

IN WEB

with
Nicky Jurd



AN ONLINE HEALTH CHECK

Creating an on-line web presence is fast becoming the way to target consumers. Use the following 10 steps as a guide to help create and maintain an effective website.

TO HAVE a website is nothing new in business but the internet is not just about being 'out there,' it's about integrating your company values, products and services and reaching another market. If you fail to represent your company accordingly, the wrong message will be sent to your consumers.

Follow this handy checklist I have put together to ensure your online representation shows your business in its best possible light.

1 Own a domain name like your business name

Your business name should be easy for customers to remember. Like a phone number, potential customers will see or hear your domain name and will need to remember it by the time they are in front of a computer. Ideally, your domain name

is an exact match to your business name, in a .com.au format or, if your business name is long, an abbreviation can be more memorable. For example, if your business is Earville Pets, try to buy earvillepets.com.au.

Having a domain name matching your business name makes your business look more professional and organised and also prevents your competition from registering the domain name that most closely matches your business name.

Do not make the common mistake of having a domain name but still using the email address provided by your internet service provider (like earvillepets@bigpond.com) or a free email provider like hotmail. Ensure you have at least an 'info@earvillepets.com.au' set up, if not email addresses for departments or key personnel.

2 Make your website look professional

Your website only has a few seconds to capture your visitor's attention - don't squander this time!

Avoid the temptation to use flashy animations or intrusive sounds that may distract your visitors from purchasing, or scare them away completely.

Make sure your website's presentation matches your business' existing brand but be aware of the vivid nature of a screen. For example, primary reds and yellows should be used in moderation.

Employ the services of professionals. Web designers, copywriters and photographers will each help paint an accurate representation of your business through your website. ▸

3 Provide the information your customers are looking for

Potential customers primarily visit a website to find contact details or a price. The most successful websites make these two elements easy to find.

Consider the most common questions asked by your prospective customers and attempt to answer these on the website. This will pre-qualify prospective customers and you will be seen to have a helpful, informative website.

Ensure you have high-quality photos to represent your products or people. A poorly taken photograph can do more harm than good.

Understand a website is an information medium and don't be shy about presenting as much information as possible. Your visitors will thank you for it.

4 Make your website easy to navigate

Consider your visitors when choosing your navigation menu and website structure. An intuitive website will help its visitors quickly locate the information they seek.

Navigation tools should be in your customer's language, not shoptalk and you will enjoy a greater response if you talk about solutions rather than products.

5 Use web copy terms customers search for

For the most part, search engines use the text on your website to determine whether your site will appear in a results list when a visitor performs a search in Google, or any other search engine.

Delivering the most relevant information to your customers will consequently assist your website in its search engine rankings for the keywords most likely to be used by your target market.

Remember to use your customer's language to ensure you appear in a results list.

Businesses operating in a particular geographical region will find most customers perform a search of two parts: the desired product or service and the location it is sold or operated. For example, 'Cairns accommodation,' 'real estate agent in Port Douglas,' 'battery charger Cairns.'

When considering what keywords a potential customer will type into a search engine, ensure they sound natural and engaging.

6 Make your business look and sound trustworthy

Trust is a considerable concern for many visitors. Today's consumers want accountability from businesses and want to know there is a person to assist them with problems.

To promote trust, your website should include photos of your staff, premises, vehicles and any other real, tangible aspects of your business.

If your website accepts credit cards, display the logos of the credit cards you accept and use the industry-standard padlock imagery.

Testimonials are easy to forge and website visitors are suspicious of vague references to the person who provided the testimonials. Ask permission to use full names, business names and logos as part of your testimonials. This will carry far more weight than empty initials.

7 Invite people to contact and buy from you

A call-to-action is graphic or text that motivates a visitor to action. This feature is frequently overlooked when writing text for a website but is the equivalent in sales talk of 'asking for the sale.'

Be clear when inviting your visitor to click a link, view a photo, fill out an enquiry form or add an item to their shopping cart.

The common 'click here' link can often be replaced with a more inspirational and informative 'send us an email,' 'view our prices,' 'request a consultation' or 'make an appointment.'

8 Make regular changes to your website

Returning visitors will appreciate fresh content such as newsworthy items about your company, reference to new products or services and industry-relevant snippets.

Consider running a weekly special, article, or news section that can be promoted in its own right to give current and prospective customers a reason to frequently visit your website.

Visitors respond to brand awareness through



your website the same as they do through catalogues, advertising and newsletters.

9 Have a reliable host

Your web host is responsible for keeping your website online. Ensuring you have a host with business-grade support is paramount to the online success of your business.

You should ensure your web host would work closely with your web developer. Either may be territorial and you don't want your business to be caught in the crossfire.

Most small businesses do not have an in-house IT department and rely on their web host for assistance with setting up email addresses and other website support issues.

Check your web host offers 24-hour emergency support and try to buy locally for the accountability benefits.

10 Actively market online

Successful websites take full advantage of the cost-effective advertising opportunities online.

The unique advantage of online advertising specifically lies in the accountability of your dollar spend. You can accurately track where a visitor came from - down to the suburb, what pages they visited and how much they purchased - feats almost impossible with traditional advertising.

Paying for links, banner ads and pay-per-click advertising is the most common advertising streams with Google's AdWords program and is the most cost effective.

If you are serious about making money from your website, marketing should not be left-out of the website budget.

Nicky Jurd

Director - CityofCairns.com

nicky@cityofcairns.com