

New Website Project

Checklist & Ebook



successwithdigital.com
info@successwithdigital.com
2-83 Huron St. Sault Ste. Marie, ON

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Introduction

A high-quality, well-functioning website is an absolute must in today's business world. It can market your company, draw in new leads and, in most cases, bring in more sales and revenues in the long term.

And for small businesses, it's even more crucial.

With a limited budget and not much cash for marketing and advertising, small businesses must capitalize on every opportunity they can to increase exposure and improve their brand's visibility.

A great website can do just that.

Unfortunately, many small business owners go about building their sites the wrong way. They design their site to be a static, boring old online brochure, or they care only about the visual appeal of it – the design, the colors, the imagery, etc.

The truth is your website should be treated as an asset – one that can attract clients and help your business grow. Sure, it needs to be informative, but it shouldn't be boring or overload the user with data. Yes, it also needs to be visually appealing, but that shouldn't be the guiding factor in your process.

Unless your site has all the proper components and pieces, none of that matters at all.

Do you want to make sure your small business is making the most of its online presence?

Then use this resource throughout your website project. Part ebook, part worksheet and checklist, this will be a valuable resource throughout the process.

- PART 1 -

9 Critical Elements of a Business Website

Building a new website? Make sure to include these important elements.

1. Great Home Page Content

Your home page is where you really sell those leads on your business. It's where they learn about who you are, what you do and how you can help them solve their problems.

If those leads like what they see, they'll move on to other pages and maybe even contact you or buy a product. If they don't, they'll click that "X" and go find another site to browse in seconds.

To make sure your home page is as powerful as possible, try some of these tips:

- Make your content about your client, not about you. Address their problems and challenges, and show them how you can help them get through and triumph.
- Keep it short and sweet. You want to be informative, but you don't want to take up all their time. Remember, most web users are in a hurry.
- Add a photo. If possible, add a photo of your team or your CEO on the home page somewhere. This helps them establish a personal connection with you, and it makes them more likely to use your services in the future.
- Have a clear call to action. What is your homepage driving leads to do? To click on your services pages and learn more? To contact you for a free consultation? To buy a product? Make sure your call to action is clear, concise and, most of all, easy to locate.
- Once your home page is optimized for best performance, then move on to the other areas of your site and keep on going. The more thorough you are, the better your site will perform.

2. Contact Information Throughout

When customers do business with small companies, they're looking for two things: great, personalized service and a convenient easy experience. By displaying your contact information, phone number, address and even a map everywhere on your site, you can virtually guarantee this for your customers.

If they have a question or need more guidance, they can easily spot your phone number or email, and contact you to get help. If they're looking to see a product in person, they can click on that map in your footer, find directions and hop in the car in minutes.

Essentially, if you want your website to have the utmost impact, make finding your contact info as easy as possible – no matter where on your site a user is browsing.

3. Fast Loading Times

Page loading times play a huge role in your website's success. First of all, they're a consideration in search engine algorithms. Put simply, that means if your site loads slowly, it will be ranked lower than competitors' sites who don't.

Slow loading times are also a turn-off to users. People are either accessing your site on their phones, at work, or while feeding the kids, and they don't have time to sit around and wait. They're in a hurry, and they want this process done and over with already. The longer your site takes to load, the less likely they'll stick around to learn more about you. And is that something you're really willing to risk?

4. Proper Domain Registration Information

Did you know the way your domain is registered can affect your search engine rankings? Well, it's true.

Google actually factors in domain registration information into its algorithm, considering it an indicator of business credibility (if it's done correctly.)

To make sure your domain registration isn't hurting your site, check these parameters:

- Make sure your domain contact information matches the contact information on your website, namely the business address and phone number. I would recommend you don't keep contact information private.
- Watch your domain expiration date closely, and if it's less than 3 years away, consider re-upping it. If you let the registration slide too long, search engines tend to think you're not committed to the domain or the site. This could affect your rankings and performance in the long run.
- Keep your same domain as long as possible. The length of time you have your domain is also important, as search engines consider longer standing sites more stable and credible. Therefore, they rank them higher in searches. Even if your company's services are changing, consider keeping the same domain if possible. It takes a long time to build up a reputation with search engines, and you don't want to lose that.

Head to your hosting account and double check your domain registration information as soon as possible. If you're not sure how to do that, just ask your web manager or IT director for help. They should be able to point you in the right direction.

5. Mobile Friendly Design

It sounds minor, but the way your website appears on mobile devices (and other devices, like tablets) is vital component of your overall online performance. As mobile web usage has grown exponentially over the past few years, search engines have begun to consider it a big factor in their rankings.

If your site looks and functions properly on mobile devices, it can be enough to give you a leg up on the competition. If it doesn't pull up properly – the font is too small, the images don't display, or it's hard to navigate – then the opposite will happen. Your search rankings will start to plummet.

The best way to ensure your website displays properly across all devices is to opt for responsive design. This automatically adjusts your site to whatever screen size the customer is using, so there are never any issues that could affect their experience or your SEO efforts.

6. A Blog

Too many business owners think you need exciting, innovative products to start a blog, and that's just not the truth. In reality, a blog should be a part of every small business' marketing strategy – no matter what your industry or specialty may be.

As long as you have customers willing to buy from you, you have a captive audience waiting for your blog posts.

Blogs serve to inform your customers, help guide them through their challenges and provide them value for interacting with your brand. They also establish your brand as an authority in your industry, and they have a great impact on SEO. They give you more URLs to work with, more opportunities for using those keywords, and more room for images, videos and other SEO fodder.

In a nutshell? They're a win-win for everybody.

7. Google Analytics Installation

Google offers a ton of free tools that you, as a small business owner, absolutely must take advantage of.

The biggest? Google Analytics.

With Google Analytics, you can get detailed insight into the performance of your website. You can learn valuable information about your audience, your SEO efforts, your individual pages and more.

You can also discover:

- How many visitors come to your website every month, as well as where they're located and how they found you
- How much time the visitors spend on your website and what pages they exited your site from
- What pages are most visited and which ones get the most viewing time
- Performance statistics on your keywords and SEO phrases

You can even set up goals and measure conversions, like sales, form submissions and more, which can be a big help in measuring your website's overall success as a marketing tool.

Google Webmasters Integration

Google Webmasters is another free tool that's a crucial part of your arsenal. With it, you can monitor the overall health of your website as viewed by Google. You'll see how your loading times are faring, if there are any errors or 404s, and how your site is performing on mobile devices. You can also get ranking data for your biggest keywords, submit sitemaps and robots.txt files and much, much more.

8. Provide Proof

Customers don't want to just take your word for it. They want to know that other people have used your services and come out on top because of it. They want proof.

That's why every great small business site needs a portfolio, case study or even testimonials section that gives potential leads insight into your company's performance. It should show them exactly what you can do, how you've helped others and how that can translate to their needs and issues, too.

As an added bonus, these pages also offer you a chance to improve your SEO efforts, too. When mentioning a past client or case study, be sure to link out to their website and social pages. The more high-quality links your website offers, the more informative it looks, and the higher search engines will rank it.

9. Off-site Tips

Just having a website isn't enough in today's digital world. If you want to have the most successful online presence possible, you also have to build up your visibility elsewhere, too.

Here are a few ways to do that:

Create a Google+ Business page and connect it to your website. This is crucial, as Google definitely favors sites that use Google+. Additionally, it gives you another place to get the word out, network with potential customers, and even get reviews.

Create a Yelp listing. Yelp plays a role in your SEO performance, as well as how a customer views and interacts with your brand. As Yelp is a highly used, long-standing and trusted domain, Google will often display a business' Yelp listing long before their actual domain – especially if they have good ratings. As a bonus, a great rating also increases customer confidence, and it makes them more likely to buy from that business in the future.

9. Off-site Tips cont.

Get on social media. Start up a Facebook or Twitter page, and start interacting with the movers and shakers in your industry. Update your customers on company news, and keep them aware of upcoming sales and specials that can save them cash. Search engines value social content very heavily, and it could have a major effect on your visibility and SEO performance.

If you want a great site for your small business, these 9 components are crucial. They'll help you draw in more traffic, attract more potential customers and, ultimately, put more money in your pocket over time. Take a minute to evaluate your own business website, and make sure you've covered all your bases today.

Step-By-Step Website Development Checklist

Development

- Gathering of information related to site content
- Website Name (Domain Name) Research
- Competition Researched
- Website Title Chosen
- Website Host Research
- Website Host Chosen and Registered \$
- Website Name Chosen
- Website Name Purchase \$
- Website Structure and Organization Established
- Link Exchange Researched
- Link Exchange Page Set Up
- Articles/Resources Provided/Researched
- Articles/Resources Chosen
- Advertising Inclusion Implemented
- Search Engine Submission Prepared
- Search Engine Submission Implemented
- Review Search Engine Submission Results (1-4 months after public release)

Step-By-Step Website Development Checklist

Design

- Artwork Compiled
- Logo Designed or Prepared as Digital Art
- Color Scheme Research and Presented
- Layout Design Research and Presented
- Color Scheme Chosen
- Layout/Design Chosen
- HTML and CSS Coding Design
- Content and Articles Added
- Review Web Standards
- Validate Code
- Check Website with Other Browsers
- Check Website with Other Computers
- Check Website with Various Screen Resolutions
- Edit and Review Website Presentation
- Test Website (typically 2-4 weeks)
- Test Links

Step-By-Step Website Development Checklist

Website Maintenance

- Frequently Update
- Check for Errors
- Add Link Exchanges
- Check for Bad Links
- Keyword Review and Update
- Check Link Popularity
- Review New Technology
- Review Web Standards and apply
- Check Site Statistics
- Add New Content
- Check Links
- Validate Code
- Re-Submit Site to Search Engines
- Check Web Page Descriptions
- Check Web Page Titles
- Review Meta Tag Standards and Update
- Review Top Searches from Search Engines (potential new content ideas)