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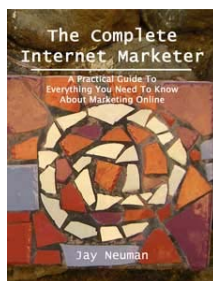
The Complete
Internet Marketer

How To Build A Small Business Website

*Chapter 18 from
The Complete Internet
Marketer*

Jay Neuman

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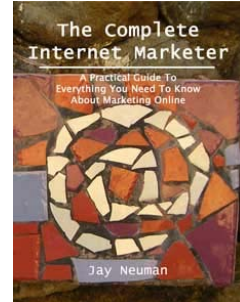
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Chapter 18

Building A Successful Small Business Website

In this chapter, you will learn . . .

- How to define the online business model for a Small Business website
- How to measure success for a Small Business website
- How to design a successful user experience for a Small Business website
- The tactics used by successful Small Business websites

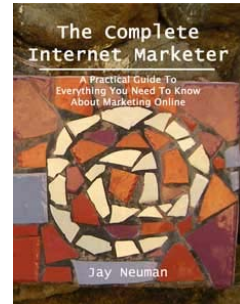
Finding Customers In A Digital Haystack The Decision Software, Inc. Story

Jeff Fowler owns the marketing database company Decision Software, Inc. (DSI). In 1999, their flagship product was a campaign management system Jeff designed. It was called "TopDog." Since then they have replaced it with a new product, MarketWide. DSI was a small company, with only nine employees. Still, TopDog outperformed similar software offerings by the largest vendors in the Database Marketing business. Plus, their expert staff and nimble approach to problem solving allowed DSI to create a fully working prototype system, with the client's own data, in the same time it took their larger competitors to write a sales proposal. If DSI could just get in front of a potential customer, their superior product and skilled engineers would win the business. The biggest challenge Jeff faced was getting those initial visits.

DSI had set up a Web Analytics software to monitor the

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performance of their website. Jeff knew that the software did not only report on clicks to their web pages. It also reported the names of businesses who were visiting the DSI website. He figured if someone from a potential client was visiting the site and checking out products then they were probably in the market for a marketing database solution. He did not wait for them to call. He looked up the company phone numbers and made his sales pitch. As a result, Jeff not only got the sales visits, but DSI won a number of new clients. A typical client installation would run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. That simple act of checking the traffic logs for their corporate website resulted in a pretty big windfall.

In the small action of checking web traffic logs and scheduling sales visits, the Decision Software, Inc. website accomplished the main purpose of all small business websites. It generated sales leads that convert into new customers.

In this chapter, we will walk through the steps successful small businesses go through to create a winning website.

Understanding The Small Business Website

Many small businesses lack the resources, or do not feel the need to build an elaborate website. Instead, they put up a basic website with information about their company and a way to contact their sales staff and customer service. The basic Small Business website is essentially the same thing as a very elaborate Yellow Pages ad. You are “hanging out your shingle” on the Internet, so people can find your business. These websites can be built for a few thousand dollars or less. Often, ROI is never measured. Rather, the relatively low cost is just considered a necessary business expense.





Dimensions of the Small Business's Online Business Model

In Part I, you learned an easy way to begin defining your online business model. You start by choosing from among seven basic dimensions that form the foundation of all online businesses (see Figure 18.1). This quick and easy approach will allow you to implement a set of features and tactics aimed at achieving the goals of your business or organization.

Seven Dimensions To Online Business Models	
1.	eCommerce
✓ 2.	Business Development
3.	Lead Generation
✓ 4.	Brand Development
5.	Customer Relations
6.	Information Delivery
7.	Cost Savings

Figure 18.1

The primary dimension for a Small Business website is *Business Development*. The website is there to capture sales leads.

The Small Business website is also the main, or only place where your business is represented online. For everyone looking online for information about your company, the website is the standard by which the business is judged. For this reason, all Small Business websites also have a *Brand Development* dimension.





Making a First Impression

For a small business, the website is first, and foremost the virtual “shingle” they hang out to let people find them online. It is the first impression many potential customers will have of the business. Since many, if not most of a small business’s customers will do research online at the start of their purchase process, that first impression must put the best foot forward.

This comes down to three basic things.

1. A Professional Appearance

Potential customers will judge the business by the presentation they find on the website. If the website is professional and shows attention to detail, then customers will assume the business does the same. If the website is confusing and hard to navigate, customers will assume they will have a frustrating experience with the business also. The Small Business website must, above all other things, make customers feel confident that they can trust doing business with this company.

2. Communicate the Brand Identity

Besides being confident in the quality of the company, potential customers also size up what the company is all about by that first impression. Every business has an identity they want to present to the public. This is their *brand*. The most important purpose of a brand identify is to create an emotional bond with customers. Companies craft the presentation they make to their customers to reflect what the relationship with the business will be like. The website is the first contact many customers will have with the business. It is the first opportunity to present that brand identity and begin forming an emotional bond with potential customers.





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Consider two small, fictitious architectural firms. One, Fabulous Homes, Inc., specializes in high-end, artistic designs for home renovations. They are expensive. They only use the best materials and spend time customizing their designs to match the homeowner's dreams. Customers will be able to show off their homes for decades to come. The second firm, Practical Homes, Inc., specializes in quality homes at an affordable price. They have designed a variety of standard home footprints that can be slightly modified to meet the specific details of the property. Their customers are typically small development companies. These are both architectural firms specializing in designing single family-homes. However, their brand identities are completely different. The websites they build should reflect those differences.

Fabulous Homes, Inc. will probably have a very artistic look to their home page. They will have elaborate fonts for their subject headings and stylized lines outlining content areas. They may even have a Flash element introducing the website with an artist's rendering of a beautiful home being drawn as the user watches.

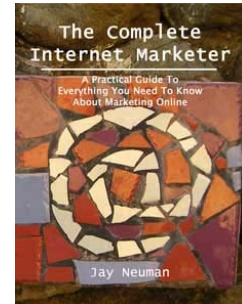
Practical Homes, Inc. will have a more down-to-business look and feel to the site. They will still have some artistic elements, because they are an architectural design firm. However, those elements will be presented on a more businesslike page. There probably will not be a Flash entry screen, because business users typically do not have time to sit through a movie before they get to the website.

3. Draw Them into the Purchase Process

While the website is making the initial impression, it must also be drawing the site visitor into the pur-

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chase process. In other words, the initial imagery and presentation should not only present the brand identity, but also convey a message enticing the site visitor into beginning a customer relationship with the business.

Let us return to the Fabulous Homes, Inc. example. Consider the following two messages that could be displayed on their home page.

“Licensed Architects Specializing in Home Design”
“Let Us Build Your Dream Home”

Both of these messages communicate what the firm does. But only the second one builds on the emotional bond of their brand to draw customers further into the purchase process.

Guiding Customers to a Purchase Decision

Once your website has made a good first impression, then site users will begin pursuing their reason for coming to the website. They may be researching before a purchase. They may be comparing companies. They may be looking for a product to purchase. They may be comparing prices. The website must be built with an awareness of what potential customers want to do when they come to the site. Then it can guide them through a process most likely to result in a sale. This will be different for each business, depending on the product and the target market.

Let us return once more to the Fabulous Homes. example. The senior partner, Joe Fabulous, conducted some market research to find out what his customers needed before they were ready to hire his firm. He did this by simply calling some of his current and past customers and asking for their input. Joe found out that most customers had to be convinced in four areas before making their final decision:





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- ✓ *Education:*
They need to learn about custom home design, to make sure it is right for them.
- ✓ *Visualization:*
They need to see examples of similar homes, to picture the end result.
- ✓ *Imitation:*
They need to hear testimonies from other homeowners, to know that Fabulous Homes is a company they will be happy with, and can boast about.
- ✓ *Validation:*
They need to be assured that Famous Homes uses only the best products and is recognized for delivering quality results.

Fabulous Homes, Inc. designed their website to lead site visitors through each of these four decision criteria. They did this in two ways.

First, they designed their site navigation to feature five tabs at the top of the page. One content area was dedicated to each of the four key considerations. A fifth was dedicated to general company information.

- ✓ Learn About Custom Homes
- ✓ Visit Our Dream Homes
- ✓ Hear From Happy Customers
- ✓ See Our Industry Awards
- ✓ About Us

Customers could visit each of these content areas at their leisure. No matter which issue was of concern to them during the particular site visit, it would be easy for them to find the assurances they needed to continue in the purchase cycle.





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In addition to designing the site navigation around the four considerations of the purchase process, Fabulous Homes also created an online guide that led prospective customers through each of these four issues. They could view the tutorial as a streaming video movie on the website. They could click through it as HTML pages, starting in the “Learn About Custom Homes” section. They could download it as a movie file that they can watch on their computer later. Customers could also request a DVD to be sent to their homes.

Fabulous Homes identified what it would take to transform a site visitor into a client. Then they designed their website around the needs of the customer in a way that would lead customers to the desired result, a sale.

Capturing Sales Leads

In the previous discussion, we showed how a website needs to lead a curious customer from interest to desire. Still, desiring to do business with a company requires no effort or risk on the customer’s part. Going the next step requires initiating a conversion. Many people are reluctant to do this, even if it is the best thing for them to do. The website has to entice them to make that step. There are many ways to accomplish this. Three are fundamental.

- ✓ Provide a phone number
- ✓ Provide an incentive
- ✓ Provide a needs assessment form

Let us continue with our story. If the site design and content does its job, customers will receive enough assurance that they want to pursue a custom home and will feel confident that Fabulous Homes, Inc. is a company they might want to have design it for them. This is all great. Still, many customers will abandon the site visit and not go any farther. The website has to make it easy for them to





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take the plunge and actually begin a dialogue with the company. This is where capturing sales leads comes in.

To bring site users into a dialogue with the company, Fabulous Homes, Inc. used a combination of the three tactics mentioned above. Every content page concluded with a call to action, inviting the customer to contact the company for a free consultation. This call to action included a phone number and a link to a needs assessment form. This is a very low-effort, low-risk step for a site visitor to take. Still, many customers will not respond to a call to action like this. It makes the customer do all the work without really offering anything in return. “Well,” a business owner might argue, “we offer a free consultation.” Most people do not consider a free sales call as much of an incentive. Even if they really want to talk to the company, there is just some kind of instinctual reluctance people feel. Joe Fabulous knew this was human nature. He also knew that it does not take much of an incentive to motivate a customer to take such a small step.

Once again, Joe relied on the customer research he had done. Since most of his customers were wealthy, they would not be particularly moved by some inexpensive giveaway. Instead, Joe decided to offer something related to what the company was all about, but that also would mean something to his potential customers. They decided that for every in-person consultation, Fabulous Homes, Inc. would donate a tree to the local “Green Spaces” organization that converted abandoned lots into neighborhood parks. Now they had completed the process of initiating a customer relationship through the website. They had created a lead generation device that would motivate potential customers to respond while also supporting the brand identity of a classy company that makes homes and neighborhoods beautiful.

To take it one step further, Fabulous Homes also created a graphical treatment of the call to action. They included it





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on the home page and along the right side of each content page. This would give every page a right hand border that offered potential customers the opportunity to save a tree and beautify a neighborhood.

Typical Small Business Website Goals

Once you have defined your online business model, the next step is to determine what goals will lead to success. These goals set the compass heading for your website. The basic small business website typically has three goals:

- (1) Generate sales leads
- (2) Support customer loyalty by providing easy online access to customer service
- (3) Support the brand

Of course, this is a prototypical list. As you go through this process, you will need to define goals specific to your own website.

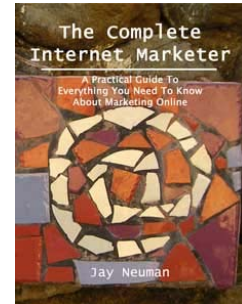
Measuring Success For The Small Business Website

Now you have set the compass heading for your website, by setting effective goals. This will let you develop a set of tactics and site features to reach those goals. Before you can do that, however, you must determine how you are going to measure success on your website. This section will show you how Return on Investment (ROI) is calculated for the B2B website.

The return on investment (ROI) from leads generated through the Business Development lead generation process can be measured as shown in Figure 18.2. You would

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basically calculate the average profit earned from a converted sales lead. Then you would calculate the conversion rate for sales leads generated through the website. Finally, you would calculate the total costs to generate a lead through the website.

However, it should be cautioned that converted sales leads is not the only return generated from the Small Business website. There is also an important branding component to the website. This is actually the bigger justification for these small websites. If you do not have a website at all, or if your website is not very good, it will actually cause you to lose customers.

Now let us look at the process for calculating ROI for leads generated through the Small Business website.

ROI for Business Development

Calculating ROI for Business Development with a small business is very similar to ROI for sales through an eRetail website. It is based on conversion of sales leads generated through the website. In fact, you will use the same method shown in Chapter 15 for calculating ROI from immediate sales on the eRetail site to calculate the return from your efforts to generate leads to your business. The only real difference is in the steps which go into taking a customer from a user on the website to a converted sale.

With the Small Business website, you are capturing sales leads that will be closed by a salesperson. Whereas, the eRetail site closes the sale during the user session, the Small Business site begins the sales process. A quick look at the process will clarify what you will be measuring.





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1. Website Response

The first step in the process is to convert site visitors into sales leads. With eRetail (discussed in Chapter 6), site visitors are converted directly to sales. We calculated a *conversion rate* at this point. With the Small Business site, a sale will not be made until later in the process. At this point, we are measuring *responses* to marketing materials on the website. In general, there are three response devices customer can respond to on the website. They can call a phone number, fill out an online form, or send an email. To measure how effective your website is at eliciting responses you will simply divide the total number of responses by total number of site visitors (also called *impressions*). This is called the *response rate*.

2. Conversions

In the next step, a salesperson will follow up on the sales leads (also called *responders*) and hopefully close the sales. When an actual sale takes place, that is considered a *conversion*. You can calculate two different conversion rates. To measure the conversion of sales leads to sales, you would divide total conversions by total responses. To measure conversion of site visitors to sales, you would divide total sales by the total number of site visitors (impressions).

This second measure can be used to directly calculate your ROI. To do this, you will measure your cost per impression in the same way as the eRetail site. You will add up all your costs to generate leads to the website and then divide the total number of site visitors by this number to get a cost per impression. With the eRetail site, however, we included all of the website costs in the calculation of total costs. With the Small Business site, you will





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only measure costs associated with the parts of the website which generate sales leads. The other, development and maintenance costs will be counted towards the Brand Development ROI.

3. Profit Per Sale

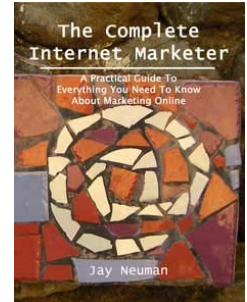
The third step is to measure your profit per sale. Once again, the basic concept is exactly the same as for the eRetail site. You will calculate (or estimate) your total profit per sale, not including your web costs. The difference between the Small Business and eRetail models is found in the nature of the sale. There are many types of small business. Some are very similar to the eRetail model and make sales directly (these should refer to Chapter 15 for an in-depth discussion of eRetail websites). Some are retail stores. Others are B2B businesses or service businesses that require a longer sales process. In these latter cases, the total revenue earned from a single sale may be realized over a period of time. For example, many B2B sales include contracts for services or products to be delivered over a number of months, or years. You must estimate the entire expected value of the sale, rather than just the immediate revenue generated. Similarly, the costs per sale must include the costs incurred by the salesperson in addition to general production and marketing costs.

Once you have completed this process, you can calculate ROI for your online Business Development efforts. At this point, the formula is exactly the same as for eRetail, as shown in Figure 18.2

Only after your website is successful in generating sales, should you pursue a traffic generation strategy, as described in Part II.

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Online Business Development Return on Investment (ROI)

(AVG. PROFIT PER SALE) - (COST PER CONVERSION)

This formula is calculated using the following formulas:

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{COST PER} \\ \text{CONVERSION} \end{array} \right] = \frac{\text{COST PER IMPRESSION}}{\text{CONVERSION RATE}}$$

$$\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{CONVERSION} \\ \text{RATE} \end{array} \right] = \frac{\# \text{ SALES}}{\# \text{ IMPRESSIONS}}$$

Figure 18.2

Designing The Small Business Website User Experience

The key to a successful Small Business website is to convince customers that your business is right for them, starting with their first impression on the home page. Then, in as few mouse clicks as possible, get them to fill out a lead form or call your phone number.

Many businesses make the mistake of trying to build a website before taking the time to figure out what the website is there to accomplish. That is always a set-up for poor results. Only after mapping out a user experience that will lead to successfully achieving your business goals should you put your web designer to work creating the look and feel for your website.





This section will walk through a typical user experience that successful Small Business websites create to initiate customer relationships and capture sales leads through the website.

The Goal of Website Design

The primary purpose of a website is to meet the needs and wants of customers coming to the site in a way that maximizes the attainment of Internet Marketing goals. The easiest way to understand what a website is trying to accomplish is to think of it as a funnel. At the wide end, tactics are employed to reach out to customers, appeal to their interests and entice them to enter your website. From this point onward, every action a user takes should be moving them down the funnel, towards the ultimate outcome(s) you want to achieve from your website.

Figure 18.3 shows the flow of a successful user experience.

Next, let us look at the steps in the typical Small Business website user experience.

The Small Business Website User Experience

1. First Contact

In general, people coming to the Small Business website will first come from search engines or be referred directly to your website. Since budgets are typically small, the first step is to optimize your web pages for search engines. Once you have demonstrated that you are successfully converting site visitors to sales leads, then you can begin pursuing other online traffic generation methods (see Part II).



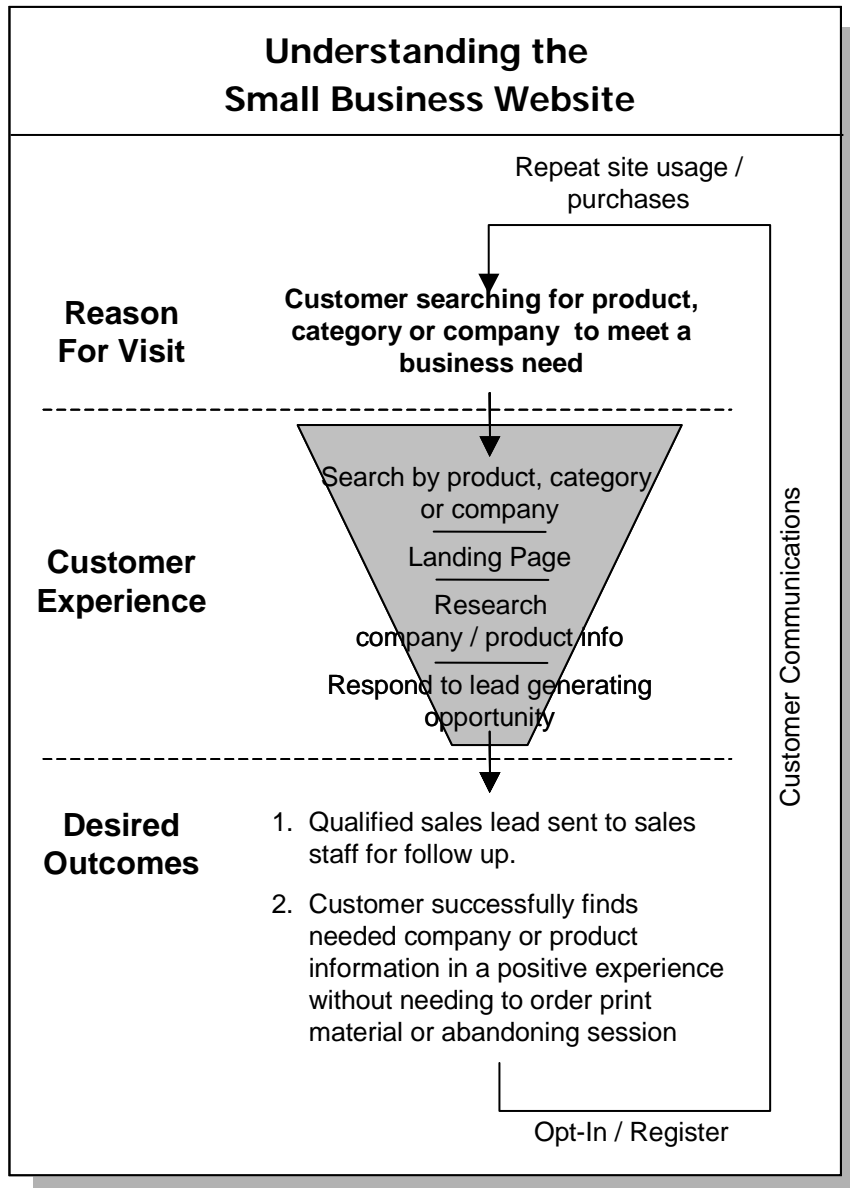


Figure 18.3

2. Home Page and Content Pages

The first impression on any website is always of critical importance. Web users will only give a web page a few seconds before they decide if they will stay or move on. You must capture their attention





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and win over their interest within a couple of glances at your site. For the Small Business website, traffic is often sent directly to the home page. Budgets are usually too small to support an ongoing initiative to build targeted landing pages. It is of utmost importance that the home page wins over potential customers.

A common mistake is neglecting to spend enough time designing an effective home page. The home page must positively reflect your brand. It must also quickly draw customers into the actions you want them to take on the website. This can only be done by taking some time to map out what information you want your customers to reach and what actions you want them to take. Then you can design the home page to appeal to your customers' interests while drawing them to the information and actions you want them to find.

If you are planning to direct customers to lower level pages on the website, or to custom built landing pages, you will want to spend time designing these pages to be as effective as your home page.

As a note of caution, some freelance web developers and small design shops love to create Flash animation "welcome" screens for the websites they build. Unless you specialize in something related to the creative arts, this is usually not a good idea for a business website. Customers researching companies they want to do business with do not want to waste their time watching video animation before they find the information they need. Just take them directly to a very professional looking home page where they can easily find whatever information they need. That is the best way to make a great first impression.





3. Navigation and Useful Content

Once you have successfully brought a customer to your website and kept their interest, then you must make sure they do not get frustrated and leave. As with all websites, having an easy to navigate taxonomy is critical.

It is also important to identify the information customers will need in order to make the decision to enter the sales process with your company. Then make sure you have this information presented on your website in a way that is easy for them to find and navigate through. For example, you could build your website with four main tabs on the top navigation: a section for product descriptions, one for company information, one for client relations and customer testimonials and a fourth for customer service contacts.

4. Lead Generation

The final step in the user experience is to get site visitors to initiate a contact with your company. This could be by calling your phone number or by submitting a lead form on the website. The ultimate goal of your website is to get as many sales leads as possible. To accomplish this, you need to structure your website content so every path through the site leads to a contact opportunity, or has a prominently displayed call to action with a phone number or a link to the lead form.

The Small Business website is there to generate sales leads for the business and to make sure the company can be found online. There are ultimately two critical factors for success. First, you must design your navigation and web pages so customers are drawn towards opportunities to respond to a call to action, resulting in a sales lead. Second, you must ensure that your website reflects your





offline branding and presents a level of quality and professionalism that will not hurt your brand.

Small Business Website Roadmap To Success

The final step before you actually build your website is to map out the specific objectives and tactics that will lead to successfully achieving your goals. In Part I, we called this your *roadmap to success*. The tactics in your “roadmap” are the building blocks that will create a winning user experience on your website.

Figure 18.4 presents a set of objectives and tactics common on Small Business websites. They are laid out according to the four levels of customer intimacy described in Chapter 2. A quick survey of the objectives and tactics shown here will give you an idea of what goes into a successful Small Business website.

These tactics are prototypical examples. They should be used as guidelines to give you an idea of what your website can accomplish. However, you will have to determine specific objectives and tactics that match the unique aspects of your business and the needs of your customers.

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Small Business Website Objectives and Tactics

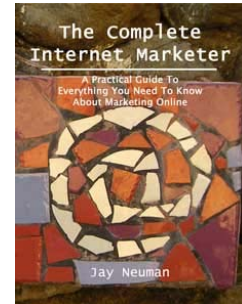
	Objectives	Tactics
Interest	Ensure that web searchers find the site when searching for your company, products or services you offer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search engine optimization 2. If yields profitable ROI, search engine marketing or set up an affiliate program
	Ensure that customers seeking company or product information, or customer service can find your company	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Put website URL in offline ads, collateral materials, product specs, etc.
Trust	Provide a positive user experience that engenders trust and a willingness to continue in the sales process	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Optimize content on home page and landing pages to make best first impression 5. User-friendly navigation and user interface for the website 6. Ensure privacy of customer information
Satisfaction	Provide content to help customers make their purchase decision, and choose your company	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Information customers will need when evaluating potential companies to do business with, in a way that is easy to find and of top quality appearance. Typical info includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Product/services info ✓ Company info and exec. bio's ✓ Customer list & testimonials ✓ Community involvement & awards ✓ Contact Us & customer service 8. Deliver sales lead submission opportunities as part of content that is of service to the customer, such as: needs assessment form, downloadable white papers, etc.
Loyalty	Use opt-in email to retain customers and generate additional sales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Periodically send follow-up email to the opt-in list, checking on satisfaction and with promotional offers and/or recommended enhancements to their products/services

Figure 18.4

(continued next page)

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The Roadmap Unfolded: Typical Small Business Website Tactics

In this chapter you have learned what successful Small Business websites are trying to accomplish and how to design a website that meets those objectives. The basic considerations for a Small Business website are to make customers feel confident that doing business with your company will be a good thing for them and to initiate a conversation with them.

The following table contains a detailed description of the tactics presented in the Roadmap to Success table (Figure 18.4). It provides nuts-and-bolts examples of the type of things implemented on successful Small Business websites. You can use this information as a framework for developing your own website. However, there is no substitute for defining the details of your own online business model and mapping out a set of tactics that will meet your own organizational goals.

(continued next page)





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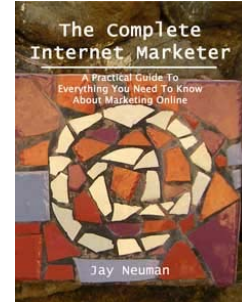
Building Interest

Building interest with the Small Business website involves reaching out to prospective customers to draw them into the process of becoming a sales lead.

<p><i>Search engine optimization</i></p>	<p>Most people will find a Small Business website while they are searching for information about a products or services they are interested in. They will find your website if it appears in their search listings. In some cases, they will know about your business and type your company name, or a variation of it into the search engine. Surprisingly, for some businesses with fairly typical sounding names, their website does not show up when their own business name is entered. Optimizing the content on your web pages to be found by search engines is the most important thing you can do to get traffic to your Small Business website.</p> <p>Search engine optimization is discussed in Chapter 6.</p>
<p><i>Search engine marketing</i></p>	<p>Paying for sponsored links on search engines, known as search engine marketing, is simply paying to get your search results listings displayed to people searching for the topics your site addresses. If your website is successful in generating sales leads, this will often be an important part of your strategy. A variation of search engine marketing is to pay to have your company name included in online yellow pages and business directories.</p> <p>Search engine marketing is discussed in Chapter 6.</p>
<p><i>Start an affiliate program</i></p>	<p>An affiliate program is a way to pay other websites a commission on sales to leads they send to your website. If you are able to clearly associate sales with visits by customers on your website then you may want to consider starting an affiliate program.</p> <p>Affiliate programs are discussed in Chapter 9.</p>
<p><i>Offline presentation of URL</i></p>	<p>For all businesses who have offline collateral, it is a good idea to include your website URL. Many people will feel reluctant to make a phone call to a business they are interested in. It is just inconvenient for them. But they will visit the website. If you have done a good job of designing your website to convert visitors into sales leads, a visit to your website will take them one step closer to a sale.</p>

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Building Trust

With a Small Business, the website is initiating the first contact with a prospective customer. This would otherwise take place with a human being. Building trust depends on the professionalism of the customer's experience with your "virtual salesman," the website. This includes the tone and presentation of what, in essence, is your sales pitch to the online customer. It also includes the usability and appearance of your website and online services.

<i>Home page and landing pages</i>	Usability and quality of content is essential for any website. With the Small Business website there is an even stronger microscope on these aspects of user experience. Potential customers are evaluating whether they want to do business with your company. They will assume their experience with your website will be the same as the experience they will have with your company if they decide to do business with you. The first contact your business makes with potential customers will often be through the home page, or the landing page a search engine places them on. These pages must be designed to make the best impression and to draw the customer further along in the sales process.
<i>User-friendly navigation</i>	All websites must have user-friendly navigation. For the Small Business website, site design should be built around leading the customer to a purchase decision. That means helping them find all of the information they need before they feel comfortable taking the next step with your business. Site navigation must be designed to make this process intuitive. A poorly designed set of menu options or content tabs can confuse your customers and cause them to leave the site before they find out what you have to offer.
<i>Ensure privacy of customer information</i>	Ensuring the privacy and security of customer information is critical any time such information is collected on a website. One important way to do this is through your privacy policy. Every website must have a privacy policy. Although most customers will never look at it, your privacy policy is an extremely important part of your website. <i>If a customer files a lawsuit against your business, the courts will look at your privacy policy to decide your case. You must be very careful to craft a policy statement that assures your customers of their safety and your good intentions, but also does not hold you liable for more than you can actually do.</i>





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Building Satisfaction

With the Small Business website, satisfaction is gained mainly by guiding them through the process of making a purchase decision. The easier and more intuitive this is, the happier they will be. This will also bring them closer to additional sales for the company.

Content to aid purchase decision

There is no “one size fits all” approach to content on your Small Business website. You must put yourself in your customers shoes. What do they need to make their purchase decision? Then you must do everything you can to have what they need on your website. You should have a professional presentation that convinces them you will take care of them better than your competitors.

There are a number of things you can do on your website to help customers move forward in the sales process. Start with the beginning. What will someone need who is starting out his or her pre-purchase research? They may be looking for an overview of your company or your products/services. They may want to see things like: a company profile, profile of typical clients, and a partial customer list. Make this information easy for them to find.

You may service different types of customer. Perhaps you have both business customers and individuals. You may offer a different service to homeowners versus renters. There are any number of ways you may divide your customer base. If this is the case, you may want to create content areas targeted specifically to these customer segments. Make it easy for them to see how your company meets their specific needs and wants. Do not make them have to sift through pages of information they do not care about.

Capture sales leads

The end result of a potential customer’s experience with your website should be to begin a dialogue with your company. This may take more than one visit. Still, you ultimately want them to move from being an interested visitor to being a qualified sales lead. To do this, you must include devices on your website to capture lead information that can be followed up by a sales person.

If your business allows transactions to take place directly on the website, then leading customers into the transaction process serves the same function as capturing a sales lead.





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Building Loyalty

Loyalty for the Small Business website mainly comes down to maintaining contact with customers and potential customers. The best way to accomplish this online is with email.

Opt-in email

For a small business, personal communication makes a big difference. Email can be used to maintain relationships with existing customers and to keep prospective customers interested.

It is a well known fact that dissatisfied customers usually do not express their dissatisfaction before they leave. They just stop doing business with you. On the other hand, one of the biggest factors contributing to customer loyalty is when a business responds well to a customer complaint. This presents a dilemma. How can you respond if they never tell you there is a problem? Email can be used to periodically ask your customers about their satisfaction with your company and give them an opportunity to offer comments. This makes a nice point of contact for happy customers. It also gives you the opportunity to rescue at-risk customers.

You will also have potential customers who have expressed interest in your company, but have not yet made a purchase. You can use email to periodically send them special offers or otherwise maintain contact, keeping them in the sales pipeline. Of course, these emails can, and should also be sent to existing customers to give them an incentive to do more business with you.

Before you undertake any email efforts, you must explicitly obtain permission to send marketing email to those whose email address you have obtained. This is called opting-in to your email program. Read Chapter 7 to learn about setting up effective Email marketing.

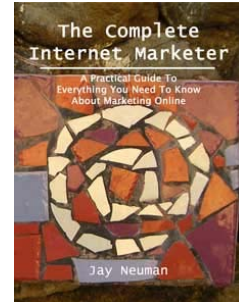
Conclusion

In this chapter, you have learned how to be successful initiating and building customer relationships through a Small Business website. In the next chapter, you will learn how to create a successful corporate website for a Consumer Goods Manufacturer.

Now turn to the Consumer Goods Manufacturer website.

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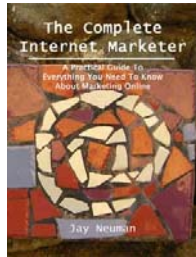


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