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## Does Your Local Business Need a Website?

If you want to attract customers, the answer's a no-brainer.

By Roy H. Williams | September 19, 2005

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Websites are perhaps the most overlooked vehicle of advertising for local, owner-operated businesses. Yes, every retailer needs one. Every dentist, lawyer, accountant and minister needs one. Every café, restaurant, coffee shop and nightclub needs one. Every wholesale supply company needs one.

I'm not suggesting that all these businesses need to actually transact business online. I'm only saying that everyone listed in yesterday's Yellow Pages needs to also be available on the internet today--it's where your customers expect to find you.

If you're thinking you might not be able to afford putting up a website, think again. For a simple website, a budget of \$2,000 to \$5,000 for construction and \$100 to \$400 for monthly maintenance and updates should cover it. Robust sites with streaming video, opt-in subscriber functions and other, more complicated features can run between \$12,000 and \$20,000 for construction and \$500 to \$2,000 for monthly maintenance and updates.

Properly constructed, a website allows your prospects to gather the information they need from the privacy of their own computer monitors. What are the questions your salespeople answer virtually every day? And how, exactly, would your best salesperson phrase those answers on his or her best day? This is the information that needs to be available 24/7 on your site.

Think of your site as a relationship deepener, a half step between your advertising and your front door. Do you suppose it's easier to convince customers to visit your web site or to convince them to get in their car, drive to your store, park that car and walk in your door?

The internet is heaven on earth for the 49 percent of our population who are introverted. That's because introverts strongly prefer to gather information anonymously. They're unlikely to dial your phone number, except as a last resort. Even more unlikely is that they'll choose to walk into your store and engage a salesperson. Introverts aren't necessarily shy--they simply like to gather all the facts before they put themselves in a position where they'll likely be asked to answer questions. Forty-nine percent of your customers strongly prefer to know *what* they're coming to buy *before* they walk in your door. And even the extroverted 51 percent of your target market will appreciate an informative site that functions as an expert salesperson during all those hours you're not open for business.

Don't think for a moment that your customers aren't already online. Several times a month, I speak to groups of at least several hundred people. And I always ask, "How many of you have used a search engine within the past seven days to research a product or service that you were considering purchasing?" I raise my own hand as soon as the question is finished. The hands raised in response have never been less than 85 to 90 percent of the crowd.

The most interesting of these situations happened about a year ago in Las Vegas. I was the keynote speaker for a trade organization whose 1,600 delegates had been gathered from around the world. I was there to deliver a speech on the keys to more effective advertising. The trade organization published a full-color magazine for their members, and prior to this conference, the executive council had been complaining to me privately about the high cost of publishing and shipping that magazine. I was waiting offstage while the emcee introduced me when the chairman leaned over and whispered, "Almost all our membership is over 55 years of age, so you probably don't want to mention the internet." Just then, the emcee finished his jabber and barked, "Roy H. Williams!" I opened my mouth and asked this roomful of oldsters, "How many of you have used a search engine within the past seven days to research a product or service that you were considering purchasing?"

You guessed it, about 95 percent.

I think maybe that chairman is still standing offstage with his mouth open.

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