

## Introduction

Whatever type of business you own, a website is an essential tool for promoting your products or services and communicating with prospects and customers.

This factsheet introduces some simple methods of promoting your website, attracting visitors and encouraging them to keep coming back. It covers issues such as search engine optimisation, producing relevant, engaging content, using social media, blogging and pay-per-click advertising.

## Search engine optimisation

Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a method of improving a website's visibility in search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo. Search engines are often the first method for users searching for products or services online. The higher your website is ranked in search results, the more visitors it is likely to receive.

Search engines rank search results based on various criteria. One of the most important criteria is the presence on your website of keywords related to a user's search.

Think about the words or phrases that potential customers might use to search for your product or service. Include them in your copy and use them to create meaningful titles, captions and descriptions for images or video content.

Other criteria that influence search engine results include:

- Originality of content and the frequency with which new content is added.
- Links to and from your website. The quality of the links is just as important as the quantity. Search engines assess where links come from, prioritise sites that have links from reputable sources and penalise sites that have links from disreputable ones.
- Effective use of tags to help search engines recognise content features.
- Mobile-friendly design.
- Page-loading speed.
- Website security.

SEO tools that help you to optimise your website content and design are widely available from search engine providers and third-party software developers.

Examples of popular SEO tools include:

- Google Analytics ([https://marketingplatform.google.com/intl/en\\_uk/about/analytics](https://marketingplatform.google.com/intl/en_uk/about/analytics)), which allows you to monitor and analyse traffic to your website.

- Google Keyword Planner ([https://ads.google.com/intl/en\\_uk/home/tools/keyword-planner](https://ads.google.com/intl/en_uk/home/tools/keyword-planner)), which helps you choose highly searched relevant terms to put in your website content.
- Bing Webmaster Tools ([www.bing.com/webmasters/about](http://www.bing.com/webmasters/about)), which help you to improve your website's visibility in Bing search results.
- SEO plugins such as Yoast SEO (<https://yoast.com/wordpress/plugins/seo>) and SEO Booster (<https://apps.shopify.com/seo-boosters>), which check your website for SEO issues and provide recommended solutions.

For more information about SEO go to <https://developers.google.com/search/docs/beginner/seo-starter-guide>.

## Optimising your website for local searches

If you primarily serve customers in your local area, it is important to improve your online visibility in search results that are carried out locally, or that include search terms specifying your town, county or region.

One way to do this is to include relevant localised content, such as travel directions and areas served by your business. If possible, include community information that relates to your business, for example a local event that you have supported. It is also important to ensure that your name, address and telephone number appear correctly and consistently across your website - on your homepage, your contact page and any other page where they might be useful for website visitors.

Another way to improve your visibility in local search results, and on Google Maps, is to use Google My Business ([https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038063?hl=en&ref\\_topic=4539639](https://support.google.com/business/answer/3038063?hl=en&ref_topic=4539639)). This is a free tool that enables you to create a business profile that will appear above ordinary Google search results, along with directions to the business and the option for mobile users to click a 'call' button to phone the business.

Bing Places for Business ([www.bingplaces.com](http://www.bingplaces.com)) is a similar tool that enables business owners to improve their local visibility in Bing search results.

## Social media engagement

Social media marketing encourages social network users to spread virtual 'word of mouth' information about your business. Social networks are powerful communication tools that allow business owners and freelancers to interact with current and potential customers.

Popular social networking platforms include Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn and Pinterest. It's important to establish which platforms are most relevant for your business. Once you do, you can set up social media accounts for your business on these platforms and post interesting snippets of information that link back to your website. For example, details of a sale or promotion, news about a brand new product, blog posts, articles or other new content.

You can add 'share' buttons to your website to encourage visitors to post links to your pages on their own social media accounts, and 'follow' buttons to encourage them to subscribe to your social media accounts.

## Relevant website content

Although the content of your website should take SEO into account, it is important to ensure that it is written primarily for your website visitors, rather than for search engines. Avoid overusing keywords or including unoriginal or misleading content just to improve your search ranking. Provide relevant, useful, authoritative content that is engaging and easy to understand.

Articles about new developments in your industry can be useful if your customers are other traders, and information about the latest trends is helpful if you sell to consumers. Many websites also include articles about the history and values of the business, and insights about key activities, such as the processes used to make a product.

Depending on what type of business you operate, 'How to' articles can be a good way of drawing customers to your website. For example, customers might find a plumber's website by searching 'How to fix a leaky tap'.

Fresh content encourages repeat visits, so it is important to add new content frequently. Include up-to-date information about new products and services, and publish news stories to encourage visitors to return to your site on a regular basis.

Remember that content doesn't just have to be text. You can also add relevant images and videos to your website to attract and engage with visitors. Many businesses have their own YouTube channel, with videos related to their products and services. As well as being available to users who search YouTube, you can make these videos appear directly on your own website.

## Blogging

Blogs allow users to write, publish and distribute information quickly online. A blog with regular, personal, diary-style posts, is a useful method of adding regular fresh content to a website. Blogs are often interactive, allowing readers to post responses and other comments.

Having your own blog can help increase traffic to your website. It's also an opportunity to join a conversation with other bloggers with mutual professional interests. Take time to read and comment on other blogs in your area of expertise. Posting an intelligent comment with a link to your website can raise the profile of your business and your website. Make sure your comments are relevant and respectful. Posting irrelevant comments can be regarded as spamming and could damage your business's reputation.

## Online directories

Online directories can point prospective customers to your website. Many professional, trade and industry associations provide online directories that are specific to their members' line of business.

General business directories can also direct people to your website. You can list your business in some online directories free of charge, but many will charge a fee. There are numerous online business directories in the UK, for example:

- Yell ([www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com)).
- Thompson Local ([www.thomsonlocal.com](http://www.thomsonlocal.com)).
- FreeIndex ([www.freeindex.co.uk](http://www.freeindex.co.uk)).

## Pay-per-click advertising

Pay-per-click (PPC) is an advertising model in which advertisers pay online publishers a fee every time their advert is clicked by a website visitor. A carefully monitored PPC campaign can be cost-effective, as you will only pay when users click on your ads.

PPC is typically associated with search engines, where adverts are displayed alongside organic search results. Go to Google Ads ([https://ads.google.com/intl/en\\_uk/home/](https://ads.google.com/intl/en_uk/home/)) and Microsoft Advertising (<https://ads.microsoft.com>) for more details.

PPC ads are also associated with social media platforms. For example, Twitter Ads (<https://business.twitter.com/en/advertising.html>) are 'promoted Tweets' targeted at Twitter users with relevant interests. You only pay when users follow your account, click on your promoted Tweet, retweet it, like it or reply to it.

## Hints and tips

- Include your website address on your marketing materials, business stationery, e-mail signatures and van liveries.
- Monitor your website traffic and measure the effectiveness of your efforts to increase it, using a tool such as Google Analytics.
- Don't add irrelevant poor-quality content or links, as this will lower your website's search ranking as well as giving website visitors a negative view of your business.
- Beware of unscrupulous 'SEO experts' who claim to guarantee to improve your search engine rankings in exchange for a fee.

## Further information

BIF044 Developing a Marketing Plan

BIF096 Choosing and Registering an Internet Domain Name

BIF107 Profiling your Target Audience

BIF392 Creating a Marketing Strategy

BIF400 Affiliate Marketing

BIF494 Legal Requirements for Business Websites

BIF541 An Overview of Social Media for Business

Google Webmasters provides information and resources to help you improve your website and connect with more visitors.

Website: [www.google.com/webmasters/learn](http://www.google.com/webmasters/learn)

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) provides guidance about privacy and electronic communication and data protection, including information about the use of cookies and other tracking devices on business websites.

Website: <https://ico.org.uk>

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**Cobweb Information Ltd**, YBN, 7 & 8 Delta Bank Road, Metro Riverside Park, Gateshead, NE11 9DJ.  
Tel: 0191 461 8000 Website: [www.cobwebinfo.com](http://www.cobwebinfo.com)