How to Get
YOUR BUSINESS
Online

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

For any company doing business today, setting up an online identity in today's digital world is essential. Whether it's through a social media page, a company-branded email or a website, an online presence will help you attract new customers and strengthen relationships with your existing ones.

By engaging customers online, you can find new customers and grow your business. The advantages the internet offers are limitless and can help your business not only get off the ground, but thrive in a competitive marketplace.

Get started, and take your business online in just three steps:

1. **Register a Domain Name**
2. **Set Up a Company-Branded Email**
3. **Create Your Online Space**

According to the Verisign 2015 U.S. online survey, 91 percent of U.S. consumers use the internet to look for local goods and services.[1] So the question is not "if your business should be online," but "what your customers will find when they look for you online?"

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1 Verisign. 5 Reasons Every Small Business Needs a Website.

Register a Domain Name

A domain name is your brand, or **business's identity**, online. It can be used for many things, including a website address, a company-branded email or connecting your web address to your social media page.

Your domain name plays a critical role in your business's success, so consider the following five tips when registering a domain name:

1. THINK KEYWORDS

Your domain name doesn't have to be your business name. Try using keywords that describe your business, services or brand to help customers find and remember you. Be descriptive - for example, if you're based in Texas and want to be known for the unsurpassed quality of your baked goods, "BestBakeryInTexas.com" is a great option. This works equally well for consulting or service-oriented businesses too. For example, a law firm may want to add a keyword to specify the location it services, or an area of specialty, such as 'real estate,' to better communicate the firm's expertise.

Internet search users are almost twice as likely to click on a domain name that includes at least one of their search terms compared to a domain name that does not contain any of their search terms.[2]

2 Verisign. How Keyword-Rich Domain Names Positively Affect Search Click-Through Results.

2. BE MEMORABLE

There are millions of domain names out there so make sure yours stands out and represents your brand. Consider a name that is:

- **Creative:** Create your own word by compounding two whole words, blending parts of two words together, tweaking a word or using a tagline.

- **Long:** Don't be afraid to have a longer domain name. In fact, the average .com domain name is 13 characters in length.[3] Descriptive names that are naturally longer in length can be memorable and great for branding.

If you need inspiration, try a name suggestion tool or bounce ideas off of friends and family.

3. DECIDE WHAT COMES AFTER THE DOT

What comes after the dot in a web address can be just as important as what comes before it.[4] As a small business, it's beneficial to choose a domain extension (e.g., .com, .net, .tv) that customers know and trust. Domain extensions can have specific uses, so make sure to choose one that is aligned with your business's goals. For instance, if your website showcases a lot of online video, then .tv may be a great choice for you. Many businesses choose .com or .net because they are the recognized standards for businesses online. Although .org is commonly associated with non-profit organizations, many charitable groups also use a .com or .net because of its global recognition and credibility.

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4. CONSIDER MULTIPLE DOMAIN NAMES

Many companies register more than one domain name to build their online presence, including names that:

- **Highlight a specialty niche or attribute**: Say you're a realtor and want to expand your customer base beyond traditional homebuyers. You could register additional, descriptive domain names with keywords like "vacation home," "rentals" or "retirement homes" as well as target customers in a specific, geographic location like "VacationHomesinLongBeach.com."

- **Support online marketing campaigns**: Register domain names that align with your specific marketing campaigns or target audiences. Some companies even register product names as domain names.

- **Protect your brand**: If you're registering "www.mommasbagel.com," you may want to consider registering "mommasbagel" in another popular domain extension like .net as well. Additionally, think about variations of the name, like "mommiesbagels.com" and "mommysbagels.com."

Used in conjunction with your main domain name, multiple domain names can give you greater flexibility to target certain markets, market specific campaigns and protect your brand. If you have the resources, build a specific landing page or website for your additional domain names, or simply redirect the traffic back to your social media page or main website.

5. SELECT A REGISTRAR

Once you've decided on a domain name, it can take as little as five minutes and the cost of lunch to register it with a domain name retailer, known as a "registrar." Many registrars also provide services for creating a company-branded email, connecting your domain name as a web address to your social media page, and building a website.

Consider these items when choosing a registrar:

1. **Price**: The cost of a domain name registration can vary from one registrar to another. Take advantage of sales if you can.

2. **ICANN accreditation**: There are thousands of registrars, so choose one (or a reseller of a registrar) that is accredited by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). ICANN oversees the domain name registration system and provides a set of guidelines and rules for registrars to follow.

3. **Contract duration**: The initial registration of a domain name can vary from one year to 10 years. Make sure you fully understand the terms you are signing up for.

4. **Customer support**: Look for a registrar that's easy to contact and has a solid customer service record. You'll want a registrar to act quickly when your site goes down or provide a fast resolution when there's an issue.

5. **Additional services**: Many registrars are full-service shops. They offer additional services like website building and hosting, email services, SSL certificates and search engine optimization (SEO) tools. This is ideal for a business owner who wants to keep all web-related services in one place.

STEP 2
Set Up a Company-Branded Email

Now that you've registered a domain name for your business, use it to be your company-branded source of communications to your clientele. It's easy to overlook the use of a personalized, branded email given the myriad of free email options available today. But for small companies in today's competitive market, using your brand name is how one business can stand out from another.

A company-branded email:

- **Evokes professionalism**: It's an effective way to help your business look more professional and legitimate to prospective customers.

- **Builds credibility**: It's a great way to show potential customers that you're successful and established, thereby increasing your business's credibility.

- **Creates a 'bigger' image**: You have the option to use multiple email addresses for different aspects of the business (e.g., billing@bobscakefactory.com, info@bobscakefactory.com, etc.).

- **Promotes brand awareness**: Every time you send out an email, you're promoting your business's name, not your free email provider's name.

- **Is cost-effective**: Typically, the cost and effort for branded email is low. It can often be bundled with the registration of a domain name or added on later for a small monthly fee.

According to the Verisign 2015 U.S. Online Survey, 74 percent of consumers would trust a company-branded email address more so than a free email address.[5]

How to Set Up a Company-Branded Email Address

1. WITH YOUR CURRENT EMAIL PROVIDER

If you're accustomed to your current email provider, you may still use it with your new company-branded email address. When you register your domain name, you'll have the option to create a business email and then redirect it to an existing email account like Gmail. Simple to set up, you can manage your personal and professional emails in one central location.

Here are instructions on how to redirect your email address from some of the most popular email services:

✉ **Outlook**

✉ **Apple Mail**

✉ **Gmail**

✉ **Yahoo Mail**

2. WITH YOUR REGISTRAR OR WEB HOSTING COMPANY

The company you registered your domain name with may offer a business email service for a low-monthly fee. This is a convenient, more comprehensive way to manage your company-branded email and is relatively easy to set up. Reasonably priced, this option only requires you to manage one provider and typically includes customer service.

3. WITH YOUR ONLINE OFFICE SUITE

If you're in need of other online business tools, packages like Google Apps for Work and Office 365 Small Business may allow you to purchase tools a la carte, such as document editing, online storage, video conferencing and secure file sharing.

Even though all three of the above methods are possible solutions, take into consideration how your business operates (e.g., email dependency, number of staff, budget, etc.) and choose the option that best suits your needs.

CREATE YOUR ONLINE SPACE

The most effective way to promote your business online is to have a website and engage on social media, but this isn't always realistic for a small business right off the bat. Even if you can't do both initially, you have several approaches to creating your online presence.

Choose a scenario to get started:

✏ **Scenario 1:** I'm not online. I'm starting from scratch.

👍 **Scenario 2:** My business has a social media page.

💻 **Scenario 3:** I want to create a website.

SCENARIO 1: I'M NOT ONLINE. I'M STARTING FROM SCRATCH.

Get your business online as quickly as possible to reap the benefits of the internet. This can be done with a social media page or online directory that acts as a temporary website for your business. The good news is that you can get something up and running in about 30 minutes. Once that's established, your ultimate goal should be creating a website, which provides the most control, credibility and flexibility in marketing your business.

1: Choose a social media site to represent your business and reach new customers.

There are many options (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube), so think about where most of your customers already are. Here are some for you to consider by business type:

- **Professional services: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter**
- **Retail: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube**
- **Hospitality: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube**
- **Home services: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube**

If you're looking for something more general, the top search engines have online directories of businesses (similar to the yellow pages). Consider free registration on one of the following:

- **Google My Business**
- **Yahoo Local**
- **Bing Places for Business**

Or get more targeted and consider setting up a presence on some of the many industry-specific online directories like:

- **Professional services: FindLaw, AccountantsWorld, Care.com, Upwork**
- **Retail: eBay, Etsy, Yelp**
- **Hospitality: Yelp, TripAdvisor**
- **Home services: Angie's List, Houzz**

2: Once you've set up your business's social media page or online directory, it's time to set up the domain name you've registered as your company-branded web address.

This allows you to use your social media page as a temporary stand-in for a website, so when customers type in your web address, it takes them directly to your social media page or online directory. This process is called web forwarding, or URL redirecting, and it's just like forwarding email. The great thing about this option is when you do create a website in the future, you already have a web address that your customers know!

How to Forward Your Web Address

(all registrars are a little different, but should be fairly similar)

1. Log in to your account (where you registered the domain name)

2. Find "**Domains**" and click on "**Manage**"

3. Click on the domain name you would like to redirect

4. Look for the "**Domain Forwarding**" or "**Forwarding**" section

5. Click "**Add New**"

6. Enter the URL of the social media or online directory page you'd like to redirect your domain name to in the "**Forward To**" or "**Destination URL**" field. (Remove the "http://www." or https://www.) If there is a forwarding setting option, select "**Forwarding Only**"

7. Save your changes

Once you're ready to create a website, go to Scenario 3.

According to the Verisign
2015 Online Survey, for small businesses exclusively using social media as their online presence, connecting a domain name to your social media page may increase web traffic. In fact, 60 percent of consumers said they were more likely to visit a business on Facebook if they could get there by using a custom domain name.[6]

SCENARIO 2: MY BUSINESS HAS A SOCIAL MEDIA PAGE.

A website is recommended for all businesses because it maximizes the benefits you can gain from the internet, and offers the most control, credibility and flexibility in marketing your business. If you're not ready for a website though, why not redirect your domain name to your social media page? It's an option that's quick to implement and comes with immediate benefits.

All you need to do is register a domain name and connect it as a web address to your social media page. When customers type in your web address, they'll be taken directly to your social media page. This gives your business a memorable web address you can promote from the beginning, and when you're ready for a website, customers already know your address. This simple technique is referred to as web forwarding, or URL redirecting, and is similar in concept to forwarding an email.

How to Forward Your Web Address to Your Social Media Page

(all registrars are a little different, but should be fairly similar)

1. Log into your account (where you registered the domain name)

2. Find "**Domains**" and click on "**Manage**"

3. Click on the domain name you would like to redirect

4. Look for the "**Domain Forwarding**" or "**Forwarding**" section

5. Click "**Add New**"

6. Enter the URL of the social media or online directory page you'd like to redirect your domain name to in the "**Forward To**" or "**Destination URL**" field. (Remove the "http://www." or https://www.) If there is a forwarding setting option, select "**Forwarding Only**"

7. Save your changes

It's highly recommended that you create a website at some point in the future. Even a simple website can prove to be very beneficial for your business. Read how to create a website in Scenario 3.

The number of businesses that use .com and .net domain names to redirect to some of the most popular global social media sites has increased year over year since 2014.[7]

7 Verisign. Q4 2015 Domain Name Industry Brief.

13

SCENARIO 3: I WANT TO CREATE 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 doesn't provide the same level of marketing opportunities or credibility that a website does. In fact, 92 percent of consumers prefer to get information from a business's website rather than their social media page, and 77 percent of consumers believe a website makes a business appear more credible.[8]

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. Many of these elements can be combined on one page to keep things simple.

If you plan to open an online store, or your business requires showing videos or other multimedia, then a more sophisticated website may be needed.

How to Build Your Website

1. Do-it-Yourself Website Builder:

There is a bevy of options, both paid and free, that allow you to create a professional, high-quality website yourself. Developed for the non-technical user, tools such as Moonfruit, Wix and Weebly advertise affordable packages with easy-to-use templates that let you point-and-click your way to a new website. Customer support is usually available as well.

Most website builders are great options if you want to start simple with just a few pages, and offer varying levels of upgrades as you scale your website.

For a checklist that outlines critical steps to building a website, click here.

Seventy-seven percent of small businesses say websites are an effective online marketing tool for both attracting new customers and engaging existing customers.[9]

8 Verisign 2015 Online Survey.

9 Constant Contact. Customer Engagement a Major Focus of Small Business Technology According to Constant Contact Technology Pulse Survey. Accessed on April 13, 2016.

2. Hire an Expert:

You may prefer to rely on an experienced web developer to walk you through the process. Hiring an expert is recommended if you want a sophisticated, complex website, or do not have the time or inclination to do it yourself. However, this option is usually more expensive.

What's the Right Approach for Me?

If you need help deciding, answer the questions below to define your business needs:

1. What is the purpose of your website? (e.g., blog, e-commerce site, online brochure)

2. What is critical for your website today? Remember you can always start small and scale up as you grow. Think about what your site requires, such as:

   - Number of website pages
   - Amount of website storage (images and videos mean more storage space)
   - Tools, such as online forms, blogs, customer reviews, maps, slideshows
   - Links to/integration with social media
   - Video and/or audio players
   - Shopping cart
   - Tech support

Again, think about your vision for your website and what it will require. This can help you decide whether a DIY or outside expert approach is best for you.

Now You're Ready to Get Online!

Good luck creating your online presence! It could be the best investment you make for your business. In the end, you should aim for a website and social media presence that work together. Think of your website as the center of your online presence where your customers go to get the full picture of your business. All other marketing activities, including social media, advertising and email marketing, should drive customers to your website to engage, learn and hopefully buy.

Once you're online, go to TipstoGrowOnline.com for resources on optimizing and marketing your website to find new customers.

How to Start Selling Online

Will your website be your online store? You have the flexibility to build in e-commerce functionality (features to equip your site for online sales) right at the start, or later on. Many of the do-it-yourself website builders have an e-commerce package that you can add on at any time, or a web developer can integrate the functionality for you. In general, here are three options:
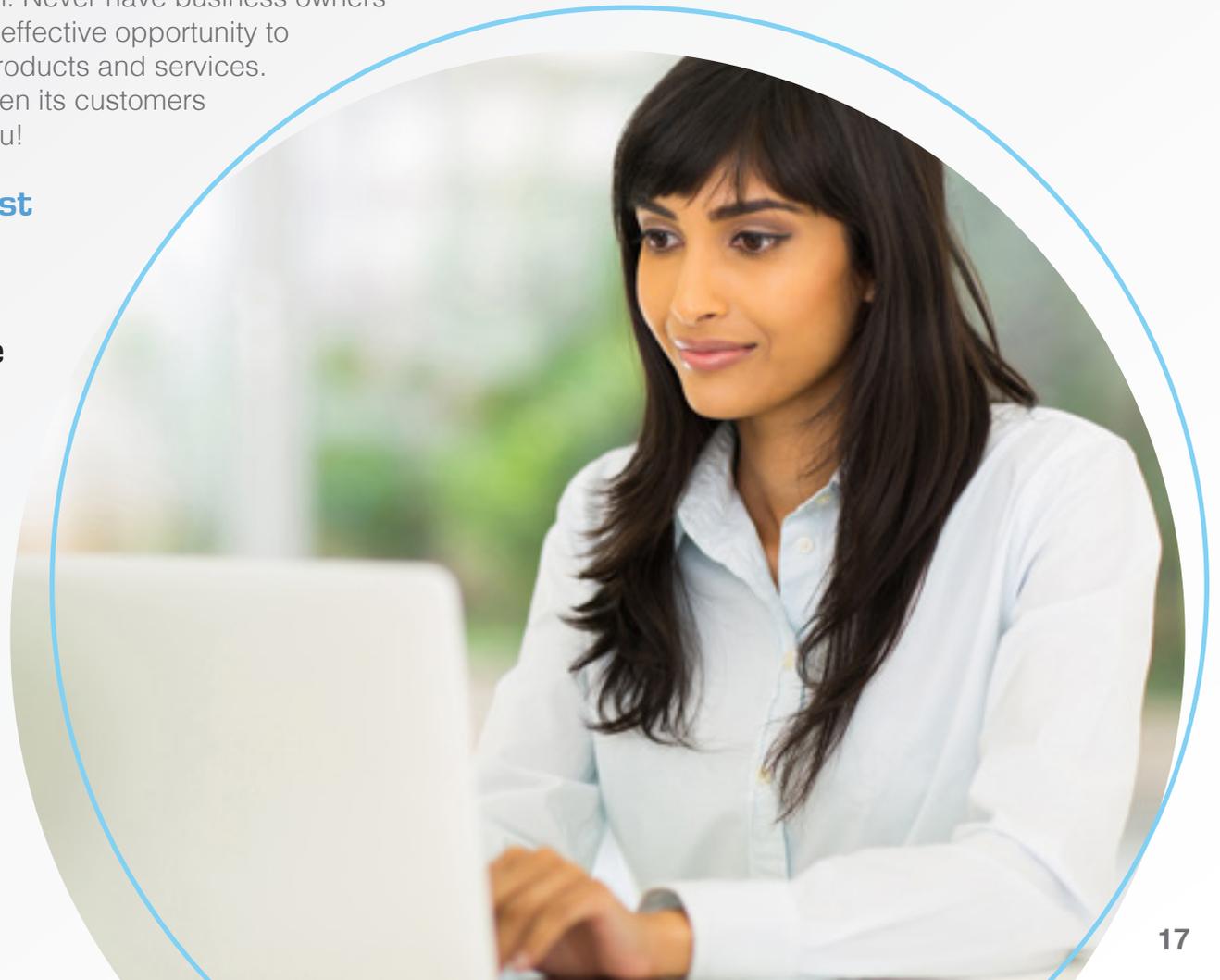
1. **Simple**: You're selling a single product and only need a way for customers to pay, like a Paypal "Buy Now" button.

2. **Hosted**: You need more than a payment button, but don't want to install and maintain comprehensive e-commerce software. Consider using a hosted provider like Shopify or Bigcommerce that allows you to create a store and host it on their server for a monthly fee (like leasing).

3. **Comprehensive**: If you need a robust shopping cart, consider using a commercial software or open source (free) product like OpenCart. When selecting a product, determine if it supports the payment methods you need, what type of support and help is provided, and how frequently the product is upgraded.

Conclusion

Today, small business owners have many options for starting and growing their business. A critical element of success is to establish a professional, legitimate brand for your business. An online presence is essential in today's world where people often turn to the internet first for information about businesses and products. Creating an online presence can be simple, relatively inexpensive and easy to maintain. Never have business owners had such a clear, easy and relatively cost-effective opportunity to reach a global marketplace for so many products and services. It's amazing how a business can thrive when its customers only need to lift a finger to connect with you!

Once you're online, read The First Five Things to Do After Getting Your Business Online. And visit TipstoGrowOnline.com for more advice on how to optimize your presence and expand your reach on the web.

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