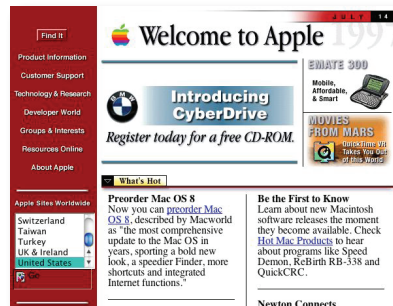


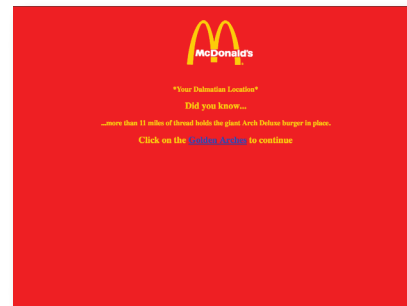
Building Your Web Presence

Small businesses have always been forced to be more adaptive, more flexible and quicker to react to market changes to stay ahead of their bigger competitors. On the whole, we simply don't have access to the funding required to create a market presence and build a widely recognized brand. Traditional advertising media is often too expensive for small businesses to provide a sustained presence across a variety of media so we pick and choose what we hope will work this year or this month. With that being said, the one area where small businesses can excel, where the playing field is a bit more level, is on-line with your web presence.

It used to be that just having a website was good enough, many small businesses designed their own or had "a guy" who did it for them.



Remember these?



Usually it was just the basics: contact information, some of the products or services offered, and links to the website of suppliers. We hoped that people would find us when they searched for our specific business name and then would call us for the information they needed.

This approach to building your online presence has several limitations. One problem is that the website rarely, if ever, gets updated until it is time to be replaced. Well, online buyers and prospects are skeptical by nature and if they are not able to find the information they want in a timely and informative matter, they will leave your site and go the next site.

This is referred to as bounce rate.

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However, the biggest problem became the competitive landscape and the need for search engine optimization (SEO) so that customers can find you. This is beyond most business owners' abilities to manage and cost became an obstacle to fixing the problem as "professionals" became involved. In an earlier step, we discussed how Google AdWords can circumvent this SEO process at a reasonable cost by allowing you to purchase your way to the top of the search results based on keywords.

But that still is not enough, you need to consider all the options available to you where you can publicize your business. This means you need to have a Facebook page, should be using Twitter and Linked-In and putting ads in places like Kijiji Halifax.



In addition, using **inbound links** is a great way to build your credibility with prospects and Google alike.

The concept of an inbound link is simple: it is a link to your webpage from someone else's page. They are very popular when it comes to advertising and promotion, often offered by fundraising organizations to make you feel better about your contribution. The beauty of an inbound link is the low cost to add and maintain the links and your ability to see where people came from, not to mention the fact that you are getting a reference from a trusted source for the prospect.

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Lastly, you need to add your business profile to every directory service you can find, sites like Yelp, Canpages, the Nova Scotia Business Directory and yes, even Yellow Pages.

So how can you build your inbound links? The easiest way is to offer the service to your customers and suppliers with the intention of helping them grow their business. Explain the benefits for search optimization and referrals and simply ask if they are willing to do the same for you. Just by adding the link to your website, you are also getting an endorsement from that company that will help prospects feel more at ease with doing business with you. Inbound links are a real win/win.

There are many online directories that will allow you to post information about your business for free. Here are just a few:

*biz.yelp.ca
canpages.ca
google.com/places*