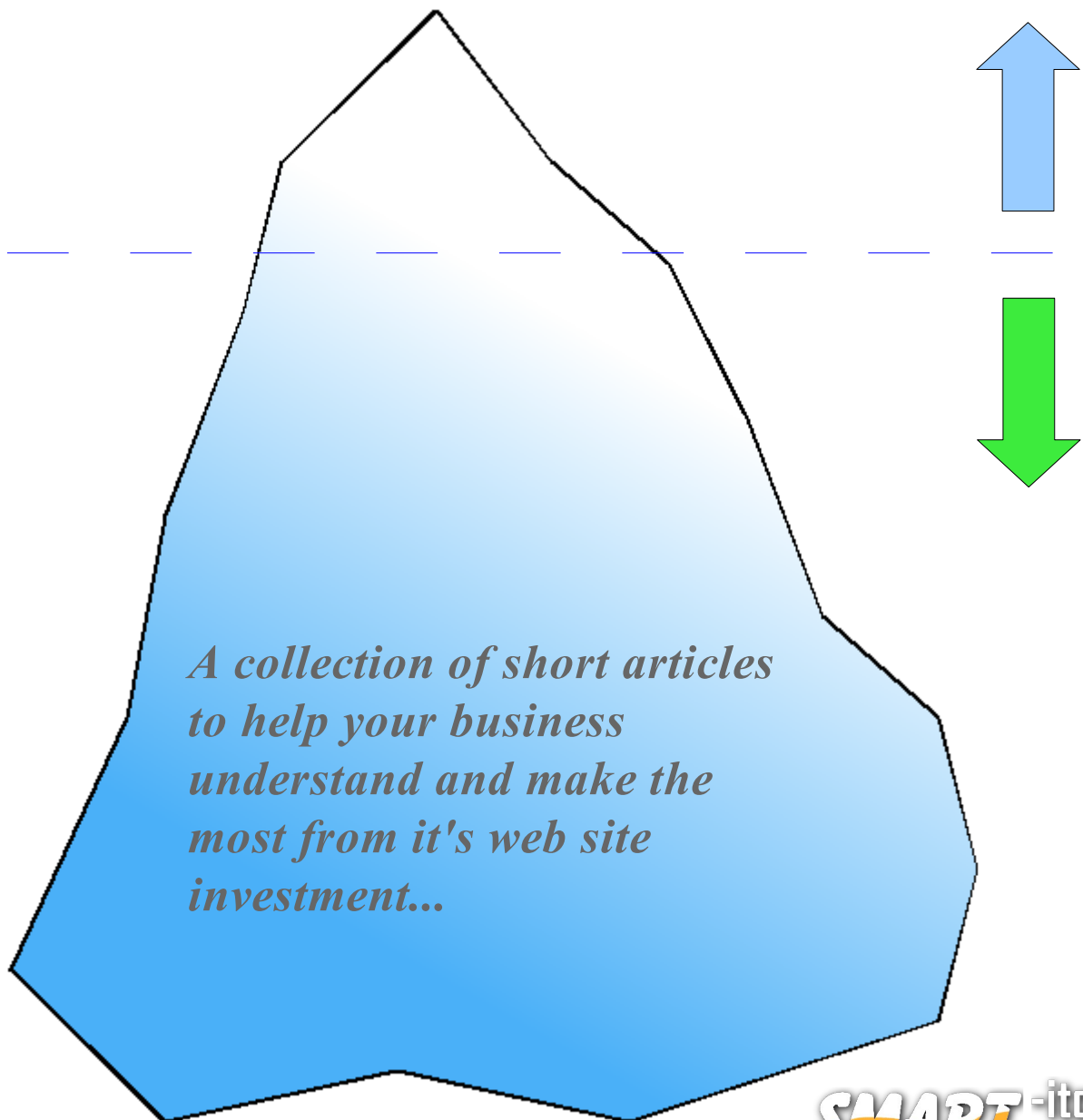

The Iceberg Analogy of a Successful Web Site

by Gary Smart



*A collection of short articles
to help your business
understand and make the
most from it's web site
investment...*

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Steps to Getting a Successful Web Site

The Most Important Factor for a Successful Web Site

Your approach and attitude towards getting a web site will determine its success, and I cannot stress this enough. Business owners have traditionally viewed a web site as a commodity - something you just buy. And worse again, most forget about what they bought soon after the purchase.

Strategic business owners on the other hand see their web site as a strategic investment, something that they will use to do business better. Your attitude is important. Business owners that view a web site as a commodity will inevitably come to the conclusion that they wasted their money, most probably because they conclude they're web site 'never made me any money'. On the other hand, the strategic business owners will eventually turn their web site into an asset they cannot do without.

Here are steps that successful web site owners take -

Step 1 - Know the Business Reason Why You Want a Web Site

If you're in business to make money, then obviously you want your web site to help achieve this goal. "How" your web site will make money is where many businesses come unstuck. If you have not thought about the "How", then stop right now! I guarantee that if you miss this step, you'll end up wasting your time and money, and eventually conclude that your web site 'never worked'.

If you are having problems formulating a business reason or the "how", speak to your business advisor, a competent web developer or [myself](#) for some ideas. I find most businesses benefit from professional advice when it comes to seeking opportunities on the Internet and how to best use their web site for business.

Step 2 - Understand What is Required From the Business Side. Just Appreciate the Technology

Building a successful web site that will meet your business goals is as much about business and what you can contribute as it about technology and what I (or any other web developer) can do.

Your business needs to drive what your web site will become - never leave it to technology. Your web site needs your ideas. You should definitely seek my advice or that of your business advisor, but never take that advice as an end. Always have your input. That way you'll get a more useful web site.

I understand that you might not understand in detail - nor want to learn about - all the technologies, tools and skills that go into making a web site work. That's fine, but at least develop a basic understanding by talking to [myself](#) or an IT expert. A basic understanding will help you drive your web site, communicate easier with technical people and make your web site successful.

Step 3 - Plan Your Web Site

When you know the business reason you want a web site, and you know what's involved with getting one, its time to start planning your web site. I (or your web developer) will sit down with you and plan what your web site will look like and what information it should contain. Some of this information will already have been discovered during the previous steps and general discussion, but there are going to be details that need to be fleshed out.

I often get asked how long planning will take. How much and how long it will take will depend on your type of business and what you want to achieve. A basic informational web site might take a few days. A fully featured eCommerce web site can take weeks, even months.

Step 4 - Your Web Site is Created

This step is where your web developer creates your web site. Many businesses start and stop at this step. If you do this, it probably means you don't know the business reason why you want a web site. If your web developer jumps straight to this step, most likely they know their technology, but lack business sense. I think the old saying "Fail to plan and you plan to fail" sums up why starting at this step is a bad idea.

During this step, I will bring your web site to life. From a technical stance, this is where I write 'programming code' and arrange the 'hosting' (and possibly your domain name if not done previously) to make your web site visible to the world.

During the creation stage, more ideas are often discovered and changes to the original plan might be made, so a couple of quick revisits back the the 'planning stage' will usually occur.

Step 5 - Advertise Your Web Site

Having a web site means nothing if you do not advertise the fact. You need to tell your current customers and potential customers that you have a web site, and why they should be excited. Give your customers a reason to visit your web site, and they will. I cannot express how important this step is. If you follow the previous steps but skip this one, you'll have a great web site that no one will know about.

You cannot rely on search engines to get clients as many people mistakenly believe. There are millions of web pages indexed in search engines. You are just one web site. Unless you are a mega corporation with millions to spend on your web site and search engine consultants, you will likely never achieve a top search engine listing for the products or services that you sell.

Step 6 - Monitor and Update Your Web Site

Now that your web site is up on the WWW and your customers are visiting it, you need to 'watch and learn' from what they do. Treat any comment you get from customers (or even your staff) as information that could be used to improve your web site. Small comments from customers that they could not find something on your web site or that they tried to do something that you or I never imagined could mean changes are needed, or better yet, that an improvement or new business

opportunity has just been discovered.

Step 7 - Go Back to Step One

No, you don't have to start from scratch. I mean appreciate each step and understand the value it contributes towards a successful web site. Remember that a successful web site is 'living'. It need to grow and evolve, especially if other businesses are doing similar things to you. As your web site becomes successful, it becomes increasingly important to revisit all the previous steps. By doing this you help identify new business opportunities and better ways of doing business with the web. This way you and your web site can go from strength-to-strength.

*“The most
important
factor... is your
attitude”*

Making Your Web Site a Success

How you view your web site and the significance and role it will play for your business will have a bearing on how successful your web site becomes and whether it will generate profits and sale leads. When selecting a web solution provider, it is also important to select a professional and competent business that can advise you on both the business and technical aspects of building a web site. After all, having a web site is only part of the story - that web site needs to be managed, marketed and maintained correctly in order for it to be a viable business asset.

The following are the most important issues to remember when building your businesses web site. Under appreciating these issues causes many businesses to make costly mistakes and spend even more bad money when it comes their web sites.

Understand the role and importance of 'trust'

Would you buy something from a business you did not trust? Especially when you had to hand over money before receiving goods or services? ... just like customers have to do on the Internet!

Your web site needs to be designed and built in a way that maximises customer trust, because building 'trust' in your online customers is a vital ingredient to making your web site generate profits. They need to trust you. Any doubt in their mind, and they will never make a sale with you or even attempt to seek more information.

Trust is also important because you can never assume that a visitor to your web site knows who you are or what you do. The Internet is global. So unless you are a global company (or to a lesser degree, country wide), chances are that many potential customers visiting your web site will have no knowledge about where you are or the quality of customer service that you provide - they will use your website as a sole proxy for this.

Understand the WWW / Internet and the role it can play for businesses

Your web site is another 'store front' to your business. It is a store front that is easily accessible from every corner of the country - and the planet. So if you desire, you're immediately an interstate - or international - business.

If you have or plan to build a 'plain' or 'boring' web site and take the attitude that 'it will do', then you are only guaranteeing its failure. If you were building or refurbishing a physical store, you would take care and plan toughly. Good business owners also keep their stores updated, clean and in good order. Why? Because customers are impressionable. A successful web site needs to do the same.

Budget for quality

Building your businesses web site on a shoe-string budget is a guaranteed way to fail and burn your money. If generating profits with your web site is your goal, don't compromise on quality. A

second-class web site will look just like that to your customers. Remember that 'trust' thing?

If you build a web site on too small a budget, you basically guarantee:

- a poor web site design - your business will look sloppy to customers.
- lack of quality content - customers will not understand who you are and what you offer.
- poor and unsecured online payment solutions - no customer will give you money if it looks risky.
- an out-of-date web site - customer will not buy from a web site that looks old and unmaintained.

Leverage your a domain name fully

You must leverage your domain name to build confidence and trust in your customers.

Your domain name, or web site address, is what customers use to find you on the web. Think of it as the phone number of the web. For example, to contact me by phone people call my phone number. To visit my web site, they use my business web site address, which is www.smart-itc.com.au.

Your web site address can also form the basis for your email addresses, for example gary@smart-itc.com.au.

Common mistakes make by businesses are:

- building a web site without a domain name
- not including their web site address and email on their business cards
- giving different email addresses to customers (such as gary@hotmail.com), and even worse including such email addresses on their business cards.

Your domain name is the **first point of contact** your customers will have with your web site. If your web site address or email address does not match your business, there will be doubt cast in the customer's mind about the professionalism and trust worthiness of your web site, and hence your business.

Don't expect customers to just 'drop in' to your web site

It is not as easy to find your website on the Internet as you may think. There are 100s of millions of web sites on the Internet. The likelihood of a customer just 'dropping in' and buying something is basically zero.

And just being registered with Search Engines is not a solution, because your web site will still just get lost in the crowd.... try a search for something like computers, jewellery, furniture or something that your business sells.... How many web sites were found?

To get sales, you must get to your customers so that they can get to you. They need to know that your business exists! It is therefore important that you web site is properly marketed...

Your web site needs to be marketed

To make sales, you need to get customers to your web site. To do that you need to make them aware

by advertising.

Many businesses believe that their web site only needs to be advertised on the Internet. Not true. Besides the obvious-to-do advertising like including your web site address on your business cards, a successful profit-generating web site needs to be marketed correctly to potential customers. This may include television advertisements, adverts in magazines and journals, posters and bill-boards, for example.

***“To get sales, you
must get to your
customers, so that
they can get to
you”***

Make Your Advertising Budget Work Harder

Did you know that a good web site can instantly add value to your off-line advertising. How? by allowing your potential customers to get more information quickly.

Consider this. You can only fit a limited amount of text on a regular newspaper, magazine or yellow pages ad. But direct readers to your web site and instantly they have detailed information about your promotions, products and services.

And did you know to have your existing web site updated to 'match' and provide more detail for your print-ad will often cost less than your print-ad.

I was recently talking to a client who purchased an 8 x 11cm ad in a 'special publication' from a regional newspaper. The cost: \$209 (for that one day). My estimated cost to update a web page to complement that ad: \$75. The next question you might ask is how do I know that people would visit the web page? I don't. But then again how do you know people will pick up the phone and call the phone number printed in the ad or visit your store after reading your ad. You don't. It's all done in hope.

My own advertising experience in the printed press demonstrates up to a 25 to 1 ratio between web page visits and phone calls. That's correct, for every 1 phone call a print-ad generates me, I get around 25 visitors to my 'matching' web page. For those wondering, I'm not talking about all visitors to my web site, I'm talking about visitors to the exact web page address mentioned in the ad. A web page address that is used solely for visitor tracking, and is not mentioned anywhere else, even on my web site.

If you have ever read one of my ads or mail-outs, you will notice that when I often list my web site as a source for more information, the web site address is usually something like "www.smart-itc.com.au/specials". The "/specials" is the key. Every time an someone views my web site using this web page address, I know they visited because they read my ad! There is no rocket science behind this sort of visitor counting, and anyone managing a web site will be able to do it. For comparative purposes, If I just included www.smart-itc.com.au in my ads, any visitors generated because of those ads would be mixed with visitors coming from search engines, visitors who saw my web site address on my car, business cards, etc.

So the nuts-and-bolts of it all is that a well maintained web site can nicely complement and value boost all your printed-media advertising. If you already have a web site and you're not doing something similar, you're missing valuable opportunities. If you don't have a web site - and you're not considering getting one, or you get told "this can't be done", you should at least consider using a short-term rentable web page (available through all good web development businesses) to get started.

Your Must-Do Monthly Check-List for Your Web Site

If you are a web site owner, at a minimum you should direct your attention to it at least once a month. Here is a check list of what you should - at a minimum - think about:

What's on my Home Page

Monthly To Do - What's on your home page? If it's out-of-date, get it updated!

Many frequently view web sites contain 'latest news' items, weekly or monthly specials and other time sensitive information that the owner wanted to 'wow' their customers with.

The home page is what 99% of visitors to a web site will see first. If it contains information that is clearly out-of-date, the immediate impression to the customer will be along the lines of "this business is slow and lazy". It's certain that customers who see an out-of-date home page will not continue to seek more information from that web site. They'll go elsewhere looking for fresher information (remember it's the Internet, this is easy to do with a few mouse clicks!).

Compare your advertising and web site visitors for the month

Monthly Do To - Did any major advertising campaigns result in more visitors to your web site.

Obviously, if you have invested in a web site, you're including your web site address on all your printed and spoken advertising. After all, you want to give potential customers every opportunity to easily seek out more information about your business, products and services.

You should also be receiving from your hosting provider (or generating yourself) statistics on the number of web site visitors you receive.

The next question is - if you have undertaken any major advertising campaigns over the month, did that result in more visitors to your web site? I'm sure you'll have some idea if it made the phone ring or caused more customers walk into your shop, so complete the picture and work out what happened with your web site.

If you've never asked this question about your web site visitors before, then you might be in for a surprise. Just make sure you seize any opportunities it presents. I've written a previous article touching on this topic - "[Making Your Advertising Budget Work Harder](#)". Please see this article for more information.

What new FAQ's are customer asking?

Monthly Do To - Are there any new FAQs to add to your Web Site?

If your customers' are asking the same or similar questions over and over again, then the question/answer pair make ideal candidates to place on your web site. If it happens often - and business find they often do - consider having an FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page created for your web site. Its amazing how many people use FAQ type pages to learn about a businesses products or services.

Furthermore, having question/answer pairs captured on your web site means all customers get the same answer. And familiarising employees with them helps ensures everyone is consistent when dealing with customers.

Expand one area of your web site

Monthly Do To - Is there a product, service or business area that you could use to naturally expand your web site?

Building a complete and 'perfect' web site from scratch is a near impossible task. Businesses evolve, grow and change, and so do web sites. So, if your trying to expand, evolve or redevelop an area of your business, consider using it to drive a similar change on your web site. Focusing on one section or update to your web site at a time is easy. Keep with it, and before you know it, you'll have an information-rich web site full of useful information.

Think about possibilities

Monthly Do To - Ask yourself if there is any information, online service or idea that can make your web site better.

Even better, have a pool of ideas. Having though about the possibilities and knowing what's possible is the perfect way to be an Internet leader and stay abreast of your competitors and their online adventures.

I know from experience, I build (or make major changes to) one client's web site, and 6 weeks later, their competition gets a web site or makes big changes to! Its appears to be a game of leap-frog with some businesses. Knowing the possibilities and having a few ideas up your sleeve is a sure way to be the leader. And anyway, it's always fun to watch the 'others' catch up, only to move the bar on them again :)

Tips to Double Traffic To Your Web Site

Want more visitors to your web site? Are you doing the following - Ok, I have to pull you up here first. I have to assume that you are measuring your web site visitor traffic?, because after all, if your not measuring it, you can't manage it, yet along see if it increases.

The Basics

All businesses serious about adding value and generating business and leads via their web site should be at least doing these simple things -

- (1) Print your web site address on your business cards.
- (2) Print your web site address on all your stationary, including 'with complement' notepads and letter heads.
- (3) Put your web site address on all your advertising material. If you're not already doing this and leverage the marketing potential of your web site, you're wasting your investment.
- (4) Place Your web site address on your car.

Get Advanced

So you've done all the above? Great, now go to the advanced stage and join the Internet elite club -

- (5) Create affiliate links. Are their 'friendly' companies who you could exchange links with, so you'll get some of their web site visitors to visit you and visa-versa. Exchanging links means you both win!
- (6) Advertise on appropriate targeted web sites. If you sell fishing equipment, advertise on fishing and camping web sites. You'll also be targeting your advertising to an audience that are more likely to become customers!.
- (7) Advertise on Google or Ovature networks - basically pay for search engine placement. While \$100 probably won't get you far initially, some investigations and testing could see your web site traffic increase 10 - 100 times over! And if its not, get professional advice on how to use this type of advertising.
- (8) So you have a list of client email addresses. Why not start up a eMail newsletter. If you've already got a paper-based newsletter, great, just starting distributing it as an email too. Of course, Make sure you clearly include your web site address in the email as a place to 'get more information', and make sure that statement holds true!. Also ask readers to forward your email on to other people they think might be interested. Emails are easy for people 'forward', so they'll get around easier than postal mail. And done properly, you'll make it easy for people to join your eMailing list with the click of a button.

Don't Go Here !

What ever you do, DO NOT, sign up to mass mailing lists to send out mass emailings about your company. Its SPAM. Not only is it now illegal in Australia, but people receiving your 'spam' (I know you think its great information, but unsolicited, it will be 'spam'), will dismiss your email without even looking at it. At best they'll ignoring you completely, at worst they'll think your business is a no-good-shonky-fly-by-night scam prowling on people over the Internet.

How did you go? I hope I've given you some ideas to easily attract more visitors to your web site. I know that 'Basics' are just that, and you're probably already doing them, but I often come across businesses that are not or have never 'thought' about doing it.

*“And anyway, it's
always fun to watch
the 'others' catch up,
only to move the bar
on them again”*

Web Design Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does my business need a web site?
2. I don't sell merchandise online. Why do I need a web site?
3. Why should I care about how my web site looks?
4. I'm thinking about a web site. Where do I start?
5. I've heard that having no web site is better than a bad web site? Is that true?
6. I already have a web page. Isn't that already enough?
7. I don't use a computer much and I'm not all that comfortable with them. How could I handle a web site and keeping it maintained?
8. We believe in face-to-face customer interaction. That's how we've built our business. A web site seems cold and would be a waste of time considering our clientele.
9. I wouldn't know what to do with a web site if I had one.
10. My business is very small, just me and a few employees and our product can't really be sold online. Why would I want a web site?
11. What can I put on my web site? Can you give me some ideas?
12. Can I manage or update my web site myself?
13. What is a 'host' and do I need one?
14. Can I be my own host?
15. Can you build us a web site to sell products all over the world?
16. How should I choose a domain name?
17. What are the cost involved?
18. Our upcoming advertising budget has consumed all money budgeted for advertising.
19. I've heard getting a web site is very expensive. It is?
20. I have a friend/son/daughter/cousin who has done a crash course in web design and I've promised them they can do our web site.
21. My question is not here.

Does my business need a web site?

Only you can make the decision if your business would benefit from a web site. The Internet has really leveled the playing field for small businesses. It is possible to compete against and even look like the big boys if you want to. If you are comfortable with where your business is and have no desire to grow your business further or add new communication lines, then the answer is probably no. However, when making this decision, please consider that a web site works best as a communications tool, not an advertisement.

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, then in today's age, you should consider a web site:

- Are you a small business with no street frontage ?
- Do you want your business to look professional and up-to-date ?
- Do you want to set yourself apart from your competition ?
- Do you want your business to look knowledgeable ?
- Do you want to provide an easy and central source for customers to access information ?

I don't sell merchandise online. Why do I need a web site?

For business today, the Internet is used more for researching information about businesses, services and products rather than buying things. A business web site is not just about selling goods online, but a communications tool to communicate with new and existing customers. For other business reasons you might like to consider getting a web site, continuing reading these FAQs.

Basically, if you believe in the quality of services or products you offer and you want to tell the world about them, then a web site can help you achieve this.

Why should I care about how my web site looks?

Its all about impressions. You would not eat at a grubby looking restaurant or stay in a dirty looking motel would you? So why would new customers to a shabby looking web site want to spend their money with that business?

Also see *I've heard that having no web site is better than a bad web site? Is that true?*.

I'm thinking about a web site. Where do I start?

I suggest that you write down any questions you have, and do some preliminary research yourself. I guarantee you'll have even more unanswered questions after you dig a little deeper. Start by reading these FAQs and other articles on my web site.

If you're not familiar with the Internet or web sites and development, I understand that it may all seem a little complicated and overwhelming at the start. But that's where I come in. I take care of all that 'stuff' for you, leaving you free to focus on your business and what you do best.

If you have questions, want to explore some possibilities or get a free quote, please give me a call and I'll try to help you over the phone or arrange a meeting with you if that's convenient.

SMART-itc,
Gary Smart,
Phone: 0438 894 575

I've heard that having no web site is better than a bad web site? Is that true?

Yes that is true. These days if you have a web site and you're advertising the fact, then some people are going to visit your web site to get more information about your business, its products and services. If your web site looks bad or has out-of-date information on it, what impression do you think potential customer will have of you? I know you operate a great business and offer excellent service, but don't let a bad web site stop new customers from making that initial personal contact and discovering this for themselves.

Try this. Pick out a business type (maybe your own industry) and do a Google search for businesses in your area (maybe your competitors). See what you find. I bet you find a few shabby web sites that make those businesses look shabby (hopefully they're your competitors :)

I already have a web page. Isn't that already enough?

That's good. What does it look like? See *I've heard that having no web site is better than a bad web site? Is that true?*

I don't use a computer much and I'm not all that comfortable with them. How could I handle a web site and keeping it maintained?

Have you ever advertised in a newspaper? I bet you don't own the newspaper or work in the newspaper's editing room to keep it 'maintained' or the press to get it printed. And you don't have to do anything with a web site either. A professional web designer like myself will take care of everything for you. All you need to focus on your business and leave the Internet and the technology to me.

We believe in face-to-face customer interaction. That's how we've built our business. A web site seems cold and would be a waste of time considering our clientele.

This could be true of your existing clientele. What about new clientele? Have you ever considered that in some cases face-to-face might be a waste of time and a nuisance to your customers?

Here is an example... I recently built a web site for a client who was all about face-to-face communication. Each month their customers are meant to phone in certain information to this business. Every month hours of staff time would be tied up answering the phone to take this information (and input it into the computer), placing customer's on-hold and chasing up clients that had not phoned in. Believing there must be a better way, we web site was built. Now each month clients get a reminder email and submit the information over the Internet. If a client forgets, a

reminder email is automatically sent to them. At the end of the month a report is generated with all the information the clients have provided. Creating a web page has been a win-win situation. The business wins because it frees up staff time and manual processing of data, and client feedback suggests that they win because they can copy and paste information from their computer into the web site, saving them time because they do not have to wait on hold and repeat all the information back to another person.

If you think the Internet or a web site will not benefit your business, then try thinking outside the square. It is ripe with opportunities to assist your clients, save you and them time and enhance other aspects of the services you offer.

Also see *I would not know what to do with a web site if I had one.*

I wouldn't know what to do with a web site if I had one.

This is a common question I get from potential customers. To answer this question, you have to do a few things. Firstly, you might have to think outside-the-square to discover what possibilities the Internet could do for your business. Secondly, if you need help doing this, speak to an expert - IT expert, web developer, even your kids (I bet they know a lot about the Internet!).

Further to this, stop thinking about what you can do with a web site, and consider what other people - potential customers - might be doing. There are two common reasons why people might use the Internet for business. (1) To find out what businesses offer a particular product or service, and (2) To find out more about a specific business... Make it easy for your potential customers to discover who you are.

It will only a matter of time before someone discovers a better to carry out your type of business with the Internet, hopefully it will be you and not your competition.

You might like to take a look at my article *Web Site Success Factors*. It includes some pointers on what to do with your web site to help make it successful.

My business is very small, just me and a few employees and our product can't really be sold online. Why would I want a web site?

Again, see *Does my business need a web site?* -

- Are you a small business with no street frontage ?
- Do you want your business to look professional and up-to-date ?
- Do you want to set yourself apart from your competition ?
- Do you want your business to look knowledgeable ?
- Do you want to provide an easy and central source for customers to access information ?

Visit one of my clients at www.damaco.com.au. How big do you think they are and what market do you think they cover? (Answer - 1 person in Hamilton, Victoria. And he sells Australia wide and has distribution rights for New Zealand)

How about smarttours.com.au ? (answer - 2 people, sourcing passengers from around Australia, and they have over 500 eMail subscribers from around the world!)

My business is helping small businesses leverage the possibilities of the Internet. Please join me for the ride and let me help you.

What can I put on my web site? Can you give me some ideas?

The possibilities are endless and will be different for different businesses. As a starting point, you might consider the following information -

- Who you are and what your business does
- Where you are located and how to contact you
- Special offers and promotions you are running
- Business news or a newsletter
- Display customer testimonials and success stories
- Press releases and information about your business

In all cases, before I start designing a web site for a client, I will discuss with them their business and what it does and how they could leverage a web site to enhance their business and the services they offer.

Can I manage or update my web site myself?

Yes, and no. It depends on what you want to do and how skilled you or a staff member is with the Internet and the technologies what make the WWW work. In general it is a bad idea, because it will be impossible to get a professional finish and cross-browser compliance if you are not experience in web design.

However.... because I get this question so much, I have developed a hybrid solution to give my customers the best of both worlds - a professional looking web site, with an easy DIY facility to update parts of their web site themselves.

What is a 'host' and do I need one?

A Host is a company that makes your web site available to the world, and yes, you do need one. And yes there is a cost involved. Professional web developers, including myself, will take care of hosting for you.

To help explain a host in another way, think of your web site as a mobile phone, and the host as a communications carries, like Telstra. You can buy a mobile phone anywhere these days, but without a communications carrier, your mobile is useless.

Can I be my own host?

Yes, but do you want to bother? You don't try to be another Telstra so your phones work do you? Some business try to explore this as a way to save money. However, if you really want to be self hosting you need to invest in computing resources and infrastructure (\$1000's). You also need to have the in-house computer/networking skills or hire them (\$75-\$100 hr) to set things up and keep things running smoothly. Unless you already have the need, equipment and facilities at your business, you'll spend thousands trying to save a few hundred.

... On the other hand, if you are planning or growing a web site that will become an integral part of your business operations, then the answer might be "yes". You should look at the benefits self-hosting can offer if your web site will be the key or only source of income (eg a web-only supplier), or it needs to integrate to other in-house or external systems and databases.

Can you build us a web site to sell products all over the world?

Yes. Actually the instant your web site is put on the Internet, it can be accessed from anywhere in the world! Now, I'm glad your thinking big!. Many more business would make a real success of their web site if they did this. But I recommend that you focus on your region/state or Australia for starters to help keep things simple until you get going. That way you won't have to worry about multiple currencies and exchange rates, tax issues, import/export restrictions or legal implications, not to mention all the technology and web site development needed to handle it all.

How should I choose a domain name?

If you are asking this question, perhaps don't pick out and purchase a domain name yourself - seek advice. A good domain name is simple to remember, simple to spell and easy to read at a glance. If you have a long business name, don't try to use it as your domain name. Consider the following. Which is easier to read at a glance? www.smarttoursandtravel.com.au or www.smarttours.com.au.

If you use your business name and it leads itself to incorrect spelling, consider registering the incorrect spellings also. That way if someone does make a spelling mistake, they'll still be able to find you. For example, consider Google. www.gogle.com (one 'o') still takes you to www.google.com (two 'o's - the correct spelling) as does www.google.com (three 'o's').

Also, remember that different domains have different rules. To register an Australian domain (any thing ending in .au), you must have a legal right to own that domain. So for example, you must have that name or something similar registered as a business name, trade mark or similar. If your business was called 'Joe's Fish 'n Chips', you could try and register 'joes-chippery.com.au' or 'fishnchips.com.au', but would get knocked back if you tried to register 'Warner4x4Tyres.com.au', because it seems to have no relevance to your business.

Because there are many rules and conditions, its best to have a few possible domain names up you sleeve, just in case you can't get your first choice. Its also worth mentioning, that you never actually

'own' a domain name, you rent it. But as long as you keep paying the renewal fees (usually yearly or bi-yearly), it will always remain yours.

What are the cost involved?

This is a hard question to answer, because it depends what you want to achieve with your web site. To break it down, web site development costs are made up of three major components:

Getting your web site created This is generally the biggest cost. This is where a web developer sits down and designs your web site, makes it look 'pretty' and puts information about your business on it. If you consider building a web site like building a house, this step is like getting your plans drawn, contracting the builder and getting the house built.

Hosting and other on-going fees After (and sometimes even before) your web site is created, there are other fees that are on-going. Typically these include the registration of a domain name (that is your www address, like www.splatpages.com), hosting fees (a host is the company that keeps your web site files and makes them available to the world via the Internet). There will be other ongoing fees if your web site requires security or eCommerce facilities. In some cases you have to pay these on-going fees even if you just let your web site 'sit there' on the Internet. Continuing with the house analogy, think of these ongoing fees like telephone rental and council rates - you pay them irrespective of how much you're home or how often you use the phone.

Web Site Maintenance Fees These fees are payable to your web designer whenever you need your web site updated (unless you have a DIY solution). If you never get your web page updated (bad idea!) then you will not incur these charges. Using the house example again, web site maintenance is a bit like getting your house renovated. You choose when and how to do it and only incur the costs (materials, labour, etc) when you decide you want the job done.

Other Charges I know I said there were only three. But there are other areas where costs will be incurred if you have an advanced Internet presence. These can include costs related to email services, eCommerce, credit card processing facilities or paid Internet advertising and placements.

Our upcoming advertising budget has consumed all money budgeted for advertising.

Please remember that a web site is not an advertisement. It is a communications tool. However, as a communications tool it will be a valuable asset when combined thoughtfully with your advertising - it will compliment and empower your advertising efforts. In fact, I believe this to be one of the most powerful uses of a web site, especially if you spend a lot of money on print-media, television or radio advertising.

Also See *Make Your Advertising Budget Work Harder* for an article specifically on this topic.

I've heard getting a web site is very expensive. It is?

Is a web site expensive? The answer is: it depends. A simple web site will cost a few hundreds dollars, while a full featured eCommerce web site with multi currency support will run into the tens of thousands of dollars.

The truth is, that many people consider web sites expensive. I believe this perception exists simply because people don't spend the time to understand what they are pricing and consider the cost in respect to what business benefits a professionally developed web site can offer.

Here is something to consider: A web site is expensive compared to what? In terms of cost, getting a web site created is really not that different to having professional print publications or flyers created. Furthermore, getting routine updates done to your web site is comparable - and often cheaper - than placing an ad in your newspaper.

Like anything, you can spend as little or as much as you like. And while you will find 'cheap' web site developers lurking around, please ask yourself what you are paying for, because again, like anything, you usually get what you pay for.

I have a friend/son/daughter/cousin who has done a crash course in web design and I've promised them they can do our web site.

Are they a qualified web developer? If they are you are lucky. If not, and you are serious about making a good impression with your web site then maybe you should consider your options again. Professional web sites look that way for a reason - a professional created them.

My Question is not here

If you have a question that is not here, please contact me (Gary) on 0438 894 575 or send me your question via my web site www.smart-itc.com.au/contact.php and I will answer your question promptly.



Gary Smart

Mobile: 0438 894 575

Phone: 03 5562 4692

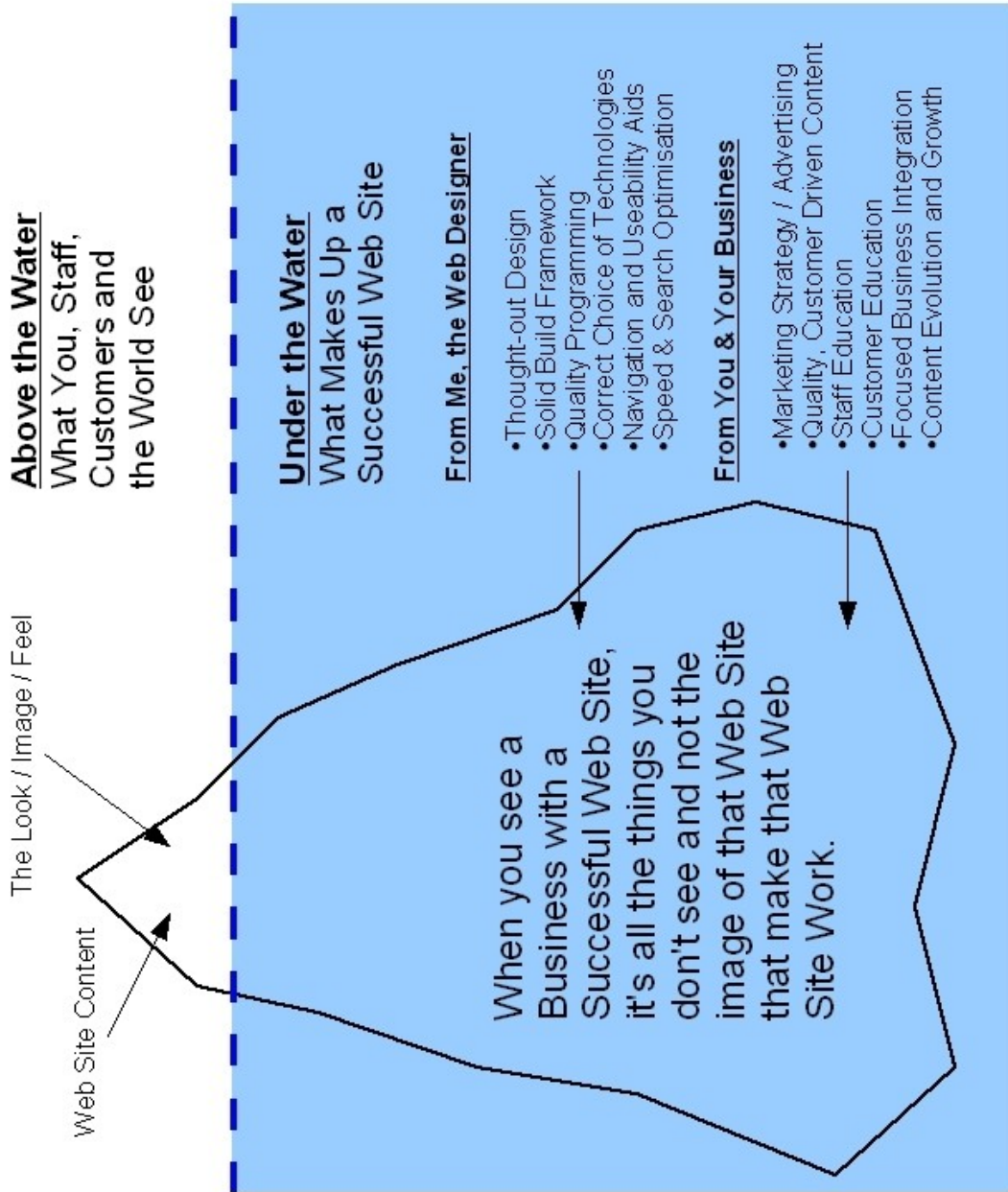
8 Aberline Rd,

Warrnambool,
Victoria, 3280

gary@smart-itc.com.au

www.smart-itc.com.au

The Iceberg Analogy of a Successful Web Site



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