

"Why You Need a Web Presence"

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Not so long ago, if you wanted to check what movies were playing, you'd check your local newspaper. If you wanted to find someone to cut your lawn, you'd open the yellow pages. In today's world, consumers use the Internet.

The Internet offers a huge opportunity to introduce your business and services to consumers. Even the smallest business can benefit from a professional Web presence. Here are six key considerations:

1. **Visibility:** Consumers research and search for products and services online. If they are going to find your business, your business needs to be on the Web.
2. **Reach:** With a Web site, you are no longer limited to a customer base that is in physical proximity to your shop. Your place of business may be in Jackson, and your customers could be in Italy.
3. **Customer service:** When customers find the information they want-when they want-on your Web site, their satisfaction increases.
4. **Competition:** A professional looking Web site can level the playing field for smaller companies trying to compete against larger enterprises.
5. **Credibility:** When you can point existing customers, potential customers, potential employees or investors to a Web site, it tells them you are a serious business.
6. **Branding:** Set yourself apart from the crowd.

Setting up a Website quickly

Template-driven software services, such as Microsoft's Office Live Small Business, have easy-to-use tools and a wide variety of pre-designed page templates so small business owners with no technical or design skills can create Web sites with minimal effort. With the Office Live Small Business service—which includes a domain name, hosting, company-branded e-mail accounts and contact management services—you can get started online for free. At the very least, start with a "business card" Web site that contains the basic information about your company:

- **Name**
- **Logo**
- **Location**
- **Contact information**
- **Brief description of your products or services**

Still think it's too much work or too difficult? There are several local website companies in town that would be more than happy to help you.

There are plenty of compelling reasons why small businesses today should have a Web presence. But with the advent of free, easy-to-use services, it's difficult to come up with a reason *not* to.