

Getting Your Business Noticed: Social Media, Website or Both?

Simply put, engaging on social media AND having a business website that work together is the most effective way to do business online. In an ideal world, all small businesses would do both. But sometimes that isn't realistic for a small business right off the bat.

In that case, it may make sense for some small businesses getting online for the first time to use a social media platform as a temporary stand-in for a website. Social media platforms have a built-in base of potential customers, are free or low-cost, and have minimal commitment – a great way to test the online waters. However, keep in mind you won't have as much control over your social media Web page. One way to minimize this is to [register your business's domain name](#), or Web address, [and have the Web address 'point' to your social media page](#) (or eventually a website). This will allow you to have your online identity, build your brand, and market your business with a professional-looking, branded Web address that is memorable. In fact, 70% of consumers are more likely to visit a business's Facebook page if they could get to it directly by typing in a Web address.¹

The intent of social media is as a marketing tool, and small business expert and advocate Rieva Lesonsky recommended in a recent [seminar](#) that eventually "every small business needs a website." Given the ease of building a website these days, it's actually possible for you to build one on your own.

Understanding the following facts and considerations will help you decide which solution is best for your online business, and how you can leverage your own solution to increase your chances of success.

SOCIAL MEDIA ON ITS OWN

There are many multimedia platforms to leverage when using social media as your online presence, such as Facebook, Google+, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Instagram and YouTube. Businesses are also advised to get involved with rating/review sites like Yelp!, Google Places, Yahoo Local and Bing Places for Business. Finally, use industry-specific directory sites like Angie's List, Honest Buildings, Houzz, Spiceworks and TripAdvisor to supplement your primary social platform.

The best advice with getting started using social media is to avoid trying to conquer them all at once. It may be best to simply start where your customers are, conquer 1 or 2 of the most important platforms over time, and then move on to the next. Remember to try to reserve accounts or claim your branded profiles on all sites/platforms you plan to leverage to avoid confusion. And if you do engage on more than one social media site, try a management tool like Hootsuite that will save you time updating all your social media messages and accounts.

WEBSITES

77 percent of small businesses said websites are the most effective online marketing tool for creating awareness and strengthening customer relationships, more than any other online marketing tool.² With a bevy of options, both paid and [free](#), for creating a website for your business, it is easier than ever to build a professional, high-quality website to showcase your products and services, and to establish your brand in a form you can control.

If cost is a concern for you, the prevalence of free or low-cost website builders makes it easy to create a website yourself. These tools are created for the non-technical user with easy-to-use templates so you can simply point-and-click your way to a new website. Costs for these range from \$0 to \$35/month and usually include customer support. Popular website builder tools include Moonfruit, Wix, Weebly and registrars who sell domain names also have affordable packages.

1. 2013 Verisign SMB Survey

2. <http://news.constantcontact.com/press-release/customer-engagement-major-focus-small-business-technology-according-constant-contact-t>

If time or management is a concern for you, having someone build your website doesn't have to cost a fortune either. Just be realistic about your needs; start small and scale your website as your needs grow. Either way, our [Building a Website Checklist](#) will help you focus in on all the critical steps for a successful website.

SOCIAL MEDIA + WEBSITE

If you already have a website, social media should be part of your integrated marketing plan that helps to drive traffic to your website. Think of your website as the center of your online presence, with social media, advertising, email marketing and other activities driving customers and potential customers to your website to engage, learn and hopefully buy.

It may be confusing as to what you should do on social media versus your website, but remember they should work together to complement each other. For instance, if you use social media for quick or weekly updates to your customers, try to also showcase or integrate those Facebook posts or Twitter feeds directly on your website. It's okay for your social media page to have some of the same content as your website; in fact, integrate social where it makes sense on your website to make the most effective use of your time and communications to customers. Blogs are another form of [content](#) that may belong on both your social media site and your website.

Other ways to integrate social media include adding visible social media buttons to link to your social media page, and for e-commerce businesses, integrating share buttons so your customers can share socially what they just bought or like on your website.

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