

# The Definitive Guide to Promoting Your Local Business Online

The No-Nonsense Guide to  
Local Online Marketing

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## **Introduction**

I'll admit it: I'm addicted to the Internet. Whenever I need a specific piece of information, want to purchase the perfect present for a hard-to-buy-for friend, or need the address and phone number of a local business, I sit down at my computer.

Because of this dependency, I'm still amazed at friends or family members who ask me a question whose answer I know I can easily find online.

## **My Beginnings**

Nine years ago, when I first started writing for the Internet, I found that most people weren't as Internet-dependent as I am. If I told someone that I found whatever it was they were looking for on eBay, Google or some other well-known website, about half of the time I'd get a blank stare.

Fast forward to 2006, and most of the time my friends and family will respond to the same comment with something along the lines of, "Oh yeah, I forgot about the Internet. Thanks!"

However, just because the Internet is reaching a high level of household saturation, not every business owner realizes how they can use it to their advantage.

## **But Why?**

Local businesses have an incredible opportunity to reach customers they never would have previously through savvy marketing techniques and publicity, using the Internet as a vehicle. Plus, the costs for these types of ongoing sales-enhancing techniques are dramatically lower than most offline options, and offer more flexibility and methods of staying in contact with your customers, while positioning yourself and your business as the experts in any given field.

## Checking Out the Competition

Some of your competitors are mostly likely online, but aren't aware of how to encourage interested buyers to make contact. Go ahead, take a look right now and see for yourself!

Go to your favorite search engine and type in the type of business you run, then your town, city or state name (depending on how specialized your business niche is). If you sell children's clothing in Washington, you'd type in something like this:

+ "kids clothing" + Washington

By using the plus sign, you are telling the search engine that the search term is required and not a nicety. The quotations are used when you want a series of words to show up in a certain format. Feel free to play around a bit and use different word combinations that describe your particular business.

How many of your competitors did you find? Did you find anyone you weren't aware of, or were you surprised at how many business names were returned in your search?

In most cases, you'll find several competing businesses in your area listed, with a couple that offer services in your general area, but aren't geographically located within driving distance.

Of the websites you found, how many asked for any contact information (such as your email address)? How many were interactive, provided useful information related to the products or services provided, or were updated recently? I'll bet that most don't. Those that do, probably do all of these things, and do them quite well.

Now let's search out the best of those websites to see how easy it is to find them on the Internet.

Type into your favorite search engine the name of the business you are looking for, even if you've already found their website. Use the plus sign with your geographical location if the business name is a common one, or you receive search results that aren't anywhere near where you live.

The companies who have effectively marketed themselves online will be found easily in your search, probably with several links to websites who mention them and link to them. Those that haven't will be lower down in your search results, if you can even find them at all.

## **What Exactly Is Covered?**

This eBook will cover:

- How to get your business up and running with a website;
- Design and functionality components to incorporate into your website;
- What you need to do to get visitors to your website;
- How to gather visitor information for future customer contact and sales opportunities;
- Where to get publicity for your local business online and off;
- Marketing tools and techniques specific to the Internet world;
- Resources for more information and learning opportunities;
- Facts and stats about the local online business world; and
- Real-world business success stories.

Customer service, relationship-building and providing useful, informative content comprise a three pronged successful online marketing campaign. If you focus on your customer's needs, you'll never need to sell on the Internet – win their loyalty and trust, and let everyone know you are the expert in your field, and you'll have willingly, repeat customers on a regular basis.

## **What Do You Need to Know Before Starting?**

I've assumed that you already have a basic knowledge of the Internet, your computer, and basic file saving and storage protocols. If you require some training before taking on what we cover in this eBook, you have several options to you to get you started:

- Speak to a teenager or employee of yours that understands the inner workings of a computer and the Internet, and ask them to give you some lessons;
- Attend a local community college's or your public library's Introduction to Computers and/or The Internet course;
- Contact a local net café and see if they offer any basic knowledge seminars, or if you can hire one of their staff for a couple of hours to show you the ropes; or

- Purchase or find one of these books at your local library: [Easy Computer Basics](#), [Absolute Beginner's Guide to Computer Basics](#) or [Personal Computing Demystified](#).
- Read more online at one of these websites: [The Web At a Glance](#), [How PC's Work](#), [Computer Science: Introduction to Computers](#), or [JafSoft's Introduction to the Internet](#).

### **Do I Need Anything Else?**

Most of all, you'll need a fair amount of time to both read through this eBook and implement the suggestions laid out. Reading is important, as is understanding the concepts mentioned within this text, but actually putting them to use is where you'll find the most success.

There will be situations where you may feel unable to do some of the tasks suggested, either because of your skill level or time commitments. Wherever this may be the case, I've given ideas as to where to find a professional to contract out some of the work, such as designers, writers or webmasters. However, I've also provided you with links and information on how to do most of this work yourself.

If you choose the do-it-yourself route, you may require other programs or manuals to ease the process (such as an HTML editor, FTP program or autoresponder – all of which we will explain) – some of which may cost money. Where adequate free, shareware or freeware programs exist, I've listed them next to the professional programs. Which ones you choose to use will depend on your individual business' needs.

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## **Do You Need a Website?**

Every brick and mortar business (literally, a business housed in a brick and mortar structure and not only based in the online world) needs a website for their customers to access at any time.

## **Make It Easy For Your Customers**

How many of your customers work irregular hours, shift work, have incredibly busy schedules or run businesses of their own? In this day and age, that reality is more the norm than not. If you could offer a potential buyer everything they need in order to make a decision online at the customer's convenience, wouldn't that increase your sales exponentially?

Of course it would! Instead of being open from 9-5, Monday to Friday, your business can now be open 24/7, 365 days a year. Everything from sales questions to product information, directions to your store to online order fulfillment can be automated through a website, without you lifting a finger (after everything has been set up and put in place or course).

## **Real World Example: Food Delivery Service**

Don't believe me? Let's use a very basic example from a recent experience of my own to show just how valuable having a business website.

Recently, I had a friend who fell seriously ill and wasn't able to get out of the house often. She complained of being so weak that getting groceries was a real chore.

Since I didn't live in the same city, I thought getting groceries delivered to her home would be an excellent idea, as well as a nice surprise. So, I went looking to see if any local businesses in her area offered this type of service.

In her hometown of [Calgary](#), Alberta, Canada, I found a [local grocer](#) that not only offered [online ordering](#) but same-day delivery for a reasonable fee. All I had to do was sign up for free, click through their virtual "aisles", pick what I thought she'd like, and provide my credit card information. Once I uploaded her physical location, I was given an approximate time that the groceries would be delivered. Within

seconds I received an email detailing my order, and thanking me for my purchase.

I then told my friend to expect a special delivery around the time given at the website. Like clockwork, the bundle of groceries was delivered right to her door, and the delivery man even helped to put some of the heavier items away for her!

Although my experience shows a high-end, well-known chain in a Canadian location, I think the point is clear: I was able to offer a gift to a friend I normally would never have been able to, all in mere minutes and without any hassles at all. Wouldn't you like to make a customer's life easier by offering something similar, if simpler in nature?

The Internet allows any business, at any time, to offer excellent customer service around the clock to any client, anywhere in the world. Let's jump into how to get started now.

## **Your Local Business Website**

Since your website will mostly be used by people within your local geographic area (basically, anyone within an hour's driving distance, depending on how remote or unique your products and/or services are), you don't need to compete with the national or international best of the best. Instead, your business website needs to cater directly to the people you serve every day.

### ***What's the Point of Having a Business Website?***

There are several ways that a business website can help your local business. They are:

- Attract new customers to your physical location;
- Remind customers who haven't been in for a while to stop by and see what's new;
- Provide all of the information required to find and contact your store;
- Give people incentives to make contact with your store;
- Position yourself and your business as the local experts in your field;
- Sell products and/or services;
- Allow the local media to gather all of the necessary background information for interviews, requests for information and the like;
- Give customers follow-up information regarding the products and/or services they purchased (i.e. help manuals, how-to guides);
- Assist potential buyers to make informed decisions on your products and/or services; and
- Create new income streams with advertising and affiliate marketing.

Unless you have a tremendous amount of time, money and energy, you won't be able to focus on all of these options at first. Getting visitors to your website can be a long process, but at the end of the day, slow and steady definitely wins the race.

### **Real World Example: Freelance Writer**

I found this out when I wrote a series of Work at Home articles starting in 1997. At first, I worked extremely hard at marketing my topic and the writing housed within the website, doing a variety of

specific things that we'll go into more a bit later (website submissions, keyword articles, highly specialized content, link exchanges and affiliate programs related to her topic of choice). However, traffic didn't really increase much, although the discussion groups were heavily frequented. So, I continued writing and focused on other things.

Six months later, I received a personalized thank-you letter in the mail from one of my affiliates, along with a check for several hundred dollars. Surprised, I logged into the backend of her site to discover she was receiving anywhere from 2,000-4,000 hits a day! A search with Yahoo! and Google showed that I was in the top 10 results for "work at home parents" and affiliate commission checks were coming in consistently from several different places. Even now, in 2006, I'll occasionally receive affiliate commissions or an email referencing one of the articles I wrote, even though the website hasn't been updated for almost five years.

## ***Deciding What to Focus On***

Now, it's time to determine which features you want start with while creating your local business website.

- Pull up your favorite search engine, and look for other, related businesses in your area. Or, if you already know who is doing business on the Internet in your region, go directly to their website.
- Can you tell what each business is trying to achieve with their website? Are they merely providing information, going for the hard sell (i.e. buy now!) or have very little information listed?
- Or do they have interactive features (newsletter sign-ups, for instance), technical information, or anything else that provides a free service?

After reviewing what your competitors are doing, you'll have a better idea as to what to do, and how to do it, to gain both the advantage over anyone else in the area, and provide greater customer service.

## ***Basic Website Page Components***

If your competitors aren't on the web, you cannot find them, or their websites don't give you enough information to get started, here is a basic framework for you to start with:

### **Home Page**

Usually this is the first page visitors will see at your website. It should offer links to all of the other pages, as well as basic introductory information about your business and its products and services. Since this is your first impression, you'll need to make this page both pleasing to the eye, simple to navigate, and have enough information on it so that your visitors aren't searching around to find exactly what they are looking for.

### **About Us**

This is where you can tell your customers about how your business started, notes about each of your key employees, why and how you came to offer the products and/or services that you do, your hours of business, where you are located (with a link to the How to Find Us page), any testimonials, customer comments or awards your company

has received, any programs, organizations or not-for-profits you support, and any membership organization your business belongs to (such as the Better Business Bureau or the local Chamber of Commerce). Don't be afraid to show off how well you are regarded in the local community, any good deeds you or your employees are known for, or how loyal and devoted your customers are. Also, if any local media have commented positively on your business, make sure to quote them and link to their respective websites.

### **Products and/or Services**

Depending on how many services, programs, offers or products you have regularly will depend on how this page is laid out. If you are service-based, this page may give a brief overview of exactly what it is you do, with links to more specified information. If your business is product-based, you may want a page for every product you sell; if you want to sell these products online, this is called ecommerce, which we will discuss in more detail later.

### **General Information**

If everyone who walks into your store invariably asks the same questions, you'll want to use a question and answer format (also known as a FAQ online) to cover all of these Frequently Asked Questions. Your return, exchange and customer service policies should also be listed here, along with the terms and conditions of your website (for instance, that you never, ever sell customer information to other companies). The general information section can be one page, or it can link to many others. Alternatively, you can have pages directly linked from the Home Page that cover these topics on their own (i.e. you'll have a FAQ page, Terms and Conditions Page, and an Our Guarantee To You page, instead of just a General Information one).

### **How to Find Us**

Even if your business is located in the middle of town with blinking lights and signs pointing right to it, you'll need very specific information in your How to Find Us page anyway. You may have tourists unfamiliar with the area wanting to stop by or a newspaper writer who wants a photo of your location to add to their piece about your business. Make sure that you have the following information to add to this section of your webpage before starting:

- Your full mailing and physical address, along with any other pertinent contact information in case they get lost;
- Directions on how to get to your store on foot, by bus, driving directions, from the closest bus station (i.e. Greyhound) and airport;
- A physical map of where you are located. You can either link directly to [Yahoo Maps](#) for free, or you can hire a local graphic artist to draw a simplified version of your location to upload onto your webpage;
- If available, links to different ways to purchase from your business, in case someone isn't able to drop by (such as delivery options).

### **Contact Information**

If there is a way to get a hold of you, or any of your staff members, list them here. Include email addresses, fax numbers, direct phone lines, when they are normally in the office (for traveling salespeople, this is extremely important), and a basic description of what each person does if it isn't immediately clear.

We've only covered the most basic of a webpage's offerings here, and will get into the more interactive features you can add on, later.

### ***Domain Names: What Are They?***

A domain name (or URL, which is short for Universal Resource Locator) is what people wanting to visit your website will type into their Internet browser to find your website. It is your virtual address on the Internet, and what you choose will not only impact whether or not people can find you, but also how many visitors you'll receive.

### **Do You Need Your Own?**

Yes. Using a URL like <http://www.geocities.com/placeholder/98765> not only looks unprofessional, your customers will wonder if you are a legitimate company.

Also, choosing a domain name that relates to your business offerings, or is easily remembered will add credibility and keep your URL at the tip of your customer's fingertips and will garner higher search engine results to boot.

### **Tips on How to Choose**

Here are some factors to consider when choosing your website's URL:

## **Where Possible, Your URL Should Match Your Business Name**

When people think of your business, they will think of what your URL is. If they don't match, you will invariably lose customers to whomever has used something closer to your business name.

The Internet allows for its users to get whatever information they are looking for at lightening speed; if there is any confusion or memorization required to find you, then your potential visitors will go elsewhere.

Depending on what you've named your business will determine whether or not that domain name is still available. For now, make a list of all of the word combinations that would describe your business, using your company name as a starting point. Add more to this list as the inspiration hits you while reading this section.

## **Niche or Generic?**

A generic URL is one that is simple, straightforward, and usually one word, such as design.com or tea.com. A niche URL is something a bit more specific, such as websitedesigner.com or theperfectteahouse.com.

Unfortunately, most generic URLs have already been taken, making this question, in most cases, moot.

## **Short or Long?**

A URL can be any combination of words up to 67 characters, leaving lots of leeway to the business owner in naming their website's address.

However, once again, most short URLs are already taken, unless they are an acronym – for instance, if your company name is The Special Tea House, the acronym would be TSTH. But how many of your customers will know this, unless your business is a household name?

You'd be better off to use TheSpecialTeaHouse.com as your URL instead of TSTH in this instance, keeping your customers clear.

## **Consider Hyphenated Names**

Using our same example again, if TheSpecialTeaHouse.com is taken, you can also try The-Special-Tea-House.com instead to see if that variation has been taken as well. However, many people find hyphenated URLs a pain in the neck to type, so only use this option if absolutely necessary.

## **Adding Related Words to Get What You Want**

Say your company's name sells children's clothing, and is called Kidz Space Clothing and Apparel. Perhaps KidzSpace.com is taken, but is TheKidzSpace.com, or KidzSpaceClothing.com or KidzSpaceApparel? Playing around a bit with different, related words can land you the jackpot when searching for an appropriate URL for your website. Other ideas are trying the plural version of your business name, adding The, My, Our, or Your to the start of the address.

## **.COM, .NET, .US, .BIZ... and The List Goes On**

One of the more beneficial aspects of having a locally-based business on the web is that you can take advantage of a country-specific domain name, such as .us (USA) or .ca (Canada). There are many variations on the .com now that are industry-specific as well, such as .tv, .biz, .net, and .org.

## ***Finding and Registering a Domain Name***

With all of your possible variations in hand, let's walk through the process of finding and registering a domain name.

First of all, some web hosts (mostly commercial ones) offer free registration and payment of a domain name for users of their web hosting plans. Since we will discuss finding an appropriate web hosting company next, I recommend waiting to actually purchase your domain name until later. You'll still need to do the following research either way however, so skipping out on this step isn't recommended.

## **How Does it Work?**

Purchasing a domain name entails contacting a company that outsources domain name registration through InterNIC. These companies are called domain name registrars.

Registration fees range anywhere from \$15-35 US a year (with some geographical delineations such as .ca or .uk going for higher) although as mentioned previously, some commercial web hosting providers offer domain name registration as a no-cost add-on feature.

Care and attention is required if you a web host that offers a complete package, as their name will most likely be listed as the owner of the URL. This can pose a problem if you decide to change web hosts later on down the road, since the web hosting company can keep the URL

and refuse to let go of it until the year long contract is up (if they do release it at all). Also, use your self as the technical contact instead of your web host (or perhaps a trusted webmaster) instead of the web hosting company, for the exact same reasons as listed above.

### **What You'll Need First**

Before you go about registering, you'll need the following information on hand:

- Both the primary and secondary DNS IP addresses from your web host. It doesn't matter if you don't understand what these terms are (they are quite technical); just have them on hand, because you'll require them in the registration process.
- Your credit card information as well as a technical and administrative contact (most likely your webmaster and you).

### **Picking and Choosing**

There are numerous well-known domain name registrar's out there, such as [Dotster](#). Different registrars will have different URL extensions, although most offer the bare basics, such as .com, .org or .net. Try all three out for size and see what interesting combinations you can come up with. Of course, if a domain name isn't available, none of the three will have it listed, but each may offer different options to make it all the more palatable.

Whatever you decide, don't wait too long to choose a name. Oftentimes, what is available right now may not be available in a day (or even a couple of minutes). When you've chosen a URL that suits your business and is easy-to-use, go for it as soon as you can.

## **Web Hosting Providers**

Depending on whether or not you choose a commercial or free web host will depend on what features to look for when making a decision. Since we are talking about your company's professional image in this eBook, we will only go into how to choose a commercial web hosting provider. Not only is their service more reliable, the extra bonuses you'll discover will enable your website to be highly interactive.

### **Reliability**

A web host that guarantees it's "uptime" (the time that they are up and running) to be 99% or higher is what you are looking for. There should also be some sort of compensation in place if their uptime falls below these limits.

### **Traffic or Bandwidth**

Whenever someone visits your website, they are downloading information from your web server to their browser. This download is measured by a byte. The more visitors you have, the more bytes that are used. Web hosting companies use the terms traffic, data transfer or bandwidth to describe this exchange of information, and monitor it's usage on a monthly basis.

Some web hosting companies state they have "unlimited bandwidth"; reading the fine print will tell you this is just not the case. Many website owners have learned, too late, that they have exceeded their allotted "unlimited bandwidth" when they receive a huge bill in the mail. Stay away from these companies as much as possible.

So that you have an approximate idea of how much bandwidth you'll be using, most new sites that aren't media, music or software dependent run less than 3 GB of traffic a month. As your site grows and becomes more popular however, you'll want to monitor this closely so that you don't get dinged with a pricey mistake at the end of the month.

Check to see if there are rates for bandwidth usage over and above the given month's allocation, and look for hosts that ask you to prepay any anticipated overages first.

## **Disk Space**

Similar to what we talked about with the bandwidth situation, be wary of any web hosting company that states they offer unlimited disk space – although for different reasons.

Disk space refers to how much room you are given on the web host's server to store your files, graphics and other information related to your website. Most websites don't need more 5 GB at most to get the job done (again, unless your site is graphics, sound or software heavy).

## **Support**

Many web hosts state that they are support their users at a technical level 24/7 (meaning, around the clock with no interruptions). Test this theory before you actually sign up with them: Are your emails answered promptly at inconvenient times (late nights, weekends or holidays)?

Also, make your questions as technical as you are able to (ask your webmaster for help if you need it). Ensuring that your "technical support team" for your website is highly qualified and not merely some salespeople looking to get more clients is crucial information to know before any problems occur.

## **Server-Side Must Haves**

Since you'll be paying for a commercial site, all of the following should be included in your web hosting package at no extra cost: PHP, CGI, Perl, CGI bin access, and .htaccess. This may sound like mumbo-jumbo to you, but all of these items should be standard offerings. Essentially, these are server-side (meaning, housed on the web hosting company's server) items or programs that you'll need to use or implement in order for your website to be highly interactive.

## **eCommerce Options**

If you plan on selling your products or services on your website, you will need a couple of add-ons that most likely don't come with the bundle of services you purchase: SSL (secure server), MySQL (database) and a shopping cart.

## **Email and Autoresponders**

Later on in this eBook we will discuss both email and autoresponders at length. In the meantime, check to see what features the web hosts you are looking at offer along these lines, since they can save you a small fortune in the long run. Key words to look for are email POP3 (the ability to have an email address such as myemail@domain.com) and mail forwarding (very much like forwarding your phone calls to a different number).

## **Control Panel**

Different web hosting companies will call these different things (usually the name of the program they are using to offer this service, such as CPanel). For new web users, a control panel is a must, since it offers a graphical interface of the backend of the web hosting company's server space that you are leasing. At the very least, the control panel should offer features such as adding or deleting new users, passwords, email addresses, databases, and the like.

## **Server**

Different servers will offer different benefits to the end user, depending on what software, programs and features you want to offer your website visitors. There are two server options: Windows or UNIX. Windows is usually a more expensive proposition, only because of the proprietary software required to run the server.

## **Payment Plans**

In order to save money, many commercial web hosts offer a yearly payment program, saving businesses like yours anywhere \$10-45 a month. Take a look at these plans carefully before signing up: what happens if you aren't happy with the service after you've paid up front for a year? Even though you'll most likely be assured a pro-rated refund, if you aren't happy with the company, who is to say they don't hassle you to get your money back?

All in all, finding an adequate commercial web host for your local businesses' website shouldn't be terribly difficult, but expecting a "perfect" web host isn't reasonable either. There will be some give and take with price, reliability and features. Make a list of what you must have, would be nice to have, and things you really don't need or want, and you should be able to find something that fits your budget.

## **Suggested Web Hosting Providers**

If you are having trouble searching the Net for adequate web hosting providers, you can start with our recommended list: [BlueHost](#) and [AN Hosting](#).

## ***Creating Your Local Business Website***

Building your own local business website can be a do-it-yourself adventure, something that you outsource to another professional, or any combination thereof. The main focus is that you have a readable, easy to navigate site that offers all of the information we discussed earlier, created in a cost-effective way that doesn't take up tremendous amounts of your time.

Does that sound like a tall order? It is! And depending on your level of knowledge, willingness to learn, expertise and budget will determine how feasible a combination of all of these aspects is.

Let's discuss some of the options available to you now, broken down by things you can do yourself, or people you can outsource this work to.

## **Outsourcing Talent**

First, let's be clear: if you want to pay someone else to create your business' website, you'll need to know a bit about web site creation and design in order to communicate your needs.

One easy way to do this is to bookmark it or print off a couple of pages of a website or two that you like. Show this to the people you are discussing the site with, so they have a better idea as to what you are looking for. The clearer you can be the better. If there is something you don't like on the site or that the site doesn't have, make sure to note this, too.

Your costs for a business website can run anywhere from nothing (bartering) to the thousands of dollars, so have a general financial range in mind, first, before you start sourcing other professionals.

## **Someone You Know**

Do you know someone who is a budding web site designer? A friend, family member, or maybe even an employee? Ask around; you may be in for a pleasant surprise.

Working with someone you know well can pose some challenges. Make sure that you have your wants and needs in writing, and don't ask too much of someone who has little experience in the field. If they are just starting out, they may not be able to create exactly what you are looking for, but rather a close facsimile. Be patient, realize that you are getting what you are paying for (if you are paying this person at all!) and plan on learning along with them how to get your site up and running smoothly.

## **Auctions**

Take a peek at [eBay](#) on any given day, and you'll easily find a host of up-and-coming web designers looking to make their mark.

A five page website, with hosting included, can be found for less than \$100. However, choose wisely if you are going this route, since you'll be locked into this site for a year (at best), and it probably won't offer a lot of functionality or interactivity for your visitors.

Ask the same questions that you would of a web host (which we discussed at length earlier in this chapter). If all of your needs and concerns are covered after some probing, then an auction can be an excellent cost-saving way to get your name out there, but not much more.

## **Freelancers**

It used to be that finding a highly-skilled freelancer was an extremely difficult process. It meant going through a headhunting firm, putting up notices, reading the classifieds, attending networking events or getting word of mouth suggestions from other business people.

Of course, these methods are all still valid. If you can find a web design freelancer through one of these avenues, that's fantastic, and I urge you to discuss with them your specific company needs.

However, many business owners just don't have the time or energy to devote towards finding freelance help, and that's where the online freelancing sites come into play.

Similar to an auction, you (the buyer) will post a bid asking for quotes on a specific project. Once again, the more specific and detailed you can be in your description, the better, since you'll get more accurate quotes that you can easily compare.

Sellers (freelancers) will then post bids based on your posting, explaining what they can offer you, what their fee would be for the entire project, any other bonuses that they are able to offer (such as web hosting) and samples of their previous work completed. If they work with other, related professionals (such as graphic designers or writers), this will probably be mentioned as well.

Usually there is a set amount of time that you keep the bidding portion of the project open, so as many people as possible can bid. Then, once the bidding process is finished, you can either choose one person or close the project if you didn't find anyone that suited your needs.

The freelancing website fees can range from a set amount per project (\$5 at some of the smaller sites), to a percentage of the project (5-15%) or a monthly access fee (\$15-60 a month). These costs do not include any fees incurred to pay the web designer when finished.

Paying people through online means usually means that you use one of the following options:

- You pay an intermediary (such as [PayPal](#), the most commonly used of all of the money exchange sites on the web): Costs can range anywhere from nil to a percentage of the amount you are sending. Most of these companies allow you to send payment by credit card, check, money order, or direct withdrawal from your bank account.
- You put the fees into an escrow system through the freelancing site. Escrow occurs when a buyer (you) puts money into an account held by the freelancing site, in trust for the seller (web designer) until the project is completed to everyone's satisfaction. If there is a disagreement, the freelancing site sometimes provides mediation to determine who should receive the money. Some, but not all, of the freelancing sites offer this service, with one or two requiring escrowed funds before a freelancer can be chosen.
- You pay the designer directly: Either through a check, money order or credit card. Fees here are only your mailing costs, or any fees to transfer the funds into a different currency.
- You wire the money, using a company like Western Union. Fees for these types of services can be high, especially if you are sending money to another country.

There are a great many of online freelancing sites available today. My current two favorites are [RentACoder](#) and [ScriptLance](#).

## **Web Designers**

Finding a professional web designer is as simple as opening up your local yellow pages, or doing a search on the Internet (very much like we did in the introduction of this eBook) to find one.

With a local professional, you'll get someone who not only understands your area, but probably is (or could be) a customer of yours. And added bonus is that you'll be able to meet with them face to face to discuss exactly what it is you are looking for.

Another option is to try your local community college or post secondary institution to see if they have a web design program. Contact the administrator of the program, tell them what you are looking to do, and they will let you know if they can either recommend someone, put up a flyer in the common area asking for assistance, or even offer you a co-op student.

## **Do It Yourself Options**

If you are looking to learn something new, designing and creating a website isn't terribly difficult or expensive process, but it can be time consuming.

Learning more about how websites are made, designed and put on the web is critical to your knowledge base in order for you not to get scammed. Even if you aren't interested in creating one from scratch yourself, a quick read over this section and the resources provided will at least give you the basis to communicate with the people who do.

## **Downloadable WYSIWIG Programs**

There are numerous well-known WYSIWIG editors (What You See Is What You Get) such as [FrontPage](#) that will walk you through the process of creating a website from start to finish.

These programs are normally purchased and housed on your own computer, have help files that teach the basics of web page design, and then allow you to upload your site (via FTP which stands for File Transfer Protocol) to your web hosting company. Free versions of this type of program do exist, such as [NVU](#), but their learning curve is usually a bit steeper than most.

If you are looking to design your own website, I highly recommend [The Site Wizard](#)'s series of free web design articles to walk you through the process.

## **Templates**

Some web hosting providers offer server-side WYSIWYG site builders or web templates for you to choose from, saving you from learning HTML or downloading a program. Check to see if your commercial web hosting provider offers this service (many now do).

You can also download numerous web site templates from sites such as [Free Site Templates](#) or [Pro Web Templates](#), and then use them in your WYSIWYG program to change and update them to your specific needs.

## **Combination**

There is another option if you are looking to create a website from scratch on your own, and it's a program that combines both the WYSIWYG program format and the template options into one, easy-to-use format. Combining eCommerce, link building, pay per click advertising (all of which we will discuss shortly in more detail), visitor statistics, mailing lists and search engine optimization, programs like [Site Build It!](#) (SBI) were created especially for the small business owner looking for a straightforward solution to getting their local company online.

## **Tying It All Together**

By now you should understand how important having a solid web page is for increased business. However, actually creating the bare bones of the site (what people see when they visit your URL) is only one portion of the puzzle. Getting people to your site is equally as important, which requires some interesting and unique tactics, which we will now focus on for the rest of this eBook.

I urge you to read through it all before you start working on your website in any way, since what you learn next will change the entire process, and may lead you in a different direction than your first inspiration.

## Local Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Anyone who is even remotely familiar with the Internet business world will have heard of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques, but few could actually tell you what it means, and for good reason.

Implementing an effective SEO program can be complex, complicated and entail a tremendous amount of time and effort to get off the ground. Do it right however, and you'll have new, potentially paying customers, visiting your website in droves.

SEO is a multiple-pronged approach whose end result (if successful) means getting high search engine rankings for numerous keywords related to your business, thus receiving large amounts targeted of web traffic.

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is often confused with SEO, and is a completely different ball of wax. Basically, SEM is the use of a auction-like bidding process where web site owners compete for the top advertising pay-per-click spots on major search engines (if you take a quick peek at Google, you'll see the ads on the top right hand side of the page after a search is performed). SEM will be covered in more depth later in this eBook.

The major differences between the two tactics are:

- SEO is free, other than the time spent (which is considerable), whereas SEM is a pay-per-use system;
- SEO, when done correctly, gets your website listed organically in the search engines (meaning your site will be listed in the results), whereas SEM listings are provided next to the organic results;
- SEO is time consuming and a long-term process, whereas SEM can take mere minutes to set up;
- SEO is thought of as a specialized skill set, whereas anyone can do SEM with some cash on hand.

So why would anyone use SEO when they could just pay some cash and receive a paid SEM listing next to the sought-after organic results? Because web users know the difference between the two, and still prefer organic results over advertising, hands down.

There are several ways to increase your search engine results through SEO techniques. Some related to how you place specific items on your website, and others are what you do on other people's sites.

Remember, not all of these tactics need to be put into place right away; this is a lot of information to absorb. If you pick one or two, however, and stick with them, adding more as your time and energy allows, the demand for your company's products or services will increase dramatically.

## ***On Page SEO***

There are several things you can do to your website to increase its search engine rankings, and they are: keyword analysis, content-rich keyword articles and enhancing your meta/alt tags.

### **Keyword Analysis**

First off, grab a pen and a couple of pieces of paper, and open up your favorite spreadsheet program. You'll need all three to complete this section of the eBook.

Now, brainstorm words (or word combinations) that could be used to describe your company. Come up with as many as you can in 5 minutes, and look for as many different ways as you can to describe your business.

With those words in hand, think about which of them you'd use in a search engine to find your company's website. Highlight or circle the ones you think are the most likely combinations, or create new ones – it's up to you.

Once finished, it's time to look at your competitor's website. Pull up their URL, and look at the front page. Are there certain words that are repeated several times throughout the page that describe the business? Write them down if you haven't already.

Now we are going to take a look at what keywords your competitor thinks is important. Go to the top of your browser window, and find the View Source option (in Internet Explorer, you can find it at View → Source). Open the file into a text editor (such as notepad). It'll look like a bunch of gobbledygook, but that's okay. Find the part that says, "meta tag" with a bunch of comma delineated words after it. Some webmasters don't use this feature, but most do.

Take a look at the list, and write down any other words or word combinations you hadn't thought of already.

By now, you should have a fairly sizeable list of what we will from now on refer to as "keywords", which are words that people use at the search engines to find a product, service or information. If you think you still need some suggestions, try this free [keyword suggestion tool](#).

From those keywords, pick a couple (5 at most) that you think are the most descriptive and highly sought after in the bunch. Using the format below, type your top five keywords into your spreadsheet program:

Keyword	Searches	Competition	KEI	Notes
Keyword #1			Calculation	
Keyword #2				
Keyword #3				
Keyword #4				
Keyword #5				

We are now going to input the KEI (keyword effectiveness index) calculation into the KEI field for each of your five keywords. Type into the highlighted cell:

=Searches\*Searches/Competition

Therefore, if the Searches column is B, and the Competition column is C, your calculation would look like this:

= B2 \* B2 / D2 (without the spaces)

Copy and paste that calculation into each of the cells in the KEI column that corresponds to a keyword line. You'll most likely get an error message, but that's okay, since we haven't put any information into the searches or competition columns yet. That's next.

Open Overture's free [keyword selector tool](#) now. Type in the first of your keywords, and take note of the results. Depending on how specific your keyword is (one word or a combination of several words) will determine how many results you get back in your search, to a maximum of 50.

The keywords are ranked from highest to lowest – but from highest to lowest of what?

As the landing page (the page I've directed you to with the link above) describes, this will show you how many times a specific keyword was searched using the major search engines last month.

This number is what we want to put in the Searches column of your spreadsheet. In this situation, the higher the number, the better – because the more people who are searching for this term, the more people you can potentially attract to your website.

If you find any other keywords with higher search results than the one you've chosen, feel free to add it (or them) to your spreadsheet, making sure to copy the KEI calculation into the appropriate column as well. Do this for all of your keywords.

Once you've listed all of the searches for all of your chosen keywords (you'll probably have a list anywhere from 20-50 keywords, which is great), open up your favorite search engine. In this case, the bigger and more well-known the search engine, the better, since you want to use what most people are using, not what strikes your own personal fancy. [Google](#) is a good choice.

One at a time, place your keywords into the search box and press enter. Let's pause for a minute once your search results come up, because there is quite a bit to look at, first.

Do you see on the right hand side of the page the separate but related links (if you are at [Google](#))? Those are all pay-per-click or Search Engine Marketing (SEM) ads. Take a look and see if any of your competitors are listed there, and make a note of it in the notes column.

Look at the top ten results from your search (again, in [Google](#), this will be ten results for the front page). Who is listed? Do you recognize any of the names or websites? Take a look at any of the sites that interest you and make a note of them in the notes section as well. These are your direct competitors; you'll need to study them closely later to see what they are doing to get such high, organic search engine results so you can try and replicate them.

Finally, look at the number of results returned from your search. This is the number you want to put in the Competitor cell of your spreadsheet for each individual keyword. Lower numbers are what you are looking for here - in the thousands, if possible. Most results will

return several million results, if not more. This number is exactly how many other websites are competing with yours to get all of those people searching that keyword – so less competition means higher rankings that are just plain easier to get.

As soon as you put a number into the Competition cell, your KEI cell should reflect this, removing the error message and putting a number in its place. High numbers mean that there is a higher demand for these keywords (more people searching), with less websites competing for their attention. Any KEI over a thousand is a gold mine (but may be difficult to use because of spelling, grammar or general usage issues), but we can just as easily use KEI results over one hundred just as well – it'll just be harder to get high search engine results for that specific keyword.

Once you've done all of these steps, sort your results by KEI, and you'll automatically have a list, from best to worst, of keywords you should focus on for your higher search engine rankings.

Some business owners may find this process tedious, or don't have the time to do it themselves, and that's okay. There are a couple of websites out there that offer commercial keyword analysis, [WordTracker](#) being the industry's leader at the moment. They even offer a free trial to see if their services are right for you. A week-long subscription runs about \$25 US, which is more than enough time to do all of the keyword analysis you'll ever need.

### **Content-Rich Website Using High KEI Keywords**

Once you've done your keyword research, it is time to pick a couple to start enhancing your web pages. Then, when you submit your site to the search engines, the spiders (electronic virtual robots that determine the content of your page to return in any search engine outcomes) will index your site according to the density of those keywords.

Density refers to how many times a specific phrase or word appears on a webpage. Most webmasters aim for 3-5% keyword density on any given page; broken down, this means that for every 500 words, a specific keyword should show up 15-25 times if it were to meet the 3-5% density target.

## **General Page Keywords**

Every page should focus on several keywords that you've specifically chosen, depending on what message you are trying to get across. Therefore, a product page with an item called "Snowbuds" should have the word "Snowbuds" listed at a high density rate, while still sounding natural. Take a look at some of the websites that ranked highly in the keywords search you did previously, and you will see exactly what I mean.

## **Keyword Articles**

Another way of driving traffic to your website through SEO means is by having keyword-rich, content-heavy articles on your website that relate to your product or services.

Keyword article writing isn't hard, but it can be time consuming for a non-writer. Don't be afraid to contract out this work through one of the freelancing options mentioned earlier if it isn't your bag.

A keyword article has several components to it: it has keywords interspersed in a variety of specific areas, it runs anywhere from 350 to 650 words, it offers a fair amount of information that a potential customer would want to know (or that customers ask about frequently), and it houses a blurb at the end of the piece discussing the writer's credentials with a link back to their website.

To write an effective keyword article, you must follow these steps:

- Create a title that is attention grabbing, usually offering the reader a teaser answer to a common problem, that also houses the chosen keyword(s);
- Create three to five bolded headers to use throughout the article that also incorporate the keyword(s);
- Write an informative one or two line blurb about the author, giving the reader a reason to click on the link to their site (at the end of the article); and
- Write short paragraphs using the keyword(s) a couple of times in each one.

An excellent example of a keyword article which focused on the words "double entry bookkeeping" can be found [here](#).

## **Enhancing Your HTML Tags**

Every web page housed within your website has a set of HTML coding tags that tell search engine spiders how to index your site's contents. Do you remember when we looked at your competitor's meta tags previously, using View → Source in Internet Explorer? These nifty little pieces of code do a lot to increase search engine rankings, although some search engines do not use them anymore.

If you are using a program like NVU or FrontPage, you can look at your meta tags easily within the site viewer (check the Help topics of either program if you are having problems finding it). Alternatively, ask your webmaster if the meta tags have been keyword enhanced.

You will also notice that there are three different kinds of tags: alt, description and keywords.

### **Alt Tags**

Alt tags refer to the 'behind the scenes' tagging of every photo, graphic or picture on your website. Have you ever put your cursor over a photo on the Internet, and had something pop up, telling you what the picture is, or giving more information about it? Proper alt tags made this happen.

To add an alt tag (essentially a description of the photo or graphic) to any picture on your website, right click on the photo after you've inserted it. You should find the alt tag features somewhere in there – but once again, check the Help section of the program you are using if you are having trouble finding it.

All of your images should have alt tags, period. Google indexes all photos using the alt tags (and makes them easily searchable because of this), and several other smaller search engines are starting to follow suit. If you can somehow incorporate the pages' keywords into your alt tags, you'll increase your search engine rankings even more.

## **Description Tags**

These tags describe the page that they are housed on, and usually are no more than one or two (albeit long) lines. Every page on your website should have a very pointed description tag that uses all of the keywords embedded in that page at least once.

Since many search engines and most directories will use your description tag in their search results, think carefully before writing a description tag. You want to tell the visitor exactly what that specific page offers, who your company is (and where), while using the keywords you've chosen for that specific page. It can be somewhat tedious, but any time invested here will be well worth it in the long run.

## **Keyword Tags**

Every web page will have it's own set of relevant keywords. Some pages may be similar, but rarely should any be the same. Copying and pasting isn't the goal here, but some repetitiveness is okay.

Since the keyword tag is meant to house all of the relevant word and word combinations a surfer might use to find your website, feel free to add as many as you like. Know, however, that search engines (or at least the ones who still use this tag in their indexing) rate the keywords based on their location in the tag. The most relevant keywords should be listed at the front of the listing, whereas the least relevant should be at the back. Make sure to add any keyword combination with your location as well to your keyword list, such as:

"bakery, Vancouver bakery, bakery Commercial Avenue Vancouver"

## **Title Tags**

Title tags house the title of the webpage it is housed in. Titles can be short or long, but can only be one sentence. Almost every search engine uses the title tag as the name of your website in all search engine results, so again, try and make it as unique, descriptive and full of keywords as possible.

## **Off Page Factors**

Although the on page SEO factors may seem more important in the long run, they really aren't. You'll need to come up with a plan to incorporate both to receive high visitor counts to your local business website, since search engine algorithms now use these factors as well to determine how relevant your webpage is to a specific search request.

## **Web Site Submission**

Once you've found a web hosting company, purchased a URL, created a web page, enhanced the content, and created several ways to have your visitors interact with your business, you're ready to submit your site to the search engines.

True, some search engines take a peek around the Internet on a regular basis, so your site may show up in search engine results before you are ready – but this is rare. In most circumstances, you'll need to do some legwork yourself before any Netziens come a' knockin.

You can either pay someone else to submit your website to the major search engines, see if your web hosting provider already provides this service as a feature of the plan you signed up for, or do it yourself. As always, you'll need either time or money to get this done successfully, so expect to invest a fair amount of one or the other to get what you need. Again, I would try using [RentACoder](#) or [ScriptLance](#) for these purposes myself.

If you would rather do it yourself, one of the oldest search engine submission websites out there, such as [SelfPromotion](#) offers free search engine, directory and local search submissions, although a donation is always appreciated. This is without question the more time-consuming of the two options, but this site walks you through the entire process with extensive explanations and directions for even the most skittish of website owners.

## **Article Repository/Submission Sites**

We've already discussed keyword articles and how to write them. But were you aware that keyword articles can also be used on other people's websites to gather even more, targeted traffic to your website?

Article repositories or submission sites (there are, literally, thousands of them at the moment) accept free keyword articles from anyone, as long as the articles follow the sometimes-strict guidelines of the

specific website. In return, you get a link to your website from your blurb (take a peek at another keyword article if you don't remember what I'm talking about [here](#)) and the possibility of having the piece picked up by ezines, other webmasters and online magazines.

Writing keyword articles has become such a booming business that many online freelance writers have started their careers writing these pieces for business owners just like you. In my experience, these articles can garner a tremendous amount of traffic in a short period of time, depending on how many visitors the submission site you've housed the article at receives on a daily basis.

And added bonus of having articles posted on these sites is that they offer a link back to your website, which is another off page visitor-increasing tactic that we will discuss next.

Several reputable article submission programs currently exist to automate the process (which can be exceptionally time consuming otherwise if you have several articles a month that you'd like placed at 20-50 sites), such as [ArticleAnnouncer](#) or [Article Marketer](#).

## **Inbound Links**

Inbound links are links from other websites to your website, other than the search engines. Literally, they are coming "in" from somewhere else.

The amount and quality of inbound links to your website has become increasingly important because of various changes to the major search engine algorithms. Although inbound links have always been important, they are now one of the main ways search engines know that your website is highly targeted using a specific set of keywords.

Getting inbound links of any kind isn't hard; all you have to do is create a 'links' page and put up links to other businesses and websites related to yours, asking them to reciprocate (which incidentally are called reciprocal links).

Reciprocal links, although important, aren't as important as the ranking of the website you are linking to. The more popular the website that links to you, the higher your search engine results will be. Plus, Google has just stated that if the link to your website has appropriate keywords in it, it'll increase your search engine rankings even further.

But how do you know what websites are worth linking to, and reciprocating with?

The following tips should help you to decide if you should offer a website a reciprocal link, strive for an inbound link, or pay for advertising that links to your website:

- If the company is smaller or their website doesn't have a lot of traffic BUT the website is content-heavy or you have a partnership with this company, focus on reciprocal links.
- If the website offers very important, specialized or unique information related to your business, link to them in context (meaning, within the body of a blog posting or article) and then let the webmaster know you've sent a link their way. They may or may not reciprocate, but most webmasters are so happy that someone found them, they will usually post a thank you with a link to your website.
- If the website is an extremely high-traffic site (like DMOZ or Yahoo!'s directory), look at advertising methods, or consider paying to be listed on their site.
- Place as many articles in high-ranking article repositories that you have time for, ensuring the links back to your website are keyword-enhanced. [Alexa](#) is a search engine that can show you (based on their own calculations) how popular a specific website is.
- Create a content-rich site that targets the niche your business focuses on, and webmasters will both find you and link to you frequently.

### ***But How Do I Know If This Is Working?***

Of course, if you are going to go to all of the trouble of setting up a website that attract visitors, you want to know if the hard work you've put into it is paying off!

The easiest way to determine if your site is attracting visitors is to check your websites' server logs, visitor tracking or web statistics. Most web hosting providers offer basic tracking, letting you know how much bandwidth you've used, how many unique visitors have stopped by (unique meaning that they haven't visited before within a pre-

defined period of time that your web host will choose), how many times people have revisited your site (well, someone using the same computer, anyway), and the like.

Some web hosts also go one step further and tell you where people are coming from to find your site. This means that if a web user clicked on a link to find you, you'll see where that link was placed. This feature is extremely helpful when trying to figure out who is linking to you, and why: normally, you can click on the link and see for yourself what's up. Make sure to send a quick email to anyone you weren't aware of who is sending traffic your way, and consider linking back to them if you can (either on your links or testimonials page).

If your web host doesn't provide in-depth web statistics, there are numerous free programs or scripts that you can run on your site to get these same features, such as [Logrep](#), [StatsCounter](#) or [AWStats Advanced Web Statistics](#).

Another extremely useful device is a keyword tracker, available for free at Digital Point Solution's [Keyword Tracker and Keyword Ranking Tool](#). This web-based program allows you to track how well your website is doing in the search engines given any specific keyword. If you have the detailed visitor statistics that we just discussed, you can easily see how people are finding your site: if any are coming from a search engine, the keywords will be listed – just plug those into this keyword tracker, and you'll get a fairly quick ranking to see how you are doing. An added bonus is that you can track over a long period how your keyword rankings change in order to track your SEO efforts.

## Promoting Your Local Website

Now that we've talked extensively about how to create your local business website and how to optimize it for web traffic, now we'll dive right into getting as much promotional clout as we can.

### Let Everyone Know How to Find You

As soon as your website is up and running, make sure to include the URL to your site on everything. From banners to business cards, television commercials to text ads in the newspaper, invoices and invitations – every piece of printed matter your company puts out should have your URL listed.

This may mean some additional costs – but there are other ways to circumvent these until you've run out of whatever it is you are using. Talk to the following people to ensure that, as soon as possible, your new address is listed:

- Your accountant and bookkeeper (to add to invoices, statements and paychecks);
- Your banker, lawyer and any other professional you work with;
- Your printer (for logos, business cards and letterhead);
- The local media (including newspapers, TV and radio);
- Your customers and staff; and
- Any companies that you network, share resources, partner or do business with.

Some of these notices can be done in one fell swoop with a press release (which we'll go into more later), a thank-you card (also something we'll discuss), postcard marketing (we will touch on this later too).

If you have a lot of business cards or other printed material left over that you cannot reprint at this time, purchase a stamp with the URL on it, and have your staff stamp the additional paperwork when business is slow. Alternatively, whenever you give out your business card, write on the back, "Thanks for visiting, James! Don't forget we've got a new website at <http://www.mycompany.com/> I hope to see you there!" and then sign your name.

## **Local Portal Listings**

Almost every major city now has a couple of major portal websites that list as many local businesses, services and organizations as they can find. Make their job easier by finding them, and submit your new URL immediately.

Some organizations also house lists of local businesses that cater to their clientele or customers (such as not-for-profits or newspapers). Make sure to find those websites as well, and submit away.

## **Local Linking**

If there are local businesses whose products or services work together, add to or complement yours, contact those companies to see if they have a website as well so you can reciprocally link to each other.

## **Local Free Publicity**

Because most people give more credence to media sources than if they received the information directly from the source (from an advertisement, for example), publicity is an important tool for the local business owner to increase sales and visibility in the community.

The only downfall to free publicity is that you have no control over the message; some media agencies will offer opinions that may not be as favorable as you'd like – but that's the price you pay for free. As long as you ensure your "news" can withstand media scrutiny, there shouldn't be any problems.

To learn more about how to write an effective, attention-getting press release targeted to your local media (newspapers, television, business-related magazines, radio stations and the like), I highly recommend [How to Write an Effective Press Release](#) for more targeted how-to information.

## **Social Networking Websites**

Online networking has boomed recently, with businesses quickly catching up to use the Internet as a way of connecting with other businesses and clients. People like Bill Gates and John Kerry have signed up with [LinkedIn](#), a free business networking site, while others like [lawyer Martin Schwimmer](#) garner more than 20% of their clientele from online networking means.

Online social and business networking sites enable it's users to find staff or a mentor, market products and services and identify potential

partners. Depending on what networks you join will depend on what you get out of the process, as well as how much time planning and thinking you invest. If this is something you want to pursue further, make sure you've thought out the process first. Here are some ideas to get you thinking in the right direction:

- What is it that you want to get out of online networking? Write down your goals and how it will help you achieve what you are looking for.
- Have a way of keeping track of everyone you meet; personal contact management software such as [Act!](#) is an excellent and crucial tool.
- Document what has been helpful to you professionally, and keep an updated list that you can send to others that ask you for help.
- Make sure that the image you want to portray is how you are coming across. Ask a friend or business partner to review what you plan on posting about yourself, and see what they have to say first. Your professional demeanor online is everything – it can both make, and break you.
- Look for networking sites that target your ideal customer, and then join. Update your profile often, and make sure you have a link to your business website listed prominently.

Some networking sites to review: [Ryze](#), [Ecademy](#), [Zero Degrees](#) and [Tribe.net](#).

### **Classifieds Websites**

Many of the classifieds websites are free, with [Craigslist](#) being the largest of them all. Since you can only search the site by local area, make sure you plug in the correct community, and add free postings about your company's products or services regularly to get free traffic from one of the highest-ranking websites on the net (thus increasing your link building and search engine rankings as well).

### **Joint Ventures with Local Businesses**

A Joint Venture (most commonly known as a JV online) occurs when a person or business combines to make a temporary partnership for mutual financial gain.

JV's are regulated in most countries; in the US the governing bodies consist of state partnership, contractual or commercial laws, and are considered a partnership for income tax purposes.

Companies form JV's for a variety of reasons, but usually they are meant to decrease the costs of larger projects or campaigns, improve access to resource allotments or create new ways of managing time, people and products.

Talk to local businesses to see if you can create strategic partnerships to increase both business profits, using the Internet as a medium.

## Showing Up In the Local Searches

Without question, local searching has increased dramatically over the past year, and many Internet marketers and advertising agencies are pushing their clients towards local search marketing. With the big two ([Yahoo!](#) and [Google](#)) search engines now providing local search, it stands to reason that there is a lot of demand, without a lot of local businesses providing these sought-after services. Yet.

### Internet Yellow Pages

If you have already invested in a yellow pages ad, you most likely have an Internet Yellow Pages (IYP) ad included in the cost. But what is the use of the ad if you aren't using it to its fullest potential?

Ask your yellow pages sales agent if this feature was included in the price of your advertisement, and what an upgrade costs. Usually, the fees are minimal (in comparison to the yearly ad) and will position your company name, URL and identifying information at the very top of all searches for your business type.

You can also do a search for other yellow page sites to see who caters to your area, and ask for their pricing schedules as well. Some to consider further: [Superpages](#), [Switchboard](#), [CitySearch](#), [Yellow Pages](#), [Yellow Book](#) and [InfoSpace](#).

Whether or not you choose to pay more for a higher listing, make sure that your contact information and URL are constantly updated at these agencies – if something changes, your potential customers don't want to be the last to know!

Finally, check your listing with each IYP service regularly. Many offer a ranking system where customers can give a number of stars to their favorite establishments. Since most businesses won't even have anyone ranking them, ask one of your best customers if they wouldn't mind writing a little note about your products or services at the IYP site. This will surely make your business stand out from the rest.

### Google Local

The most important search engine to get listed at is Google. Not only is it the biggest around (and has been for numerous years), its technology also powers some of the other more popular search engines on the Net today.

If you have a lot of links pointed to your website, Google will invariably pick you up without having to do a thing. But what about their local search?

All you have to do is register with [Google Local](#) and they will send you (in the mail) a PIN number with your account information. Once received, you can update your information easily, and your listing will show up anywhere from 2 weeks to one month later.

## **Yahoo Local**

Yahoo is a very important website to have your webpage listed at because it provides search results to numerous other services as well as their own visitors.

Similar to Google, the easiest way to get indexed by this giant is to have a lot of links pointing your way. Of course, submit your website for free [here](#) as well, but there is no guarantee your site will actually get listed, since Yahoo is extremely picky about what does, and doesn't, get listed.

The best way to ensure your site gets listed with Yahoo is to search their local pages extensively, find the category that best suits your business, and submit from that page (usually there is a submit to this section link at the bottom of every page, saving you the time of copying and pasting the exact location later on).

A basic local Yahoo listing gives businesses their name, address, phone number and other relevant information posted when someone searches for a commercial business in this section of their search engine. Most websites already listed in Yahoo have been added, but if yours hasn't, make sure to fill out [this form](#).

Enhanced listings give businesses a link immediately below basic listing information under the heading "More About [business name]". Yahoo considers these listing to be their equivalent of bolded yellow pages advertising.

An enhanced listing costs \$9.95 US a month, and includes a short company description, links to promotional portions of the company's website and up to ten photographs.

## ***Vertical Search Engines***

Not technically local search engines, vertical searches are becoming increasingly important in the niche marketing game to position your products or services in front of interested, high volume buyers.

Vertical search engines look a bit different than Google or Yahoo! since they only list product or service driven business listings that cater to the user who knows exactly what it is they are looking for. Business to business (B2B) purchases account for most of the vertical search engine traffic so far, which is promising considering your potential return on investment (ROI).

Websites like [Business.com](http://Business.com), [WholesaleGopher](http://WholesaleGopher) and [IT.com](http://IT.com) offer their visitors highly relevant search terms in niches not easily found elsewhere. If your business caters to a B2B client, or can offer higher purchase power to consumers looking for larger quantities, vertical search engines are an excellent method of making contact with highly-targeted customers looking to buy.

## **Paid Advertising**

Jupiter Research says U.S. advertisers spent close to \$3.2 billion on paid searches in 2005, an increase of more than 23% from the year before. Even with these incredible statistics, the local advertising market still isn't close to being saturated, so there is a lot of room for your business to stand out.

As you've learned, there are several reasons why you'll want to combine your promotional and SEO techniques with paid advertising to increase your search engine results and web page rankings. As with the free (but more time consuming) promotional options, there are a myriad of choices. This section will discuss the current options available to you, with a list of suppliers of those services.

### **Pay-Per-Click Advertising, or SEM**

According to Jupiter Research, Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising jumped from \$100 million in 2000 to \$3.1 billion last year. PPC is big business on the Internet, and for good reason: it works.

PPC is best explained by taking a trip to Google. Do you see all of the links on the right hand side of your page? Those are pay-per-click ads, where people bid (like in an auction) on advertising space next to their chosen keywords.

The costs for PPC advertising can vary greatly, depending on your needs, wants and keywords, but usually are usually several pennies per click. Higher bids are usually associated with high demand keywords. Plus, with the more competitive keywords, more people are going to see (and click) on your advertisement, which can quickly drive your costs into unmanageable amounts.

Let's create a figurative situation to flesh out the PPC advertising idea a bit more.

For this example, we will pretend that your business is in wholesaling, and you are looking to get some high-yield results for your PPC dollars. You do some keyword research and determine that there are an awful lot of people looking for wholesale doll supplies, which you have lots of. So you log your PPC program, and determine the top bids using the keyword "wholesale doll supplies" is only \$0.03 per click. You place a bid for \$0.04, set your criteria and place your credit card on

file with Google for payments. Most PPC advertisers require a credit card for ongoing payments, and you'll see why in a moment.

Your keyword results told you that several thousand people a day search for "wholesale doll supplies", and with a 1% response, you'd be getting approximately 5-10 potential customers a day clicking on your link, averaging \$0.35 a day. Not a problem, you think, and you focus on other projects for a couple of days.

About a week later, you receive a phone call from your webmaster telling you that you've had an incredible upsurge in new traffic the past week, and what on earth are you doing? You've also noticed a couple of more sales than normal, so you decide to go and look at your PPC account to see how things are going. What a return for your investment!

Or so you thought...

When you actually see your account, you are horrified! Several thousand people clicked on your link every day, which has quickly run up your PPC account to just over \$500. You immediately turn off your keyword bid for \$0.04, and sit back a bit to think about everything. What on earth went wrong?

In this situation, a little bit more research was required along with some calculated testing, before jumping in without any checks or limits in sight.

"Wholesale doll supplies" is a highly sought after keyword, with few websites offering true wholesale supplies in the area. People who are searching for these terms usually know this (or quickly figure out after hitting the top website results Google fed them). Savvy net users know that PPC advertising is usually highly targeted, so many will click on the link, curious to save themselves some time. As we've discussed previously, the average attention span of a Netizen is less than 10 seconds – so if they didn't find exactly what they were looking for right away, they'll click back to Google and keep on looking, which explains why sales weren't dramatically higher, but traffic was testing your server's bandwidth limitations.

But what can a smart business-owner can do to avoid these kinds of costly mistakes?

First, set a daily limit for the clicks you are willing to pay for. Many successful PPC users know that testing is the key to financial gain using this system, so they'll try out a series of keywords one at a time, monitor them daily, and only pay for what you can afford. Usually, this means topping your daily click cost to \$5-10/day.

Also, make sure that the page you link to from your advertisement is exactly what you are trying to entice new customers to buy. Don't use a URL that points to the main page of your website, or to a higher-level section. Give everyone exactly that they are looking for immediately, and you'll have a much higher return on investment (ROI).

It has only been within the past year that businesses have truly picked up on how much PPC advertising can benefit their bottom line. Local businesses are poised in an even better position, because they can offer searchers exactly what they are looking for in minutes, with a map and address, thanks to Google's new Local Search (a program which we will discuss more, shortly).

Google and Yahoo! are the top of the crop at the moment, with most of the PPC traffic hitting one (or both) of these companies. However, these sites are also pricier than the others, and may not have affordable rates for the keywords you are targeting. Depending on the competitiveness of your desired keywords, you may have better luck at one of the up-and-comers instead: [MIVA](#) (formerly FindWhat), [IndustryBrains](#), [Kanoodle](#), [LookSmart](#), [BrainFox](#), [Enhance](#) (formerly ah-ha.com).

Some of these sites also offer different types of PPC advertising; [MIVA](#), for instance, offers PPC in email format instead of through a search engine.

## **Pay-Per-Call**

Not all local business owners are willing to jump into the foray and get everything we've discussed here up and running in a couple of months. That's where Pay-Per-Call comes in: online advertising that combines PPC methods with real-time phone contact with your company.

Let's face it, not every business will be sold on the PPC idea. It seems a bit risky, and there is no guarantee anyone who clicks on the link will buy. Plus, you need a website for the customer to click to, which is a time consuming and sometimes pricey process.

However, every business has a phone. When a potential buyer has a problem, they don't want to wait for an email response to their questions – they want an answer, now, to their concerns. Pay-Per-Call offers this option, appeasing parties on both ends of the purchasing process.

Pay-Per-Call advertising is extremely simple: when someone clicks on a Pay-Per-Call ad, they are sent to a basic profile webpage that offers information and suggests calling a toll-free number.

Merchants are only charged when someone makes the call, not when someone clicks through, and extremely detailed statistics are available to the company at any time.

Pay-Per-Call advertising is considerably more expensive than other online advertising methods, however. Each call you receive from the service can cost anywhere from \$2.00 to \$20.00, depending on how competitive the category you've listed is. But users of this service agree across the board – in the end, it's much cheaper than having a full-service, automated website, and it brings in a much higher ROI as well.

Predictions abound from research companies such as the Kelsey Group, who projected last year that pay-Per-Call advertising will become a \$1.4 billion to \$4 billion industry by 2009.

[Ingenio](#) is one of the world leaders in Pay-Per-Call right now, offering services across the AOL search and IYP pages. They started offering services in 2004 (the first company to do so). [Miva](#) joined the ranks of Pay-Per-Call advertising several months later, and Google is offer a [beta version](#) of the service now (which is currently free). [Verizon](#) also offers this service through their [Superpages](#) (IYP) website.

## **Relationship Marketing**

Similar to offline marketing, online marketing methods need to create a personal relationship between the potential buyer and seller in order to make a sale.

Relationship marketing is the term used to describe the ways in which to achieve this target. Since the ways to do so online are considerably different than those used in the print, radio and television marketing worlds, we'll go into great detail here about how to create an interactive, ongoing relationship with your customers and interested clients in order to increase website visitors and sales.

### ***Email Marketing***

Email marketing offers companies a unique way to stay in touch with their customers, find new ones, and position themselves favorably on the Internet if done correctly. Done wrong, however, and you'll have a cacophony of Netziens knocking down your door in anger.

The most important thing to remember is that you cannot send an email to a random person who hasn't requested information from you or from a company you are working with. This is called spam; in a worst-case scenario, your web hosting company or Internet service provider could cancel your contracts immediately, without notice, and without refunding you any money. The best case scenario is that you get a nasty email from someone asking you to remove them from your email list. Either way, it's no fun, so just plain don't do it.

But how do you find email addresses of people wanting information about your products or services, legally and with integrity?

### **List Buying**

Just like with regular mail, you can buy email lists from third-party companies who compile email addresses for companies similar to yours.

The Direct Marketing Association (DMA) has a list of all registered, reputable sources for permission-based email lists (meaning: users have given their permission to be sent emails on a certain topic) so that you don't damage your Internet image.

## **Creating Your Own**

Easily enough, you can create your own email list by having a business card draw housed at either your business, at trade show or other location. Ask for others to place their business card in a sealed container in order to win a monthly draw (and follow through on this). Write somewhere on the draw box that all email addresses will be used internally for the purpose of letting everyone know who won for the previous month, and will be added to your mailing list.

By doing this, you are telling people they will receive contact from you, and they are allowing it by placing their card in your draw box. It is a win-win situation for everyone!

## **Crafting the Emails**

When sending out mass emails to a new list, the focus should be on testing and tweaking your message as much as possible to get the highest response rate.

Working with a professional writer or advertising agency is a good bet for this process, especially if you've amassed a list of more than a couple hundred prospects.

Otherwise, if you want to try it yourself, remember these following tips to ensure a positive response that garners more business:

- Do not bombard anyone with lots of emails. One a month (or less) will suffice.
- Discuss a benefit to the reader right off the get-go, so they are compelled to keep on reading.
- Use short, simple sentences that get to the point. Be as conversational as possible.
- Tell your potential buyer why they need your product or service, and then give them an extra bonus if they come and visit soon (i.e. print off this email and bring it in before a certain date, and we'll give you something for free).

## **Measure Your Success**

Don't forget to keep track of all responses from your email advertising. Different messages will elicit different responses. Keep track of them

closely, and you'll figure out quickly what works and what doesn't to get more money rolling in.

## ***Autoresponders***

When running a bricks and mortar business alongside an online sales generating website, any sort of time-saving device helps.

Autoresponders were originally created to do just that: save you time while creating a strong relationship with your clients and potential buyers alike.

Think about it: how many emails have you sent that answered the exact same thing, but were sent to different people? Do you refer your clients to your website for more information, or have you just copied and pasted the same response to someone else while changing the identifying information?

We've all done it, unfortunately, but there is a better way. You can free up a tremendous amount of the rote emails you send out, helping you to focus on what is really important: making money.

Plus, autoresponders work around the clock, on your client's time frame. If at 3am they are surfing the net and require more information about widget ABC, all they have to do is send a note to your autoresponder, and they'll have it in minutes. This not only builds your business credibility, it increases your chances of getting the sale because you've answered all questions quickly and efficiently.

If you aren't already sold on their features, autoresponders can also help by:

- Instant confirmation of an online order means customers will buy from you again, thinking that the speed of 'your' response equates quality. You'll receive the order when you log into to your email account next, knowing that the client has everything they need while they wait for either a shipment, or contact to be made if there are further questions or specifications.
- If you sell informational products (such as eBooks or other electronically delivered items), your customer can purchase, receive an autoresponder message telling them where to download their content, and a thank you letter – all without you having to do anything other than check your payment processor to ensure you received the cash.

- Autoresponders are excellent devices to upsell related products and services to your clients or potential buyers by automatically sending a note related to the sale on a pre-determined time frame – once again, with you doing nothing.

Automating your entire customer service process can reduce your costs, time and energy spent on the basic tasks of running your business, so you can handle hundreds (if not thousands) more customers, increasing your profits in the meantime.

The two easiest and best places to automate customer responses are the ordering and fulfillment process and basic customer service. Let's discuss those ideas a bit further now.

### **Automating Ordering and Fulfillment**

The sooner you can automate your ordering and fulfillment processes, the better off you'll be to increase sales exponentially online.

Mind you, when you start your business you probably want to take care of all of the orders yourself since there is a large amount of satisfaction knowing that people want your products and services! But once that initial excitement has worn off, you'll want to automate the entire system. Think about it: if it takes you 15 minutes to take care of each order right now, what will happen when you start getting 10 orders a day? 100? In order to grow, you'll need to have someone or something else take care of the processing.

The more time consuming of the order and fulfillment processes can be taken care of by an autoresponder, such as:

- Confirmation of the order: Even though making a purchase over the Internet is a fairly commonplace event these days; customers are still concerned about the safety and efficacy of buying online. Having an automatic response to let them know their order has been received reassures your buyer that everything is as it seems. Plus, it will save your customer an email or phone call to check up, confirming the order went through properly.
- Letting the customer know their item has been shipped: Once again saving your customers an email or phone call, automating the shipping process is another way to ensure your

customer knows exactly what is going on in their order fulfillment.

- **Actual order fulfillment:** If you are selling items, services or information that can be delivered online, the entire selling process – from sales letter to order fulfillment, from follow-ups to gathering testimonials – can all be performed using an autoresponder.
- **Sending follow-ups:** Oftentimes we want to send our customers a thank you note for their purchase. Autoresponders can do this without you lifting a finger, plus they can initiate another, related sale as well (provided you write it into the copy), which can create hundreds or thousands of dollars in extra revenue for you.

### **Automating Basic Customer Service**

You already know that online buyers not only expect, but require extremely quick and efficient service. Since you can only do so many things at once, automating whatever you are able to (customer service wise) is the best possible way to ensure your customers and potential buyers stay happy.

Imagine a Net user who visits your site, but has a question they can't find on your website. Wouldn't it be great if, instead of searching around for the information, they could put their email address into a form on your website, and within minutes receive a comprehensive FAQ in their mailbox?

Another use for an autoresponder is to provide answers to commonly asked questions in an article format. "How to Choose a Product" or "Weighing Product ABC in the Fight Against Disease 123" are just two of the many types of articles that you can place in an autoresponder.

And after a customer has asked for this information, your autoresponder can even send a pre-written note a couple of days later, thanking them for their request and offering to answer any other questions they may have. Or, it can let them know about a specific sale regarding the product they are looking at.

But now the question must be asked, how can you set up an autoresponder without a lot of downtime, and at a low cost?

## Where Can I Find an Autoresponder?

You have three different options when it comes to setting up an autoresponder, and they are:

### 1. Your Web Host

Before you look anywhere else, check to make sure that your web host doesn't already offer this service. Many do.

### 2. Free Autoresponders with Ads

There are many free autoresponder packages available today. Each has different services and benefits, but almost every single one will ask you to run other people's ads in each message you send a customer, and some will ask for your customers' email addresses as well. If you choose this option, make sure to read the fine print. Some free autoresponder companies: [GetResponse](#) and [FreeAutoBot](#).

### 3. Paid Autoresponders

If your web host doesn't have an autoresponder package, then a paid service is probably your best bet. You won't be limited to how many you can have, you can use it as often or as little as you like, there won't be any ads from any other companies competing for your customer's money and time, and you can probably integrate some sort of newsletter or ezine package as well. One of the more popular autoresponder companies is [AWeber](#).

## Writing Autoresponder Copy

You'll notice that in order to automate everything, there are a lot of things that need to occur: you need to put a system in place, have copy ready for each situation, and know when to intervene if necessary. But do you have to write the information yourself?

If you are like most business owners, you've probably already done it. Take a look around at your current FAQ's, how to's, articles that have been written about your business, information pages, white papers, and the like. I'll bet that if customers or potential buyers have asked you enough, you've already created a handout, photocopied document or speech you rattle off at a moment's notice. Those are what you load into the autoresponders, perhaps with a bit of tweaking.

You can also search the online article repositories for pieces that related to your business that you may be able to use as well. These articles are normally free to use; all that is required on your part is to keep the blurb at the end that describes the writers' business as a payment for the piece. [Ezinearticles](#) is one of the most popular of these types of sites, but there are thousands to be found. Just open up your favorite search engine and type in 'free articles'.

Another option is to have a writer review your copy for you. An experienced copywriter will have lots of knowledge on how, when and why to write autoresponder pieces, and may even give you some advice not found here already. Try hiring a local writer, or better yet, find a net copywriter at one of the many freelancing websites available today, such as [RentACoder](#) or [ScriptLance](#).

## ***Blogs***

You may have heard of blogging on CNN, or from friends. Businesses and personal users alike have quickly figured out that these journal-like postings about almost anything under the sun drive traffic to their websites, connect people to each other and provide free, interactive content as quickly as it can be typed out.

A blog, short for weblog, is an extremely easy way for anyone to post new content on any given subject at any time, with the newest of the postings at the very top of the page. Think of it as an online diary of sorts.

But how will this help your business, you ask?

Blogs offer up-to-the minute content creation at very little or no cost at all. Many web hosts have blogging available already on their server, or you can use one of the freebie sites and link to it from your own website easily (such as [Blogger](#) or [WordPress](#)).

By having complete control over your blog, you can post whatever you like that relates to your business. Remember the SEO techniques we described earlier? If you can incorporate some of these in each and every posting, you'll have Internet traffic in no time. Plus, your customers will see you as the expert (since you are able to post frequently about various factors that drive your business, products or services).

If you don't have time to post yourself, you can always fill your blog with more content from the free article sites we described earlier, or you can hire a writer (again, from [RentACoder](#) or [ScriptLance](#)) to blog for you.

### ***Postcard/Card Marketing***

One of the more affordable ways of getting your businesses' name into the mouths of potential customers is to start a postcard marketing campaign. For a fraction of the cost of other types of direct mail, you can choose the size, frequency of message and image quickly and easily.

But postcards, you think? Who pays attention to a postcard?

Think about your mailbox for a second with me: You gather all of your mail and sort through it quickly every day, tossing the obvious advertisements and direct mail pieces and putting the bills aside. What do you have left? Normally, not much, if anything at all. But if a local business decides to send you a postcard, it not only gets your attention because of its unusual size, you think perhaps it was sent by a friend visiting exotic lands. You look at the picture, and then flip it over for the anticipated letter.

If it's a simple marketing message, you may discard it. But what if that same postcard was a voucher for 20% off with your next visit? Or maybe the flip side was a quick top ten list of things that most homeowners interested in your products or services would find highly useful? If you think of postcards as selling tools in these manners (very much like the Internet – provide a free service or information to attract the sale), your direct mail response can skyrocket from an average 1% response to 10% or more.

Of course, your postcards need to look like professionally produced mailers. There are several ways to do this on your own:

- Use special design programs (Microsoft Publisher being one of the most used by small business owners), to create pleasing layout and design;
- Contact your local post office to ensure you have the correct sizing before working on any artwork;
- Purchase royalty-free photos to use on the front face of the postcard (such as [iStockPhoto](#) or [Corbis](#));
- Write the copy for the back portion of the postcard;

- Proofread; and
- Send off the final document to your local printer.

If you are shaky in one of these areas (such as design or writing), once again, there are many different places online (or locally) that you can look for freelance help.

Make sure to send out postcards smaller than 4-by-6, since this is when the serious cost savings occur in most areas, which can quickly add up if you are sending out a couple of thousand messages.

Once everything is printed and ready to go, make a trip to the post office. Let them know what you are trying to do. In most situations, you can tailor who receives your direct mail easily: all of the businesses in a specific geographic area, all of the residences in a zip code, or all addresses within a certain mile radius.

There are several ways to measure the efficacy of your postcard campaign, such as your response rate (phone calls, drop in customers, etc.) or how many people came into the store, made a purchase, and for how much, after receiving a postcard. Since this type of marketing is easily repeatable, monitored and measured, adjustments can be made quickly and on-the-fly so that future campaigns are even more successful.

### ***Thank You Notes***

For the cost of a greeting card you pick up at the store, you can mail out a personalized business thank you to any customer or business partner you choose with the click of a button.

Companies like [SendOutCards](#) offer a complete system, from graphic design to stuffing and mailing. You can send out one or many cards all at once, for any reason you can imagine.

Perhaps you want to tell an employee they are doing an excellent job, or you want to thank someone for their referral. In less than 60 seconds, you can do this, and more, without dealing with the hassle of creating a customized thank you, stuffing envelopes and finding time to get to the post office.

## Conclusion

If you have worked through this entire eBook, then the first thing I must do is congratulate you! It was no easy task, especially if you actually worked through all of the projects instead of merely skimming through bits and pieces that interested you. Kudos!

Of course, keeping your local business website up, running and current is another challenge. But with the information you've learned, received, processed and put into play, you should be well equipped to take things even further on your own time, at your own pace, to build and grow your business online.

Feel free to bookmark my [Entrepreneurs](#) website for ongoing advice, tips and tricks for the experienced small business owner. I update both the blog and the article series once a week, so check back often. Plus, if you have questions about this eBook or have further information to share, I'd love to [hear about it](#)! Alternatively, you can ask questions or start a [discussion](#) as well, and get answers from other experienced entrepreneurs from around the world.

Thank you for taking this journey to business growth along with me. I hope it's been nothing but useful, educational, and a doorway to success.

Namaste.