



Boost your Sales with Online Marketing

A Guide for Entrepreneurs

Share



Table of contents

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------|
| | Online marketing that clicks | 2 |
| 1 | Build: Create your online presence | 4 |
| | Get started | 5 |
| | Setting Up Your Online Properties | 6 |
| | Online Design Basics | 9 |
| | Social media | 11 |
| | E-commerce | 11 |
| 2 | Drive: Attract customers online | 13 |
| | Value-added content | 14 |
| | Email marketing | 16 |
| | Online ads | 16 |
| | Search engine optimization: 4 tips to boost your online findability | 17 |
| | Social media | 18 |
| 3 | Measure: Gauge the success of your digital efforts | 22 |
| | Tools to track visitors | 23 |
| | Analyze the quality of interactions | 23 |
| | Continue measuring | 23 |
| 4 | Optimize: Learn and adjust | 25 |
| | Review your online properties | 26 |
| | Extend your reach | 26 |
| | Take it to the next level | 27 |
| | Making the Internet your ally | 28 |



Online marketing that clicks

The Internet has revolutionized the world of sales and marketing. In just a few years, it has become an indispensable tool for reaching customers for many companies.

But Canadian entrepreneurs aren't exploiting the full potential of the Internet to increase sales. Many Canadian small businesses don't even have a website.

And those with a site often don't use it effectively, which can mean poor returns on investment and frustration for busy, results-oriented entrepreneurs.

The reality is that businesses are missing out on huge opportunities if they ignore the Internet, says Ravi Dindayal, Director, Marketing - Consulting at BDC. "This is how customers find products and services. The first thing they do is go online," he says. "There can be an immense return on investment, but you have to be committed and devote the resources—time and money—to make it work."

Important for all kinds of businesses

An Internet presence is important even if you don't plan to sell anything online. That's because customers may still look for your website or social media pages to learn about your business.

This eBook uses real-life stories from Canadian entrepreneurs to show you how the web can help your business attract customers and boost revenues.

We'll look at manageable steps you can take to create a successful website, attract visitors to it and convert more of them into paying customers. We'll also cover key questions, such as how to measure and optimize your efforts, ways to use value-added content to foster a community online, and how to unlock the power of social media and e-commerce.



4 steps to success

The eBook is divided into four parts that deal with the four stages of a successful digital marketing plan.

- ①. **Build**—This section explains how to create a basic digital presence for your business, including a website, e-commerce tools and social media platforms that are all adapted to mobile devices.
- ②. **Drive**—Here you'll learn how to drive potential customers to your online properties.
- ③. **Measure**—In this section, we look at how to measure the results of your digital efforts. You'll see why it's critical to listen to what web visitors are saying and analyze their online behaviour.
- ④. **Optimize**—The final section deals with how to use what you've learned as part of a continuous cycle of improving your efforts and better converting web visitors into customers. You will also find a roadmap for layering on new digital features as your sophistication grows.

With some hard work, you can devise and implement an online marketing plan that's right for you and your growing business.

1

Build: Create your online presence

Perhaps you'd like to develop an online presence but aren't sure where to start. Or your business may already have a website and a social media presence, but you can't help wondering whether your online efforts could be paying off better.

The good news is that it's never been easier to get started online.

New inexpensive and free tools allow you to get started with a basic website, even if you don't know anything about programming. And easy-to-create social media pages give your business even more tools you can use to market online.

What's most important is simply to begin. The idea is to start small and build incrementally. Mistakes are inevitable, but the key is to be patient, learn as you go and continually strive to optimize your efforts.





Get started

First, step back and think about what you want from your online presence.

Your digital game plan doesn't need to be anything too elaborate or fancy. The idea is to sit down with key staff and hammer out the following main elements.

Goals

With the help of your staff, set out your online objectives. These should guide all your web efforts. Ask yourself what you're trying to achieve. Are you selling to customers directly from your website? Are you generating leads for your salespeople? Are you serving customers?

Customers

Identify the target customers for your online efforts. Be as precise as possible, describing such factors as their typical age, education and income level, as well as their aspirations, likes and dislikes.

Content plan and key messages

Determine what kind of content will appeal to your customers. Plan not only promotional marketing content but also entertaining, interesting and educational material. Think about ways to engage your audience with content that will keep visitors coming back and sharing your material with their networks of friends and associates via social media.

- Develop a few key messages, telling the story of your company. You will use these to choose what content to produce.
- Review your existing content to see what you can use on your web properties—anything from photos and videos to how-to product guides and educational resources about issues relevant to customers.

Mobile plan

Develop a mobile strategy that ensures your online efforts reach users of smart phones and tablets. That means making your web properties mobile friendly and creating content specifically targeted to mobile devices.



Action plan

Create an online action plan that describes what you will do, in what order, to achieve your goals. Spell out who in your company will take on various tasks, such as managing e-commerce sales on your website, creating content and measuring your web traffic, including traffic on social media. Come up with a publishing schedule for your various web properties (i.e., how often you'll post new content).

Setting up your online properties

A website and social media pages are your business's storefront on the Internet—marketing your business 24 hours a day. Even if you don't sell online, potential clients may still look for your site or Facebook page to check out your products or find your address. And if what they find is confusing or unappealing—or if you're not there at all—they may think twice about buying from you.

Free and low-cost services such as WordPress and GoDaddy allow businesses to design and update a website quickly, with no programming know-how. Social media pages also let companies promote themselves with no upfront costs or tech skills.

If you've got a bigger budget or limited time, you can also hire a website designer to create a site. Either way, the key is to get started. At this stage, you need a web platform that presents your company in an attractive and professional way, gives you basic functions and allows you to add features as you learn and progress.

Sure-fire benefits

Whether your website and social media pages are selling tools, ways to collaborate with business partners or simple introductions to your company, the benefits are irrefutable. You should expect to use these tools to do some or all of the following:

- showcase your products and services in a cost-effective way
- reduce your advertising costs
- reach potential customers anywhere in the world



- offer value-added information that fosters a community of customers who may, in turn, share your content with their networks
- improve customer service
- get feedback from customers and track their activities to improve your offerings and sales performance

Many sites need a makeover

Despite the importance of an online presence, many businesses have a website and social media pages that are unattractive, tricky to navigate or ineffective at converting visitors into customers. If you suspect this is your problem, it may be time for a makeover.

That's what Nick Houseman realized at his Montreal aviation consulting company, Zenith Jet. His website was bland, dated and text heavy. It offered few details about Zenith's services and products.

That was a problem, especially because almost all of Zenith Jet's customers are outside Canada and often get their first impression of the company from the site. Houseman knew the Internet could be a cost-effective way to market his company internationally. So he decided to have the company's website redesigned and then turned to BDC Consulting to help him increase the number of prospective customers visiting the site.



**Putting our money
into our website was
the most effective
way to go.**

Nick Houseman



A clean, sharp look

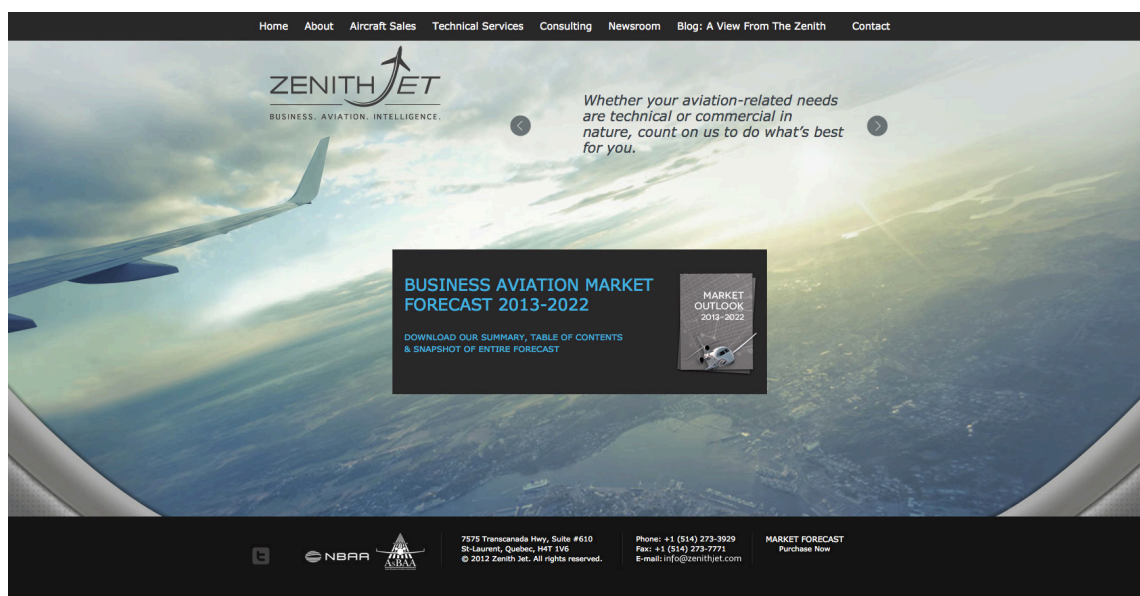
Zenith Jet's new site has a clean, sharp look. Stunning aerial photos now pull in visitors on every page. As well, the site has been reorganized to minimize the need for visitors to scroll and click to find information. Zenith's contact information is prominently displayed on every page.

Also, the site features the latest aviation business news—a way to establish Zenith as an industry thought leader.

Sales growth follows

The changes helped Zenith Jet's site move up to the top of the first page in web searches, leading to an explosion in Internet traffic. Sales have grown impressively.

"Putting our money into our website was the most effective way to go," Houseman says. "We can't afford ads in *The New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal*. It's thousands of dollars for a one-time print ad, whereas a website is there 24 hours a day."



Zenith Jet's website

Online design basics

It's important for your website and social media pages to reflect your company's goals and image. Here are some design basics that are critical to a good visitor experience.

- Prominently feature a clear, succinct description of your business, including whatever makes it stand out from the competition.
- Use powerful graphics that have visual impact but aren't overly busy or distracting.
- Be sure your contact information and logo are prominently displayed on each webpage.
- Feature a clear call to action that pushes visitors toward your goals—for example, "Shop Now" or "Sign Up for Our Newsletter."
- Consider what information visitors will want to find quickly. Keep content concise and to the point.
- Ensure the navigation is simple and consistent throughout the site. A rule of thumb is that visitors should be able to access any page with no more than three clicks from the home page. If your site has an e-commerce store, it should be easy for a customer to create and sign into an account, browse through your catalogue, and make a purchase.
- Be sure your site gives visitors a sense of security and professionalism, especially if you want to sell products online.
- Group information in searchable sections such as About Us, Our Services and Our Products.
- Make sure your site displays prominent links to your social media properties and company blog.

- Avoid using music or video that automatically plays when a visitor arrives. These can be irritating and may make your site inaccessible to visitors with limited bandwidth or mobile devices.
- Be sure your website can be easily viewed on a smart phone or tablet.
- Even better, create a simplified, mobile-friendly version of your site that loads when the site detects it's being accessed by a mobile device. The mobile-friendly version should have more concise text, and no large photos or videos. Be sure to test your site on various types of mobile devices to ensure it works on all of them.
- Also, consider creating a mobile software application (or “app”) for your company that visitors can download onto their device. An app gives users a shortcut icon that brings them directly to your site, so they don't need to search for it each time.



Social media

It's vital these days for businesses to consider having not only a website, but also a presence on social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Social media is where customers increasingly look for information about businesses.

Creating and maintaining social media pages is a great way for companies to foster an online community of current and potential clients, who can become your advocates and help you get noticed online. (For more information, download BDC's free eBook, *Social Media: A Guide for Entrepreneurs* by visiting bdc.ca/socialmediaguide.)

But entrepreneurs shouldn't underestimate how challenging it is to consistently generate appealing content and keep at it month after month. (Read tips on how to do this in part two on page 15.)

E-commerce

E-commerce has revolutionized the way Canadians do business, but many Canadian entrepreneurs are missing out.

Just 13% of Canadian small businesses were selling online in 2013, according to Statistics Canada. Meanwhile, about 76% of Canadian households shopped online in 2015, according to Canada Post.

Easy to get started

The good news is that getting started in e-commerce has never been simpler. No longer do businesses need to invest huge sums in an e-commerce website.

You can create a sales-ready site with no programming knowledge using free services, such as OpenCart and PrestaShop, or inexpensive providers, such as Shopify and eBay Stores.

These services provide tools to create a basic website that includes an online store with a digital shopping cart and permits payment via credit cards or other methods, such as PayPal. They also allow you to offer an online product catalogue, options for customer reviews and feedback, and data on your sales to help you track performance.



Grow your site as you learn

When starting out, don't get caught up in trying to create a huge e-commerce site with hundreds of products. Start small with a basic site offering a handful of products to test customer interest and work out any glitches in order processing. You can add more products and site features as you learn and grow.

Other options are available for businesses that sell to other businesses. A B2B company can create an e-commerce web portal, known as an extranet, that lets customers log in to their account, find product pricing and place orders online.

The convenience of online ordering can help you attract more customers. It can also streamline order processing and fulfillment, reducing costs and errors.

Aim for a professional look

Be sure that your online store or portal has a professional look, attractive product images, clear descriptions and an easily navigable layout so visitors can quickly find what they're looking for. Make sure it's simple for customers to create an account, search your catalogue and place an order.

Finally, don't neglect order fulfillment. Before you launch your site, make sure your company has the infrastructure to handle orders, shipping and returns.

2

Drive: Attract customers online

You've worked hard to create a great website and social media pages for your company. Now how do you get potential customers to visit? Even more importantly, how do you get them to buy your products and, ideally, spread the word about you to others?

An attractive website isn't much good if it attracts little notice. It's like a beautiful store stuck in the middle of a desert.

Embrace a different way of marketing

Marketing on the Internet is different from other forms of advertising. In fact, traditional hard-sell marketing is often a turn-off for Internet users.

Instead, adopt a soft-sell approach, especially in your social media messages. Offer interesting, fun and educational content blended occasionally with direct marketing messages. (While it's okay to be promotional on your website, you should strive to offer plenty of value-added content there, too.)





Position yourself as a trusted adviser

Content that is compelling and regularly updated encourages visitors to return to your web properties. It also gets them to share your content, which in turn helps your business rank higher on Internet searches. The goal is to have your company found by a growing number of prospective customers and to build relationships with them as a trusted expert in your field.

Five specific tools will help you attract more visitors, especially all-important repeat visitors:

- value-added content
- email marketing
- online ads
- search engine optimization
- social media

These tools are especially important as consumers get savvier about tuning out conventional marketing messages.

Here's the tricky part: Coordinating your campaigns using all five of these tools across all of your online properties. "All these things need to work together. You need a cohesive approach," says Ravi Dindayal, Director, Marketing - Consulting at BDC, who heads a team that advises businesses on every aspect of online marketing.

Value-added content

Here are tips for creating online content that brings in traffic and moves visitors toward your goals.

Listen

Start by listening. Get a sense of what kind of content your prospective customers want to see and share with others. Pay attention to what other, similar companies are already doing successfully to get attention on the web. Look especially at content that attracts lots of comments, likes or shares.



Be helpful

Find ways to be of service to Internet visitors, and you'll have better odds of turning them into paying clients. Be fun and imaginative. Do something different. Examples of good content include how-to articles and blog posts, educational videos, Q&A sessions with knowledgeable employees, event announcements, surveys, and contests. Also, keep your eyes open for excellent content developed by others to which you can link. If you have an e-commerce site, you can feature links to some of this value-added content when customers log in to their account page. But be careful not to reproduce other people's copyrighted material without permission.

Use visuals and video

Be sure to use lots of strong visual content, such as charts, photos, infographics and videos. With today's information overload, you should be careful not to overwhelm visitors with too much text. Videos are a particularly useful way to put a human face on your business and gain credibility. They're also useful for demonstrating products or services, and providing how-to information. Customer video testimonials can also help generate sales.

Use web-friendly writing

Writing for the web has to be concise and punchy. Don't turn off online visitors with big blocks of text and long, confusing headlines. Instead, title your content with brief, clear and attention-grabbing headlines. Use short sentences and paragraphs, conversational language, and lots of subtitles to break up text. Also a big hit: Organize your content into bullet points or a "top-10" list.

Think local

If your market is in a specific geographic area, your content should reflect this by focusing on news and other relevant material from your region.

Update often

Without regular updates, the number and frequency of visits will drop off. Follow the publishing schedule you came up with in your online content game plan—and tweak content based on your results. "Think of your content as a garden," Dindayal says. "You have to water it and maintain it. It's an active, ongoing thing."

Consider audio

Podcasts—audio files that you record for people to download—are another way to use your expertise to promote your company. Producing a podcast can be relatively easy and inexpensive. Get a larger audience by submitting it to podcast directories.



Host a webinar

Host an educational seminar over the web to showcase your thought leadership and build brand awareness.

Email marketing

Many businesses get an excellent response from email marketing. The idea is to collect email addresses of existing and potential customers and regularly send them a newsletter, eBooks, promotions or other high-value content.

Besides special offers, it's important to offer interesting content that ties in with your brand.

Build your list of contacts by inviting web visitors to sign up for your mailing list in a call to action button or pop-up. You can also collect email addresses when people enter contests on your social media pages and through a sign-up form in-store.

Online ads

Buying online ads for your company can be a cost-effective way to gain more Internet traffic for your web properties and boost sales. One option is pay-per-click advertising, which you can purchase through Google and other search engine companies. With this service, you pay to have your message and website link show up alongside results when Internet users search for certain terms relevant to your business.

Highly targeted ads

Google AdWords allows you to buy highly targeted ads based on such factors as geographic location and language. The Google AdWords Keywords Planner allows you to input various terms and see which ones attract the most searches.

Another option is to buy space on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. These platforms also permit targeted advertising based on user demographics and geographic location.

A key advantage of digital ads is that you get immediate data on how effective they are. You can use this information to optimize the ads and improve your results. (Learn more about measuring and optimizing in parts three and four.)

Search engine optimization

4 tips to boost your online findability

If people can't easily find your business on the web, you may be missing important opportunities.

Sites that appear on the first page of Google search results attract 90% of web search traffic, according to a study by digital marketing firm Optify. Sites on the second page attract just 14% of web traffic.

The art of improving your search rankings is called search engine optimization (SEO). It's a complex subject, but here are a few tips to help make your site and social media properties easier to find on the web.

- ①. **Choose appropriate keywords**—Select words that customers are likely to use when searching in your niche, using tools such as the Google AdWords Keywords Planner. Make a list of 20 to 50 keywords to sprinkle in your content, especially in headlines and other prominent text on your main web and social media pages.

Choose terms that help you stand out, including specific geographic areas if you have a location-based business. Also use your keywords in “tags”—code on your web pages that you can boost your search engine results. (If you don't know how to add tags, ask a website designer or an SEO expert for help.)

- ②. **Trade links**—The more sites that carry links to your site, the higher it will tend to rank in searches. Ask the owners of related sites to carry a link to your site in exchange for carrying a link to theirs.
- ③. **Use social media**—Search engine results now take into account how much website content is shared and discussed in social media. Your site should feature social media sharing buttons and compelling content that encourages visitors to share. Your social media pages should also feature links to your website, which will boost your search rankings. Websites that feature a blog also tend to rank better in search results.
- ④. **Get outside help**—An SEO specialist can help you boost your findability on the web.



Social media

When used properly, social media can help propel a business to a new level of visibility—and success. The key to getting attention and building traffic on your social media pages is to regularly post engaging content that builds a loyal following, generates interaction and gets shared.

That formula has worked well for Walter Manning and Savannah Olsen, co-owners of the Vancouver-based Old Faithful Shop, a modern-day version of a country general store that sells uniquely designed, quality household products.



Savannah Olsen and Walter Manning, Co-Owners, Old Faithful Shop
Photo: Grant Harder



Key part of succes

Manning says the duo's extensive use of social media is a key reason for annual sales growth of 50% since the store opened in 2010. Even before starting the store, Manning had developed a loyal web following for his blog devoted to his passion: Photography. When he and Olsen designed their store and chose its products, they used the same visually appealing esthetic as Manning's blog. Many of his blog readers became store customers and followed its social media pages.

Manning and Olsen post regularly to their company's Facebook page and Twitter account. They try to stay away from too much self-promotional material—a turn-off on social media—focusing instead on fun and educational posts that people are likely to share with friends. Posts include attractive photos, book suggestions and music lists that reflect the store's brand.

Great way to attract customers

"I can't believe that some businesses don't use social media," says Manning, whose company has about 11,000 Facebook fans and 47,000 followers on Instagram. "We have better engagement with customers through Facebook and other social media. It gets more customers into our bricks-and-mortar and online stores."

It's generally a good idea for your business to have an account on every major social media site to reserve your place and protect your brand.

Main social media sites

Here are the main social media sites and the ways your business can use them to attract a following of potential customers and be more visible on the Internet.

→ **Facebook**—Facebook is virtually synonymous with social media. With over 1 billion active users, the site can't be ignored by businesses.

A business Facebook page lets you showcase a human, fun image of your company and is easier to update than a website. Visitors to your Facebook page can subscribe to your updates by clicking the "Like" button on your page. This means they may get your updates on their Facebook page.

The key to building traffic on Facebook is posting compelling and informative content. The more interesting it is, the greater the chances that visitors will "like" your site, and comment on and share your content with their friends. And the more interaction you foster, the more likely your posts are to appear on the Facebook pages of your fans and their friends. For more information about Facebook for business, visit facebook.com/business.



- **Twitter**—Twitter is a “microblogging” site on which users write short posts—called “tweets”—that are no more than 140 characters long. Tweets can include links to articles, photos and other content.

Visitors to your company’s Twitter page can subscribe to your tweets by becoming one of your “followers.” The site also lets visitors interact with you by sending comments and questions, or sharing (“retweeting”) your posts to their own networks of followers.

Twitter can be a useful and easy way for businesses to engage clients with entertaining or informative items. It’s the digital era’s equivalent of the water cooler—a meeting place to catch up on what’s going on. The site can also be useful for handling customer questions and issues.

Build number of Twitter followers by following other Twitter pages, especially those of industry figures and influence leaders active on the site. If you follow someone, there’s more chance they’ll follow you in return. Use the site’s powerful search tool to find people who regularly post about keywords relevant to your industry, then click “Follow” beside the person’s user name to start getting their tweets.

Engage your audience with tweets about events, links to interesting content, surveys and contests. Your Twitter feed should ideally be a mix of your own tweets, retweets of other people’s content and replies. For more information, visit business.twitter.com.

- **LinkedIn**—LinkedIn is a social media site that’s popular for professional and business networking and recruiting. It has tools allowing you to easily and quickly build a large network of business contacts who will see your updates about your company and to whom you can send direct messages. The site is a fast-growing method of recruiting, thanks to its powerful job search tools.

As well, LinkedIn allows your company and employees to join and create discussion groups relevant to your business. This lets you raise your profile and establish your company as an industry leader. For more information, visit marketing.linkedin.com/company-pages.

- **YouTube**—With more than 1 billion visitors per month, YouTube is the most popular site on the web after Google. Businesses can target this traffic by creating their own YouTube channel—a free and easy way to reach potential clients with fun and educational videos.

Videos are a powerful way to put a more human face on your company and engage visitors. For example, show a video tour of your company, feature employees at work or do a product demonstration. For more information, visit youtube.com/yt/about.



- **Consumer review sites**—Of the various types of social media, review sites have had one of the biggest impacts on consumer behaviour. Many consumers now check reviews before deciding on everything from where to eat or stay to which TV, mattress or car to buy.

In many industries, it's critical to regularly monitor review sites to see what consumers are saying about your business. While you can't control what's being said, you can manage your reputation by responding promptly and politely to questions and comments, and proactively dealing with complaints.

Customer reviews can also provide free market intelligence and product feedback.

Here are a few other tips for dealing with review sites.

- Be truthful, transparent and neutral in tone, regardless of the language used by the reviewer.
- Be sure to get listed on relevant review sites, with a link to your own site, if possible.
- A bad review isn't always bad news. Customers can get suspicious if the picture is too rosy and you have no negative comments. Responding constructively to criticism shows you are open and care about clients. Feedback can also help you get better.
- Invite customers to contribute testimonials. Obtain customers' permission before posting their positive feedback, and never post fake reviews.
- While monitoring review sites, look for what customers are saying about your competitors. This is an invaluable source of market intelligence..

For more information on how best to use social media, download BDC's free eBook, *Social Media: A Guide for Entrepreneurs*, by visiting bdc.ca/socialmediaguide.

- **Blogs**—A blog is a good place to feature content on your website and build interest in your company. It can establish you as a credible authority in your field, helping draw more visitors to your site and putting more sales on the books.

Blogs are easier to create and update than a website. A regularly updated blog hosted on your website also improves your ranking in web searches.

But remember your customers and prospective customers are pressed for time. They see a lot of online content every day. That's why it pays to take the time to learn best practices for blogging. You should also make sure to promote your blog posts on Facebook, Twitter and other social sites.

3

Measure: Gauge the success of your digital efforts

Measurement is where the true power of the Internet lies. It tells you whether your new website redesign is paying off or whether you're wasting your time with all those Facebook posts.

Many businesses that have trouble getting results from their online efforts are simply failing to measure the impact of their efforts and act on this critical feedback.

"Measurement is the real beauty of Internet marketing," BDC's Ravi Dindayal says. "With traditional advertising, you have no idea what's effective. But with digital, you get all this data. You can see what's working—and what's not. Then you adjust to improve your performance."





Tools to track visitors

Free tools such as Google Analytics allow you to measure your website's traffic volume, how long visitors stay, where they're coming from and what kind of device they're using.

Information is also available on the path visitors follow to buy something through your website or take some other action. All of this information allows you to continuously tweak your site design, content and marketing campaigns, based on what's working best.

You can get similar data on your social media efforts by using free analytics tools available on most social networking and blogging sites. Other free tools that can analyze your social media pages and rate your social influence include Klout, Kred and PeerIndex. As well, paid services are available that provide more detailed data and analysis on your website and social media efforts.

Analyze quality of interactions

Keep in mind that you shouldn't just measure basic data, such as the number of social media fans. It's even more important to track the volume and quality of interactions on your sites—comments, likes, retweets and so on. Such interactions tell you that your site is attracting the right kind of visitors—engaged fans whom you can sway to meet the goals you set out in your online game plan.

Continue measuring

It's also important to remember your work is never done. As the Internet and markets evolve, it's vital to keep measuring constantly to see which content and campaigns work and which don't—and to learn as you go.

Philip Murad has turned his knack for measuring his web efforts into a thriving business. His Vaughan, Ontario-based company, Philip & Henry Productions Inc., books dates for a network of magicians across North America.



About 70% of his business is generated through the Internet, and that business has been growing by 30% year over year.

Murad's success hasn't happened magically. It requires a continuous investment of time, energy and dollars. His secret is working each day on strategies to drive more traffic to his website in order to generate sales leads and new customers.

He carefully tracks every aspect of his Internet marketing efforts with free tools, such as Google Analytics. This lets him compare traffic generated by various keywords and the way they are positioned on his site.

"I tweak it all the time," he says. "The beautiful thing about marketing through the Internet is that you can track its effectiveness."



**The beautiful thing
about marketing
through the Internet
is that you can track
its effectiveness.**

Philip Murad

4

Optimize: Learn and adjust

The Internet offers unprecedented data on your marketing efforts, but if you don't use this intelligence to optimize your web efforts, you're wasting your time and resources.

Unfortunately, this is a common mistake, BDC's Ravi Dindayal says. Many companies create a basic website and social media properties but then put little effort into optimizing them and wind up frustrated with poor results.

Optimization can be divided into three stages, depending on the sophistication of your web presence. It's best to start small and focus on simple, incremental improvements to avoid becoming overwhelmed.





Review your online properties

Stage one is to review your website and social media pages to make sure they are meeting your basic requirements. They should:

- be user friendly for visitors (easy to navigate, with clear calls to action and prominently featured contact information)
- present your company in an attractive, professional way that is consistent with your branding and overall business strategy

Extend your reach

Once you've accomplished this first level of optimization and gained some experience online, you are ready for stage two. Here is where you start making efforts to extend your reach online.

Set up your online analytics tools to generate the measurement data that will be at the heart of your optimization and other Internet efforts. Using this information, you can take the following actions.

- Look for information on what is working best on your website—and what you need to improve or replace. Experiment to see which tweaks improve your results. For example, does a bigger font, different positioning or a new call to action increase the number of people signing up for your online newsletter?
- Gauge the reaction to value-added content. If you post a new photo on your website, do visitors look at it more or less often than they looked at the previous one? How many photos are ideal on various webpages? Is a video better? Which social media posts get shared most? Which generate the most comments?
- Work to improve your findability in search engine results and on social media.
- See which keywords work best in online ads.
- Focus on ways to improve the conversion of visitors into paying customers. This can pay off more than efforts to get more traffic to your site. For example, make sure forms are simple and easy to fill out. Also, align calls to action with content on different pages. Visitors are more likely to subscribe to a newsletter if the subscribe button is beside a useful how-to article.
- Think about how to make your brand more impressive online.



Take it to the next level

Once you've mastered stage two, you're ready for the next level of sophistication. Here's where you optimize your online presence in creative ways to enhance your brand still more. Optimization at this advanced level can even involve revising your business model.

Create an omni-channel customer experience

The idea is to coordinate your online efforts with all your other activities to offer a seamless and satisfying customer experience.

If you're a retailer, this means coordinating your online and in-store efforts to make sure sales reps are aware of your online and other campaigns. They should be ready to honour coupons and update a client's loyalty card if needed. "When you do something online, make sure it comes alive in the store," Dindayal says.

Omni-channel marketing also applies to B2B companies. Sales reps answering the phone should be aware of your online campaigns and other web efforts.

Many businesses are taking the omni-channel approach even further. Some restaurants, for example, hand customers a tablet to browse the menu wirelessly, place orders and pay through the company's web-based portal. A growing number of retailers are equipping sales reps with tablets that allow them to check inventory, access product information and promotions, show videos and process purchases on the spot.

Build a community

Look for creative ways to give customers and other online visitors an enhanced role. For example, you could hold photo and video contests, run guest posts, and publish customer testimonials. Some companies even use crowdsourcing (input from their online audience) to enhance products.

Provide thought leadership content

Offer more in-depth material to solidify your place as an industry leader and build your email list. This includes eBooks, white papers and blog posts about developments in your field.

Integrate with business applications

Integrate your e-commerce or other web efforts with your back-office tools, such as accounting, inventory, order processing and returns.



Make the Internet your ally

A well-implemented online marketing plan can propel your business to a new level by helping you find more customers and do a better job serving the ones you already have. BDC clients featured in this eBook have done just that by turning the Internet into a sales and marketing ally.

Nick Houseman's Montreal aviation consulting company, Zenith Jet, found that a revamped website and some help from BDC Consulting led to a big increase in traffic to the site and helped to boost international sales for the company.

Walter Manning and Savannah Olsen converted a loyal social media following into a thriving customer base for their Old Faithful Shop in Vancouver, helping to fuel sales growth of 50% per year.

And Philip Murad of Vaughan, Ontario, has seen a big payoff from his hard work in optimizing his website for better sales. His company, Philip & Henry Productions—which books magic acts across North America—now generates 70% of its business online.

Online sales and marketing have taken these businesses to a new level of success, and they can do the same for your business. Still, it's often challenging for busy entrepreneurs to devise and implement the right online marketing game plan and finance their investments.

BDC can help at every stage

BDC is here to help get the job done right, the first time. From more than 110 business centres across Canada and online at [bdc.ca/articlestools](https://www.bdc.ca/articlestools), we offer entrepreneurs customized technology financing and independent expert advice at an affordable price.

We are Canada's development bank. Our mission is to ensure our clients have the support they need to succeed in all their projects.

Boost your Sales with Online Marketing: A Guide for Entrepreneurs

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