

# Asset or Risk?

6 Factors Influencing Online Success or Failure



## Your business website: **An asset or a risk?**

The invention and mass uptake of the internet should have been the great equaliser, closing the gap between small-to-medium businesses and much larger corporations, with the associated much larger budgets. It granted access to a whole new form of advertising with a similar reach to TV and radio advertisements, but for a fraction of the cost. The former were frequently out of reach of small businesses with a budget that only allowed for a few black-and-white lines in the local newspaper. The internet, on the other hand, had a practically unlimited reach. And it was so simple! The neighbour's son could whip up a basic website for you in a couple of hours and you were set. "Having a website" was ticked off your list and you never had to give it a second thought.

The reality has been somewhat different. As the internet has grown exponentially, both in terms of customer reach and in the number of businesses present, it has become harder and harder for small businesses to come out on top of their bigger competition. Just having a website isn't enough anymore; you need to have a great website. A website that is slow to load, unappealing to the eye or otherwise flawed can in many cases be worse than not having a website at all, actively turning potential customers off your business. A great business website, on the other hand, can be one of your company's greatest assets, attracting new customers, retaining your old and driving a huge increase in revenue. A study found that 30% of small businesses, with less than twenty employees, were generating over 25% of their total revenue through their web presence.

In 2015, consumers are motivated by an ever-greater desire for speed and convenience in every aspect of their experience with you, and

your website can be a key tool for providing these. You don't have to be actively selling products through an online store in order for your website to generate revenue; even customers who only use the internet to find your location and/or contact details are typically highly motivated to take positive action shortly afterwards by making a purchase, reaching out to contact you or further researching your products.

### **So what makes a great website?**

Successful business websites are a hugely diverse collection with a wide range of purposes, but the successful ones have several features in common. These key features are critical to providing a positive experience for your customers. Their execution can be the difference between your website being a success or a failure, and in turn whether your business thrives or ultimately loses out to the competition.

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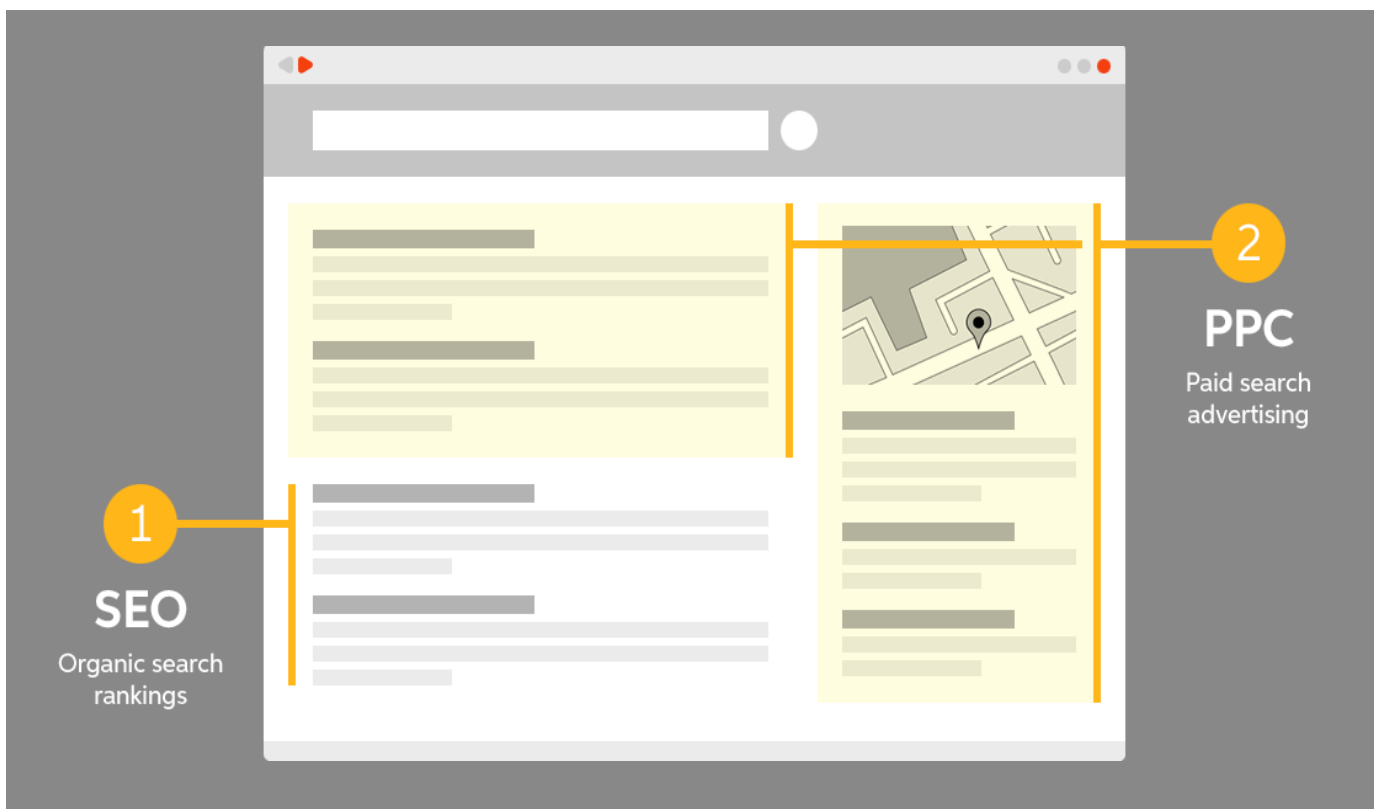
## 1. Get found:

# Make sure your website shows up in search listings

“98% of searchers choose a business that is on page one of the results they get”

While in a perfect world all search results would be equal, the reality is that as the number of businesses with a web presence grows, so too does the number of results generated by any particular search. Only a small number can be shown on the first page of results, and rarely does a consumer browse beyond that critical first page; in fact, 98% of searchers ultimately choose a business listed on the first page of the results they get.

Knowing that you want to be listed on the first page of results doesn't tell you a thing about how you might get there in practice! The sites that do show up in the first page of results are there as a result of two factors, executed either independently or in combination: search engine optimisation (SEO) and search engine marketing like pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.



## Search Engine Optimisation

Search engines like Google use an algorithm to automatically assess sites and rank them based on their perceived relevance to any particular search query. Search Engine Optimisation is the process of creating and organizing your site with the key factors indicating its relevance in mind, so that the search engines are more likely to be able to accurately rank you in the results. The critical factor is not just to appear relevant; it's to BE relevant. The algorithms are surprisingly intelligent and increasingly able to identify the tactics people use in an attempt to artificially bump up their ranking (for example "keyword stuffing", the practice of mentioning certain keywords over and over again). Being caught out at this will result in being pushed further down the listings rather than higher up. The successful business websites are the ones who really work to create and share content that the people coming to the site will find useful, and this is an ongoing process.

- **Label everything**

How do the search engines know what your website is about in order to rank it under the appropriate terms? The bots that trawl the internet and index each site look for relevant terms in a few different places. Labelling your pages, headings, URL links, image names and alt tags with descriptive keywords helps the bots to know what they are looking at, and in turn what keywords you should be ranked for.

- **Keep up to date**

Outdated content, security certificates, and even copyright notices in the fine print all contribute to a negative impression of your site's relevance and reliability. It makes customers wonder: if you aren't paying regular attention to your site, what else might you be missing?

- **Be accessible via mobiles**

Search engines will now actively penalise websites that provide a poor experience to users on mobile devices. This is yet another reason to make responsive design a priority.

- **Focus on quality over quantity**

Attempting to artificially boost your rankings through manipulation of SEO not only gives users a negative experience but will result in a lower ranking through search engines. Make your focus creating a site filled with carefully edited information that visitors will find relevant, useful and easy to navigate.

- **Encourage links**

Precisely because of their focus on creating useful and relevant content, other sites often link to the most successful ones. This boosts their perceived authority and thus their ranking. Where possible, encourage other sites to link to yours by providing an abundance of valuable content.

## Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

With Search Engine Marketing like Pay Per Click, your business listing appears above or alongside the other search listings when somebody searches for nominated keywords or phrases related to your business. You pay a fee whenever somebody clicks on your advertisement. While simple in theory, this becomes more complicated when you consider that your competitors may well be paying for the same space under the same search terms, and some consideration also needs to be given to selecting the most accurate keywords and phrases so that your result is actually relevant. Hitting on the perfect phrase to get the most out of the campaign can be quite an art form. Successful businesses have usually spent quite a bit of time testing this or seeking professional advice on the best strategy to use.

## 2. Responsive Design: Optimised for mobile/tablet

- 3 of 4 mobile searches trigger follow-up actions like further research, a store visit, a phone call, a purchase or word-of-mouth sharing
- 81% of mobile searches are driven by speed and convenience
- and yet...93% of small to medium business websites are not mobile compatible and will not render successfully on mobile devices or smartphones”

An increasing number of people are using their phones and tablets to research businesses. Most of those people have a PC available to them to use, but elect instead to search using their mobile, as speed and convenience are a high priority for them. In many cases, landing on your website on a mobile device will be the first exposure they have to your business, and first impressions count!

Successful business websites are equally as easy to navigate on mobile devices as they are on computers, if not more so. Their contact information is easy to find and often has click to call functionality, with additional buttons added to provide customers with directions to their shop front or office from their current location. There are three main options used to provide mobile functionality:

- **Mobile site**

In some cases, where the main site is too complex to display on a mobile device, an entirely separate second site is created especially for visitors on mobile phones or tablets. This generates a lot of unnecessary work (double the work of maintaining a single site) and can get complicated when it comes to adding content, changing prices, correcting errors, etc.

- **Apps**

This is rarely a viable option for anything other than a large corporation, but in some cases business owners create an app to share information or host their online store.

- **Responsive design**

Responsive web design is the art of creating websites that “respond” to the device they are viewed on, altering their layout and proportions to display well regardless of screen size or orientation. This means you have only one site to update and manage that can be viewed on any device.

Responsive design is Google’s recommended option, and will contribute positively to your ranking in searches. It is a key factor to be taken into consideration when developing a Search Engine Optimisation strategy.



### 3. Visual experience:

# Make everything easier for your customers

Successful business websites have a cohesive “look” which makes them instantly recognisable and distinct from their competitors. Far from just being attractive to look at, much consideration goes into creating a design that makes everything easy for the customer. Some areas to consider are:

- **Clean and uncluttered design**

While there are now huge arrays of bells and whistles that can be added to a site including animated graphics, music and sound effects, be careful not to get overly excited in this area. This isn't a race in which the site with the most gadgets wins! The key to success is to make sure the focus is on your valuable content and not your fancy designs.

- **Informative content**

Crucially, they want to know where you are, what you sell and how to find or contact you. Having your contact and location details prominently displayed throughout your site is absolutely critical, and successful business websites have this down. Their phone number and location are clearly displayed on their home pages and their online listings; in many cases their relevant contact information is clearly visible on the top or side of every page, so that customers don't need to scroll or click through multiple pages to find it. Studies have shown that consumers will bounce quickly from a site if they can't find what they're looking for easily. Successful business websites are successful because they make absolutely sure this doesn't happen to them!

- **Colour**

A business often has particular colours associated with its brand, which often relate back to those in its logo. These are used to create a consistent look on the website that is easily recognisable as connected to the company. Consideration should also be given to using colours that are easy on the eyes so important points and text stand out.

- **Images**

Our brains process images 60,000 times faster than text, so websites featuring clever use of high-quality images are very successful at capturing the attention of browsing customers. The trick is to recognise that large images slow down the loading speed of the page. Try to strike the right balance of using enough images to be pleasing to the eye without unnecessarily cluttering the page.

- **Typography**

Many successful businesses use a consistent font family, style, and size to help their customers easily distinguish between themselves and their competitors. Gone are the days of being restricted to Times New Roman; there are now hundreds of options to choose from. Take the time to test a few and settle on one style that effectively embodies your brand and fits your tone and voice.

- **Logos**

Your logo is an important and recognisable part of your brand, and should be featured prominently on your site. It should be high-resolution and ideally linked back to your home page for ease of navigation.

#### 4. Engagement:

## Regularly updated content

Creating and sharing content regularly influences the success of several other factors. It improves your rating for search, it encourages people to link to your site, it drives an increase in traffic, it ensures you continue to appear relevant and up to date... its importance can't be understated. Consider incorporating a blog into your business website or sharing case studies. At the very least, make sure your price lists, menus, and contact details remain up to date.

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#### 5. Analysis:

## Ongoing analysis, review and updates

The managers of successful business websites know that the internet is a rapidly changing space and that they must constantly be alert and flexible in order to keep up. Positions in search rankings and comparisons to the competition aren't static; you have to be pretty on the ball to remain successful. An SEO strategy requires regular analysis, testing and updating to harvest the best results. Content requires regular review in order to remain current and relevant. Basically, a successful website isn't set-and-forget; it requires careful, ongoing analysis and review.

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## 6. Security:

# Security for your business and your customers

50% of all small businesses have been a victim of a cyber attack, the average amount stolen was \$19,948.  
17% of consumers who dropped out of a purchase cited concerns about payment security.  
90% will not complete their purchase if a warning page pops up during the process.  
56% go to a competitor's website to complete their purchase if there is a security warning. Only 17% will try the first website again

Website security is absolutely essential. If you have an online store, make sure you carefully encrypt and protect your customers' payment details like their credit card information, but remember that online security is about much more than this. Your own data is equally important, and you should take care to protect your business from threats like hackers and viruses.

The security of your site, or the lack thereof, directly impacts consumer trust in your brand. Browsers will prominently flag out-of-date security certificates and warn potential customers about even viewing your site, let alone making a purchase. With the relatively frequent media coverage of data leaks from even large and well-established companies like banks and internet providers, you can't rely on your business name being known to overcome the suspicion aroused by questions of security on your site.

## Putting all these into practice requires time, knowledge and money...

Once you recognize the key influencers of business website success or failure, it's time to consider how best to address any potential holes in your current situation. The complication is that mastering any of the above areas takes a considerable investment of time, money or knowledge, and in some cases all three - things that tend to be in short supply for the average business owner. These barriers can seem insurmountable, and in fact often were, as businesses have historically been limited to two main options in developing a business

website and each required an abundance of either time, knowledge or funds: either doing it all themselves or hiring an agency.

There is an emerging third option, however, which has been designed specifically to help small businesses overcome these barriers. With no lock-in contracts, no knowledge or experience required, and only enough time for the odd phone call or email necessary, this third option is breaking down the barriers...



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