

Web Site An Effective Tool For Attracting New Customers

Simple Steps Help Small Businesses Maximize Online Experience

(NAPSA)—Business owners in search of advantages when competing against larger companies can realize tremendous benefits by taking their business online and knowing how to maximize their Web site's effectiveness.

Many small-business owners worry that designing, building and maintaining a Web site is complicated, time-consuming and labor-intensive. What they may not know is that there are affordable tools and services that can simplify the site-building process.

By using technology tools to quickly and easily optimize an online presence, contact and maintain relationships with customers, and consistently communicate a brand, even the smallest companies can compete in an increasingly crowded global marketplace. Taking your business online can provide these advantages:

- It helps expand your customer base by enabling you to tap into national and international markets.
- It helps you improve customer service through targeted, personalized communication.
- It saves you money by letting you stretch marketing dollars.
- It can help grow your business through increased visibility, sales and customer relationships.

There are some simple steps you can take to get started on the Web, expand your online presence, and ultimately reap the rewards of your online investment.

First, register your domain name. Select a name that best represents your company. You also need a Web-hosting service, such as Microsoft Corp.'s Web-hosting solutions for small businesses. Consider getting a business Web address for your Web site (e.g., www.mycompany.com) that you can put on all your marketing materials, including your business cards. This also provides you with professional e-mail addresses such as president@mycompany.com.

Once you're online, make sure search engines are picking up your site and helping you drive customers to it. Submit It, a service available through MSN Search, enables you to manage the search engine marketing process.

Once you have a visitors' attention, your goal is to motivate them to spend time exploring your site, persuade them to keep clicking from page to page and prompt them to return to your site in the



By maintaining a strong Web presence, small businesses can compete with larger competitors.

future. Simple design, familiar navigation tools, a site map and logos, and a guided tour make it easy for customers to get where they need to go.

To build your brand, consistency is key. Directly connect the site mission with your offline goals and marketing. Include your Web address on print materials targeting potential customers.

Take advantage of online demographic tools to analyze your customer base. Many vendors provide tools that track the income, age and other factors of your visitors; these factors are critical to a small company's ability to spend marketing dollars wisely.

Implement in phases. If you don't have enough money to build a deep site, start small and eventually add supporting content that shows your capabilities, adding to the site as time and budget permits.

Finally, just as small businesses work with lawyers and accountants, they should consider working with a local technology consultant. The Microsoft Small Business Center provides an easy-to-use Partner Finder tool. Microsoft also offers opportunities across the country for small-business owners to meet face-to-face with technology consultants. The Microsoft Across America road show is a series of free, half-day seminars accompanied by a 40-foot truck filled with the latest technology for small businesses. Technology consultants are on hand at these events to offer demonstrations and answer questions.

For a complete schedule of Microsoft Across America events, and for more easy tips on how to leverage the Internet and find tools to help you take advantage of the Web, visit the Microsoft Small Business Center at www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness.