

Why do you need a web site?

Well, just what kind of question is that? Everyone should have a web site, right? OK, now put the emphasis on the word “you” or the word “need” instead of the word “why”. Too many people just wake up one morning and decide that the world won’t go on unless it has their web site running in it, and then they find someone who would be only too pleased to save the world and accommodate them. Unless you have thought out what a web site is going to do for your business, you are probably wasting a large proportion of your investment.

Here are four possible reasons to have a web site which are fairly easy to rationalise, and one that needs some more consideration. So let’s start with the simple ones.

Provide information to your clients. A web site can contain more information than a business card or brochure, and lots more than a 2-line entry in the phone book. If you want to reduce the time you spend giving directions, your opening hours, product specifications or shipping rates, even a simple web site can do this, and it does it 24-7!

Support Sales. By providing all of the information a shopper requires, and possibly a means to compare prices and or specifications of other products or suppliers, a business can “make” a sale (and if it has the technology, *complete* a sale) which would otherwise have not existed. Many shoppers these days will browse for information, shoppers reviews and hard specifications, make up their minds on a product and supplier and complete their purchase. Anyone without a web-site or whose website does not capture the shopper’s attention does not participate in this market.

Perform an on-line service. There are many models for this, most of which actually sell a variety of goods which can be easily shipped. Other services could include digital design, product support, proprietary information services, preparation of tax returns—in fact just about anything that can be performed with little or no human intervention. These services may enhance an existing business or they may *be* the business.

Create advertising revenue. Whatever the primary reason for the site, or even without having a primary reason, a web-site can generate revenue by including ads from other

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companies, who pay when a viewer clicks on their ad. Many sites today apparently have no other reason to exist than this, but usually ad revenue is a secondary objective for a site.

The other reason I often hear is **Marketing**. This sounds like a reasonable enough objective, until some thought is given to how a web site will do that. I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that a web site per se does nothing for Marketing. Maybe this is just tricky semantics, but the best web-site in the world won't bring in a single new customer who wasn't actively looking for its product. It's like printing a glossy catalogue and keeping all of the copies in your warehouse and waiting for someone to ask for one. While a well designed web-site can assist in the marketing of a product, the real marketing effort is in getting visitors to come to your site.

So that's several good reasons to have a web site and one that needs more examination. I like to tell clients that having a web site is a business necessity like having a telephone number. However, while the basics can be covered with little expense, meeting many of the other objectives which can be supported by a web site is a very different proposition, and the initial ease of getting a basic web-site with your very own domain name and e-mail address should not lull you into a false sense of simplicity.