

Online Promotion For Free!

Promoting your website is no longer about banner ads and reciprocal links – the web has grown up.



THERE are many ways to spend your advertising dollars online and similarly, there are plenty of ways to take advantage of free opportunities to spread the word about your business. The following are several free online promotional avenues you may not be aware of.

Get your website listed in the search engines

Search engines are responsible for 85 per cent of average website visits, which means if you're not well placed in the engines, you're missing out on a lot of customers.

Here's the quickest way to get your website ranked well:

Think of keywords your customers will use to find you. For example, a tourist looking to stay at an apartment in Cairns city might consider the following keywords:

- cairns apartments
- cairns city accommodation

- cairns self-contained apartments
- cairns family accommodation

Include these keywords in your website text.

The search engines will not rank you for the keywords you want unless you include them in your text. Ensure you include them in a natural way using proper English. Here's an example using the keywords above:

"Cairns X Apartments offer self-contained accommodation in the heart of Cairns city and are especially well suited for families and couples travelling on a budget. The apartment complex is walking distance from the popular attractions on the Esplanade, Muddy's Playground and Cairns Central Shopping Centre. Cairns X Apartments is the perfect accommodation choice for your tropical holiday."

Submit your website to industry websites and specialised directories

Search the web for directories that focus on your particular industry such as tourism, education or finance. If you're lucky, you may even find specific directories for micro industries, such as managed apartments or English schools.

Think about the many terms people use to describe your industry and search for these. Most businesses belong to trade associations or professional bodies which feature member listings. Ask for a link, and ensure you're listed appropriately.

Avoid directories or bodies that solicit your business for upgraded listings as they are often not sufficiently trafficked or worth the expense.

The more websites you are listed on, the more credible your business appears. Search engines will repay you by listing you higher for the keywords you have used in your website's text.



Write articles for others to use in newsletters and on websites

Many of us write mini articles everyday in the regular emails we write to our customers. Consider making these more formal articles and submit them to other companies for inclusion in their newsletters and on websites.

The usual policy for such an exchange is that other websites and newsletters can reproduce the article only in its entirety, without modification and by including the author's byline and a link to their website at the bottom of the article.

For those of us who already write articles, consider posting these to your website and include a note allowing others to republish the article without seeking permission provided it is left intact. This allows your articles to be more quickly distributed across the internet.

Issue press releases

As newsworthy events happen in your business, consider submitting them to print and web periodicals within your industry. Links from news and media sources are favourably considered by search engines and can boost your website in search engine rankings.

Press releases have the added benefit of making your business appear dynamic, changing and expanding, which encourages others to do business with you.

Start a blog for your business

Blogs work incredibly well for establishing a regular visitor base to your website. Many businesspeople offer regular industry comment to clients and associates and a

blog allows you to get this content out to a wider audience.

Include your URL on everything

You might be surprised how simple this suggestion is but despite having someone's business card and brochure in my hand, I often need to search high and low for their website address (URL).

Don't make potential customers look for you. Print your website address wherever your phone number is including on letterhead, business cards, envelopes, flyers, brochures, emails, outdoor signage and so on.

To aid readability, I recommend excluding the http:// part of your web address and just including the: www.domain.com.au part instead.

Promote your website in online forums and blogs

Many people are attracted to the internet for the vast number of forums, blogs and online communities. Tap into the areas in which your business exists by seeking out your peers and competitors online and finding where they exchange information.

Respect the culture of these discussion groups by not openly spamming advertising throughout the posts but instead, offer valuable contributions and information to the people asking questions.

Ensure you include a signature at the bottom of your posts that links back to your website. Regular visitors to these forums will gradually trust and recommend your business provided you do not aggressively market your business or overtly plug your products.

Write testimonials for businesses you've used

Many businesses display testimonials on their websites and this is a great way to show your support.

Ask for your testimonial to include a link to your website and ensure you include a company logo.

The end result is another link to your website and credible support of a business transaction.

Ask visitors to bookmark your site

This encourages repeat business so people can find your website again easily by checking their list of favourites. It's simple, quick and free.

There are lots of other free ways to promote your website, but a common theme throughout most of these ideas is involving yourself in the online business community.

Unless you become familiar with how the online customer thinks, you will have trouble communicating and doing business with them.

Do you have any other ideas? Submit them to my website and discuss further at www.cityofcairns.com/freepromotionideas.

Nicky Jurd

Director – cityofcairns.com
nicky@cityofcairns.com