

How to effectively use a Web site to market your business



Websites are wonderful marketing tools. They're a great way to tell people about your products and services, you can post updates to software, have help files, include tips on better using your products and services and much, much more.

Websites are more than just text or more than just graphics — you can incorporate photos, illustrations, animation and sound and more.

Websites are fluid and can be changed or updated almost instantly. You can immediately respond to any situation via your Web site (for instance — road construction has blocked the main access to your business so you post maps with an alternative route).

As wonderful as Web sites are, they're not for everyone. Don't put one up just because everyone else is doing it. (Remember what your mother told you about jumping off that bridge because everyone else has leapt off.) Almost more than any other marketing tool, you need to have a plan in place. So before you decide to put the time, money and energy into a Web site, take a moment and think about what you plan to do with it once it's up. (Don't have a plan but are committed to the success of your Web site? Not to worry — we can help you create one.)

Your customers need to find your Web site both current and useful. They also need to know where it is, so you need to commit to promoting it, both online and offline. For the very best results, your customers and potential customers should view your Web site as a tool — something they find valuable enough to keep coming back.

Your customers also need to find your Web site easy to use. If your clients end up hunting for information, they're just one click away from your competition. Make sure you keep their needs in mind. Don't, for example, have them fill out all their billing information before they discover that what they want is backordered. You've just wasted their time, which most likely means you've just lost a customer.

Most importantly, you need to pay special attention to your content. (This is a graphic designer telling you this, so listen up). An ugly site with great content that customers find useful will be more successful than a glitzy site with no content.

Above all, remember your graphic designer is a resource who can help you make the most of your Web site. Don't be afraid to ask questions or gather information about your specific situation.

Karin Wilson owns Wild Woman Design, LLC, a graphic design firm. She can be reached via her Web site, www.wildwomandesign.com, where you can also sign up for her monthly "Graphically Speaking" column — full of tips to help make your graphic design a success. Copyright 2004 Wild Woman Design.