

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

**A website lets you put your products in front of a worldwide audience. It can help you generate new revenue, cut costs and build better relationships with both customers and suppliers. The costs of setting up a website are relatively low, so every business should think about having one. This briefing will help you decide a strategy for your website. A second briefing, Designing your website, explains how to put your ideas into practice. This briefing covers:**

- **The benefits of setting up a website.**
- **The costs involved.**
- **How you can make money from your site.**

### 1 The business benefits

You can reach new customers and improve communications with existing customers through a website. You can also sell online.

#### 1.1 Improve marketing to existing customers.

- Give customers up-to-date news about product launches and special offers.
- Provide a forum for customer feedback.
- Give all the detail you want. The cost of publishing extra material is virtually zero.

#### 1.2 Address new markets, national and global.

- You can reach potential buyers anywhere in the country, or anywhere in the world.
- Realistically, UK buyers will usually provide the best opportunities, as you can avoid complications of law, documentation, language, overseas delivery and payment.
- The US still has the most active Internet users, but web use is growing fast in the Far East, Latin America and Europe. People everywhere can reach your web pages just as easily as their local sites.

#### 1.3 Cut costs by providing technical information and after-sales support online.

- Compile lists of frequently asked questions (FAQs) so that your customers can answer many of their own queries, whenever they want.
- List contact details for distributors or stockists.
- Give extra information to help customers order the right items first time.

#### 1.4 Protect existing revenue streams and generate new ones.

- Set up a web shop to sell your products or information services online (see 4.1). Sales on the Internet are soaring, as people become less nervous about giving credit card details over the web.
- If your site appeals to a niche market, sell advertising space to suppliers of non-competing items for that niche (see 4.2).

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

1.5 Recruit people with specialised skills, knowledge and experience.

- Advertise job opportunities on your site.

Once your website is set up, space on it is effectively free. Whenever you have an idea that involves putting out extra information to help your customers, suppliers or employees, you can try it at no cost.

### 2 Exploiting your website

A website can make it possible to deliver existing services more efficiently, as well as new ones.

2.1 You can publish an online catalogue of goods and services.

- Visitors can learn about your products and make a selection at their own pace.
- Catalogues can be updated instantly, with no need to re-print and redistribute them.

2.2 You can create a shopping site, so visitors can buy from you 24 hours a day (see 4.1). Without careful planning, this will put strain on your stock systems, IT and logistics.

- Contact your local business support organisation for advice.

2.3 You can provide product update and service information for your existing customers.

- Fast-changing information can be updated at regular intervals, or even in real time. For example, some companies allow trusted customers access by password to 'live' information on stock levels.

2.4 You can keep in touch with travelling employees or tele-workers.

- They can file information via the website, so that everyone works from centralised records that are always up to date.

### 3 How much will it cost?

Costs are determined by the level of sophistication you build into your website.

3.1 For a comparatively small, simple site, the costs will be modest.

- Registering your domain name for an initial two years could cost as little as £20. Prices vary, so shop around. Recent rule changes mean that you can now register a domain name for ten years.
- Some ISPs will now give you around 20Mb of free web space.
- You will probably need to invest in web design software and pay for the services of a designer, though some ISPs offer easy-to-use design tools to help you create a basic site. You should also allow for the cost of training for those employees who will update your pages.
- Your telephone costs will escalate as you make more use of your website. Use a high-speed ISDN or ADSL link if you are transferring large volumes of information or graphics onto your site. This will speed up the process and save you money.

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

3.2 Costs will be higher for a more complex site, but the impact will be greater.

- More sophisticated, business-oriented web-hosting packages are available for a monthly fee.
- Consider employing a website manager and a web designer, especially if you will make frequent changes to your pages.
- You will need a programmer from time to time if you want to add extra features to your site — such as search tools, or a 'shopping trolley' system for online sales.
- If you open a shopping site (see 4.1), you may have to pay commission on sales to an online bank or a shopping software supplier. This is in addition to your own bank's charges (of up to five per cent) for processing credit card transactions.

If this is your first website, consider paying an established web design agency to provide a complete service. This would cover designing, programming, managing and updating your site. This is an expensive option, but could be worth it if your team lacks web expertise.

### 4 Making money

Even if your site is mainly aimed at improving communication with your customers, it may offer revenue-raising opportunities.

4.1 You can sell products and services direct from your site.

- Once set up, a website is a cheap and efficient method of making sales.
- Margins can be unusually high, because there is no wholesaler or retailer involved.
- The best sellers are commodity goods, such as CDs, that can be sold at reduced prices, reflecting low overheads.
- The web is ideal for selling things that buyers find hard to track down.
- Items that can be sent digitally can be sold and delivered directly. This includes music, software, images (from a photo library, for example) and investment information.
- Service industries can also sell online. Travel agents, hotels, plumbers and dentists are taking bookings on the web.

Securing payment is the critical factor when selling online to consumers. With a simple operation, you can ask buyers to fill in an on-screen form to be emailed or faxed to you. If you use secure email, an off-line payment system can be cheap and practical. For a more complex, automated operation, you will need software that allows secure online processing of debit and credit cards.

4.2 If you draw a large, commercially interesting audience, you could sell advertising. You will need perhaps 10,000 visitors a month to make this worth considering.

- Web advertising is sold in banner sites — strips of space on the screen with instant, click-through links to an advertiser's site.
- To display banners and track performance statistics, sites need to be equipped with special banner ad management software.

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

- Advertising rates are generally £25 to £50 per 1,000 displays of a banner ad.
- Contact one of the specialist online ad agencies or new media companies if you think you have an audience to offer.

4.3 If customers trust your information, you may be able to charge for access to your site.

- Visitors pay by monthly subscription, or leave credit card details so that you can charge them for their use of the site.
- Charging for access will reduce the number of visitors. Consider starting as a free site and later charging for access to your most popular and valuable pages.

### 5 Making a site successful

Stick to a simple, clear design that delivers what your customers are hoping to find.

5.1 Provide an information service, not just an online catalogue.

- For example, Amazon.co.uk offers reviews and interviews, as well as a vast range of books, CDs and videos.

5.2 Use a news section to add impact.

- Grab people's attention by displaying news and offers on the first page of your site.
- Industry news often makes good copy and may be valued by visitors to your site.

5.3 Make visitors feel involved by asking for their opinions and respecting their interests.

- Include links to other interesting sites. Do not put them on the first page or you may encourage visitors to leave too soon. Links can be coded to open up in a new window, so that people who follow them do not actually leave your site.

5.4 Make the site relevant to global audiences.

- Set up localised pages for key overseas markets, with details of dealers and prices.

5.5 Ensure your site is efficient, attractive and free from design glitches and spelling errors.

- Keep it simple. Cluttered designs with too many graphics take too long to download.
- Check that every link works.
- Test your site with the main browser types and on Mac and PC platforms before you go public.

### 6 Attracting visitors

6.1 Use email — or an old-fashioned mailshot — to let a targeted list of potential customers know about your site.

- Rent an email list from a broker. Check that list members opted to be included.
- Never send junk email. Recipients may object and swamp your mailbox with junk.
- Make sure your email message is short and simple, with no images or formatting.

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

6.2 Provide incentives to attract visitors, such as discounts for online buyers.

6.3 Register your site with the search engines — the starting points for keyword-based information searches — so people can find it. Each search engine site offers you a simple online registration form to fill in.

- Most search engines accept new entries automatically. Yahoo! (<http://uk.yahoo.com>) is an exception. It vets entries manually.
- Publicising a site can be hard work. You could pay a specialist registration company to do it for you — but you will probably get better results if you put the time and effort in yourself.
- Check your designer has put the keywords and the summary information (meta tags) used by search engines on every page.
- Re-register occasionally. Search engines are weighted in favour of newer registrations.

6.4 Announce your site on the search engines' 'what's new?' pages.

- Most provide a free advertisement for your new site for a limited period.
- Internet magazines also print lists of new and recommended sites.

6.5 Negotiate to exchange links with relevant but non-competing organisations.

- If your trade or industry body has a website, ask for a link to your site.

6.6 Plug your site in all company literature.

- Include it in your letterhead and business cards, as well as flyers and advertisements.

### 7 Getting help

Word-of-mouth recommendation and advice from business friends and experts will be more help than books, which are soon out of date.

7.1 Business Link have IT advisers.

- They can put you in touch with specialist designers and agencies. Contact Business Link on 0845 600 9 006.

7.2 Choose a consultant who has been recommended by someone you trust, or who worked on a website that you like.

- Contact The British Computer Society on 01793 417424, or visit their website at [www1.bcs.org.uk](http://www1.bcs.org.uk), for a list of consultants.
- Internet and business magazines often run features about web design agencies.

### 8 Getting started

To create a website you need to establish a location and organise the content.

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

- A** The usual way to establish a location is to rent space for your website on a server run by your Internet service provider (ISP) or another 'hosting' company.
- To register your own domain name — the unique name identifying your site — visit <http://www.nominet.org.uk> or do it through your ISP.
  - Only set up your own server if it is essential. For example, if you publish sensitive information or material that needs continual updating. Running your own server is expensive, costing several thousand pounds a year, and requires a dedicated computer and high-speed telecoms links. It also opens up serious security, maintenance and back-up issues.
- B** For maximum impact, employ professional designers to develop your page content.
- A good web designer will know how to make the best use of the technology.
  - Ask web designers for references and look closely at their previous work.

### 8 Security

Security is a vital factor for any website.

- A** If you decide to run your own web server or link your office network to the Internet, you will need to install a firewall — a set of software filters and barriers.
- Firewall techniques change fast as new threats arise. Fitting a firewall is a job for a computer security specialist.
  - Create secure sections of the site, accessed by password, for restricted or subscription-only information.
- B** For online payments, you will need to set up a secure link to the online bank or credit card authorisation service you use.
- If security is a high priority, you can use a digital certificate of authentication. This verifies your identity to customers, but it is an expensive and complicated system.
- C.** You can take off-line payments, using secure email for customers' card details.
- This is safe and also economical, as you do not pay commission to an Internet bank or payment processing company.

### Experts' quotes

"Businesses that don't have a website will find it increasingly difficult to compete. These days, customers increasingly look for suppliers that use the Internet to provide up-to-date product information and to deliver a more integrated and dynamic service."

Roger Gilbert

Business Link

South Yorkshire

## First steps 4 | Developing your website strategy

“Once someone has been attracted to your site, it is vital that the means are in place to legitimately capture the visitor’s email address for future marketing purposes. For example, offering a free email newsletter gives a good reason for the interested visitor to provide this information.”

Martin Walsh,

Business Link York and North Yorkshire

“On the Internet, you occupy the same space as any other company, so a good website can make you look bigger than you really are.”

Simon Smith,

Applica

Expert contributors

Thanks to Ben Rubinstein (Cognitive Applications, 01273 821600); Simon Smith (Applica, 01628 894339).

Article from <http://www.businesslink.org>

*This CD is edited and published by Business Link Somerset (BLS) and is for information only. The views expressed in articles do not reflect BLS corporate views and BLS cannot be held responsible for action taken in respect of the same. Before making any business and/or financial decisions it is prudent to consult an acknowledged expert in the field.*