Why Do We Need An Online Presence?

7 Steps To Success

A guide to help you understand how to get the most from your online presence

A report by

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The World Has Changed

Ok, so I'm starting to sound like my grandfather here. We forget that in a few short years the World Wide Web has had the most profound affect on our lives. The internet didn't exist for the general public before 1992.

I think the Internet has affected us all in different ways. I have a daughter who spent a year in MeadowBrooke in Philadelphia USA and we regularly used FaceTime to chat. These video chatting sessions were often initiated when she visited her local Starbucks or other restaurant where the wifi access was free. So on average we spent about four online hours together every week. And it cost nothing except bandwidth. I got to see what she bought when shopping, what her favorite meals were, what her gym looked like and what she planned to do the next week.

Together we would discuss her travel plans, I got to Google the roads she drove on and I was able to use Google Street view to see the places she visited.

That would have been impossible a few years ago.

The Changing Environment

In South Africa where I was born and choose to live, the rate of adoption of the Internet was hampered by a number of factors. Chief amongst these was the slow connectivity speeds and expensive connectivity costs. This was mainly due to Telkom, the main and for many years only telecoms provider, holding a monopoly on fixed lines and a regulatory environment which was out of touch with the importance of the Internet as an economic driver.

However, by the end of 2012 it soon became apparent that these strangleholds were being overcome, with the provision of cheaper cellular data and the parallel investment in fibre optic cables which were placed in the major cities. This investment came soon after a series of high speed underwater cables connecting South Africa with the rest of the world were completed.

So at a wholesale level, the environment changed for the better, with more cost effective and speedier connections. Telkom and other ISPs upgraded their line speeds accordingly and South Africans started getting reasonable access to the Internet.

This process mirrored what was happening elsewhere in the world. We just had to wait a little longer.
New Devices

At about this time the world became obsessed with connectivity and new devices were becoming popular. Up until the end of 2012, Blackberry handsets dominated the South African market, chiefly due to favorable BIS rates offered through the major cellphone networks. However in 2013, in sync with the rest of the world, the new generation of smart phones such as the iPhone and Samsung Galaxy series gained traction in this market.

Once again, this trend was initiated by cheaper data access from the network providers.

The World Adopted The World Wide Web At An Alarming Rate

Arthur Goldstuck, the MD of South African research firm World Wide Worx, estimated that there were about eight million Facebook users in South Africa in March of 2013. This is relatively small compared to the over one billion users worldwide but nevertheless gives a reasonable estimation of the number of active social media users in South Africa at that time. Now what really makes this statistic remarkable is that Facebook only became available to the general public in September of 1996, (http://techcrunch.com/2006/09/26/facebook-just-launched-open-registrations/).

In a mere six and a half years, eight million South Africans and 1 billion people worldwide chose to adopt social media as a way of communicating.

Of course, the way to illustrate the growth of the Internet is to look at the number of search engine enquiries undertaken on the worlds largest search engine, Google. In 1998 Google reported that they had on average 9800 searches every day. By 2011 this had grown to 4.7 billion searches every day. Now in anyone's book this is an awful amount of people questioning things on the Internet.

The Internet Has Changed The World Forever

The internet or world wide web is really an amazing place. It is far more than a repository for information. It is a space that allows computational abilities. The
worlds body of knowledge doubles every few months and most of this knowledge is available on the net.

Clever people have used the internet as a vehicle for doing amazing things. For instance, the Khan Academy offers free online tutoring from grade one to university level and beyond. Quite amazing actually. It’s a model that competes with established educational institutions.

Amazon has changed the way we buy books with more books being sold in the Amazon eBook store than printed books. Authors too are benefitting from this arrangement as they are cutting out the expensive publishing and selection process they were accustomed too.

As business people we were taught in business school that our knowledge is one of the main factors that differentiates our business from our competitors. That’s no longer true. You can Google anything and find out how to do anything.

I believe that one of the factors that influences our businesses success is our ability to apply knowledge. Our success spends on our ability to develop business processes and apply them consistently whilst creating an environment where we remain open to refinement.

Critical to business success is to understand how this new open and connected world can influence the way we do business and how potential clients find out about our business.

In this new connected world we have a spirit of openness and transparency. Companies are sharing knowledge across industries to mutual benefit. Don Tapscott in his TED talk illustrates this magnificently when he tells the story of his neighbor who uses the new found openness principles that the world wide web has created to discover over $3,4 billion of gold reserves. [http://youtu.be/jfqwHT3u1-8](http://youtu.be/jfqwHT3u1-8)

So we live in a different world.

If I think about the way we gather information, the way our customers gather information, then we have to acknowledge that the Yellow Pages and Encyclopedia Britannica are being replaced by online alternatives such as Google.

**Are We Like Ostriches?**

Ostriches are the largest birds in the world. These heavy flightless birds have relatively small brains and powerful legs. Males are known to be very adept at protecting their young and females with their ferocious kicking with their powerful legs. When an ostrich attacks, man has little chance.

However ostriches are very protective over their beautiful large eyes. So any man walking in their proximity just needs to carry a branch of thorns and ostriches show utmost respect.

Another characteristic of ostriches is that they don’t fear what they cannot see.
Ostrich handlers on ostrich farms carry small cloth bags which they slip over an ostrich's head when handling them. The ostrich immediately calms down and allows itself to be handled.

In fact ostriches are known to bury their heads in the sand to produce the same effect when they become overwhelmed.

So what's with the ostrich analogy?

We have all adapted to the Internet and the new world of connectivity in some respects. We use smart phones, and most of us subscribe to Facebook or other social media but how many of us have actually sat down and thought about how these changes affect the way we do busy or get new clients.

There have been major shifts in the way we communicate and yet most of us have not changed the way we promote our businesses to fall in line with these changes. I say this with confidence. Research conducted by Mary Meaker in 2013 shows that of the four main media groups namely print, radio, television and the internet, that print media only grabs six percent of our attention as compared to the internet which grabs 35% of our attention. That's a staggering statistic. Most people dismiss it out of hand as its so unbelievable.

But consider this. A young man I recently met told me that he is part of the heads down generation. On enquiry he explained. His smartphone is part of his life. He uses it to text friends, form relationships, keep in contact with friends and family, research information for projects for varsity, googles for information and suppliers, finds his way through a GPS app and much much more. When he's in a taxi he isn't concerned about the view. He's keeping up with life. He says billboards are a waste of money. If you want to communicate with him then his device is key.

Similarly how many times have you found yourself in a social situation or work environment where a number of people in the group are texting own their phones.

Our communications devices are replacing other forms of media when it comes to grabbing our attention.

**Shift Happens**

So in a world that has obviously changed. A world where we now communicate through devices, a world where we google for answers to our problems, a world where we build and nurture relationships through devices. A world where we crowd source answers to problems we may not be used to. “What to do about a leaking geyser, where's the best restaurant for a breakfast for ten people, where's the best locksmith, etc etc.” how have you adapted to provide information about the business products and services that you offer.

In fact here's a hard hitting question. Do you even know where to start?

Is this change a bit overwhelming?
Do you feel equipped to handle this or would you rather bury your head in the sand like the ostrich and pretend this isn't happening.

Dealing With The Fear Of Change

For anyone who has researched anything about these changes and what to do about it you're in for a shock, the amount of possible solutions is staggering. You can get advice from knowledgable people and you can get advice from people who think they are knowledgable.

You know you need to take action. You know you need to do so now and you want a quick fix. And believe you me there are many people peddling quick fixes.

I'm telling you to be be careful. What follows is a strategic approach that every business should follow. It forms the basis of any online marketing strategy. By following this route you will be amazed at the results that you can get.

The World Wide Web Gives You Tools That You Wish You Always Had

In business school we learnt that market research was key to understanding our target market needs. Research companies charged a lot of money to determine what people were looking for and how it may be possible to influence people.

The great news is that market research tools are built into the Internet. You can tell what people are looking for. When you know this its so easy to provide solutions (your products and services).

So for the first time ever small and medium sized companies have access to market research at very low prices. He tools are there for anyone to use.

Now the power of this research becomes evident with this example. In South Africa at the time of writing there were on average 50 searches for short sleeve shirts per month and yet about 50 000 searches per month for T shirts. Now which of these would you be wanting to sell online?

Of course from this example it is also evident that you need to know what it is that you are selling. Essentially the same thing but the way you package it is vitally important.
Taking A Strategic Approach

It’s worth noting at this stage that many of us have our heads in the scrum when running our businesses. There is so much going on. Staff have to be hired, motivated, business processes have to be set out, statutory returns have to be taken care of, sales have to be made, we have to promote our business, we have to network, we have to please clients. We have to watch cash flow, contain losses, organize logistics and supplies and the list of things to do never ends.

At times it can be a bit overwhelming.

So in this mad rush to be competitive and profitable we are constantly looking out for opportunities and we jump at this and that.

Sometimes it’s worth just taking a breather and looking at the possibilities that our business offers.

Most of us are opportunists. We wait for the next opportunity, which we grab and before long we are overwhelmed with the things we need to do, cutting across various skills sets.

In this type of mindset we compete with our opposition for a larger slice of the pie. We are all selling the same products or services.

We need to reflect on what makes us different to our competitors. And that’s not service, unless you’re offering a 24 hour service when everyone else is not.

How you package your services is key to your success. How you position yourself in a valuable way to your client ensures that you transcend your competition.

Competing for a larger slice of the pie is hard work. Isn't it more exciting if we could redefine the pie, grow it and get new customers who ordinarily would not have been interested in our services.

Successful companies are able to articulate their point of differentiation effectively through their slogan.

By example Mercedes Benz, BMW and Audi are all top quality German cars and yet each finds a niche in the market. They do this by not competing directly with each other, but by their positioning statements. Audi claims their advantage lies with their technology, BMW says theirs lies with their sheer driving pleasure and Mercedes Benz claims "the best or nothing".

Each of these excellent motor cars appeals to a different subset of people. Each slogan and brand appeals to a differ emotion.

Understanding how you are perceived or could be perceived is a very important part of marketing your organization.
This is merely one aspect of your strategic plan. Knowing where you are going is vitally important to allow you to sieve out the non strategic opportunities. For instance Audi cannot build a new car that does not push the technological bar and BMW cannot make a car that doesn't supply a wonderful driving experience.

Your strategic direction directs the way you create and package your products or services. If done effectively your slogan encapsulates the driving force of your business.

I know of many businesses that sell products and services that people need. But the businesses that prosper sell products and services that people want.

The great thing about the Internet is that you can tell what people want...

The 7 Steps To Internet Marketing Success:

Step one: Research

Research is vital. We can tell what people are looking for on Google by checking out the history of search engine queries.

Always try to satisfy existing demand rather than creating new demand. Why reinvent the wheel when it's already there. Sure you may want to differentiate your products a bit for that gives you a competitive advantage.

Base is the website. This is your primary reference site. Everything needs to point here. It seems to me that the whole online experience confuses people. How does their website and their social media, video content etc fit into the bigger picture.

Step two: Your Website Is Your Core

My website is my heavy lifting area.

This is the place that I direct people to. It's the place where I entice them to sign up for my email newsletters. It's a place for my clients to access reference material. It's the place where I direct people to via my email newsletters. It's the place that you direct your search engine queries, your social media interactions and your pay per click traffic.

My website is simply the place where I offer value. I encourage email sign ups and the place where my business leads are obtained. It's where sales are concluded and relationship journeys start.

Your website should be the central part of your online strategy...

But your website is more than that. It's your online shop window. It's the place to wow your audience, the place to solve clients problems and the place to give them insight to satisfy their needs.
Your website may fulfill different needs. You may want to make clients aware of your services and products or you may want to sell your services and products. Or you may want them to sign up to get further information. We have a whole book dedicated to building an effective website which we are happy to share with you.

If you look at the different elements that make up a successful business you should be looking at traffic, engagement, conversions, up sells, xxxx

**Step 3: Traffic Is Key (SEO) – Create Great Content**

The first element that is vitally important to getting traffic is search engine optimization (SEO). Now much is written about this topic and The Online Marketer offers a specific course entitled “Is your website Googlicious?” All our website clients have free access to this course through our online marketers club.

Essentially search engines are concerned about three main areas, how your website is structured, how important your website is in other people's eyes and how relevant your content is to answer specific search engine queries.

2012 / 2013 marked a departure in the way Google and other search engines determined how worthy your website is to get additional traffic. In short the relevance of your content has become very important.

If you get this right you will be blessed with lots of traffic. But you need to know that you need to be current with your content. You need to constantly update your site.

And to do all of this you need to dedicate time to your online promotion. I don't think that you can easily opt out of online promotion so one way or the other you need to adapt your business processes to include online promotions and the creation of relevant content to existing search queries.

**Step 4: Social Media Also Drives Traffic**

Of course, you want to supplement your website with a great social media strategy.

Facebook is a social place. A place that people visit when they are relaxing. It's not a place for hard sell. In fact although Facebook has done a lot to improve its messaging service it hasn't quite yet cut it in that department but it is improving. Certainly with the new iOS apps messaging on Facebook has improved.

So, Facebook is a place where I connect with my most intimate of friends and family. It's a personal place. I also have a Facebook page for my business ,but quite frankly I haven’t yet discovered the magic bullet for defining engagement. I think the secret here probably lies with targeted Facebook ads because that's what Facebook wants.
So I'm going to explore that area and hopefully will be able to report back something positive in that area.

Google + is an enigma. Everyone expected it to be a replacement for Facebook. Well it isn't and it shouldn't be. But it is an extremely powerful place to find people with similar interests. So to explain how I use it, is to say that Facebook is a place where I hang out with my closest family and friends.

Google+ however is where I go when I want to explore and find out what people with similar interests to me are up to. So, it's the place where I check out what online marketers are up to and for those of you who know that I also have an interest in the burgeoning home inspection industry in South Africa, then you will understand why I have so many followers in that area.

LinkedIn on the other hand is all about business. Here I connect with people that I have dealt with over the years. I get to know what they are up to and sometimes I engage with them about what I am up to if I think it could be of assistance. It's also a space where I pay back. I regularly recommend people I know for specific services they offer if I know they do it well.

**Step 5: Author Rank, What's This?**

Of Course Google + is so important in other respects as well. It is the seat for your online reputation. You need a Google+ profile to set up yourself as part of the Google authorship program.

Google Authorship is a key factor in determining your online reputation and it is an essential part of growing your online presence. Recently Google told us that it will continue to play a greater role in determining your standing in the online community.

So getting started early in this program is key to your long term success.

**Step 6: Pay Per Click Advertising**

Pay Per Click advertising sounds very scary. The truth is that nothing could be further from the truth.

With Pay Per Click advertising you don't pay anything for your ads to show. You only pay when someone clicks on an ad.

I can hear you panicking about budgets already. Don't. Pay per click advertising provides an excellent means of controlling budgets. In fact it's the only form of advertising that I know of that you can use with confidence to determine what the cost of every lead or sale is.

You can measure your advertising costs by means of the cost of conversions. So, if a sale is worth $100 and its worth spending $10 on getting that sale it's possible to create a campaign and set it to those metrics.
On that basis your advertising budget becomes a percentage of your turnover and not some other arbitrary metric.

You can set daily limits or campaign limits for your spend. There are many other variants as well.

Pay Per Click advertising is an auction. On that basis you're ranking for ads depends on your offer and on the quality of your landing page. So once again we can see how important it is that you provide excellent content for your website.

If you're confused about the term landing page don't be. A landing page is the page that a person lands on your website after inputting a search query in a search engine. Remember websites are not like books. They can enter your site from any relevant page.

So from that you can deduct that the more relevant pages you have the greater your chances are of getting website traffic.

**Step 7: Keep Track Of What's Happening**

It's amazing what you can learn from behavior on your website. By setting up your analytics program you will be able to see what people are doing on your website, which pages they arrive on, where they go to, if they convert (according to metrics you set up) and wether they thought that hanging around with you was a great idea.

With proper analytics you will know what percentage of your visitors convert, what percentage came from your Adwords Campaign, whether or not your landing page converts for sales or leads etc.

Proper analytical takes time to set up but the investment is well worth the effort.

**Setting Goals And Measuring**

Measuring your performance against your goals is a key management tool in all parts of your business. Just as you set turnover goals and cost cutting targets and productivity levels so you should understand and set the metrics for your online presence.

Taking the time to understand your marketing goals and how they feature in your campaign allows you to integrate the things you need to do to boost your online marketing into your workflow.

Once established then you no longer have to fear online marketing. You embrace it and enjoy it. This is the only type of marketing where you can measure your success. That's pretty awesome for any business.

Merely knowing the number of visitors to your site falls far short of what can be done to understand people's wants and needs. For instance it is now possible to link your Pay Per Click campaigns to specific actions on your website. For instance if you
require someone to fill in a form on your site then you can measure the number of people who actually fill in the form after being directed there by your Pay Per Click campaign. You can also measure which ads were most effective in driving people to your site.

So why is this important may you ask? If people are visiting the page but not taking the action your would like them to then its most probable that that your copy is not converting them, either because the relevancy isn't good enough or you are not being convincing enough with your argument. There may be visual stimuli that are lacking, like a prominent call to action button.

Once you know what’s working and what's not then it is easier to tweak your campaign.

Setting up your analytics system to take care of all the possibilities is therefore an essential step in your online marketing strategy.

Comparing Online Marketing To Print Advertising

Moving into the online world to promote your business can be scary because there is so much that can be done. Much of it is strange to you. What steps do we do first, what next? Which steps are likely to have the most benefit?

The one thing we can assure you is that every step you take makes an incremental difference to your campaign. And the steps you take have a permanent influence on your marketing. So if you have a blueprint and you follow this blueprint then you have a marketing system that is in place for ever.

Compare this to the old print advertising you used to do. Yes it was effective, but it was expensive and every advert you commissioned had a shelf life, every step you took was washed away in time. Much like your footprints on the beach.

Yes new skills are required to deliver an online success but these skills are essential if you want your business to prosper.

If you don't do it someone else will.

The Internet has created a wonderful opportunity for you to succeed in delivering clients. It really isn't difficult and once set up will continue to deliver value over time. In its most simplest form I guess my story of the Rottweilers will give you an example of how it can be done.
Your business doesn't have to be a massive organisation to benefit from an online strategy. Here's an example of how a simple website and a Pay Per Click campaign allowed this dog breeder to sell his puppies at a premium.

A chance conversation with the breeder revealed that he had an unexpectedly large litter of thirteen puppies and he was worried about the ability to sell them all. One of the reasons was that the kennel is situated in East London, South Africa and he felt that there wouldn't be a large enough market for high quality Rottweilers unless he sold them at a reduced price.

A consultation with The Online Marketer resulted in a far better solution for the breeder. We wanted to create a basic website and drive traffic to the site using Google Adwords. The breeder was skeptical. So we offered him a solution. If he priced the puppies at R7000 each we would set.

So that's what we did. The puppies were all sold and the breeder got R7000 per puppy as apposed to the R3500 he had reasonable expectations of making.

In year two we spent R4300 on an Adwords campaign and the breeder made R70000 in sales by applying our knowledge and experience and we have a great case study to use to show people what can be done online to promote a business.

So at The Online Marketer we use our experience to provide value added solutions to businesses.

Banish Your Fear Today – Take The Next step....

I know that many people fear taking the next step to launch their marketing online. It's scary doing something that is new. The time and financial investment in something you don't understand fully is scary and all marketing must be done cost effectively.

And this is where most business's make a fatal mistake.

Having read this report you already know more than 90% of web designers. How can that be? Well the technical skills required to put a website together make up only 20% of what's needed for an EFFECTIVE online presence. How can that be?

Effective websites are a result of a process. The process begins with online research to determine what people are looking for on the web. Once you know what people are actually looking for you need to package your products and services accordingly. That's where the services of a professional copywriter come into play. The copywriter, who is skilled in writing web copy, will then craft a “landing page” which offers solutions to the existing searches on the Internet.
Then a skilled developer will take the content and format it for Google's visibility requirements and your clients' requirements. Google of course loves this and when recognizing that you are supplying answers to existing queries will deliver your results to the front page of searches.

But it's a competition to be on the front page and others will be taking part in the competition. That's why you need to follow our blueprint in order to remain there or to get there is there is stiff competition. You can help your page along by driving some traffic to the search engine by using a Pay Per Click campaign as well. This will provide you with instant traffic.

When considering that in 2013 there were over 5 billion searches on Google every day and comparing that to the low volumes just a few years ago (9000 per day in 1998) it becomes crystal clear that most people are using the Internet as their primary resource to find out information and to procure goods and services.

So the question is? Do you have a choice but to have a strong online presence?

To get new customers you have to embrace the Internet. And you need to do it properly.

I hope that this report has given you some clarity on how this can be achieved and also removed some of your fears.

Knowledge is power.

Call Kirsten at 076 128 4614 or kirsten@theonlinemarketer.co.za to schedule an appointment (telephone, Skype or face to face) to discuss how we can assist you to launch your company online.

If you think your current online presence is effective then do this quick test.

Go to google.com or google.co.za and enter one of your companies better selling products and services and hit enter.

Does your company appear in the search engine results page? If so well done.

If Not

Don't delay – Give us a call today

You'll be surprised at how little an effective online presence can be.