

Database Watchdog Special Report



Customer Grabbing Websites

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If You Don't Have A Website, You Are Missing Out On Up To 85% Of Your Potential Business.

Research commissioned by 1&1 found that 85% of 1,848 people polled would have doubts about buying from a company that didn't have a web site. (.Net magazine July 2006)

The lack of a website raises doubts in potential clients and makes them more likely to do business with a competitor who actually does have a website. Clients increasingly use the Internet as one of their primary forms of finding goods and services.

Some of the more common myths many business owners cite as justification for not having a website are as follows:

Myth #1: I don't need a website, I don't sell anything over the web.

Just because you may not be engaging in e-commerce doesn't mean that people aren't looking to buy from your business.

Think about all of the places where your company is on a list right next

to your competitors. The following organizations publish lists and websites where your business is listed right next to the competition:

- Chambers of Commerce
- Industry Organizations
- Better Business Bureaus

Failure to have your website on these lists is a major marketing mistake. Potential clients search these lists to find out more information about companies in your industry. If they can get on the Internet and find out good information about your competition, they'll likely do business with them instead of you.

Myth #2: It will take a long time to build and cost me a lot of money.

"Over two thirds of small businesses (67 percent) believe it would take ten times longer to create a site than the average, and nearly two thirds (63 percent) over-estimated the average costs by 400 percent" (.Net Magazine, July 2006)

Build Time

Creation and implementation of a website doesn't have to be a long process. Most web developers can have a web site up and running according to client specifications within a few weeks. If the client has simpler requirements, this timeframe can be reduced to a matter of days.

Cost Concerns



A great website requires less time and money than most people think

A website is one of the most cost effective forms of advertising available to your business. The cost to build a website compares favorably with other forms of advertising that your business may currently be using.

Compared to other marketing tools like business cards, direct mail and brochures, keeping a website up to date is incredibly cheap. A good web designer can keep your web site up to date with little cost and very little turn around time. Your website will always be your most current form of advertising.

Myth #3: The Internet is for global and national marketing – all my clients are local. Having a website won't help my business.

70 percent of U.S. households now use the Internet as an information source when shopping locally for products and services—an increase of 16 percent since October 2003 (Kelsey Group and ConStat 2005)

The overwhelming majority of Internet users are using the Internet to search for local products and services. Not having a website means that these web surfers are finding your competition's website and working with them instead of you.

Myth #4: Businesses in my industry don't need websites.

Almost all businesses will reap some value from having a presence on the Internet. Try this easy test. Go to any of the major search engines and type in "Find a (your profession)". Include the quotes. A recent search on Google produced the following results.

- 20.5 Million hits (links) for "Find a Doctor"
- 15.3 Million hits (links) for "Find a Lawyer"
- 76 Thousand hits (links) for "Find a Plumber"

In addition to these hits, all of the searches were accompanied by numerous advertisements by companies that will help you perform the search for the desired profession. These search companies make money helping potential customers find businesses just like yours.

As an example, for “find a plumber”, there were 11 sponsored links related to finding plumbers on the first search page, and many more links on following pages. Five sample links which appeared were:

findaplumber.com
 bestcontractors.com
 plumbingnetworks.com
 homeimprovementportal.com
 local-plumbing-contractors.com

Still not convinced? The following quotes relate to medical and legal professionals but similar results will apply to most industries.

Medical statistics:
A significant portion of home dial-up Internet users (40.0 percent) and nearly a majority of broadband Internet users (47.9 percent) use the Internet to research health services and related issues. (US Department of Commerce, 2004)

Legal Statistics:
4 million people each month use the Internet to find legal help; by 2007 the number of consumers and small businesses that boot up to find a lawyer is expected to climb to 7 million. (LegalMatch.com)

Myth #5: I sell my goods and services to other businesses, not to the general public. I don't need a website.

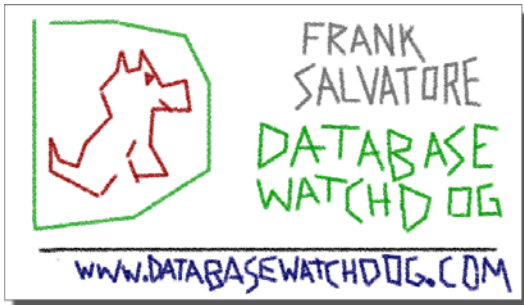
97% of surveyed companies use the Internet to research or identify vendors. (BuyerZone.com 2005 Business Purchasing Survey).

The Internet is just as effective when marketing to other businesses as it is to the general public. As you can see from the above quote, the Internet is one of the main tools used by businesses when looking for goods and services from other businesses. A website is mandatory for companies partaking in business-to-business transactions.

Having A Poorly Designed Website Is Worse Than Not Having a Website at ALL.

68% of consumers said they distrust a website that doesn't look professional (Questus Corp. – 2006 study)

An ugly web site will repel rather than attract clients. You didn't have a five year old create your business cards in crayon, so why would you have a web site that looks unprofessional?



You wouldn't do your business cards in crayon...

A web site that doesn't look professional is a complete turn-off to prospective clients. As a part of your overall marketing strategy, a web site must have a professional look and feel and encourage clients to work with your business.

Yet many companies have unprofessional looking web sites. There are three main ways that **good companies fall into the trap of having a bad web site:**

- 1) Using a "Build Your Own Web Site" package
- 2) Website Neglect
- 3) The "computer geek" friend built the website

Bad Website Trap #1: Using a "Build Your Own Web Site" package

"73 percent of small businesses admitted they wouldn't feel confident tackling a build your own web site package" (.Net Magazine, July 2006)

The majority of small businesses are hesitant to build their own web site, and rightfully so. These "Build Your Own Web Site" packages have many hidden drawbacks:

Extremely high cost:

Although initial signup costs may appear to be low, web site hosting through cookie cutter web sites can range from \$30 - \$100/month just to host your limited number of pages. A web designer has existing relationships with hosting companies that will allow your custom web site to be hosted for much lower prices.

Support:

With a professional web designer, you get to sit down with your consultant face to face to work out

the details of your web site. It is an interactive process through which the web designer delivers what the client requests. With build your own web site packages, you are responsible for everything, and if something goes wrong you're on your own.

You are the designer:

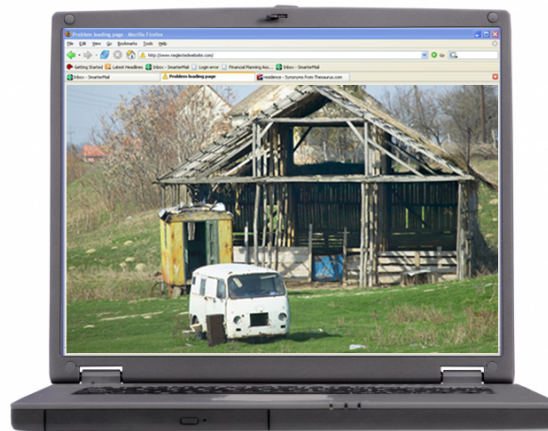
Free up your nights and weekends if you're going to use a build your own web site package. You're about to take time away from your core business activities and devote it to something you're probably not very good at. After all the time and effort that you put into building your own web site, the results can be downright awful. Not so with a professional web designer. A professional web designer can help you with content layout and integration creating an effective web site design that will attract clients.

Your web site will be a clone:

Build your own web sites have a limited number of web site designs from which to choose. Do you want your web site to look like every other web site that the build your own web site company offers? Your web site should be as special and differentiated as your business.

Bad Website Trap #2: Website Neglect

This is a common pitfall for the small business owner. When web sites aren't kept up to date with the newest technology, the site suffers by being out of style and the business suffers by not taking advantage of the newest technology.



Is your home page suffering from neglect?

Style

Site visitors decide within 50 milliseconds after seeing your home page whether or not they're going to even look at your website. You have to make a solid first impression. If you're using ugly or annoyingly outdated elements in your website like frames, animated gifs, background music and blinking text, website visitors will go elsewhere and ignore your website completely.

Technology

Advances in Internet technology in the past few years allow you to get your message across to the customer much better than in the past. There have also been many more technological breakthroughs that allow you to interact with your customers and potential clients more effectively than was possible in the past. E-commerce, video, and blogs are now readily available and widespread methods which provide a better customer experience and more revenue to the savvy business owner who employs them properly.

Bad Website Trap #3: The “Computer Geek” friend built the website



Please don't trust him with your website

As a vital part of your overall marketing plan, your website is a reflection of your business. Unless your “computer geek” friend is a professional web designer, using his services is likely a big mistake.

A painter, a plumber and an electrician all may do work on your house, but they are far from being the same thing. It works the same way in Information Technology. Although all IT Professionals work with computers, their specializations and fields of expertise vary widely. A good website developer knows all about design, e-commerce, search engine optimization, and other methods to draw potential clients to your website and make money for

your business. These are skills that other IT professionals don't possess.

Bring in the electrician to wire your home and the professional web developer to build your website. If you don't, potential clients will stay away in droves.

Tips For Having A Customer Grabbing Website

We've established how important it is to have a website for your business. We've also established that the website must be designed by a professional and kept current. The key to having a customer grabbing website is finding the right website developer. Your website developer must be an expert in the following areas:

- **Style**
- **Website Marketing**
- **Data Collection and E-Commerce**
- **Customer Service**

Tip #1: Style Counts

Site visitors make up their mind whether or not they like a site's home page in just 50 milliseconds. (Research conducted by Carleton Univeristy in Ottawa Canada)

The style of your website is extremely important. If a visitor doesn't like the layout of your site, they are likely to move on in the blink of an eye. Style is arguably the most important element of your website. If visitors are turned off by your design, nothing else on your website will matter – including website content or

where you appear in the search engine rankings.

An experienced web developer is aware of the limited amount of time that a website has to make this first impression. The web developer will not only design a website that pleases the business owner but one that the web site visitor will find engaging.

Tip #2: Website Marketing is Key

Your website is an important part of your overall marketing strategy. Even if you don't sell goods or services online, your website should project a positive image that makes potential clients feel comfortable with the idea of working with you. The company that you choose to build your website should have expertise with website promotion.

Promoting your website involves two key areas:

- **Search Engine Optimization**
- **Marketing Your Business Expertise**

Search Engine Optimization

50% of websites visits are accessed through a search engine. To give your website the best chance of taking advantage of the power of search engines, you need to have an expert optimize your website for search engines. A website design firm with experience in *Search Engine Optimization* (SEO) will construct your site so that it is more

likely that your web site will be indexed and located by the major search engines. A good website developer will have experience in this area and will help optimize your website so that people who are looking for goods or services that you offer will be more likely to find you.



Search engine optimization helps clients find your website

Marketing Your Business Expertise

Another great way to market a business is by marketing the company's areas of expertise. This can be done through online elements like blogs, newsletters, message boards and streaming video seminars. All of these tools when used properly can position your business as an expert within your industry. These interactive tools allow you to attract a community of users interested in your area of expertise. Be sure to work with a website developer who recognizes

the value of these tools and has experience implementing them.

Tip #3 Data Collection and E-Commerce are Extremely Important

Choose a web developer that has experience interacting with and collecting data from website visitors. If you're selling goods online, your web development team needs to be familiar with E-Commerce.

Whether or not you're selling goods and services online, you still need a method to build a customer database. When customers come to your site, you need a way for them to interact directly with you. You need to be able to collect information from them so that you can later contact them with information about the services that your firm offers.

Tip #4 Customer Service is Vital

This applies to your business as well as your website developer. If you have a way for customers to contact you through your website, you must respond to their requests in a very timely manner.

In the same way, your website development company needs to be responsive to your needs throughout the design, development, and support phases of your website.

Initially, the website development company you select should meet with you to conduct a needs assessment so that your goals for building the website are known. There should be follow up meetings as the website is being designed so that you and your web developer agree on the design and content of the project. Finally, after the website is up and running, the web development company should be easily accessible and responsive to your follow on needs. Finally, the **website development company should guarantee their work.** A good website development company will work closely with you throughout the entire website development project so that there won't be any ugly surprises.



A great website developer provides great customer service

Summary and Contact Information

Here are the key points to take away from this report.

1) **Every Business Needs to Have a Website.**

Customers search online for information for businesses – even local businesses that they don't purchase goods from online. If they can't find information about a business, they move on to the next business that does have a website. Very few businesses can afford to not have a website.

2) **An Ugly Website is Worse Than No Website at All.**

A poorly designed company website creates a lack of trust in the customer towards the company. Websites need to be professionally designed and kept up to date.

3) **Key Elements to a Successful Website are: Style, Marketing, E-Commerce/Data Collection and Customer Service.**

Your best bet towards building a successful website is to seek out a professional who is experienced in these areas.

I sincerely hope that this document has given you a better understanding of why you need an effective website for your business and just how important it is to use a professional when building your website.

Database Watchdog has a newsletter about website development and other IT issues that is published quarterly. If you'd like to be on the email list for the newsletter and for any subsequent reports from Database Watchdog, go to www.databasewatchdog.com and sign up.

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