SMALL BUSINESS GUIDE TO ONLINE MARKETING
— *FUNDAMENTALS* TO GET STARTED

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Contents

Introduction

Creating an online marketing strategy might seem daunting, but preparation can mean the difference between success and failure for an SME. In a crowded online landscape a small business will need to make its presence felt with an eye-catching website, a search engine optimisation (SEO) strategy, an engaging blog and a mobile-friendly site for customers.

This eBook will equip you with the necessary tools to create an engaging, functional, customer-focused online presence that will help increase conversion. Gain insights into marketing to an online audience, learn how to pick the right web designer, create an intuitive design, write click-worthy content and build an effective eCommerce strategy.

This guide, brought to you by *SmartCompany* in partnership with Sensis, will also address frequently overlooked issues that could lead to problems, such as neglecting to fix back-end systems before launching your new website, or failure to optimise your site for mobile devices.

By the end, you'll be able to apply professional marketing strategies informed by experts across website design, eCommerce, search engine optimisation, content, social media and mobile web design to empower you to reach your goals in today's competitive business world.

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Chapter 1: How to create a well-designed website

Part of a good online marketing strategy means creating a website that presents your brand in its best possible light, with the customer experience front of mind.

We Push Buttons web designer Robin Jennings highly recommends the following questions to ask your web designer before setting out.

1. **Can I see your portfolio of work and see several testimonials from happy clients?** Good web designers have a portfolio of successful projects they can showcase with references confirming their work.

2. **What content management system (CMS) do you use, and why do you choose to use that CMS over other ones?** A CMS is used to assist your developer and to give you the tools to manage some content yourself (documents, images, videos, etc.).

3. **Are there any ongoing maintenance fees? What long-term email/phone support do you offer clients?** Research all the costs of keeping the site running and shop around to get the most suitable price.

4. **If I engage your services will I be able to manage the website myself or do I need to go through your company?** Don't be afraid to find out how much management you will have over your own website.

5. **What measures are you taking to ensure my website is future-proof to handle upgrades and business growth?** Reputable designers will understand this demand because they know it's important to be transparent.

6. **How scalable is my website?** If you later decide to open a second store or offer new products, you need to know if the website can double in size without a major redesign.

eCommerce design

If part of your online strategy is to offer products or services that your clients can order, you need to think about creating the ideal online shopping experience.

Far too often companies try to crowd their entire product range onto the homepage, but the most successful websites strip things back so visitors can view goods or services without distraction.

For an online store you'll need to cover yourself with the obvious essentials: a bank account and a merchant account – or if you start small you could use Stripe or Paypal to do your payments, advises Natalia Taplin, Sensis Product Manager – Websites.

Think carefully about your domain name, she advises, and steer clear of a name too similar to competing brands and ensure you don't breach somebody else's trademark.

"This choice is often an afterthought but is very important, as it's very expensive to change it once you have traffic flowing," says Taplin.

Robin Jennings says the following components are key to a successful eCommerce outfit:

eCommerce user interface (UI):

eCommmerce user interface (UI) focuses on how a site is designed and how products are laid out on screen. It needs to make intuitive sense to the user. Good UI comprises:

- **Simple and minimalist design:** Ensure you have an uncluttered look for your product range.

- **Organise menu categories:** Ensure categories have been decided well in advance.

- **Product images:** Add multiple images of each product in a gallery, and allow customers to zoom in.

- **Product pages:** Have an accurate and engaging description about each item. Don't copy and paste text from your supplier.

- **Product specs:** Ensure there is a 'Read More' or 'Specs' button when necessary.

- **Search button:** Make it easy to find in the header or near the main menu.

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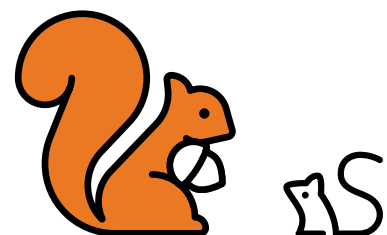
eCommerce UX:

In addition, customers need to have an exemplary user experience (UX) to meet their needs. Here is some more specific advice for the browsing and shopping cart area.

- **Searchability:** Spend the extra money on building an advanced search function so visitors can find what they are after.

- **Create meaningful item tags:** These will aid internal search.

- **Lead the customer's eye:** Underneath each product item there should be an area for additional upselling. This could be a small photo gallery such as 'Customers who viewed this item also viewed …' so they continue to shop.

- **Customer support centre:** An online chat window means you can have a staff member in place most of the day to provide immediate support and convert sales.

- **A locatable contact page:** Ensure your business's phone number and address is easy to find.

- **FAQ and Terms and Conditions:** Communicate security policies and terms clearly, and include a relevant FAQ section with clear freight and shipping rates.

Shopping cart UX:

- **Shopping cart location:** The shopping cart should be visible but not dominant, and it often works best when located in the sidebar or in the top right corner.

- **Seamless buttons:** Ensure visitors can easily remove items from their cart and continue shopping with minimum fuss.

- **Customer detail fields:** Have as few fields as possible for purchasers to complete. People want to buy, not fill out a survey.

- **Checkout:** Allow guest checkout because some people don't want to register or become members.

- **Payments:** Clearly list all the payment options and include the SSL companies' logo – the encrypted security technology – to show your site offers secure online transactions.

- **Invoices:** Ensure invoices are branded with your company's information and are emailed automatically as PDFs.
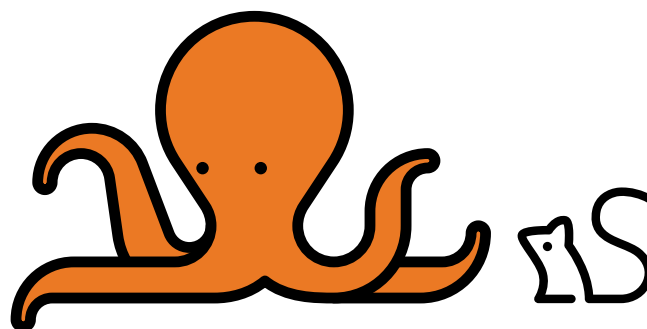
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Chapter 2: Building an online strategy? Fix the back-end systems first!

One of the mistakes businesses can make when launching an online marketing strategy is failing to address the back-end systems first. Rather than boosting business, a new website with poor operations could work against you by highlighting flaws in your ordering, inventory and processing systems, says Fronde Australia country manager Don McLean.

Developing a new website without fixing these operational systems first means you'll be ill-prepared for the increased business activity driven by a new site. *Ask if you've got the processes and people in place to be able to cope with double the orders,* says McLean.

"Otherwise you're putting yourself in a situation where you can have a 300% increase in orders and collapse once the website goes live."

How can I prepare for increased traffic?

Identify what functionality you'll need and what support you have in place by considering both the customer and the back-end system, says McLean. There are some key questions to ask when it comes to your online operations.

- Are your inventory controls lacking?
- Is identifying when to re-order stock a difficult task?
- Do you have the right level of stock on hand?
- Do you have trouble tracking and locating your stock?
- Do employees experience additional strain during peak business periods?
- Can you handle the level of customer service traffic and the extra queries?

Get integrated: Consider the cloud

The cloud is a valuable tool to help sites bring together different systems – accounting, finance and customer relationship management (CRM) – into one complete business management system, says McLean.

Integrated systems will streamline the ordering process, advises McLean. When a customer orders a product, the stock is sent to the warehouse, the order is sent to accounts where you can track it, and the customer is notified of their purchase.

"If you have disparate systems – a website on one system, accounting on another, customer service on another platform – straight away you're going to introduce errors," says McLean.

Whatever online strategy you decide on, fixing back-end issues first will help you work towards a more efficient new site that can handle increased demand.

Chapter 3: Write click-worthy content

Once your website design, back-end systems and eCommerce are sorted, the next step is to think about content creation – which will be a major part of any successful online marketing strategy.

Content should be informative, engaging and relate to your business and industry. In essence, you want people to think of your site as the online space for valuable information, says The Content Folk co-founder and strategist Nicole Kersh.

Generate valuable content

The key word here is "valuable". Do customers want a DIY video for one of your products, a how-to guide on healthy living, or an opinion piece on a trending news story in your industry?

Listen to your audience and pay attention to what customers do with your product, says Kersh. This relates back to knowing your target market, and producing content to market your product or service is definitely a consideration when trying to improve your SEO. Good businesses are about solving customer problems, and the same goes for the content.

Does your content ring with authenticity?

SMEs often make the mistake of thinking about themselves, their offers and their own interests first when they write, but people engage with people, not machines, says Kersh. Honest engagement coupled with specifically targeted content based on the needs of your audience will establish that human connection. Then the road to conversion is much easier.

Experiment with topics and mediums

Thinking of topics is the point in the content cycle where people seem to get pen-shy and suddenly suffer from 'bullet-pointitis', says Kersh. The best way to pick a topic is to put yourself in the shoes of your demographic and identify the problems they search for online, says Kersh. Write something you feel is worth reading about. And if you're bored writing it, a customer is likely to feel the same way reading it.
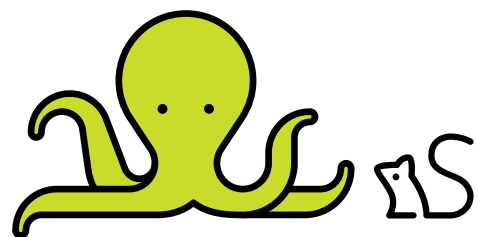
Kersh advises there are no hard rules to content creation, but that you should experiment with different platforms and mediums. Think about blogs, case studies, videos, podcasts, visuals and infographics.

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3 Social media tips for better engagement

Engaging with social media needs to be integral to any online marketing strategy. Your social media content needs to be representative of your brand, shareable and on-message. There are some key ways to make sure your content hits the mark with your followers.

1. **Tailor content for each platform:** Certain businesses will prosper on visually rich sites like Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube, while others may generate more buzz with Twitter's 140-character information sharing platform.

2. **Social media management tools:** Management tools will help you schedule content, monitor all your social networks and measure performance to track what works and what doesn't.

3. **Learn about your users:** Converse with and listen to your customers for qualitative feedback to guide your business decisions. The range of platforms you use provides you with a direct, bilateral conversation with your customers.

Chapter 4: Every online marketing strategy needs SEO

Many small business owners overlook the fact that content won't yield results unless it's designed for search engine optimisation (SEO). You can have the best information, but if customers don't know you exist you won't see any results. Therefore SEO is vital to any decent online marketing strategy.

To put search into perspective, in 2012, there were **1.2 trillion searches** on Google globally, says Sensis senior manager of SEO Kavit Shah. That's roughly 3.28 billion queries fielded by Google per day.

If you think of the typical search engine results page (SERP), only 4% of that traffic goes beyond page one and onto page two of the search results, says Shah. In other words, 96% of users who are requesting the queries are finding what they want on the first page of Google's results. Any websites that were on that first page of Google's results gained a high volume of traffic.

Here are Shah's essential steps for effective SEO:

1. **Identify your goals:** Do you need to direct more traffic to your site, increase online sales from your website, get more qualified leads or improve visibility of your online brand?

2. **Ensure your SEO Strategy is 'local':** Ensure your location information is clearly marked on your website for the search engines to crawl, and that you appear within Google's Map-based results.

3. **Research to find the 'right' keywords:** Do your keywords line up with specific pages on your website, and do those pages help you realise the goals you set for the site earlier? Try to get a grasp of the non-technical terms people use to describe your products/services.

4. **Customer reviews:** Encourage your customers to leave reviews on both your company website and authoritative sites that store reviews for businesses.

5. **Create unique content:** Search engines hate duplicate or plagiarised content. Ensure the content you publish projects your unique identity.

6. **Good link structure:** Links allow users to click through and navigate your site, and they help search engine robots (spiders) to follow and crawl your content. The absence of links means that the search engine spiders hit a virtual dead end on your website and are forced to leave the site with their crawl unfinished, preventing them from showing your content on SERPs.

7. **Avoid keyword stuffing:** Don't spam search engines by stuffing your pages with keywords. Search engines like Google can penalise such sites by removing them from their index of results. Their algorithms are now smart enough to process when a sentence or paragraph is no use to a human user and was written purely for the purposes of ranking.

8. **Analytics tools:** Measure performance on your pages for insights into the user's mindset and their behaviour so that you can tweak your content and layouts to better suit users.

Chapter 5: Understanding your target market

With your increasingly visible online presence, you need to have a solid understanding of your target audience. Is it international or local? Small businesses can fail because they haven't gained a critical understanding of their audience.

"Unless your goods are prohibitively big to send internationally, just try and go international and see what happens. The investment is not that high and you might find a hidden market you did not know before," says Sensis' Natalia Taplin.

"Usually your products define your audience, but also think outside the box. For example, a great percentage of lingerie online is bought by men, so targeting women only would be a mistake!"

Free tools such as Quantcast can give you an understanding of where your traffic is coming from, as well as shedding light on the demographic information about your site's visitors, advises Nicole Kersh.

Your users' social media platforms, such as their Facebook profiles, can also give you a snapshot of what types of people are connecting with your brand, says Kersh.

Listen to your audience and pay attention to what customers do with your product, advises Kersh. Have your customers found new ways to use your product, or are they talking about a particular aspect of your service?

You should be analysing your audience, their interests and online reading habits to gain insight into what kind of content they like and what you could be creating, says Kersh.

Chapter 6: Making your website mobile-friendly

Increasingly, people are using tablets and mobiles to access information, and it is vital that mobile is taken into consideration in any online marketing strategy.

In the past year the strongest technology trend displayed by Australian consumers was the increase in use of mobile devices, according to the **2014 Sensis eBusiness** report. Internet use on mobile phones increased to 73%, up from 68% last year, while 56% of Australians accessed the internet on a tablet device.

Clearly, having a mobile site is not an optional extra – it's a requirement. Here's how to get yours right to keep your customers happy:

1) Test, Test, Test: Consider testing the functionality, format and usability of your site across different screens and platforms. You might be surprised to find that reading your site on a mobile device isn't that easy, particularly if you have to constantly pinch the screen to zoom, or scroll up and down, and side to side.

2) Responsive design: Your site has certain breakpoints where it won't function as well on different devices. It could be going from a large desktop to a laptop to a mobile screen. A responsive design will ensure your site's format will adapt to the size and capabilities of different devices. This will ensure the text and images are scaled appropriately, providing customers with a better experience.

3) Measure for deeper insight: Having a tool to measure the effectiveness of your website will show you where most of your traffic is coming from. For example, if you have an eCommerce site, and are losing 50% of people at the shopping cart, especially when using their mobile, perhaps there's something wrong with your engagement on mobile at that point. Fix it, and you'll see improvement.

Chapter 7: Last Word

While you may be in a rush to get your online strategy up and running, remembering the fundamentals will place you in better stead in the long term.

Think carefully about web design, the user experience for any eCommerce aspects, and back-end operations to ensure customers get the best service.

Consider the messages you are sending in your content creation, ask how you can step up SEO to ensure your site gets found, tap into where your target market is and what you'll be getting, and ensure your website is mobile-friendly.

Combine all that with savvy social media approach, and you should be on track to a first-class online marketing strategy that will help your business grow.