

Ask SCORE

MAKE YOUR WEB SITE MEMORABLE FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

As more and more customers rely on Internet search engines and online directories to locate sources of products and services, Web sites are increasingly becoming a "must" for all types of small businesses.

But it's not enough to simply have a presence on the Web. Unless your site is set up with the customer's needs in mind, it may be doing very little to benefit your business.

Whether you design the site yourself or work with a crackerjack professional designer, it's important to remember that looks, though important, are not everything. Even the most attractive site is simply taking up cyberspace if it's not functional.

Consider what your site is like from the user's perspective. Are the various functions easy to find and use? Can customers find what they want fast? Your goal is to have a site that appears professional and credible to customers as well as being easy to navigate. For a prospect intent on buying, there is nothing more frustrating than having to deal with a clumsy or cluttered site. Categories should be clear and logical.

And while the Web's almost unlimited space gives you the choice of drowning customers with product details, you may want to exercise some restraint. Give visitors the option of clicking to more information if they

wish, but don't force it on them. Coax customers by stages. Filling out forms is often necessary, but keep them simple and break them into bite-sized parts.

And by all means make the photos or other graphics on your site compelling—not the same old generic stock photos you see everywhere. Use graphics of real people and places to add personality to your site and reinforce the notion that your business exists in the real world, too.

The bottom line is that your small business Web site should be built around convenience—the very reasons that have made doing business online so popular. That means clear, concise text with relevant graphics; straightforward operating instructions; fast, simple checkout processes for online sales; and no surprises or dead-ends—the same features YOU look for when you do shopping or research online.

To learn more about technology and Internet issues facing your small business, contact SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business." SCORE is a nonprofit organization of more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors who provide free, confidential business counseling and training workshops to small business owners. Call 610.327.2673 for the Pottstown SCORE office, or visit on the web at www.pottstownscore.org.

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