

# The small business website dilemma



By [Linda Botha](#)

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The topic of conversation, whenever I meet with a certain older acquaintance, invariably turns to 'online business' once how's-the-wife-and-goldfish has been asked and answered.

You see, he has translated a couple of books, intends to sell them to a specific online community, and will therefore rely on search engine optimisation (SEO) to get eyeballs on his sales pages. As a result I am the recipient of well-intended but sometimes inaccurate wisdoms about the digital realm, and its bullhorn, SEO.



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## Keeping up with the times

Like him, there are many business owners who use the wealth of information present on the internet to educate themselves, especially about topics like SEO. But, like him, many small business owners absorb inaccurate or outdated information, which they then accept as gospel. (The danger with something like SEO is that it changes whenever search monolith Google updates its algorithms.)

As a result, many small business website owners suffer from a misconception of what it is to have a website in 2013: (still) a collection of static pages that will automatically generate an additional revenue stream. Failing that, just a quick application of SEO and all should be well.

Times have since moved on.

Owning and operating a digital presence today should perhaps, more than anything, include a clear understanding of competition in the digital arena, followed by clear strategic thinking. It's a question of how much content your competitors have versus how much you have.

It's also a matter of how well their content is aimed at both people and search engines, and whether yours can do it a little better. After that, the comparison becomes technical, and is almost exclusively focused on search engine criteria.

But, is it really that important to rank number one on search engines? From what I've heard from small business clients as well as my acquaintance, many people seem to think so. Yet while there are businesses whose websites really need to feature somewhere on the first two pages of the search engine results, ranking number one shouldn't be a main priority.

## Ranking number one

Drawing visitors and turning them into clients should be the focus instead - they can come from a variety of online locations, not only search engines.

At this point it would be prudent to discuss online strategy, and how it can help new or as yet low-ranking websites draw some of that much-needed traffic. But let's be honest, small business owners are more focused on doing business, on survival, than on spending colossal amounts of time on the internet to develop digital strategy.

Enter the "SEO experts", quotes intended because it seems to have become an industry sporting many fly-by-night online authorities. They, too, know that many small business owners have heard from a friend or tech-savvy nephew that ranking number one on Google can bring in tons of business.

"We'll get you to #1 on Google" and similar claims are most frequently employed to attract the unsuspecting business owner. Sounds good.

But let's be clear about this, ranking number one for the most popular keywords in any industry (using ethical strategies which won't result in later penalisation) is likely to be extremely expensive. Even then it cannot be guaranteed. Ranking number one for a less popular keyword is more possible and likely to be less expensive, but carries a greater risk since it may not attract any visitors, or not the type of visitors you wish to invest in your business.

Here's Google's take on the matter:

"Beware of SEOs that claim to guarantee rankings, allege a 'special relationship' with Google, or advertise a 'priority submit' to Google. There is no priority submit for Google."

## Online guidelines

While it's hard to give a specific solution that can apply across all industries, there are a few simple guidelines small businesses may adopt for a greater online success potential:

1. *Know thy audiences.* Successful marketing isn't as complicated as you may think. In very basic terms it's a question of telling people how a product or service applies to their lives. But for this to happen, you have to know who they are, and in what circumstances they may need what you have to sell.
2. *Publish fresh content regularly.* In the age of social media, fresh content is available by the minute. People have come to expect regular content updates from the websites they want to do business with. Just remember to keep it relevant to your audiences.
3. *The quality of content plays a crucial role in online success.* An overdose of incorrect grammar and spelling mistakes requires additional mental processing power from people who have a lot of other things to think about. It may also obscure the meaning you wish to convey. If you can't write, enlist the services of a freelance copywriter to get you going.

The final step is to find out which keywords people are using to find products or services like yours, and to use those keywords at strategic locations in your content. This will make it easier for them to stumble upon your website, and because you are addressing their needs, increase the likelihood of them investing in your products and services.

That said, once my acquaintance reads this, it'll most likely again become the topic of conversation - with the slight difference that he won't remember I wrote it, and, again, I'll be the recipient of well-intended, but this time more accurate wisdoms about the digital realm and its bullhorn, SEO.

*Additional resources:*

*Google's Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) page:*

<https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35291>

*Marketing Profs: Three Deadly Reasons Most Websites Fail*

<http://www.marketingprofs.com/articles/2013/11495/three-deadly-reasons-most-websites-fail>

## ABOUT LINDA BOTHA

Translator, content creator and editor, Linda Botha, has established herself firmly in the language services industry over the last 25 years. Her experience includes corporate and educational content development and publishing, and managing large document projects. Linda currently offers a free business writing course through Linda Botha Language Solutions at [www.lbls.co.za](http://www.lbls.co.za). Reach Linda at [linda@lbls.co.za](mailto:linda@lbls.co.za), or connect with her on Facebook.

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