

5 online basics your business needs to survive

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It's no secret that the internet has taken over the world. Many of us would now have a difficult time living without it, as we rely on it to find information for common questions, directions to our destinations and interactions with the people in our lives.

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Countless businesses have leveraged the internet's ubiquity and power to fuel their own popularity and success, but a number of businesses are still reluctant to get involved in the online marketing game -- usually due to fears of cost, or even intimidation at the notion of change.

But you don't need to go all-out with an online strategy. If you want to build a reputation for your business -- or at least satisfy your existing customers -- there are some online basics you'll need to put in place. Here are the bare-minimum features every modern business should have:

1. A website

If you don't have a website, you're behind the times. Your website is the hub for the rest of your inbound marketing strategy, serving as the final destination for your directional efforts. It's the place where people can reach out and contact you, giving you the opportunity to gain new customers and leads. Even more importantly, a website is a place where people already familiar with your brand can find more information about you, such as . It's also a marker of legitimacy; if a prospective customer finds out you don't have a website, he or she may not take you as seriously, or believe you don't keep pace with modern trends.

2. A social media presence

Having some kind of social media presence is also important. It's not absolutely necessary to post every day or go out of your way to build an audience (though I highly encourage this), but you should at least fill out the basic information in profiles on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Again, social media serve as a marker of legitimacy, showing the "realness" and modernity of your company. It's also a way to get in front of people who are specifically searching for you on these outlets.

3. A base of local citations

Local citations are brief entries or descriptions of your company in off-site locations, such as third-party local directories or review sites. Chances are, even if your business doesn't have a website or social media profile, it's already got a handful of local citations in existence due to customer reviews or mentions of your business. Because they're there, you might as well take advantage of them. Peruse popular sites like [Yelp](#) or [Google My Business](#), and make any needed corrections to information like your company name, address and phone number. Local citations are good for local SEO and general visibility alike.

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4. Regular updates

It's not enough simply to establish a presence; you also have to take the effort to update that presence whenever necessary to keep your audience in the loop. An important example: If your company changes locations, you'll need to update your address on your website, social media profiles and possibly your local citations, as well. The same is true if you change your

hours or offer new products or services. Take the effort to keep your audience updated.

5. Easy contact options

Much of the reason you need an online presence is to give online users an easier way to connect with you; you'll want to make that potential connection as easy as possible by including many varied contact options. For example, you'll need to at least include a phone number and contact form on your website, and perhaps a live chat feature as well. You'll also need to reliably respond to people who reach out to you on social media channels.

Beyond the basics

If you have the preceding five basics in place, you can count yourself as meeting the minimum threshold for modern visibility. But if you want to go beyond them, you can start getting involved in some entry-level strategies to afford you some measure of escalation and improvement:

- **Optimization.** Optimization (specifically -- SEO) is the process of making changes to your site and online presence to increase its visibility in search engines like Google.
- **Ongoing content.** Developing an will help you stay relevant to your social media audience, provide more information to your customers, increase customer loyalty and brand recognition and even improve your search rankings. I highly encourage maintaining a regular blog.
- **Social engagement.** Reach out to new people who might be . Building an audience will make you more authoritative, and might even earn you some new leads.

- Growth. Once you get your foot in the door, you'll find it easier to escalate the visibility and reputation of your brand with more content, more followers and more online marketing tactics. For help with growing your business online, see .

Try to keep an open mind about the possibilities for online marketing, even if your industry is an old one, and even if you're used to more traditional means of marketing and advertising. Simply establishing a baseline presence can have an enormous benefit for your current and potential future customers alike, providing information, direction and additional visibility.

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But, by going beyond that level, with a framework for a content marketing and SEO campaign, you'll start seeing traffic and engagements within a matter of weeks.