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Your Role in Developing and Marketing a Website

Good advice to keep in mind before jumping into an ebusiness venture.

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I am a firm believer in the idea that every business should have some sort of web presence. Of course I am, it's my business. I am living proof that this is an unbelievably effective source of (sometimes...usually) cheap advertising. Even if it is something as simple as a single page with a brief description of the business, address, directions, and phone number (although I don't recommend this as a long-term option). To be taken seriously by web savvy individuals (and lets face it, they're out there, and it's spreading) you must have at least displayed your initiative in this area.

This being stated, I find at times that there are some common misconceptions regarding beginning a web campaign. Also, there are a few items to keep in mind, whether you're a veteran of the ecommerce community or just starting out.

Sadly, just because you built it doesn't always mean they'll come.

I've talked to many people who think by buying a domain name they will magically appear at the top of the search engines. This is not the case. Different search engines use different technologies to find related sites, but in every case a little know-how is required to make sure your listed at all.

If your goal is to be ranked high when a user types your company name, your web developer can optimize and submit your site. Things like adding Meta information in the site's head, adding Alt tags to images, and submitting your site to search engines regularly, whether by paid or free services, are all good options. This is usually a relatively simple and inexpensive process. If your goal is to be ranked high based on keyword entry, then it gets a little tricky. Avenues to explore can include signing up with Overture.com, pay-per-click advertisements, and affiliate programs. Another great way to get people to your site (and essentially keep them there) is to offer helpful information, interesting articles, games, you name it. Another good rule of thumb, the more links going into and going out of your website the better. All this being said, don't overdo it. Make sure the links, articles, etc, are actually interesting and helpful. Make sure they're organized in such a way as not to confuse the user.

List your website on every single thing that your customer sees. This will act as a constant reminder of your web presence. Your web developer and/or marketing professional should help you decide which of these (and other) options will work best for you and your business.

Don't get tired.

Think of your website as an ongoing dynamic advertising campaign. Many times companies neglect their website after it goes live. Sometimes building a website can be time consuming, and after it's "done", many people breathe a sigh of relief and move on. If this happens to you, basically, what you've done is waste a lot of money, because no one will care about it if you don't. Try to keep your website fresh with frequent updates. Make sure you discuss this ahead of time with your web developer so that you can work out a fair plan. You may decide to purchase "block hours" for updates, or develop a content management system with an administrative control panel to easily make changes yourself. A good developer will be able to discuss the pros and cons of each.

Track your progress

Your hosting company should offer you valuable information about your website once it's launched. By tracking who's coming to your website, where they're coming from, what they're looking at, how long they're staying and when they're coming, you will be able to make accurate judgments of what courses of action to take to increase traffic as well as make your advertising dollars go farther. Discuss these options with your developer and marketing professional. Make it part of your daily routine to take note of the results. Learn from your mistakes. And above all, do not judge your success by the amount of hits. Pageviews are a more accurate reading of the number of people visiting your site for a given time period.

Learn from other people's mistakes

I'm sure we all remember when the Internet was a new frontier, and it seemed everyone was quitting their jobs to get rich online. Well, for some it worked, but unfortunately for many it wasn't meant to be. We can learn a valuable lesson from this. Not that ecommerce is unwise, but rather that just like any other business, careful planning is an undeniable necessity. I personally don't believe that any type of get-rich-quick idea is wise. Plan your e-venture just as you would a new branch or investment. Think about whom you're reaching, how do they think? What do they need? What are your competitors doing? What can you do better? These types of questions can help plan a roadmap to success.

Good luck in all your ventures, both online and off!