

Benefits of a Website

More and more people and businesses use the Internet to find information, it is convenient and saves time. Having a website is becoming so mainstream that customers and the general public almost expect a company to have a website. If people want information on a product or service, they are now saying, "**I think they have a website, I'll check that out first.**"

Below is a partial list of many benefits you can expect from a website:

1. Increases awareness of products and or services

A website provides the opportunity to publish the who, what, when, where, and why of your business in a very powerful and effective manner.

How many potential customers might be swayed if they could learn a little more about you, your company, your products, etc., without having to phone or taking the time to meet with you in person? A website makes it easy for customers to learn more about your business anytime at their own pace.

2. Expands market place

A website can expand your reach to a market that may have been difficult or expensive to reach through traditional advertising. Increasingly, people search the Web rather than the Yellow Pages when looking for a service or product. You would be amazed at how much shopping actually occurs on the World Wide Web overnight! With an e-commerce site you can even make sales when your office(s) are closed. Currently over 75% of the people in the US access the Internet, up from over 40% at the end of 1999.

3. Increases hours of operation

Not only will your website be there 24 hours a day, 365 days a year with the possibility of reaching millions of people every day, but now your customers are able to contact you outside of your normal business hours. Your website is still working for you while you are at leisure or asleep, and is not dependent on your having a computer or leaving your computer on.

4. Marketing tool - replace or complement existing sales and marketing channels

It is a very low-cost method of promoting your business. By advertising your website, in addition to your product or services, you give potential customers the opportunity to learn far more about your product or services than you could ever place in an ad.

Advertising experts agree the Internet will become an increasingly popular advertising medium, with anticipated spending eclipsing \$15 billion and have an 8% increased share of all advertising spending by 2005.

5. Reduce costs / Improve efficiency

Reduce publishing costs

One of the largest expenses a business can incur is designing, printing, and delivering marketing materials. Websites are quicker, easier and more cost-effective to update than print based media. You can keep your website more current, more affordably than any other media can.

With a website, you can instantly publish that same information: new product announcements, employment opportunities, contact information, coupons, almost anything, without material or delivery costs. People can learn about it instantly just by visiting your website.

Now, just imagine how much it would cost to produce a catalog for 200 different products, and keep it in consumers' hands for an entire year. You can accomplish this with a website very easily, with low development cost and almost no distribution cost.

Reduce marketing costs

Buying advertising space, whether it is a newspaper ad, billboard or radio spots, can be expensive. In addition is the burden of the hours spent trying to figure out the perfect words to say in a limited space. A website is an unlimited number of full-page ads that you can change at will!

Reduce communication costs

A website can do far more than sell products. You can also have pictures, details and prices of your products and or services, the very latest company information, hours of operation and maps indicating the location of your company's outlets on your website. It can also supply your staff, suppliers and business partners with important and timely information. Just about any printed matter can be converted to a web page and distributed by email at far less cost and time than by fax, mail or courier services.

6. Build branding

Build brand awareness by having your website address (URL) on all marketing material you use. Having your brochures, website, business cards, ads, posters, etc... have the same look and feel increases your brand awareness.

7. Enhance your image / Reflect your spirit

A website can help you to establish a credible, professional image, instilling a level of trust with your customer and their purchasing confidence will follow suit. Your website can (and should) reflect the spirit and vision of you and your company.

The Internet also offers the opportunity for a small-business to portray itself as a big business. (Or, for a big business, to fall flat by having a website that poorly represents its true stature.) How will your business be perceived on the web today?

8. Improve customer service / Reduce costs

Does your staff spend a lot of time on the phone answering customer requests for information on a product or service? Do they keep answering the same questions and sending out the same material? Do they spend a lot of time on the phone with customer support?

A website can help reduce long distance phone bills, postage costs, printing costs and labor costs (and frees them up to perform other tasks) by having that information on your website.

Your website can also take orders while you sleep as people can place orders on a website at any time, day or night. You would be surprised how many extra sales you could have by developing an on-line brochure or virtual store.

A website lets you publish support information with up to the minute accuracy. Some companies only offer support through their website. If the website does not offer the answer an online feedback form is provided. This is perhaps the most underrated usage for business websites today.

9. Improve Efficiency

Email can improve efficiency of your operation - for your customers and your employees. Customers who use email do not have to deal with many problems of everyday business: pushy sales people, remembering to call during business hours, having to battle crowds to get to your stores, spending time waiting on voice mail or getting the wrong information. It is convenient, easy, and safe for the customer. Email is also convenient for you. You can respond to all your customer inquiries at the same time, and do it when you have a free moment - not in the middle of rush hour when someone calls up to ask for product information or directions to your location.

10. Provide information

Even without an online store, people can look to your site for driving directions or a map to find your store. Tourists can look up your small shop and stop there on their next trip to your area. Many people use the Internet to find information. You can use your website to educate and inform the populace. This can be done in various ways: publish an online newsletter, have an advice column, offer message boards, or simply have a place where people can submit their names and email addresses to join your mailing list for more information. This is another way to gain public awareness of your business or organization. It also allows you to grow your customer base for direct marketing.

11. Create a competitive edge

If your customers can not find you online, they will find your competitors. With more and more companies making a web presence, the companies that lose business to their competitors will most likely be those who fail to represent themselves on the Internet. If a potential customer can leisurely browse your company information online but cannot find your competitors' information, your company now has an additional edge.

12. Open new channels of communication with staff, partners and suppliers

Intranet websites (websites that are generally closed to the Internet users and are accessible to organization members only) are an easy way to provide your employees with a way to reach the information they need to perform their duties in one centralized location. You can post benefits information, changes in staff, kudos for hard work, a place for their schedules, and much more. You can put as much or as little information as you want on your site and make them supply a password to access the information that needs to be kept private.