

ALL Businesses MUST be Online! No Excuses Survive

Source: Website101.com

Some common misconceptions

We have heard arguments from other web developers and even some small business owners against having a web presence and would like to address those here. We have been quite enthusiastic in our support of a web presence as a potential necessity for small business. Not only is that presence expected by the public, it has potential as a great leveling medium that makes small business nearly as accessible as GiantCompany.com. Here are some of the most common backward views.

- **Don't believe the hype - not everyone needs to be online.**

Enthusiasm for bringing all small business online is sometimes seen as involving some kind of snake-oil salemanship or dishonest get-rich-quick schemes. When the truth in that attitude is - the belief that some businesses should be denied a web presence because they are not likely to succeed there.

- **Can the business make the investment necessary to make an effective web site, and can the existing offline business benefit from a web site?**

The investment necessary is negligible, unless their web developer is willing only to create a full service high-end site using all the latest bells and whistles - and consequently makes the service financially inaccessible to small business. **A web site can be compared to all other routinely used business tools. Phone, fax, copier, computer. Tools we are expected to have by our customers and clients.**

If a business doesn't have what it's customers expect they are seen as less than professional and risky to do business with. The phone company doesn't tell the struggling entrepreneur, "We don't think your business should have a phone, because you can't afford a full-page ad in the Yellow Pages, so we are not going to provide you service!" No, a simple listing is sometimes necessary. Some companies won't even blink at spending \$1,000 a month for a quarter page phone book ad or paying nearly that much for local newspaper splash ads yet they don't see the utility of a 24 hour-a-day 365 day a year advertising medium.

- **If a business is going to benefit from a web site, the site has to hold some sort of utility for the business. Why make a site that doesn't offer much value for your business? Why should the local burger joint put up a site that has its menu on it - when the menu doesn't change from year to year?**

Our contention at WebSite101 is that the web presence is the utility for business. If a customer expects to call a business, they don't ever consider the possibility you won't have a phone. Our belief is . . . **If you don't have a web site, some potentiial business will just go elsewhere. It's not the utility that matters most, but the presence.** Even if that site offers only an unchanging menu

or unchanging services, contact information, business philosophy or bio. The customers will expect the web site to be there whether you change your mind, your products or your hairdo.

- **Another issue to consider is whether or not the business has the necessary infrastructure to handle a web site. Who is going to deal with the incoming e-mails? Can someone dedicate themselves to marketing and taking care of administrative issues for the site?**

You need an infrastructure to decide who is going to answer the phone, who is going to open the (snail) mail and who will dedicate themselves to doing office paperwork and filing. Of course it becomes an employees job to do specific tasks. This list of tasks is going to add a small enough responsibility to an employee or two that it is also negligible. Replying to e-mail takes less time and expense than answering snail mail. Somebody has to be sure the filing gets done and it is no less obvious that **someone must be dedicated to the task of web site maintenance and administration, but in most small businesses, that may mean only a weekly two hour (or less) task.**

- **Some small business owners want to make a site with 3-5 products, no online ordering and minimal promotion. In a case like that what is the point of putting up a web site?**

Because the customer expects it!. There should be no judgement involved about the potential success of the site. You may contend that if a business can't be successful they should stay out of business and not clutter up the landscape. We're suggesting only that **a web site will soon become expected by the public and the businesses they seek to deal with.** Not that it will make us successful. Use of the other business tools won't guarantee success either - **because you own a phone, it doesn't mean it must ring off the hook to be considered necessary!**

We believe that it will become expected for a business to have a web site, successful or not. No matter what your company brochure and business cards say about you or your level of professionalism, you are still expected to have them. If a client needs to fax you a document, have you modify it, sign it, make a copy of it for your files and overnight a signed copy to back to them, you had better be able to do all that and call back to verify you've done it. If you don't have the phone, fax, copier and word processing software to handle that - you look unprofessional. We believe that a web presence will soon become a part of that mix - and probably at some point soon - streamline the whole process to be handled online!

Maybe we're dreamers but that's our sincere belief. We love the technology and it's potential and believe it will affect us all in ways we can't even begin to imagine yet. Necessary or not. Successful or not. Unchanging or not.