

According to Business Link, in a report recently published, Britain's small businesses are failing to get the most out of their on-line presence. Research by BT Openworld shows that a quarter of small to medium size businesses are at risk of losing customers by relying on out of date web sites. The most common areas of neglect being news, services information and up to date contact details.

Many businesses are concerned about the costs of investing in their web site as they are unlikely to see a quick return on their on-line investment. However competitive companies are only a click away, so you need to maintain a strong internet presence.

According to research, businesses have to realise that time moves more quickly online; a year in real time can equal anywhere from four to twelve years in "web time". The content of your web site can become outdated very quickly. Many businesses think they can just put up a web site, forget about it and then wonder why they don't get many web based enquires from clients and prospective clients.

Research by the DTI has found the following to be the 5 key disadvantages to not keeping a web site up to date:

1. New visitors will recognise old content.

There is something about stale content, a savvy web user can recognise it at first glance. If visitors to your website perceive that the content is not fresh they may look at it once, but are unlikely to bookmark your site and even more unlikely to return to your site. It's like the difference between a brochure and a newspaper, a client may pick up a brochure and read through it once, they may even save the brochure, but they will not be pulling it out once a month to read through it again and after a period of time will even forget they have it. A newspaper, no matter how small always has fresh content so that if someone picks it up and likes what they read, they will likely pick up another copy at a later date. Web sites are like that; visitors will quickly perceive whether your site is a brochure or a newspaper and will treat it as such.

2. Returning visitors will not come back again.

When a potential client visits your site and likes your content they may bookmark it and return another time to see what's new. If after several months there is no new content, it is likely they will assume the site is not going to change and will stop checking your site. It is returning visitors who usually like what you have to say and are interested enough to keep in touch. These visitors are likely to convert to clients in the long run, or are useful contacts to your business. Your web site acts as a networking tool to business contacts you may never have actually talked to.

3. Other sites may not link to you.

Getting linked to other sites is a good way to get visitors to your site, but a little known fact is that links to your site can dramatically improve your search engine ranking. Getting good quality sites to link to you is difficult when your site is not kept updated. A good webmaster does not link to every site that comes along and asks for a link only to those that will offer valuable information to their customers.

4. Search engines will not index you as often.

Google and other search engines may index your site several times a month, if your content changes regularly. This gives your site a definite advantage because the changes you make may be reflected in the next week instead of the next month. This also makes your site seem fresher and more up to date to web users who may notice the new content in the search engine and visit your site.

5. The competition will have the advantage.

This point is very simple, by not updating your site regularly you are giving the advantage to your competition that do.