

## 10 Ways to Make Your Web Site More Effective

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The Internet is becoming the mainstream technology for business-to-business transactions. Many small businesses have responded to this by developing their own Web sites. However, studies have shown most Web sites are ineffective online brochures that don't help the company make money or help with marketing.

**SUCCESS TIPS.** Having an effective Web site starts with goals and good planning. You need to have clearly defined e-commerce goals and a game plan to implement them. Once you do this, the rest will fall into place.

Below are ten proven ways to make your Web site more effective.

1. **Business Model.** Selling on the Web is different than in the real world. Customers want 24/7 service and there are many more (direct and indirect) competitors to deal with. Your business model (value proposition) needs to reflect the needs of your online customers.
2. **Communications Plan.** Effective Web sites start with well-designed communications plans. These plans identify the site's potential audience groups and what types of messages will be targeted to them. Most sites skip this step and the result is confused users.
3. **Differentiate or Die.** There are over 1 billion Web sites so it's easy for your site to get lost in cyberspace. Being on the Web may make it easier to get access to your business but it also opens the door to many new competitors. One way to break out of the pack is to have a clearly defined niche market that you service. The reality is you have about 10 seconds to clearly communicate what your company does and its value proposition to a buyer before they lose interest.
4. **Accept Online Payments.** An article notes "65% of small-company Web sites do not let customers buy online" (USA Today, August 28, 2001). Being able to get paid online gives your site credibility, not to mention being able to get paid faster.
5. **Content.** Having "how to" information encourages repeat visits and helps you "up-sell" and "cross-sell" your goods and/or services. Make sure the content loads quickly and is up-to-date to keep up interest.
6. **Newsletter.** An online newsletter is an excellent way to drive traffic to your Web site. Online newsletters also have the benefit of being able to be easily forwarded to others via instant messaging, which increases your reach.

7. **Community.** Having a message (discussion) board is an excellent way of encouraging interaction with your customers. Web content and an online newsletter help provide starting points for discussions.
8. **Exchanges.** No Web site should be an island. That's why it's a good idea to join an online exchange or portal that lets potential buyers in a particular commodity area or industry find you more easily.
9. **Globalize.** The Internet is international so your site should include such features as metric system units and the ability to get paid in foreign currency. You should also consider having non-English content to meet the needs of your customers.
10. **Updates.** Web content can become quickly dated. That's why it is a good idea to do quarterly reviews of your site to make sure everything is up-to-date.

Success on the Internet is not easy or guaranteed. However, using the above tips can help you improve the odds. Remember, your Web site is often the first contact many people have with your company. Make it count.

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