

The internet as a business tool essay example

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



The Internet as a Business Tool

You have a business that's doing OK but you feel could be making you a lot more money than it is at the moment. So what can you do that's within your budget, to bring in those customers and more sales? You know that advertising costs mega-cash (that you just don't have!). You also know that you can't afford to set up a telesales operation, employing staff to make thousands of calls to find those elusive "qualified" buyers. So can the Internet solve your problems? Well, it certainly can help.

For most businesses, having a website is at the very least beneficial, and in many, many cases it is essential. Whatever services or products you offer to the market, your potential customers need to know you exist. With more and more people using the Internet as first choice to find the goods and services they need, it is becoming without doubt the most important medium for marketing a business, as well as being probably the most affordable. Other more "traditional" forms of marketing such as TV commercials, newspaper and magazine advertising, etc not only cost a lot more but in comparison they reach a far smaller audience.

Even without going to the expense of setting up a website, (though that is getting cheaper all the time - more later), your business can make a leap forward in communication terms by taking advantage of the very low-cost facility of e-mail. Services such as Gmail or Microsoft's hotmail are free (no usage costs/charges once you have an Internet connection), and provide a powerful and flexible means of instant communication to virtually anywhere in the world. If you arrange to set up a so-called "bulk" e-mailing system, you can send the same e-mail message to hundreds of people just

as readily as to one person. Just think of the savings in postage, in letterheads and envelopes, in staff costs to stuff envelopes, taking them to the post office, and so on! And the time savings are significant, too. By the time people receive your sales brochure or quotation by regular mail, your e-mailed equivalent could have been received, replied to, and the goods ordered and on their way to the recipient. Just like a physical filing cabinet, your email system allows you to save your incoming and outgoing messages into folders, that can be arranged however you decide - e. g. by client, by subject, by category, etc. Also, you can attach files to your messages. For example: formal quotations, contracts, invoices, drawings, etc, etc. So you can transmit and receive business documentation much faster than using regular mail, and at very little cost. Not only that, but the e-mail and the Internet don't keep "office hours". It's there to use 24 hours of every day. There may be many occasions when your day begins with reading your e-mails from customers or potential customers who've contacted you overnight, when they've accessed the Internet during their own day on the other side of the world.

And e-mail is not the only way of communicating over the Internet. The Microsoft Voice-Over Internet-Protocol (VOIP) system called Skype allows you to communicate directly with others over the Internet. You can use the system to make voice calls to landlines or mobile telephones at low cost, or to other Skype users free of charge. It's also possible to have a videoconference using the system. By late 2011 there were already over 600 million users of the Skype system worldwide. So your business communication options can be vastly expanded and accelerated using the

Internet. In what other ways can the Internet boost your business?

How about research? If your business is in a competitive field (as most are) you need to know as much as can about your competitors: How do their prices/charges compare with yours? What range of services/products do they offer? How big a business are they? Where are they based? How many staff do they employ? How long have they been in business? The answers to all these and other important questions can be found on the Internet, either on the websites of your competitors or on sites providing information and data on registered companies. And – just as with the e-mail system – all this information can be obtained while you're sitting at your desk; no need to rush around to libraries or time-consuming travel on “covert” missions to check out their business premises. Also, as with the e-mail, your research can be worldwide; you're not limited to checking out competitors in your own country or local area, though of course you can focus your research if you so wish. Having assessed your competitors, you can plan a strategy for your own business that takes advantage of that knowledge. So how best to market your business, given that you possess that key commercial information?

Undoubtedly, the next step up from e-mailing clients and potential clients is to have your own website. A basic website need not cost much to create – indeed it's relatively easy nowadays to create one yourself with the help of various hosting companies who provide support and assistance during the process. Once created, those companies also provide hosting services which are also at affordable levels of annual costs. The more complex your business is, the more sophisticated your website needs to be. However, a

well-constructed website will pay for itself many times over in increased sales. More sophisticated websites have multiple pages, keyword search facilities, a purchasing section and other facilities, tailored to your particular type of business. If you sell a range of products for example, you may decide to include product literature on your website. Clients purchasing a product from you can then download and print the brochure or instruction manual, saving you the costs of printing and shipping the documents with the products.

But once your website is “ up and running”, you need to let people know it is there. This can be achieved in various ways. You can write emails and articles related to your business and submit them to newsgroups and other web-based sites. Join business networks like Linked In and make contacts there to spread the good word about your business. As time goes on, your well-constructed website will help your business to become known to a wider audience, which means that the Internet Search Engines like Google and Yahoo will place your business higher up in the rankings when someone searches for your business category on the Internet. It is important to “ maintain” your website, i. e. to ensure that it is updated to reflect new products for example, or to post news items; in short, to keep it up to date and with fresh content to encourage return visits by clients and potential clients. Remember that in traditional marketing you actively seek out clients, whereas with Internet-based marketing you are encouraging clients to come to you. If your website is either uninteresting or difficult to navigate once there, visitors will leave and go to your competitors’ websites instead. Another tremendous advantage of your business having an Internet

presence is the ability to handle payments automatically. With a properly set-up website, you can be selling goods or services 24/7, merely responding to purchases already made without your active participation, by shipping goods for example. Various organizations such as PayPal provide secure payment services for businesses, in return for only a small commission payable on each transaction. And remember that the Internet-based business model requires minimal staffing and other overheads costs. In many instances it is also independent of location, hence no expensive city center office premises needed.

Of course being on the Internet is no substitute for business acumen and entrepreneurial flair. You still need to be a good businessman/woman and do all the good business things like having a sound business plan, good cashflow control and all the attributes of any successful business. The Internet merely helps it to happen for you if everything else is right.

One more aspect of your business that is facilitated by using the Internet is recruitment. If you post any staff vacancies on your website, you can attract applications from a wider base of candidates than by advertising (e. g.) in local newspapers or job centers, and at lower (i. e. zero) cost. Also, if your advertisement requests submission of CVs from interested parties, it can be so much easier to pre-select suitably qualified applicants to create a shortlist before any interviews are offered, and to send polite rejection e-mails to unsuitable candidates. Similarly, interviews can be arranged by email, again organizing both the administration efforts and the dates/times of interviews to suit your own circumstances.

Considering all the foregoing, it is clear that the Internet is much more than

one Business Tool; used properly it can be a full set of tools. In fact many businesses would find it hard to explain how they operated before the Internet became an integral feature of their operations. It's quite possible that many small businesses could not continue if they had to stop using email and revert to using the traditional postal systems or "snail mail" for all routine correspondence. The ability to operate largely independently of office hours is also a tremendous advantage. Most small business owners work long hours anyway, but being Internet-based adds the flexibility of working the hours that best suit the proprietor's circumstances, instead of being tied largely to a Monday-Friday 9-5 routine. In many cases you (and your staff if you have any) can work equally well from home, saving even more costs. Having a website is an excellent way to promote your business and to advertise your goods and services to a worldwide audience, and to update your message as often as you want without incurring repeated advertising expenses. At the same time as marketing your business, the Internet allows you to keep a close eye on the competition, affording you the opportunity to stay one step ahead of the game. If you aren't yet using the Internet for your business, it's high time that you were!