

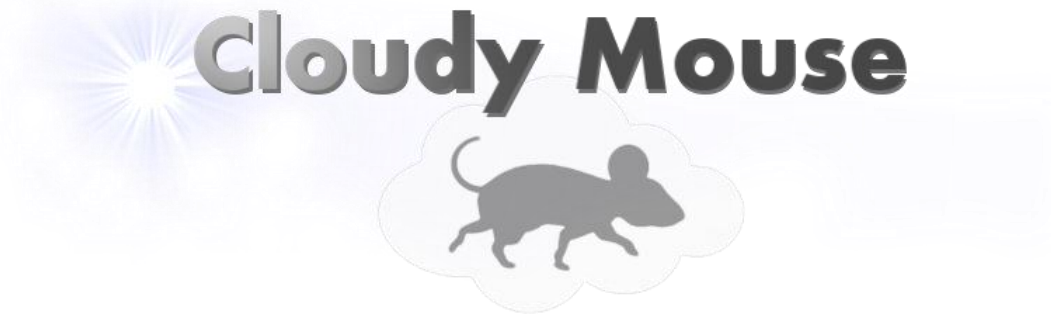
How to Start Growing Your Business Online

# How to Start Growing Your Business Online

The Basics of Promoting and Marketing Online

Revision v1.0

Website Services and Web Consulting



Where do you see your business?

We see it in the cloud

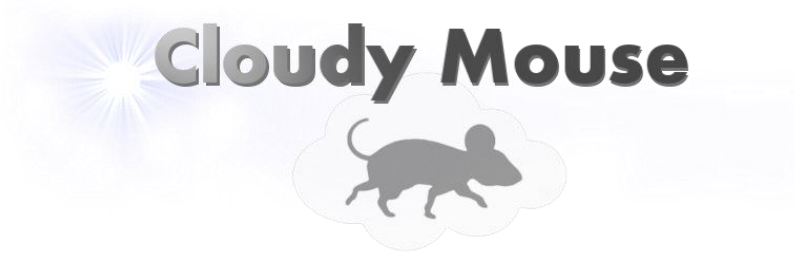
Lansing based Cloudy Mouse - Web Design and Consulting

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# How to Start Growing Your Business Online

## The Basics of Promoting and Marketing Online

Provided by



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## 1) - Intro

Operating a small business is full of various responsibilities. One of the most important parts of running a business is obviously your customers. It all starts and ends with their satisfaction. That is why you need to place some importance in how your business is represented online. A growing number of people use the internet for finding information about businesses and for locating services.

This guide is designed to help you learn the importance of having a website, creating a business blog, and staying connected with your customers across all platforms. The online world can no longer be ignored, no matter what type of business you are managing.

The first step in promoting your business online is having a website created. While there are many options that utilize free templates, having a professionally designed website helps your business stand out. After the creation of a website, you need to stay connected to customers and reach additional customers. This can be accomplished through social media and the regular updating of a business blog.

We have compiled this information to give you a quick overview of why you need to focus some of your attention to increasing your online profile. If you enjoy what you read, you can find other helpful articles geared towards business owners on our blog, by visiting [cloudymouse.com/blog/](http://cloudymouse.com/blog/). Keep reading to learn more about the basics of growing your business online.

## 2) - Custom Website versus Wordpress Theme



Whether it is a custom website or a Wordpress theme, at some point, every business should have a website. While some may feel that social media profiles keep them in touch with customers, it does not provide the same level of exposure as having your own website on your own domain. If you operate a small business and you do not have a website, then it may be time to jump on the internet bandwagon – in fact, your competition probably already has a website.

When it comes to websites for small businesses, there seem to be two main options available – Wordpress or a custom website. There are other options; though, they can be lumped into the same group as Wordpress (such as Drupal and Joomla). There are advantages to both types and you may never notice the differences. Still, every business decision requires some research, so here are some of the advantages to having a custom website built compared to having a website plastered into a Wordpress theme.

### What is Wordpress?

If you are not familiar with Wordpress, it is the most used blogging software in the world. It allows users to pick a theme and then build a website around that theme. When you get stuck trying to figure out how to edit an aspect of your Wordpress site, there is plenty of forums and discussion boards covering this blogging platform. This makes Wordpress wonderful for those that plan on maintaining their own website.

The reason that Wordpress is so prevalent is that it is easy to use. This means that anybody can decide to advertise themselves as a website designer. Businesses can end up with a simple site that any teenager could have put together in an afternoon. This does not mean that there is anything wrong with Wordpress websites; however, there is something wrong with a website designer charging you several thousand dollars for one.

## The Benefits of a Custom Website

Wordpress is useful; though, having a custom website has its own benefits too. Instead of using a cookie cutter theme and then figuring out what colors to use, you get an entire custom website design that is made to represent your business. This allows your website to better reflect your business, as well as stand out among your competition.

Besides the overall appeal, another benefit to having a custom website built is that they are quicker to load. Wordpress is easy to use because it has extra code – in order to let it work with plugins designed by individuals. All of this extra code is unnecessary for most websites, adding to the size of each web page. Custom websites do not need this extra code as everything is being designed to work together in the first place. This results in custom websites that are three to four times quicker to load than Wordpress websites.

Custom websites can be built to allow you to post your own content. That is one aspect of the custom websites that is often overlooked. Many businesses have enjoyed being able to post blog articles related to their business by using Wordpress. If that is your main reason for considering Wordpress over a custom website, then give custom websites another chance. They can be designed to allow you to make your own posts, just as Wordpress can, even with a simpler interface.

The bottom line is that a custom website can have a much more personalized touch than a Wordpress theme. If you are considering hiring a website designer to make a website for your business, ask if they can build you a custom website. You'll be surprised at how affordable it can be. In the end, having a custom website is one of the most cost effective forms of marketing that you can use.

### 3) - Learn How to Grow Your Business with a Small Business Blog



Have you been disappointed with the results that you are getting from your website? Once you have a website created to represent your business online you expect customers to start popping up. The problem is that a small five to seven page website that explains your products or services may not be enough to begin reaching additional customers. The internet is over saturated with websites. There are millions upon millions of websites out there and getting your handful of web pages to show up in search engine results is not always a simple task. If you really want to expand your reach and continue to grow your business, then you need to learn the advantages of having a small business blog.

#### How Can I Increase Customers with a Small Business Blog?

As mentioned, you are limited to a handful of pages with a standard business website. Over time, your business blog will include dozens of informative articles. This will increase the online presence of your website. Over 66% of businesses that add a [new blog article](#) each week has seen an increase in new customers. The numbers increase to 92%, for the businesses that blog daily. Here are some of the basic facts of how a small business blog can increase traffic to your website:

- A larger website equals more traffic. The size of your website is a factor in search engine results.
- More backlinks. People and other websites are more likely to link to a helpful blog article than a business web page.
- People often share what they like with others. If they find your article useful they may share it through social media sites, creating even more backlinks. Also, social media sharing is a growing factor in Google search engine rankings.

## What is a Small Business Blog?

The word blog gets tossed around a lot. Basically, a blog is a website that contains articles. What these articles are about will depend on the needs and purpose of each business. So how is this any different from a regular website? A standard business website is straight forward you are limited in scope and will typically try to describe the products and services you offer, much as you would create an advertisement. The purpose of a blog is typically to inform or entertain people with helpful articles and then compile these articles in one location so that they are easy to navigate. Currently, over 40% of businesses use a [business blog](#) for various marketing strategies.

## What Will the Blog Articles Be About?

Since the point of a small business blog is to provide people with helpful information, blog articles are a good way to inform potential and existing customers about features and services. Being limited with the amount of information you want to provide on your business website, blog articles allow you to announce new products, services, and features as you release them. It is also a useful way to further explain the point of specific products or services. For example, if you operate a heating and air conditioning company, many people may not understand the point of having their furnace inspected annually. With a blog article you could explain the dangers of a faulty furnace and finish up by providing an overview of what an inspection would entail. This way, your customers are more knowledgeable and can make an informed decision.

## Does a Small Business Blog Require a New Website?

Whether or not you want an entirely new website to display your blog articles is up to you. That is a business decision that you will need to consider. All that you really need to display your blog articles is a new web page on your existing website that includes a simple navigation menu and excerpts of your most recent blog articles.

## Do I Need to Write Blog Articles for My Business Blog?

Whether or not you write your own blog articles is another decision to consider. Running a small business can be very time consuming. Instead of writing your own articles, it is much easier to supply an SEO company with a topic and allow them to produce a high quality article. These companies have the experience and the talent to churn out helpful articles on any topic. They will do the keyword research to find the best keywords for your topic and then produce an informative article. How much information you supply about the content of the blog article is up to you.



#### 4) - How to Appeal to the Mobile Market



If you are not paying attention to your mobile customers, you are missing out on large demographic. The mobile market increased 81% in 2012, over the previous year. Right now, mobile customers make up around 15% of online shoppers. That is why every business needs to pay attention to how their business is represented online your online presence to mobile customers cannot be ignored. Here are some ways that you can ensure your small business is making the most out of the internet.

### Responsive Web Design

Your website is the building block of your online presence. That is why your website needs to be easy to read and navigate for mobile customers. In the past, many businesses would have a separate custom website designed for the mobile market. This is not the ideal scenario, as it can lead to problems with logistics and search engine optimization. A mobile customer that reaches a website that is hard to read will look for another website.

A much simpler, and less expensive, option to reach the mobile market is to have a custom website built that uses responsive web design. Responsive web design is a design that responds to the user's device by adjusting the layout and navigation of the website. If you want to see an example of responsive web design (and are not viewing this on a mobile device), shrink the width of your browser. You will notice how the menu changes to a mobile menu and everything fits in the screen. The web page is adjusting the layout based on the width of your device. This makes the page much easier to read and navigate, for mobile customers.

## Social Media

With the growth in mobile customers, there has also been an increase in the number of individuals that use their mobile devices for connecting to their social media accounts. Even phones that cannot fully access the internet can typically access social media feeds. Customers are more likely to leave comments and feedback on social media business pages than they are on an actual company website. Take advantage of using social media to stay connected with your mobile customers by making sure your business is actively using these profiles.

This doesn't mean that you need to create a profile for each social media site in order to reach mobile customers. Instead, take the time to consider the demographics of your target audience in the mobile market. Twitter, Facebook, and Google+, all have a different majority demographic. Google+ has more individuals interested in technology and tend to fall in the 20 – 30 age group. Facebook has the biggest share of online users aged 40 – 60 years old. Twitter tends to be right in the middle, with a mix of everything.

## Keep Up with the Mobile Market

While these suggestions make sense now, over time everything changes. Pay attention to the trends in the mobile market. Five months from now there could be a whole new application or website that everyone uses on their mobile devices. For now, follow good common sense marketing principles. Do not completely ignore 15% of the marketplace.

## 5) - The Benefits of Keeping Your Clients Informed



When your business is dealing with services, there can be many difficulties. Things do not always go as planned, things break and issues arise. Combine that with the fact that you often provide clients with a quoted price – which is not always so cut and dry. More often than not, I find that businesses do not keep their clients informed. While no one wants to hear that a job is going to cost more or take longer than planned, no one wants to find this out after the project's deadline. You can do the best work and offer the greatest quality; though, when things go wrong, and they will, you need to take care of it and keep your client informed with courteous speed.

### Take a Proactive Approach

Let's take a look at an example. We have all gone out to eat and had our food take an unacceptable amount of time to reach the table. When this occurs, it is hard to remain patient, as we all know that you are not yourself when you are hungry. This can really change your overall impression of the restaurant. Even if you complain and a manager attempts to remedy the situation, you already have a negative view of the restaurant. That is simply bad business.

If the manager had taken the time to come to your table as soon as they were aware that the food was going to take extra time, you may not have had the time to get upset and would probably be a little more understanding. There could be several reasons why the manager did not a proactive approach, such as the fact that he might have not known that your food was taking a while to prepare due to an employee being too scared to let the manager know. By taking steps to keep you informed of the food situation, the manager would be able to keep you as a customer.

## Stay Ahead of the Problems

Lack of communication between employees can lead to situations like the restaurant example. This is especially true if the employees are afraid to let their manager know. Be open and honest with your employees and in turn they will feel more comfortable letting you know about delays and other issues. That is how you get ahead of problems. Here are some general suggestions for keeping your client informed:

- Regular updates - Provide daily, weekly, or monthly updates, depending on your client's needs
- Inform clients of any delays or problems as soon as they become an issue
- Provide realistic deadlines
- Give them an honest price quote

When you are able to keep a customer up to date with the progress being made, they are going to be more understanding of unexpected delays and other problems. You know the feeling of not being informed and having to wait an hour for your food to arrive. Your client is busy too and their time is just as important as yours. Providing prompt and honest communication is going to save you money and earn you the trust of your clients. One of the main points to remember is that people will naturally think of themselves first. The more effort you make to keep your clients informed, the happier the clients will be.

## Stay Connected with your Customers

To me, being proactive is the way to win customers' business. Hence, you may notice that our sites are constantly being updated, fixing things we find to be not at their best. Also, we are always asking for feedback and take it very seriously. Why spend so much time, effort and money to find customers; if you are not going to do everything in your power to keep them. In this day and age there is no reason that you should not know what customers like and do not like about your business. With Yelp, Facebook, and Twitter, just to name a few sites, you can gain valuable insight into your customers.

Look, we all know that there are going to be things we just can't control; so why not mitigate that which we can. The web is a never ending source for info - Free info, and all you need is to know is where to look. By now I think we all understand how to use

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Google. If you don't, this is definitely where you should start. If you spent even half the amount of time trying to keep your customers as you did looking for new ones, there is no reason you couldn't cut your advertising in half.

### Free Advertising

Word of mouth is the best advertising you can get – it is free and it is trusted. Social media is your word of mouth, as are review sites such as yelp. If you were reading those reviews and commenting on those sites, people would know just how much they mean to you. Get a bad review or comment? Just say, “I am sorry to hear that you were unhappy on your last visit, if you give us a second chance, I personally will make sure that these issues are resolved”. Then do everything in your power to do so. Guess what? That person is probably going to rave about you, I know I would. Not to mention that everyone on that site sees how you handled this and have a deeper respect for your business. We all want to feel like we matter and as a good business owner, every customer should matter - so show it.

## 6) - Deciding what data should be moved to cloud storage



Ever since the advent of cloud storage, small businesses have been slow to move their files to the cloud. Part of the reason for this is the difficulty in deciding what should be stored in cloud storage. For most small businesses, the act of moving files from a secure server or internal setup to the big scary world of the internet simple does not make sense. If you already have your files secure and stored, what is the point of cloud storage? For one, cloud storage allows employees to be able to instantly share work and collaborate on projects. Also, it frees up resources internally. By choosing what should be kept in cloud storage and what should be kept in-house, you can cut the load on your servers, making it easier to secure what needs to be secure. As you consider moving files to cloud storage, use these tips for deciding what should be moved.

### Confidential Data Should Remain Where It Is

If your small business divides data into categories, then you should think about the different categories you have. Many small businesses will set up a demilitarized zone to keep confidential data from touching the external network. For example, confidential data is typically something that should stay where it is. While cloud storage is secure, your small business may not want to risk having confidential data being accessed across unsecure connections.

### Transferring Applications to Cloud Storage

There may be situations where moving an application to cloud storage could benefit your business. Before deciding if an application can be moved to cloud storage, figure out if that application is dependent on other applications. Will the application still be able to work on its own, once it moves into the cloud? Small applications that can

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operate on their own should be moved to cloud storage. This is another way to free up the internal servers at your small business.

After determining that an application can be moved to cloud storage, the next step is checking to see if there are any restrictions that prevent you from using the application on the cloud. There are some software developers and vendors that will not support an application if it is stored in the cloud. Without support, those applications will no longer receive updates.

### What Data Should You Move?

Once you have gone through your data and applications, determining what data are confidential and which applications cannot operate from the cloud, what data are you left with? Information that does not require a high level of security should be stored in the cloud. Not only does this free up more resources on your internal network and servers, it makes it easier for employees to collaborate. Any data that you would feel safe leaving on an employee workstation should be safe in cloud storage.

The bottom line is that cloud storage can really help out a small business. It provides affordable storage space for data and applications, while freeing up resources on your servers. Employees are able to share work and access it from more locations. If an employee needs to travel and take work with them, it is always available when the data is stored in the cloud.