

Here's how to effectively build your online presence as a small business

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The rate of digital adoption in South Africa has rapidly accelerated in recent years. Today, over 72% of the population uses the internet, which equates to an estimated 43.48 million internet users. With more of the local population adopting digital platforms for working, shopping and playing, small businesses have a golden opportunity to cash in by strengthening their online presence.

Why go digital?

The saying, 'location, location, location' has been used, particularly in the retail industry as a way to emphasise the importance of choosing the right geographical position for a business. The same applies in the digital world. Brands and businesses need to position themselves in the digital spaces their target audience is using for research, infotainment, entertainment and social networking. In this way, small businesses can transcend geographical boundaries and reach more customers both locally and abroad.

There is also a significant financial advantage to consider. For the most part, establishing an online presence through a website, social media or online advertising can prove significantly more cost-effective than traditional marketing methods.



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Digital marketing is also much more measurable than more traditional marketing streams. Through data analytics functions, brands can gain access to valuable data on key metrics such as user behaviour, website traffic, conversation rates, lead generation and customer lifetime value. For small businesses, whose budgets are often tight, more targeted marketing campaigns means more return on investment, and that's always good news.

Website? Check.

According to a study conducted by design and creative agency directory, Visual Objects, 76% of consumers visit the website of a store to gather information on the brand before heading to its physical location. So, while there will always be relevance and space for brick-and-mortar retail, the modern consumer leans more towards an omni-channel experience that integrates online visibility with physical accessibility. The best place to start building your online presence, therefore, is via a website.

Firstly, the website should be responsive and adapt to different screen sizes and devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and desktops, to provide a more seamless user experience.

Secondly, the website should have clear and intuitive navigation that makes it easy for users to find the information they need. A recent study by Portent recommends that website pages should load in no more than four seconds, so building a website that caters to the shortening attention span of consumers, will undoubtedly pay off in the long run.

Next up – think social

A report by Meltwater found that the fourth highest reason (42.5%) why South Africans use social media is finding inspiration for things to do and buy. Following closely on this is the intention to find content.

But remember, as much as there is pressure to have a presence on all channels, not all social media platforms are created

equal or made for the same target audience. Instead of pandering to what's trending or popular, conduct research on which channels your specific audience uses, what they find interesting and what they use those channels for.

Build an e-commerce empire starting with the basics

If you own a brand that sells products, boosting your online presence by setting up an e-commerce store could unlock a myriad of new and exciting possibilities in terms of brand awareness and reputation, revenue, profit and growth.

According to the International Trade Administration, South African online sales increased by 66% at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to this, one of the major turning points for many local e-commerce outlets has been the proliferation of payment methods. With customers demanding unprecedented levels of convenience and choice, the best e-commerce sites are those that offer a range of payment methods, including digital wallets, cryptocurrency, cash-on-delivery, buy-now-pay-later facilities, mobile payments and EFTs.

While building your online presence using these steps may seem like more science than art, even the most seasoned digital marketers agree that online success relies heavily on trial-and-error. Once you have executed a strategy, measure it using analytics and iterate accordingly. With some persistence, a good appetite for learning and a bit of good luck, you'll be well on your way to building your brand online.

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