

Designing and enhancing your Internet presence

Introduction

Often small businesses with great services or products to offer fail to make the most of their Internet presence because of a naïve approach to marketing online. Although this document can't replace the role of an IT professional, it aims to be a helpful guide for small business personnel trying to design or enhance their Internet presence. With the spending on Google advertising topping the amount spent on ITV, the Internet should not be ignored as a channel to market.

Using the information in this document should help clarify the decisions to be made when establishing and managing your Internet presence. From a carefully considered registration of Domain Name, through good website design and hosting, to the imaginative use of Email, having a professional image on the Internet can make the most of rather than damaging a great offline reputation.

Hopefully, you'll be able to make use of the information in this document to develop and implement your own Internet presence successfully, but in any case it will give you enough information to be able to properly manage a third party engaged to deliver such a presence.

Search Engine's like Google are popularly used as the Home page for a lot of users who even use it as a way of navigating the web. Search engine results are often used as a research mechanism for providing some sort of reference guide for judging the provenance and professionalism of businesses like people used to do with word of mouth. Even following a word of mouth recommendation, an Internet search would probably be done to check on Internet presence as 'independent' assessment.

Ensuring your Internet presence reflects the image you want to put forward to existing and prospective clients is vital and its important is only increasing.

Domain Name selection and registration

Establishing your own Domain Name is an essential first step to the establishment of a coherent and professional presence on the Internet. Your presence on the Internet Will take the form of your Email address for communication, identity in online postings, website address (URL) for customers to visit, website address listed in online directories, all of which gets printed on your business cards, letterheads, invoices and complement slips.

Your Domain Name should be as meaningful and snappy as possible, ideally reflecting your company name, primary product, service or location where relevant. So, for example, a company producing Cox apples in the UK may do well to register www.cox-apples.co.uk as

their Domain Name (as it happens, this Domain Name has been registered and 'parked' by a joker organisation that try and resell Domain Name to appropriate recipients).

There are a large number of 'agents' that would register your Domain Name with the licensing authority for a fee. However, it is important that you chose the right organisation and deal for this registration process as you could pay over the odds or get tied into an arrangement where it is restrictive and/or costly to make use of the Domain Name as suits your needs.

You are best advised to register your Domain Name through Easily Ltd (www.easily.co.uk) as they provide a fully automated / online sign up and management facility to reduce costs, and very importantly, don't have any tie in or penalty clause for moving away from them as Registrar should you chose to. Many other online registration options would tie you in to use their hosting packages, pay a premium to avoid their advertising or have punitive penalty clauses for moving your Domain Name to an alternative Registrar or hosting agent.

Both for image reasons and current search engine functionality, a Domain Name that is similar to what is being searched on is preferable like the cox-apples.co.uk example. You can search for the available Domain Names from the Easily Ltd (www.easily.co.uk) home page. Not though, that if you already have a Domain Name registered and in use for Email and web site use, it is generally not a good idea to change it unless there is very good reason to.

If your Domain Name is not registered or hosted with Easily, it is possible, and preferable, to transfer the registration of your Domain Name to Easily.

Email hosting and structure

Once a Domain Name is registered, you will want to make use of it for Email and probably a website presence. Email could be directly hosted by having your own mail server, or for very small businesses, it is more likely that you would commission a POP3 Email account for yourself from where you registered your Domain Name. Easily provide webmail services for these Email accounts.

It makes sense to have a POP3 account whether used or not for backup redundancy purposes.

possible to use Email forwarding – spam considerations. Use first last name or surname first name first letter? Website hosting could be direct or masked but lose functionality being masked.

Website hosting and functionality

Host on linux and case sensitivity an issue, whereas on Microsoft platform not an issue.
Will a site require database backend, php, asp, sql, frontpage even? Bandwidth, site storage
etc

Content

Break up for sections and menu grouping, look for wide scope with specific wording for searches.

The content should be broken up into pages of around 300 words per page. There is an argument that the file names should be flat file rather than directory located which needs investigating further.

Design

Should be developed to be as content independent as possible to allow for speedy site redesign according to fashion - should comply with disability requirements. Care about file naming conventions, alt image tags etc.

Use of Metatags, sitemaps, static webpages, titles.

Templates for repetition of structure

What's required from the website

Collaborative updating?

Testing of the site cross platform

Google Maps

Location specific advertising presented through Google Maps. Essentially though, each search engine user a 'spider' to visit each website

Search Engines

Each Search Engine operates a little differently,

Search Engine Optimisation

Essentially this should be based on high quality content specific to the services or products you provide, but is then reworked to ensure that the content is aligned to the content and phrases actual people search on. This is the organic optimisation side of marketing to be complimented by Pay Per Click advertising.

Run site pages through keyword density checker at <http://www.ranks.nl/tools/spider.html>
The use search engine optimisation techniques to formulate words and phrases to formulate pages for keywords and so they are readable for users. Sitemap.xml

Use absolute references rather than relative so that search engines can compare like with like links for Page Ranking. Also, use the rel="nofollow" switch in <a href> links so these external links don't reduce Page Ranking.

<http://www.webworkshop.net/pagerank.html>

User experience optimisation

The site should be tested by people no immediately associated with the site's development and their actions and responses monitored for how actual users are expected to use the site and appropriate amendments made to facilitate smooth process flow. Calls to action should be measured in this phase.

Use Google adwords for assessing search engine optimisation.
www.google.co.uk/analytics

Directory listings

Google Maps listing

External link

Ensure offline and online marketing material have a similar look and feel to feed off each other for corporate identity reasons.