

Are you using your web site effectively?

Campbell River Mirror - Published: January 27, 2008 5:00 PM



Campbell River Mirror - Published: January 27, 2009 5:00 PM

Many small business owners struggle with the seemingly overwhelming task of managing their web site and finding the time to keep it content rich and current.

But entrepreneurs have embraced the fact that not only is the physical location for a business important, but having a virtual address for their customers is as well. And given the importance that this business tool can play in promoting your products or services when done well, the benefits of an effective small business website can result in sales and new contacts and help brand your business further supporting your marketing and PR efforts.

Discussions around website development have been a key focus as the chamber prepares to launch our own new website. It's been an interesting process that involved a lot of comparative analysis of other sites and discussions with our chamber members on what they considered valuable and wanted to see. In response to that research, highlights from the new site are focused around small business management resources and tools for the new business start-up through to developed businesses, enhanced member profiles, on line surveys and polls, new events, news and advocacy sections and greater opportunities to promote and showcase our member's success and promote local business priorities and initiatives.

As we talked to those small business owners and web site developers, there were some common aspects of web site management that they identified that could help small business owners gain the most value from their web sites. And although we can all recognize there are too many different factors that can impact web success, as a general rule, here are a few of those captured from that feedback and some of my own personal observations:

Content is key. Almost all the search engines scan a site's content and the more content you have on your site the more the search engines can scan and the more your site will be identified when potential customers and clients are looking for your products and services. Many people measure a web site's success by the number of visitors it gets – so ask yourself: why would prospective customers come to your web site and what value-added content can you put on your website to differentiate your business, introduce products and services to new customers, increase revenue and communicate more effectively with new and current customers and clients.

Keep it current. Having lots of content is great but if it is all two years old, it's not going to look like your site is much of a priority. The search engines actually track this. They monitor how frequently your site changes as they visit it for indexing. The more often it changes, the better your rank in the freshness category.

Links both in and out must be relevant. If you are going to link to someone and/or ask them to link to you, ask yourself: is it relevant?

It's better to have relevant links placed throughout your web site – on only those pages that specifically relate to the topic that the page being linked to.

Organize and structure your web site intuitively. Your customers and potential customers are frequently rushing to find the specific information they are looking for. They rarely read through web pages but rather scan headings and bulleted lists to find the detailed sections of interest. Prudent choice of URLs will impact your web site's performance. Professional web designers will already know this but if you are using a content management system to build your web site, or portions of it, it is important to understand the significance of the URL used to access pages on your web site.

Design does matter. Your web site is an important aspect of your overall brand identity but remember that once you have made that first impression, visitors to your site will move immediately to asking: is this site giving me the information I need and can I find it quickly.

It's worth the time and investment to talk with web site developers to create a site that will lead your business to understand your customer's wants and needs.