

## **So You Want A Website, Right?**

*By Wayne Smallman, Octane Interactive*

This might come as something of a shock, given that I'm a web designer and developer, but the first few questions I ask a prospective new client are designed to determine whether they actually need a website at all. I know, weird, eh? Anyway, the thing is, there's a surprising number of businesses out there who feel pressured into particular marketing activities, just because that's what their competitors are doing. If I must sound like your dad, chiding you for doing the self same thing as one of your daft friends: would you walk off a cliff if they did?

OK, that's probably unfair, but the point is made. Having a website, is essentially extending the remit of your marketing efforts. In doing so, you're taking on more marketing activities and committing yourself to those activities over the long term. Simply having a website isn't good enough - prospective clients aren't psychic, nor do they rely on the search engines magically propelling your website onto their computer screens.

Having a website is merely the start of a long process that requires effort, perseverance, dedication, patience. Sound familiar? Yep, it's just like anything else in life, love and business. But things have moved a little since websites were de rigueur; we now have web logs (aka blogs) to contend with. And like their website cousins, they too need constant love and affection.

So, if I sat down with you right now, I'd ask:

- Who are you selling to / aiming at? If you're selling to the elderly, it's less likely the web is the primary place to be and more likely you need a radio, TV or print advert. But if you're selling sportswear at discount prices or health foods to a younger audience, then you have a good market to aim at.

- What is it that you offer? If you're a carpenter or a carpet fitter who only offers services to small catchment area, a website might not serve you well. But if you're selling medical products to healthcare specialists, then we have something to build an offering around.

- Who would be managing your website / blog? If you and your team are all really busy with other things, you're going to struggle to keep the momentum going. But if you have a good team of people, with a plan and a long-term strategy, then we're in business.

Of course, there are more questions to ask, but those three are of the make-or-break variety - if we don't get the right answers to those questions, it's unlikely that the other questions will really matter. The web is a growing medium and a ripe opportunity for a growing number of businesses and business types, all over the world. But it really does pay to do your homework first, because the alternative could be a very costly lesson to learn.

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