

5 Mistakes Small Businesses Make Online

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Small business owners are busy. It's difficult to focus the right amount of attention on all facets of your business when you've got both off- and online operations to juggle. So it's no surprise that mistakes are made along the way. But when nine out of 10 U.S. consumers use the internet to look for local goods and services, **and** research a potential purchase,¹ one mistake you can't afford to make is neglecting your online presence.

Here are a few common errors that many small businesses make online, and what you can do to help make sure your business is on the right track.

1. Using a social media page as your only web address

Only 51% of small businesses have a website,² yet 80% use social media.³ So for many small businesses, social media is key to growing your business. But how do your customers know where to find you on social media? One of the easiest ways to ensure customers can find you no matter where your online business is located is to [register a domain name](#) and [point it to your business's social media page](#).

Called domain forwarding, it works just like forwarding mail. You create a rule that automatically redirects anyone who visits your domain name to your page on Facebook, LinkedIn, Etsy or whatever social media platform you use as your business's communications or e-commerce hub. Domain forwarding is easy to set up with your domain name registrar and can take as little as five minutes.

A domain name also helps to brand your company by providing a memorable web address you can market. And when you are ready for a website, you don't have to change the web address that your customers already know and use.

2. Using a free email provider as your company email address

A domain name is so much more than just an address for your website – it can represent every aspect of your business's online identity, including your communications. In addition to your web address, you can use your domain name to set up a custom email address for your business. For example, what email address would look more credible to customers: info@pearlywhitesmiles.com or toothymike88@genericfreeemailservice.com? The answer is pretty clear, especially if you are already driving them to your website, pearlywhitesmiles.com. In fact, 65 percent of U.S. consumers believe a [company-branded email](#) (e.g., contact@joescompany.com) is more credible than an email sent from a free email account that is not company-branded (joescompany@freeemailservice.com). And with email and phishing scams on the rise,⁴ consumers are looking to do business with companies they can trust.

3. Putting off building a website

There's no denying it. In today's digital world, a website is essential. Eighty-four percent of U.S. small businesses say their website is critical to their business, [according to research from Verisign](#).⁵ And 97 percent of SMBs with a website would recommend having one to their small business colleagues.⁶

It has never been easier to launch a website. With many free website builders like Wix.com and Weebly available today, business owners have easy and economical options to create their site. Designed for the non-technical user, these tools provide easy-to-use templates that allow you to point and click your way to a new website. Some features, at no cost or as part of a package, include shopping carts, online forms, blogs, social sharing links, video and audio players, search engine optimization, mobile device optimization, website reporting, customer support and much, much more.

The key is to start small. Create a couple of pages and expand from there. Just make sure you do your research and select a website builder that fits your needs and can scale with your business as you grow.

¹ 5 Reasons Every Small Business Needs a Website. Accessed April 5, 2016. <http://www.verisign.com/assets/ebook-5ReasonsSMBWebsite-Jan2016.pdf>

² Lack of websites common pitfall for small businesses. Accessed April 5, 2016.

<http://www.post-gazette.com/business/pittsburgh-company-news/2015/01/06/Lack-of-websites-common-pitfall-for-small-businesses/stories/201501060018>

³ How SMBs Use Social Media: 15 New Stats You Should Know. Accessed April 5, 2016. <http://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/stats-smb-social-media-list>

⁴ APWG Phishing Activity Trends Report: 1st – 3rd Quarters 2015. December 23, 2015. https://docs.apwg.org/reports/apwg_trends_report_q1-q3_2015.pdf

⁵ 5 Reasons Every Small Business Needs a Website. Accessed April 5, 2016. <http://www.verisign.com/assets/ebook-5ReasonsSMBWebsite-Jan2016.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

4. Building a website and then forgetting about it

Your website is the central hub of your online presence, but no one will see it if you don't actively market your business online. There are many ways you can generate traffic to your site and find customers, including:

- **Social media marketing:** Advertise your business and its products and services on social media and drive customers to your website for more information.
- **Email marketing:** Use your company-branded email and send customers information on special news and sales. Include a link to your website where customers can learn more.
- **Search engine marketing (SEM):** Also known as paid search, SEM allows you to promote your business website on the paid advertising section of search results pages.

One of the best ways to drive customers to your website and keep them coming back is by [creating high-quality content](#) that they find interesting and valuable. Consumers are looking for genuine, reliable information online, so stick to what you know and keep it simple. Starting a blog on your website is a quick and economical way to start creating content. For each blog post, focus on a single topic and write two to three paragraphs. It's easy for your customers to read and more manageable for you to produce. Adding compelling content to your website on a regular basis can also improve its ranking on search engines, which is even more reason to focus on content!

With so many marketing options, SMBs today don't need to go it alone. Many registrars offer marketing services that you can take advantage of, or check out [TipstoGetOnline.com](#) for more tips on how to get started.

5. Not considering a domain name strategy in your marketing plan

Remember that a domain name is so much more than just a web or email address – you can also use it for marketing. In fact, it's a tactic that big brands successfully use today and one that you can easily implement to propel your brand.

Big companies register more than one web address for many reasons. Say you launch a marketing campaign. You can register a distinct domain name for that campaign and forward it to a page on your existing website that supports the campaign. You can also use domain forwarding to help customers find your business. For example, if your domain name is JaneDoeBakery.com, you can also register a domain name with a specific geographic location (e.g., JaneDoeBakeryinDenver.com) or highlight specialties or business areas potential customers are likely to search for, or in which you want to grow, like DenverSpecialtyCustomCakes.com or CupcakesInDenver.com.

In fact, [recent research](#) from Verisign revealed that internet search users are almost twice as likely to click on a domain name that includes at least one of the keywords in their search, compared to a domain name that does not include any of the keywords in their search. While there are many variables that go into search rankings, such as content quality, cross-linking, advertising budgets, faster website speeds, etc., having a portfolio of descriptive, keyword-rich domain names may make the difference in being found online. Verisign's analysis of the comScore data illustrates that registering keyword-rich domain names may be a smart strategy, giving businesses a leg up when it comes to getting prospective customers to click to their websites.

If you're making any one of these mistakes, don't worry. The good news is that it can be easily fixed. Read [The First Five Things to Do After Getting Your Business Online](#) to make sure you're on track.

About Verisign

Verisign, a global leader in domain names and internet security, enables internet navigation for many of the world's most recognized domain names and provides protection for websites and enterprises around the world. Verisign ensures the security, stability and resiliency of key internet infrastructure and services, including the .com and .net domains and two of the internet's root servers, as well as performs the root-zone maintainer functions for the core of the internet's Domain Name System (DNS). Verisign's Security Services include intelligence-driven Distributed Denial of Service Protection, iDefense Security Intelligence and Managed DNS. To learn more about what it means to be Powered by Verisign, please visit [Verisign.com](#).