

Creating An Online Presence For Your Small Business

Given the impact technology has on all aspects of our lives today, from communications and socializing to commerce, it makes sense that your small business needs a strong online presence. Everything from your website to your social media profiles contributes to the overall recognition of your brand and can play an important role in bringing in new business and retaining existing customers. According to Adaptive Marketing, 97% of consumers use the internet to find a business.

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What is an Online Presence?

According to HubSpot.com, an online presence is defined by how easy it is to find a brand or company online. It is important for building your business reputation, increasing brand awareness, and providing visibility to your products or services when potential customers are searching for related keywords. It also helps consumers find your business before they know it exists, and it helps them learn about your reputation before making a purchase. Eventually, all of this information will play a role in your customers' purchasing decision.

Steps to Build Your Online Presence

The following are steps to take to create an effective online presence for your small business:

1. Find a domain – The domain that you select for your business website makes a major impact on potential customers' ability to find you online. A domain name is basically the "online name" of your company. Finding a domain is relatively cheap and easy to do, but it can also be challenging to find exactly what you want, due to the existence of so many websites.

There is also a variety of available domain name extensions, such as .com, .org, or .net. For-profit businesses generally use .com, while non-profit organizations tend to use .org. You also have the option to purchase multiple domain names and/or multiple extensions and have them all point to your website. This helps to ensure that prospective customers find your site more easily.

2. Develop your site map – Site maps are needed to ensure that your site appears higher in the results of searches conducted by a customer. Search engines allow programs known as web crawlers or search bots to sift through the internet in order to index it as completely as possible. When one of these programs arrives on your website, it follows all of the hyperlinks to find out their content. The hyperlinks represent all of the pages and sub-pages included on your website. The more accurate and developed your site map is, the more optimized it will become in search results.

3. Shape your social media identity – Being on social media is now a necessity for businesses. In fact, in 2019 there were approximately 3.2 billion people on social media globally, so having an identity is critical to

reach your intended audience on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Having a presence on social media instills trust in your current customers and prospects. If your business is not present on social media, it could cause potential customers to doubt that the business is a legitimate and professional organization.

In addition, social media is an effective method to build your credibility and reputation and showcase your brand. When potential customers are researching your brand, one of the first places they'll look is on social media. This also provides an avenue to communicate with them and also learn what people are saying about your business.

4. Communicate with customers via email – Another key to building your online presence is to create an email list through which you can deliver content. An email list enables you to engage with current and potential customers on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. To grow your email list, you can create content that people have to sign-up to receive. Customers today appreciate a business that communicates with them and provides valuable content that can either influence or convince them to make a purchasing decision. In addition, 80 percent of business professionals believe that email marketing increases customer retention.

Helping Small Businesses Thrive

While these steps may seem like a large commitment of time and resources, creating an online presence for your small business is relatively cheap and easy to start. For more information on how PlainsCapital Bank can help support your business, speak with a PlainsCapital Bank representative today at 866.762.8392.