



Reinvent your small business

With technology advancing faster than people are adopting and the face of customers changing through these technologies, it is important to recognise changes and move with them.

The changes represent opportunities for your business to renew its vitality. Being proactive and innovative in your response is the only way to stay afloat and reap the benefits of a new business climate.

For example, the publishing industry is undergoing major changes with the growing popularity of e-readers, such as the Apple Kindle and the iPad. Small publishing houses or even distributors need to have the means and the knowledge to adapt to these major trends.

They will need to be adept in the business dynamics of e-readers. They will need the technological expertise to not only understand the e-readers, but also to sell them. They will also need the foresight to actively work for and within this new business environment. What will the future hold? Will people still be purchasing hard-back books?

It is not all doom and gloom, but rather it is an opportunity to take advantage of new technologies and their inherent possibilities.

Nonetheless, it can be a daunting endeavour for many people.

Here are some ways of navigating the uncertain waters of change

Develop a strategic plan

As with starting up any new business venture, it is vital that you have conceptualised your business's future and the limitations of your resources. A strategic plan is a must for business direction and success.

Recognise business opportunities

Look into the future. The proliferating digital world could mean that your business can make money by going online. This can be seen as an



Taking you forward

advantage, as the costs associated with physical places are reduced.

Reinvent yourself and your business

Look at what your business does best and grow from there. Use the available technologies and develop NEW products/ services. Simply repackaging old designs will inevitably fail.

Leverage your current assets

As before, using your accumulated experience and business assets can place you a step ahead of your competition. It is vital that you look to the future; now is not the time for 'in those days' nostalgia.

Consider Investors

Armed with your strategic business plan, consider seeking financial support from external sources.

It is more than adaptation which can help you move forward in your business. A better term would be reinvention. Embracing the change as an opportunity for creativity can help pave the way to a successful 'new minded' business.

Search engine optimisation



A website is not a self-governing outlet that will automatically bring business for your company. Being online is not the sole solution for attracting customers for you business.

Imagine a tiny store, in a desolate part of town, off an obscure road, tucked into a small passage, covered with wooden panels as your website. It will remain obscure unless the appropriate steps are taken for its prominence.

Many people will automatically search for your business through search engines. They may specifically type in your business name or simply a few keywords that relate to your industry.

The internet is a sea of web pages and content, yet there are ways in which you can optimise your chances of being found and indexed via search engines.

You have the control over five basic variables in search engine recognition

1. Keywords

Keywords are the very foundation of your search engine strategy as they target searches towards your site. Placing keywords on your pages and in the links pointing to your pages will lure people to your site.

Your keywords will need to represent your business, picking the wrong keywords will attract the wrong customers.

2. Content

Search engines index words, not images. A search engine will index the keywords a customer types into its

server. Therefore the more words you have on your site and the more key words you use will make it easier for a search engine to index your site.

3. Page Optimisation

Having content is only the beginning. It will need to be placed on the pages of your site in the correct way. The pages must be optimised to get the most out of the keywords.

For example, a word near the top of the page is more prominent than one near the bottom. Additionally, a word at the beginning of a title tag is more prominent than a word at the end.

4. Submissions

Submissions refer to you actively submitting information into the search engines.

In 2005, Google introduced the XML sitemap, which is a file that is placed into your website's root directory. It contains a list of links to your pages to help the search engines locate them.

However, this is not sufficient and you will more likely achieve indexing through links and keywords.

Nonetheless, you will also want to provide Google, Yahoo! And MSN live search the sitemap the want, in case they decide to use them.

5. Links

Links pointing to your website are extremely important in a saturated and competitive keyword market. If you have a business with much competition, chances are you will all be vying for the same keywords.

Having as many links, which include keywords, pointing to your site as possible is a sure way to stand out from the competition.

Make sure that the links come from relevant websites that cater to a similar audience as yours.

Remember that, these five points need to be addressed when conceptualising the function of your website.

A website is a great tool for marketing, advertising and communication. It is important to take advantage of this through ensuring all of the proper steps are taken for its prominence online.

Creating customer loyalty

As businesses understand the value in keeping old customers, loyalty programs have become the norm in effective customer management. Customer loyalty cards are almost an expected business practice and most credit card companies have in turn taken this step on board with points programs and business partnerships.

Big Airline companies such as Qantas, have long run programs which reward loyal customers such as frequent flyer points and the Qantas Club.

However, for small businesses in highly saturated markets loyalty programs are a contingent measure to stay one step ahead of the competition. Your goal is to make your

customers happy upon first visit and then prompt them to return in the future.

The best customer loyalty programs are simple and maintainable. Here are a few examples:

1. Reward cards: These cards can be handed out to customers upon purchase. For example, if you own a café or a food franchise, the card may offer customers a free upsized or a discount with the next purchase. Many hairdressing salons also offer free treatments for example.
2. Pre-purchase point cards: These are very popular in businesses such as espresso bars. The simple concept is delayed gratification. A customer knows that he/she must contribute to the business to be rewarded in return. An example could be a free coffee for every 10 coffees purchased.
3. Club Cards: This is most popular for franchises or larger businesses. It may include benefits to the customer such as discounts, sales news and special services. Customer gifts relating to your business are also effective. For example, if you own a supermarket franchise, a club member may be entitled to a small gift for x amount of dollars spent.

Your business operations will determine the most appropriate loyalty program. The loyalty program you choose should reflect your business' values and standards.

Regardless of the loyalty program you implement, customers will only participate if they see explicit value in their continued business. Therefore it is still your number one priority, as a business operator, to provide a high level of service and quality at all times.



Why blog?

Setting up a blog page for your business will facilitate the communication of knowledge and expertise between customers and firms.

Blogs are an efficient and cost effective way to share company knowledge, build client bases and direct web traffic to your company.

Effectively, blogging online for your company means regularly publishing company movements and industry information. It also allows readers to comment and to access links to sister or similar blog pages.

Linking blogs will open up your client bases immeasurably. As other blog readers are prompted to access your company's blog, your prominence and brand identity will expand.

Blog software companies include wordpress.com, blogger.com, blogspot.com and many more. In simply typing 'blog websites' into Google, you will have access to close to 200 million hits!

For a blog to be successful, it is important that it is:

- Updated regularly: this is important, not just for client perception of your firm, but also for Google. A blog which is updated regularly is more likely to be indexed by search engines on account of its activity.
- Keyword rich: again for search engines. Search engines will not pick up sentences heavy in conjunctions; instead pages are scanned based on relevant words.

- Linked to many other resources (websites, blogs): herein the linked pages must be relevant. For example, if your business is a clothing boutique, linking to popular fashion blogs would direct large amounts of new and important traffic to your site.
- Interactive: allowing readers to comment on your articles and perhaps link your page to theirs will enhance your prominence online.
- User friendly: having a recognisable URL which resonates with your business and is easy to remember and search.

Blogs do have their limitations however and so should be used in conjunction with your firm's website. But with minimal costs and energy, the advantages of blogging make it an avenue that should not be ignored.



Keeping your customers

The single most important factor influencing the livelihood of your business is your client base. Your customers, while being the obvious harbingers of sales for your business, also represent your brand.

A dissatisfied customer will not only stop doing business with you personally, they also have the potential to affect any future business you have with other customers.

A handy analogy to remember is a walking advertisement. A dissatisfied customer will, on average, tell four or five people of their bad experience; whereas a satisfied customer will only spread word of their good experience to one person.

Additionally, it costs five times more to win a new customer than it does to keep an existing one.

By working hard at your relationship with an existing customer, you can turn their one-off business into something more permanent. This can help you save money and boost profits.

Installing a customer feedback system can provide you with first-hand direct information on customer satisfaction. This can be achieved in the following ways:

1. Providing your customers with a feedback form once they have purchased your goods/services.
You can invite your customers to comment or suggests areas for improvement. This must be provided in a hassle-free, efficient manner for the customer.
2. If you sell by mail order, then the feedback form can be included with any dispatched orders.
3. If you are a service business, contacting your customers via a telephone call can also be effective

However, this must be done immediately after the service was provided, so the customer's experience is

fresh. It is most important that the customer feels some form of mutual benefit in this arrangement.

4. Online resources.

Immediately after an online purchase was made, a customer may be directed to a short survey evaluating the ease of purchase or accessibility of the website.

In addition follow up email is quicker, more cost effective and efficient than mail.

Providing your clients with the opportunity for feedback helps your business identify any areas of weakness or areas which need improvement.

Furthermore, customer feedback reflects positively back onto your business. It establishes your brand as caring and responsive to customer needs and wants.

It is vital to keep your customer's happy and content to avoid them seeking business with your competitors. A customer can be finicky and will, without second thought, seek business elsewhere if they feel their needs have not been met.



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TAGGART
& PARTNERS
Accountants & Business Advisors

32 Logan Road
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Tel: 07 3391 1188

Fax: 07 3391 1788

Email: info@taggartandpartners.com.au

Website: www.taggartandpartners.com.au

