business. Articles about new developments in your industry can be useful if your customers are other traders and information about the latest trends is helpful if you sell to consumers. Fresh content encourages repeat visits, so it is also important to add new content frequently. Include up-to-date information about new products and services, and publish news stories to encourage visitors to return to your site on a regular basis.

Remember that content doesn't just have to be text. You can also add relevant images and videos to your website to attract and engage with visitors.

Write targeted copy

Good web copy is clear, succinct and written with the website visitor in mind. Focus on producing useful, relevant information that is easy to understand.

Most people use search engines, such as Google, Bing or Yahoo, to help them find information online. Think about the key words or phrases that potential customers might use to search for your product or service. Include them in your copy and use them to create meaningful titles, captions and descriptions for images or video content.

Keyword research tools can help you identify alternative words people use when searching online. Go to <http://soovle.com/top> and <https://serps.com/tools/keywords> for examples of free keyword tools.

For a simple list of alternative phrases, type a search term into Google and look at the drop down list that appears. Google offers a more sophisticated Keyword Planner tool, <https://support.google.com/adwords/answer/2999770>, which is free to use if you create an AdWords account.

Follow search engine providers' best practice guidelines

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a method of improving a website's visibility in search engines such as Google and Bing. Search engines are often the first method for users searching for products or services online. The search engines rank search results based on various criteria, including keywords and inbound links. The relevance and frequency of keywords related to a user's search is taken into account, as is the quantity and quality of links from other websites. The higher your website is ranked in search results, the more visitors it is likely to receive.

The search engine providers prioritise quality content and publish clear guidelines on ways to improve your search-engine ranking. For best practice guidelines for Google go to https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35769?hl=en&ref_topic=1724121. Go to www.bing.com/webmaster/help/webmaster-guidelines-30fba23a for guidelines for Bing, and go to <https://uk.help.yahoo.com/kb/SLN2245.html> for Yahoo guidelines.

Design, content, quality and technical issues all impact on your website's search ranking. You'll need to take these into account when you plan, design or commission content for your website, and when you update it.

Get relevant inbound links

Inbound links (those that point to your website from another site) are important for SEO, but the quality of the links is just as important as the quantity. Search engines assess where links come from, prioritise sites that have links from reputable sources and penalise sites that have links from disreputable ones. 'Link farms', or sites that contain nothing but links to other sites should be avoided.

The best way to generate quality links is to produce authoritative content that other sites will choose to link to. Reciprocal links should only be used where the links are relevant because search engines will penalise sites with irrelevant links. For example, exchanging reciprocal links with suppliers in your industry, or with trade associations of which you are a member, could prove beneficial.

Submit to directories

Online directories can provide useful inbound links that point prospective customers to your website. Many professional, trade and industry associations provide online directories that are specific to their members' line of business.

General business directories can also direct people to your website. You can list your business in some online directories free of charge, but many will charge a fee. There are numerous online business directories in the UK, for example:

- Yellow Pages and Thomson Local both have online directories at www.yell.com and www.thomsonlocal.com.
- FreeIndex (www.freeindex.co.uk) provides free online listings for UK firms in dozens of sectors and trades.
- Other popular online directories include Scoot (www.scoot.co.uk), UKDirectory (www.ukdirectory.co.uk), Yahoo Local (<https://local.yahoo.com>) and Google My Business (www.google.co.uk/business).

Explore pay-per-click advertising

Pay-per-click (PPC) is an advertising model in which advertisers pay online publishers a fee every time their advert is clicked by a website visitor. A carefully monitored PPC campaign can be cost-effective, as you will only pay when users click on your ads.

PPC is typically associated with search engines, where adverts are displayed alongside organic search results. Go to Google AdWords (www.google.co.uk/adwords) and Bing Ads (<http://advertise.bingads.microsoft.com/en-us/home>) for more details.

PPC ads can be embedded in all kinds of websites, including blogs.

Publish an e-zine

Publishing an e-zine (electronic newsletter) can help you build relationships with your customers and prospects, and encourage them to keep visiting your website.

E-zines can include information about new products and services, developments and trends, plus industry insights that may interest your prospects and customers. They can help you to establish the credibility of your business by providing valuable, informed opinion about current issues.

You should provide the facility for people to sign up to your e-zine from your website. Send your e-zine out by e-mail and link your content to news, offers and articles on your website.

Make sure you send your e-zine to subscribers who have opted in to receive it. Sending unsolicited e-zines breaches the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003. See BIF 410, A Guide to the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003, for more information.

Publish a blog

Blogs (or weblogs) allow users to write, publish and distribute information quickly online. They can be standalone micro-websites, or a feature of an established, bigger website. A blog, with regular, personal, diary-style posts, is a useful method of adding fresh content to a website. Blogs are often interactive, allowing readers to post responses and other comments.

Having your own blog can help increase traffic to your website. It's also an opportunity to join a conversation with other bloggers with mutual professional interests. Take time to read and comment on other blogs in your area of expertise. Posting an intelligent comment with a link to your website can raise the profile of your business and your website. Make sure your comments are relevant and respectful. Posting irrelevant comments can be regarded as 'spamming' and could damage your business' reputation.

Submit articles to online and print publications

Submitting articles to other websites and print publications is a good way to raise the profile and reputation of your business. A well-informed and useful article can encourage readers to visit your website, so make sure your website address features in your biographical note at the end of the article.

The article does not have to be a promotion for your products or services. Guidance or opinion relating to the industry in which your business trades is likely to be just as successful. In general you will not be paid for writing the article, but you will benefit from the free promotion that comes with it. You can approach relevant publications, such as trade magazines, and offer to write an article.

You could also send a piece to article submission networks, which distribute articles via several related blogs, e-zines and directories. Examples include Ezinearticles.com (<http://ezinearticles.com>), Articles Base (www.articlesbase.com) and Buzzle (www.buzzle.com). The downside of this is that you have no control over where the article appears. This could lead to irrelevant or 'spam' postings, which could have a negative effect on your business' reputation.

Use social media

Social media marketing encourages social network users to spread virtual 'word of mouth' information about your business. Social networks are powerful communication tools that allow business owners and freelancers to interact with current and potential customers.

Popular social networking platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn and Pinterest. It's important to establish which platforms are most relevant for your business. Once you do, you can post interesting snippets of information that link back to your website. For example, details of a sale or promotion, news about a brand new product, blog posts, articles or other new content. Remember that this information must be interesting enough for a user to want to tell their friends and acquaintances about it.

Run an affiliate marketing programme

Affiliate marketing is a method under which a business rewards an affiliate for directing traffic to its website. Affiliates promote the business' products, services or online content and place a link to that business' website on their own site. The affiliate is then paid every time someone clicks on the link or completes a specified transaction, depending on the terms of the affiliate programme. This is known as cost-per-click or cost-per-action.

The easiest way to set up an affiliate marketing programme is to join an affiliate network as a merchant. The network connects merchants with affiliates and tracks clicks and commission. Major UK affiliate networks include www.affiliatewindow.com and www.paidonresults.com. See BIF 400, A Guide to Setting up an Affiliate Marketing Programme, for more information.

Engage in PR activity

Traditional PR can help to raise awareness of your business and increase visitors to your website. You need something newsworthy to arouse positive media interest in your business. A common technique is to carry out or commission a survey relevant to your product line or services. You

can then use the results to create a topical press release, which you send to carefully targeted journalists, editors or bloggers.

A targeted approach is likely to yield the best results, but you can also distribute press releases via online services such as www.pressbox.co.uk and www.prfire.co.uk.

Alternatively, you can appoint a PR agency to handle the promotion of your website. Examples of agencies that specialise in online PR for business include www.kdweb.co.uk/public-relations.htm and www.clickthrough-marketing.com. See BIF 149, Choosing and Using a PR Consultant, for more information.

Hints and tips

- Give users a good reason to visit your website by providing content that they will find informative and useful.
- Encourage website visitors to sign up to your mailing list.
- Interact with your customers via social media and encourage them to spread the word about your business and website.
- Monitor your website traffic and measure efforts to increase it using a tool such as Google Analytics (www.google.com/analytics).
- Don't add irrelevant reciprocal links, as this will lower your website's search ranking.
- Don't send unsolicited marketing e-mails or post irrelevant promotional comments on blogs as these 'spam' practices can harm your reputation.
- Beware of unscrupulous 'SEO experts' who guarantee to improve your search engine rankings in exchange for a fee. Search engine optimisation is a legitimate discipline, but best practice involves good design, clear copywriting, creating engaging content and keeping your website up to date.

Further information

BIF 96 Choosing and Registering an Internet Domain Name

BIF 149 Choosing and Using a PR Consultant

BIF 326 Choosing and Using a Website Designer

BIF 392 A Guide to Creating a Marketing Strategy

BIF 400 A Guide to Setting up an Affiliate Marketing Programme

BIF 410 A Guide to the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003

Useful contacts

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is an independent authority concerned with information rights and data privacy, and can advise on privacy and electronic communication and data protection.

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Website: <https://ico.org.uk>

Google Webmaster Central provides information and resources to help you improve your website and connect with more visitors.

Website: www.google.com/webmasters

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