

Turn Your Web Site into a Selling Site

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Most small businesses have a Web site of some kind and many are relying more and more on the Internet to help their marketing and sales efforts and contribute to profits. But wanting a Web site that works hard for the business and actually getting one that does so are two different things.

There are dozens of ways a Web site can go wrong. Even if you have a crackerjack designer, they may know little or nothing about building a site that actually produces sales or leads. An eye-pleasing site by itself won't necessarily get the job done.

This is one area, however, where a great deal of help is available to the small business owner. As small business gains experience with the Web, some clear steps have emerged that you can take to improve your odds of online success. For example, while appearance is important, the usability of a Web site from the customer's perspective is even more vital.

How easy is it to get around your Web site? Can customers find what they want fast? Your goal is to have a site that appears professional and credible to customers as well as being easy to navigate. For a prospect intent on buying, there is nothing more frustrating than having to deal with a clumsy or cluttered site. Categories should be clear and logical.

And while the Web's almost unlimited space gives you the choice of drowning customers with product details, you may want to exercise some restraint. Give visitors the option of clicking to more information if they wish, but don't force it on them. Coax customers by stages. Filling out forms is often necessary, but keep them simple and break them into bite-sized parts.

And by all means make the photos or other graphics on your site compelling—not the same old generic stock photos you see everywhere. Use graphics of real people and places to add personality to your site and reinforce the notion that your business exists in the real world, too.

Every inch of your site should address your customers' goals and needs, not just the needs of your business. Make the checkout process on your Web site fast and simple. Don't bombard buyers with last-second choices or pop-up ads. And if your site requires a registration process, don't force buyers to answer endless questions designed to fill your need for marketing demographics.