

HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE



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This e-book is part two in a series on online small business success. For part one of the series, check out **How to Get Your Business Online**, a step-by-step guide on how you can get started online.



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You've achieved a huge milestone by getting your business online, whether it's a social media account or website, and making it available to millions of potential customers and partners. You're probably excited to be online, but possibly a little uneasy about the next step? Don't worry - the next phase of your online journey can be successful if you're focused on the following three steps:

- 1. Establish Your Online Brand**
- 2. Optimize Your Online Presence**
- 3. Find, Market and Sell**



ESTABLISH YOUR ONLINE BRAND

In today's internet-centric world, many use the web to look for and research products or services. So what will customers find out about your business? Think about the online brand you want to establish. If you're unsure of how to start, your web address (or domain name) is a great place to begin.

THE MANY USES OF A DOMAIN NAME

The domain name you choose will be the name of your business's space on the internet – and, possibly, a customer's first impression of your company. Here's how you can use a domain name to start building your brand.

START A WEBSITE

A website is one of the best tools to grow your business. And nowadays, it's even easier to create than most people might think. While a social media presence can be a great asset, it may not provide the same level of marketing opportunities or credibility that a website does. In fact, **77 percent of consumers** believe a website makes a business appear more credible.

You can start with a simple, one-page website and scale it as you grow. Easy, do-it-yourself tools allow business owners to create their own, and most service providers offer bundled services with everything you need to build and maintain your website (e.g., domain name, web hosting, design templates). Many businesses that offer professional services find that all they need is a one- to four-page website that includes general information, contact information, product/service information, social media icons and links, and customer testimonies.

If you plan to open an online store, or your business requires showing videos or other multimedia, then a more robust website may be needed. For example, you can add e-commerce capabilities to your site that allow you to take orders, process payments and provide customer support. Many of the do-it-yourself website builders have packages that you can add on at any time, or a web developer can integrate the functionality for you. Even if you don't plan to sell products online through standard e-commerce functionality, enabling lead capturing and processing, such as an email subscription list, on your website or social page to collect prospect information for further sales follow-up may still be a good idea.

**Still need to register
a domain name
for your business?
Search for yours at
[Verisign.com/register](https://www.verisign.com/register).**

REDIRECT YOUR DOMAIN NAME

If your main business page is on a social media site, online directory, e-commerce site or third-party website platform like Weebly or Wix, chances are the web address provided to you is branded to the specific platform and not for your business. While free hosting services are great, the web addresses that usually come with those services are long and not very memorable, making it hard to market your website to customers. You can change that by using your domain name as the web address for your business page on any social media or e-commerce site. This is called domain name forwarding or redirecting, and gives you an easy to remember online address for use in your marketing efforts. To start [web forwarding](#), log in to your account (where you registered your domain name) and change the settings on your domain name. Oftentimes, the provider you registered your domain name with can help you forward it.

SET UP A BRANDED EMAIL ADDRESS

Your web address can also be your email address. A branded email address can give you and your employees a more professional-looking branded channel for communication with customers, as well as free marketing for your company. [Seventy-four percent of consumers](#) say they would trust a company-branded email address more so than a free email address. It's easy and cost-effective to set up too. The provider you use to register your domain name can most likely help you set up your email address quickly and inexpensively. Read [Three Ways to Set Up Your Business Email Address](#) for a quick guide.

PROMOTE YOUR DOMAIN NAME

Consider adding your web address to social media platforms that your customers frequent and online directories where your business is listed. That way, no matter where your customers find you online, you can always drive them back to your main online presence. Likewise, include your web address on your business cards, ads, uniforms, brochures, newsletters and other collateral you give to customers. This is a great way to promote your brand offline and gives potential customers an easy way to learn more about, and connect with, your business online. Research shows that [64 percent of consumers](#) prefer to buy from businesses they can contact online.



OPTIMIZE YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Building your website, or establishing a social media account, is often the first step to bring your business into the digital age, but it doesn't stop there. It is important to update and maintain your online presence so it stays relevant for both customers and search engines. This section discusses some of the most common ways to optimize your website to help it become a useful marketing tool.

CREATE CONTENT

Once you have a platform for communicating with customers, use it. Tell your business's story and what you offer. There's plenty of advice out there about [content marketing](#) - here are a few of the more useful tips:

Know your audience: Give your customers what they're looking for. The point of content marketing is to get your audience to consume your content. But if it isn't valuable to them, they won't. Ask yourself:

- Who are your website visitors and social media followers?
- What would they find relevant and interesting?
- What can you provide that will make them not only engage with your content, but share it with their online networks, friends and family?

Understanding your audience and incorporating content specific to their needs and interests on your website and social media channels can help you stay relevant.



Create content goals: Are you looking to increase awareness of your business? Generate leads? Increase customer loyalty and trust? Create a list of goals for your content. Creating goals can help keep you focused on creating content that helps achieve your goals, and also provides a starting place to measure its success.

Showcase your expertise and value: Think about how you want your business to be known. If your restaurant is launching a new brunch menu, create and share your favorite brunch recipes. Or maybe you own a hair salon and can offer advice on the best hairstyles for people with curly hair. Everyone is an expert on something. Find your niche, be genuine and start writing!

Start a blog: A blog is a good way to add fresh content to your website without breaking the bank or taking up a lot of time. Posts don't have to be long to be successful, but you should have someone proofread your writing before posting. Images, photos or videos can help illustrate your point and usually [make posts more interesting and engaging](#) for readers. There are many free and low-cost options for professional-quality photos and images if you're not comfortable creating them yourself. Or, if writing isn't your thing, hire freelancers or curate content from other sites that your readers would find interesting. Just make sure you cite the source.

Measure frequently: In every facet of your business, metrics are helpful in recognizing trends, seizing opportunities and demonstrating return on investment. Content is no different. [Using web analytics to measure your content's success](#) is helpful to understanding what is working and - most importantly - what isn't. This allows you to adapt your content strategy as needed.

2 Tips for Online Selling Success

- **Include product descriptions and images:** Your customer isn't in a physical store to look at, touch or try on your product, so provide as much information as you can, like product specifications, along with top-quality, high-resolution images.
- **Get an [SSL Certificate](#):** If you are selling to customers online, you'll want to make sure their payment information is protected. An SSL (Secure Socket Layer) certificate encrypts the parts of your website that collect personal information, like credit card and customer form details, giving your customers the piece of mind that their data is protected.

OPTIMIZE YOUR WEBSITE FOR SEO

Ninety-one percent of consumers use the internet to search for local goods and services. So make sure customers can easily find your business in their search results by [optimizing your website for search engines](#).

Also known as search engine optimization (SEO), here are some basic tips to get started:

Use keywords in your website content: Search engines look for the best match to what online consumers look for, referred to as keywords. Your web content should contain lots of the keywords relevant to your business. Speak in the language of your customers; put yourself in their shoes and imagine the keywords they might use. A keyword research tool like Google AdWords or WordTracker will give you insight into keyword frequency (the more the better) and give you ideas for keywords you hadn't considered.

Update your content on a regular basis: Search engines consider new content to be more relevant. The older your content gets, the less the search engines will favor it, and the less it will help you rank on search engine results pages. Create a schedule for updating or adding new content. The more you update, the more search engines will visit your website, creating a positive effect on your rankings.

Share and promote your web address: Search engines place a high value on links from other sites to your website, as if that site is "voting" for you. Known as backlinking, this is considered to be a reflection of your "authority." Look for opportunities to link from legitimate websites, social media posts or other credible resources like small business agencies, [local directories](#) or reputable directories in your line of business. These links will also help drive traffic to your website as well.

Tip: Aim for High-Quality Links

Don't purchase links or fall for someone promising to get you a large number of links in a short period of time, as search engines will consider low-quality links as an attempt to trick them and you could be penalized.

How to Integrate Keywords Into Your Web Content

- Sprinkle keywords throughout your web content in a way that sounds natural, not forced. Stay away from jargon and acronyms.
- Use different variations of the same keyword, including verb tenses and plurals, as search engines consider these completely unconnected words (i.e., pet sitting, pet sitter, pet sitters, etc.).
- Use your keywords for page names and other website data.

Optimize for mobile: Mobile-friendly websites make it easier for users to search, read and interact with content on a mobile device's smaller screen. And with predictions that there will be 11.6 billion mobile-connected devices by 2020¹, enabling mobile search on your website helps to ensure the best visitor experience. Google's algorithm also favors websites that look and perform better on mobile devices, making them appear higher on search results.

If you are building your website from scratch and doing it yourself, look for a website builder platform with responsive web design. A responsive design/mobile-friendly website can display on tablets and desktops as well. Converting an existing website to a mobile-friendly site, though doable, is more complex. A web developer can be a good option.

It can take a few months for SEO to kick in, so the sooner you start, the sooner you can see results. Just remember that optimizing your website for search is a marathon, not a sprint. SEO should be an ongoing project. Search engines can be fickle and frequently change their algorithms, so don't get too tied up in following the trends. Instead, focus on building a website that provides a good experience for your customers.

Is Your Website Mobile-Friendly?

Take Google's **mobile-friendly test**.

If it's not, you can sometimes customize this yourself depending on your website software, or contact your website provider or developer and ask them how to update it. Opt for **responsive web design**, if available, which recognizes the users' type of device and enables the website to seamlessly adjust to any screen size, such as a desktop, tablet or smartphone.

¹ Mobile Future. The Rise of Mobile: 11.6 Billion Mobile-Connected Devices By 2020. Accessed Oct. 31, 2016.

FIND, MARKET AND SELL

Ninety-one percent of consumers look for local goods or services online, but with millions of websites and social pages, you can't expect customers to come running to you. You have to get out and actively find them. In this section, we explore how search engine marketing, social media marketing, multiple domain names and email marketing can help you find new customers.

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

Search engine marketing (SEM) is the practice of purchasing ads on search engines. It is also called paid search and sometimes referred to as cost-per-click (CPC) or pay-per-click (PPC) marketing because most search ads are sold on a CPC/PPC basis. SEM functions similarly to SEO by focusing on keywords. Advertisers bid on their desired keywords so that their website appears when a user searches on that term in the paid advertising section of the search results page. SEM can be cost effective because you determine the amount you're willing to spend (per click and/or per day).

Depending on the competition in your industry, relying on unpaid SEO may leave your business low in the search rankings. By paying for SEM, you have more control over the specific keywords that will promote you, as well as where your website appears on the search results page.

Don't be intimidated by search engine marketing; it can be an effective tool that can bring customers to your website. Some of the larger search engines, like Google, Bing and Yahoo, have fairly simple programs to get started. Like anything new, start small with paid SEM and add complexity (and budget) as you learn more and see results over time.



Advantages of SEM

- **Raising Exposure:** If you are falling behind with organic SEO or you want to hit the competition, use paid SEM to get your name and your website above the organic rankings.
- **Boosting Promotions or Sales Events:** When you need a lot of traffic in a short time, SEM is a good choice because it will raise your exposure for the length of your campaign. You can control costs by the duration of the SEM program.
- **Discovering Effective Keywords:** SEM can help you identify the most effective keywords and phrases to drive traffic to your website. Subsequently, you can use these keywords in SEO by peppering your website with them.



SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

While social media platforms may have originally been built as tools for networking only, they are proving to be successful platforms for companies to find and connect with new customers. Nearly two-thirds of American adults use social media, an almost tenfold jump in the past decade², so try marketing to your customers and prospects through paid social media advertising. Each social media platform has paid promotional programs unique to their site that are fairly easy to manage, and many are specifically geared toward small business owners. Here's an overview of some of the most popular sites:

FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM

With more than 1 billion active Facebook users, it's no wonder businesses like to advertise here³. You also get a two-for-one deal because Facebook now owns Instagram. You should set up a Facebook Business page to start advertising on both platforms, and think about your objectives. Do you want to drive traffic to your website or to an event? Do you want more followers and engagement on your social site? You can promote your Facebook page, a specific Facebook post or video, or your website from your business Facebook page. You can also promote ads on Instagram through your Facebook page. Users see your ads in their News Feed or on the right-hand column of the page.

PROS:

- Costs are pretty reasonable, which allows companies of any size or budget to easily test ads out.
- Depending on complexity, ads can be launched quickly.
- You can target your audience with detailed requirements like age range, gender, location and interests.
- Multiple variations of your ad can be created and tracked for performance.
- You set your daily budget so you can plan for exactly how much you are spending.
- There are a variety of different ad types to choose from.

CONS:

- You're on your own. While Facebook has a fairly robust instructional section, they do not have customer service or account managers to provide guidance or advice. However, it is fairly inexpensive, so a little bit of trial and error won't break the bank.
- The ad types and processes for posting them frequently change, so it pays to stay on top of the latest Facebook news.
- While Facebook makes a lot of data available about your ad performance, it is up to you to track and interpret that performance to optimize your campaigns.
- You'll have to be creative to make your ad stand out as advertising overload is a rising concern.

² Pew Research Center. [Social Media Usage: 2005-2015](#). Accessed Oct. 31, 2016.

³ Facebook. [Company Info](#). Accessed Oct. 31, 2016.

LINKEDIN

If you're a business-to-business company, this platform may be for you. With nearly 450 million users in more than 200 countries, two new members join the LinkedIn community approximately every second.⁴ LinkedIn gives you the ability to sponsor posts or create ads that link directly back to your website and network with prospects and customers.

PROS:

- You'll get step-by-step instructions on how to create your ad.
- Like Facebook, you can create different ad variations in one campaign and track performance.
- You can target your audience with detailed specifications, including location, job title, age, gender, current employer and education.

CONS:

- LinkedIn ads are often more pricey than ads on other social media platforms. However, for the right campaign, the extra expense may be worth it, especially if you find you get better leads or more engaged customers. Take a look at performance of your ads to make the right determination.
- While LinkedIn makes data available about your ad performance, it is up to you to track and interpret that performance to optimize your campaigns. You can get assistance from an account manager if you meet the spend requirements.

⁴ LinkedIn. [Company Info](#). Accessed Oct. 31, 2016.



TWITTER

Twitter has approximately 330 million active users around the world, posting 500 million tweets per day. It is a great place to attract website visitors by posting brief, interesting posts about a topic and linking back to more information on your website. Many businesses use Twitter advertising for lead generation activities by enticing Twitter users to visit their site and fill out forms to receive a piece of content, view a video on demand or subscribe to an online service. You can also promote your Twitter handle to gain followers and grow your customer community.

PROS:

- You can target by demographics, keywords, phrases, users who visit your page and followers of a particular user – great for migrating competitors customers to your website.
- Basic setup is simple and self-explanatory.
- Ads run almost immediately.
- Typically less expensive than alternate PPC options.

CONS:

- While Twitter makes data available about your ad performance, it is up to you to track and interpret that performance to optimize your campaigns. You can get assistance from an account manager if you meet the spend requirements.
- With so much content constantly streaming on Twitter, there is a lot of competition to get your target audience to focus on your ad.



YOUTUBE

Video is one of the most consumed types of content on the internet today. If you [use video to promote your business](#) and its offerings, consider advertising on YouTube with its more than one billion users worldwide.⁵ With YouTube advertising, you can create display ads, in-video ads or promote your own videos.

PROS:

- You can create targeted campaigns by choosing topics, keywords or demographics.
- Only pay when a user elects to watch your video.
- Since YouTube is owned by Google, advertising is integrated with Google AdWords, so it can be easy to align your SEM advertising strategy with your YouTube advertising strategy.

CONS:

- You don't have any control in choosing what content ads appear before or next to yours, so there's the potential that a competitor's video will appear right next to your ad.
- Videos can be more labor-intensive and time-consuming to create. But the payoff can be big if done correctly.

⁵ YouTube. [Company Info](#). Accessed Oct 31, 2016.



EMAIL MARKETING

Although social media and mobile marketing have received a lot of attention, email marketing still remains one of the cornerstones of digital marketing. Email marketing may also help boost customer loyalty with your brand, drive business to on- and offline channels, integrate multi-marketing channels, and fuel the growth of social networks.

Here are some [email marketing tips](#) to help you get started:

Get subscribers: Building your customer list is probably one of the most important parts of email marketing.

Tips for collecting email addresses:

- Collect emails during your checkout process (in-store or online).
- Collect email addresses at events.
- Promote an online contest – like a free giveaway – through social media and have entrants sign up or submit with their email address.
- Add an opt-in form to the homepage of your website or blog.
- Add an email signup call-to-action as a custom tab on your social media page.
- Partner with a complementary business and have them promote your email newsletter.

One thing to remember: While building your email subscriber list, it is important to make sure that customers/prospects opt in directly to receive communication from your company.

Choose an email service provider: Providers can range from easy to use web-based solutions to robust on-premise providers. As a small business getting started, consider a solution that will help you grow, is cost effective and doesn't lock you into a lengthy contract. Be sure to know your number of subscribers (or projected number) and in some cases, how often you plan to email them. Most email service providers base their pricing plans on these factors. Some popular solutions include iContact, Constant Contact, MailChimp and Campaign Monitor. At a minimum, choose a provider that can help you enable automated follow-up, so when a customer signs up for your email newsletter, your provider will send an immediate confirmation or "welcome" email with additional information about your business.



Create email content: Always put your customers first by marketing the benefits they will receive from choosing your company's products or services. You have about three seconds to capture the attention of your readers when they open an email, so keep your emails short and simple.⁶ Your content should deepen the relationship with your audience by providing them valuable information in a timely manner. And use a [company-branded email address](#) (through the domain name you've registered) to establish credibility.

Tips to write effective and engaging emails:

- Make sure your brand name is included in the FROM field.
- Keep subject lines at 35 characters or less (and don't use all caps).
- Establish the purpose of your email early as it will set the tone for what your subscribers can expect from the communication (i.e., promoting a sale/product, testimonials, running a contest).
- Provide a call-to-action that is clear and enticing.
- Use short sentences and bulleted text.
- Personalize when possible.
- Make sure to always include a link back to your website, social sharing links and/or 'Forward to a Friend' options.

Knowing when to send: Unfortunately, there isn't a scientific method to determine how often you should send, or what day or time will get you the highest engagement rate. The best way to determine these factors is to simply test.

Follow these steps to get started:

1. Select a few different customer subsets in your subscriber list.
2. Establish some baseline metrics, such as times, subjects and content you think will work best.
3. Create and schedule your test emails to the identified subsets.
4. Measure and analyze the results to determine which subsets had the highest engagement rate. What times worked? What content produced results?
5. Take your best test results and replicate - send to the rest of your list that didn't **receive your test emails**.

Tip: Nurture Your Subscribers

Once you have a subscriber, nurture that new relationship. It's easy to lose customers through poorly executed email marketing, so be very thoughtful in your communications and send follow-up-emails – an automated email service can help.

⁶ Media Post. [Email Marketers Have Only 12 Words to Capture Readers](#). Accessed Oct. 31, 2016.

MARKETING WITH MULTIPLE DOMAIN NAMES

Most small businesses don't realize that they can register multiple domain names to enhance marketing efforts. In fact, it's a tactic that many big brands use for multiple reasons, including helping to ensure customers can quickly find them and avoid confusion, and SEO. They also utilize this tactic to highlight specific attributes of their businesses and to support major online marketing or product initiatives.

Registering domain names for specific campaigns: Many brands register taglines for campaigns as domain names, in addition to their brand and product names. For example, a cake shop's main website might be bobscakefactory.com. If the business launches a campaign to promote business in their home state of Texas, they could register another domain name like bestbakeryintexas.com and redirect visitors to their main website. The cake shop might also want to start a campaign highlighting different cakes in their product line and register cakesfordinner.com, which would send consumers to a separate landing page.

Registering domain names to highlight keywords and enhance SEO: Realtor Barbara Morales, owner of Delaware-based Barbara Morales Associates, differentiated her business by registering and marketing additional, descriptive domain names containing keywords, such as "waterfront homes" and "retirement," to expand beyond traditional homebuyers. As a result, over 90 percent of subsequent home sale leads came through her websites, and she was able to successfully expand her business into selling vacation and retirement homes.



You may want to include a specific geographic location (one that you are targeting or in which you have a specialty) to make the domain name descriptive and search-engine friendly, like Morales did with her WaterfrontHomesDelaware.com, SellingRehobothBeach.com, RetirementInDelaware.com and GolfCourseHomesDelaware.com domain names. Recent [research from Verisign and comScore](#) revealed that having keyword-rich domain names can help with getting more clicks. That's because internet search users are almost twice as likely to click on a keyword-rich domain name that includes at least one of their search terms, compared to a domain name that does not contain any of the keywords.

Registering domain names for brand consistency and expansion: Because your online presence is so important, whether you are supporting an established business or building a new one, you need to ensure customers can find you quickly and easily. Many companies register several variations of their domain name, on some of the most common extensions like .com and .net, to help ensure customers trying to reach their site won't be confused if they accidentally misspell the company name or use the wrong extension.

You can also register domain names in preparation for an expansion into other product offerings, or even a different town or state. You may be starting off locally, but if things go well, your business may expand regionally, nationally or even globally in a few years. Being proactive now and registering domain names that correspond with your plans for the future can pave the way for future growth.

Building a [domain portfolio](#) requires a mix of strategy and creativity. By using the tips above to [find additional great domain names](#), you are well on your way to growing your brand online.

You can redirect any additional domain names you register to your current website, or if you have the resources, build a specific website that supports each domain name.



CONCLUSION

Now that you have the foundation needed to grow your online presence, determine where you will begin.

For many businesses, this next phase of your online journey can make or break your plan for success. Remember: the online business world is about trial and error, so try out the different methods discussed in this e-book to see what works for your business. Start out small, test, and then optimize to achieve the results you want. Foster the customer relationships you have already garnered, and work to grow new ones.

And if you haven't already, document a business plan with goals and objectives, that also includes a step-by-step timeline for how you will achieve them. Where do you want your business to be in the next three to five years? This will help you drive your business's online strategy.

For more advice on how to optimize your presence and expand your reach on the web, visit [TipstoGrowOnline.com](https://www.tipstogrowonline.com).





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