

# eBusiness

**7 steps** to getting your  
small business online  
and making money  
**now!**



**Paul  
Wallbank**

# Ebu\$iness: 7 Steps To Get Your Small Business Online... And Making Money Now!

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# *eBusiness*

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## ***About the author***

**Paul Wallbank** is one of Australia's leading experts on how businesses and consumers use the web. In 1995 he had the foresight to set up a computer service business, PC Rescue, after discovering that few businesses were providing IT support specifically for home and small businesses. His company quickly grew to cover all of Australia.

Paul is a regular technology expert on ABC radio and a columnist for <[www.smartcompany.com.au](http://www.smartcompany.com.au)>. He also runs workshops and consulting services for corporate, government and community groups on a range of topics relating to the rise of digital industries, connected communities and pervasive computing.

Paul has written seven books on internet use, including *The Internet For Dummies*.

Visit Paul at <[www.ebusinessbook.com.au](http://www.ebusinessbook.com.au)> for bonus information and great tips on getting your small business online.

# ***Introduction***

At the time of writing *eBusiness* in early 2011, the use of social media has exploded. Facebook has raced past 600 million users; Google has offered US\$6 billion to buy daily offer site Groupon; and smart phones are outselling personal computers. The way we do business is rapidly evolving as these technologies change our world.

Many businesses feel challenged by these changes. At the end of 2010 some of the Australian retailing industry tried to turn back the tide with a campaign for tax changes to stop people buying online. These retailers didn't understand that the internet's real effects on their businesses are a lot more subtle and powerful than saving a few GST dollars.

Driving most of the change is how our customers, suppliers and employees are becoming more informed by using the web to discover who we are and talking to each other about their experiences in dealing with us. In this environment, having an online presence becomes a business essential.

In my opinion, there are three reasons why businesses haven't gone online: the cost, the jargon, and the time it takes to set up a website or social media presence. This book will show you how to set up a full web presence in just seven easy steps — it won't take you more than a weekend to implement a basic but functional and professional look.

*eBusiness* will help anyone who wants to get their ideas, project or business onto the internet cheaply and effectively. Much of the advice here is for small or start-up organisations that want to get their message out to the world.

You can also visit the *eBusiness* website at <[www.ebusinessbook.com.au](http://www.ebusinessbook.com.au)> to find bonus resources such as links, frequently asked questions and advice on web consultants.

Towards the end of writing *eBusiness*, Google and MYOB launched their Getting Australian Businesses Online project, which also helps local merchants set up a website. The appendix includes an overview as well as the instructions to help you maximise your results through this terrific service.

Earlier, I mentioned three reasons for why businesses are not online, but there's also a fourth reason and that is that many businesses think they don't need a website. Those days are over. In a world where our customers, staff and suppliers are online, we have to be online as well. This book will show you how to create an internet presence quickly and effectively so you can grab the opportunities on offer.



# ***Chapter 1: Define your business***

Given that most business writing about the internet focuses on marketing, it's tempting to think the internet is just a marketing tool, and nothing more than a glorified electronic brochure or business card. Thinking about the internet that way would be a great mistake, as the web isn't just a means of drawing attention to ourselves. Our customers are looking for us on the internet, and everyone — our suppliers, creditors, debtors, employees — is checking our web profile before doing business with us.

For tradespeople, the move to mobile internet and online directories has meant that customers are logging on to find plumbers, electricians and locksmiths. In most cases, it's easier to find a mobile phone or computer than to find and rummage through a printed phone directory. Today, having some sort of presence on the web is overtaking the traditional advertisement in the local newspaper or phone book as the main way to advertise your services.

When customers go online they not only find our website — and our competitors' sites — but can also see comments on social media and product review sites, where previous clients discuss how good a meal, product or service was. Our reputations are now being set by what other people are saying about us online.

The internet is a great marketing platform, but today your business brand and reputation are more than just a function of what you claim and promote: it's increasingly about how you deliver what you promise.

First, though, we have to make those promises and that's the first reason your business has to be on the web. If your business isn't on the web, then for many people it simply doesn't exist. So what are we trying to do on the Net?

## ***What is your business?***

The web can be a pretty brutal place. Social media and review sites will punish anyone — particularly businesses — who misrepresent themselves or don't deliver on their promises. It's important to understand what your business is and what value it adds for customers before you start making grand claims.

While this might sound scary, it is in fact an opportunity for smaller and more nimble organisations to promote themselves. In this era of big business spouting the mantras of shareholder returns and corporate responsibility, it's easy to miss the point that the whole reason a business exists is to deliver a product to the customer.

The major weakness of big businesses is that most workers in large corporations have nothing to do with serving the customer. Instead, they spend their time writing memos and engaging in office politics.

Because your business doesn't have this massive, flabby overhead, you can execute your ideas quickly and comparatively cheaply. And this book aims to help you do just that.

## ***Which markets are you catering to?***

It's easy to talk about our market but who the heck are they? Are they other business owners, the local accountant, married retirees, expectant mothers, baby boomers, gen X, gen Y or the younger Millennials?

One assumption that's often proved wrong is that all internet users are young. The reality is that while those in the 25-39 year old age bracket grew up with computers and are high users of technology, older age groups are rapidly catching up. If you sell to seniors, don't assume they aren't online, as they are increasingly joining the connected masses.

We make a lot of assumptions about our customers and we're often proved wrong. Luckily the flexibility and cost of the web means we can test new ideas and change things quickly. Having said that, your existing knowledge does influence the channels you use. If you are selling to other business owners, for instance, it makes sense to invest more in your LinkedIn presence; a maternity shop owner is probably going to be more focused on having a presence on internet baby forums; and a pizza shop might find that Twitter is the best place to advertise daily deals (see figure 1.1, overleaf).

**Figure 1.1: Crust pizza Twitter feed**



## *Where do you want to sell?*

Some businesses have global ambitions, while others are quite happy to occupy a corner in their neighbourhood. Each extreme needs a web presence, but the needs of the aspiring multinational are quite different from those of local businesses.

One challenge for big, established businesses is the growth of online stores and payment systems, but not every organisation needs or wants to be selling online. What a business chooses to do regarding e-commerce will determine how great their online needs are.

Later chapters will look at the various options and which ones are useful for different types of business. It's important to keep in mind that running a business is a journey — plans change and new opportunities come along — so throughout the book we're looking at the most flexible options for an

online presence — ones that can grow and adapt with the changing needs of your venture.

## ***What do you want from the Net?***

When we make an investment decision the question is how does the investment meet our business objectives? Every internet decision is an outlay of either our time or our money, and time is the much scarcer and more valuable asset for a business owner.

To define what we are looking for from the internet, we can boil down some key objectives for most businesses.

## ***Marketing***

The most common use companies make of the Net is marketing and it's true that the internet — in fact anything to do with computers — is the greatest marketing tool ever invented for small business.

In print and older media the idea of marketing was to shout at people through advertising. The more a company could afford in big newspaper ads, billboards and loud, obnoxious radio and TV ads the better.

In the online era those methods still work, but things have changed subtly. Today we don't have to shout, as the audience can filter us out or use channels, such as search engines like Google, that don't work well as a platform for shouting. If we use online marketing, we still need to spend time and money, but we don't have to shout or go big. We'll look at some of the specific marketing strategies later, but we need to understand at the beginning of the process exactly how we're going to use online tools.

Getting out the message that we are open for business — that we are the best hairdresser in Toowoomba, the best plumber in Northbridge or the best baker in Launceston — is the basic function that all businesses need from the web.

Marketing is the basic, but not the only, purpose of an online presence, and it's a mistake to focus just on the marketing aspects of a website. The web is much more than just telling the world your opening hours and which credit cards you accept.

## ***Recruitment***

The internet has taken over as the main way to recruit staff. Most job advertisements have moved from newspapers onto the web and now the social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, are becoming the main way for businesses to find staff.

Prospective employees are also checking out your site to see what jobs are available, what sort of business you are and who your best contacts are. Having a presentable website means you can tell people who you are and what you do.

When people do find a job that looks good, they log in and look up details of the employer on the web, Facebook and LinkedIn to see what the organisation is like and who they know there.

If your intention is to find the right people online, you will need to have a presence that encourages applicants to find you and send you their details. In many industries, particularly hospitality, lots of negative or aggressive comments on review sites or social media can turn potential employees off as they begin to sense there is a problem with the business or they will have to deal with stroppy

customers. When dealing with negativity online, business owners and managers win fans with sensible, considered and empathetic responses. By coming across as a level-headed person, you not only win customers but also show prospective staff that you're someone reasonable to work for.

## ***Suppliers***

In all businesses, one of the recurring questions is 'Can I trust this guy to pay me?' So the more information you can give to your potential creditors the better. A consistent web presence assures those you ask for credit that you are a viable organisation that can be trusted to pay its bills.

## ***Authorities***

Even the biggest free-market capitalists find themselves having to deal with government, even if it's only to prove to the Tax Office that their business is legitimate. A web presence gives the bureaucrats evidence that you are a legitimate, operating business. That legitimacy also counts if you find yourself in a trademark dispute, as an internet presence proves you have been trading under a name for some time.

In recent times it's been popular to talk about a business's USP — unique selling proposition — as the key difference between enterprises. The USP idea, however, looks at only one aspect of how every business is different.

A business is a human, social enterprise made up of individuals: the owner, staff, customers and suppliers all impose their unique personalities on the business and make it what it is. Even when the objectives of two businesses are the same, each one will follow different paths to achieve

them. The same is true on the Net: each of us has a different way of using the web, and we have to acknowledge those differences — what works online for one business won't necessarily work for the competitor down the road.

## ***Listening and learning***

The web is a great place for listening and learning — in many ways it's a free market research tool. One of the great advantages for small and new businesses is the online social media channels. Blogs and forums let us listen in to what the market is saying about us and our competitors.

It also gives us a window to the world: we can read about the latest trends in New York, Tokyo, London, Shanghai or Paris as they are happening. What would once have taken weeks or months to filter its way through magazines and newspapers is now on your desktop as it happens. This gives smaller, more flexible businesses a massive advantage over the larger, more slow-moving organisations. It means you can be ahead of the market and bigger competitors. This listening advantage for small business is grossly understated, as the Net is one of the most valuable listening tools we have.

## ***Thought leadership***

Many people own a business because that's where they work best. Often these folk are original thinkers, which is why they don't work well in bigger, bureaucratic organisations. One of the advantages the Net offers this group is that it provides a publishing platform that gives you the opportunity to become a leader in your industry or community.

The web offers a great opportunity to get your ideas into the marketplace, which can establish you and your business



as leaders. A good example of this is the Australian Newsagency blog (see figure 1.2) where the owner, Mark Fletcher, has established himself as a leader in the industry, which helps grow his retail software business.

**Figure 1.2: Australian Newsagency blog**

## Australian Newsagency Blog

A blog on issues affecting Australia's newsagents, media and small business generally.

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### Claiming the \$1,000 prize

Mark on February 28, 2011 1:58 PM

A colleague newsagent just won \$1,000 from the ACP *I Love Magazines* promotion. His sub agent actually sold the magazine to the customer. The newsagent won because his sub agent list was up to date with ACP. This is a timely reminder to newsagents to ensure that your sub agent list with each distributor is up to date. This newsagent is \$1,000 better off.

I love the I Love Magazines campaign as shoppers can only win from newsagents and outlets supplied by newsagents.

Category: [magazines](#) → No Comments

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### Publishers: promote newsagents when advertising your magazines

Mark on February 28, 2011 6:04 AM



I was thrilled to see the advertisement for the latest issue of *Country Style* magazine in the Sunday Herald Sun yesterday. I was disappointed that this ad did not mention where people could purchase the title. **This was a perfect opportunity to promote that Country**

#### RECENT COMMENTS

- Jeff on Help for newsagents on XchangeIT compliance
- Mark on Why a newsagency can be a good business to purchase
- Former newsagent on Why a newsagency can be a good business to purchase
- Angela on Real Life Bugs and Insects
- a proactive newsagent on Lack of respect for free newspapers
- Mark on Why a newsagency can be a good business to purchase
- peter on Why a newsagency can be a good business to purchase
- Y&G on GOI ad covers newspaper masthead
- shaun s on Help for newsagents on XchangeIT compliance
- MAX on Chasing UFC stock
- shaun s on Chasing UFC stock
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**Meet the Hottest Singles**  
Start Having Fun w/ Online Dating. Free to Browse. Sign Up.

## Budgets

Just as the reach of the web is huge, so too are website budgets. Some big organisations spend tens, sometimes hundreds, of millions of dollars in building their web presence. Often their massive expenditure fails as they still think in terms of shouting across a hundred markets that

they make the funkiest jeans, blingiest shoes or most refreshing drink.

While shouting can work, it generally fails online because people can just flick to another website or stop following you on Facebook and Twitter. So the web changes some of the fundamental ideas of modern marketing. This opens a wonderful opportunity for small business owners, who may not have the budgets, but are closer to their markets and have a better feeling for what customers want.

We should take care not to forget there are costs to using the web even with 'free' services: it will cost you something in either time or money. While this book looks at doing things cheaply, we shouldn't forget that well-spent money will take your online presence a lot further. We will look more closely at some of the costs involved in setting up a web presence, and where smaller and cash-strapped businesses can defray or delay some of their costs until they have more money in the bank.

## ***How do you sell?***

Your online presence is also going to be affected by how your online sales channels work. You may find that a poorly worded website or Facebook page will get you flooded with enquiries you can't deal with. Make sure you have considered how you're going to project your presence online to avoid disappointing customers or, even worse, being overwhelmed by work you can't handle.

## ***Timelines and business plans***

Naturally everything has to fit into your business plan and timelines. There's no point in launching a website before you've decided on a business or product name, for instance. It's also counter-productive to have a local listing or an active social media presence before you have opened your store. The online and the physical worlds are deeply related and work together: we can't ignore one or the other.

## ***Credibility: the 360 degree brand***

All of the examples discussed in this book show that today everyone you deal with is using the internet to check out your business. Probably the biggest thing the internet has done is break down the idea that marketing and branding are separate from other business aspects. If you are a bad payer or lousy employer, people are going to be talking about that online. If you are providing great service, people will also be talking about that.

By not being found online, you're creating a vacuum and the internet loves filling empty spaces, often with misinformation. If your website is the first thing web-surfers see when they are online, you fill that hole and give people a place to gather around you.

## ***Conclusion***

Everything you do on the Net has effects in the offline world, so a well-planned internet presence works to unite the various messages. Having a basic web setup is important just to let the world know who you are, and the good news is

that many of the important tools, such as listing with the key online directories, are free. Step 1 will look establishing an online presence using free tools, such as free listing sites and how to go about adding your details to useful sites.

## ***Checklist***

- If you're launching a new business, have you included websites in your business plan?
- Who are the people you want to attract to your business?
- Can you sum up your business in 140 characters?
- Are you planning to sell online?
- Do you intend to sell overseas?
- What are your budgets?
- How long are the timelines you are looking at?