

Digital marketing can open markets for small enterprises

The wide world of the internet and digital marketing may seem out of reach to small business owners, who often believe that digital media is only for large companies. But nothing could be further from the truth.



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"Digital marketing is for everyone. All that is needed is taking the time to cross the 'knowledge gap' so that business owners can enter the rewarding arena of digital marketing," says Ravi Govender, head of Small Enterprises at Standard Bank.

Because of the importance of digital marketing and its potential to increase the market share of small businesses, the topic was selected for the BizVideos series currently running on Standard Bank's BizConnect website www.standardbank.co.za/bizconnect, where the entire series of BizVideos can be viewed.

Growth chances are reduced

"Consumers are increasingly turning to the internet because of the ease of accessibility and convenience it offers. They can look for product information or shop online at any time of day or night, whether they are at home, work or even on the move. Not taking advantage of this trend could cost a business selling opportunities and reduce their chances for future growth," says Govender.

Key areas that should be considered are:

- Paying for digital marketing, which involves placing banner adverts on suitable websites aligned to your business' offerings;
- investing in 'owned media' such as constructing your own website and/ or blog;
- using 'managed properties' such as Facebook or Mobi-sites offered by major Internet operators for general public and business use; and
- 'earned media' which involves developing a digital public relations or editorial campaign that encourages people to get

to know and discuss your business on line.

"Internet marketing is a cost-effective way of reaching a large and growing audience, and should be part of the everyday marketing arsenal used by small businesses. Another advantage of digital marketing is that the results achieved are easier to measure than traditional forms of marketing," says Govender.

Visits are recorded

"Every time a website or web page is opened by a potential customer, this is recorded and tracked, providing the website owner with information on how often the site or a page is viewed, and even what products are most often viewed."

Other items that can help deliver dividends include:

- Offering value-add features to a site. These can include tools like calculators, or interactive or other devices specific to your products;
- providing in-depth information on the technical aspects of products; and
- tips for optimal use of products and services.

Major considerations

"When developing a digital marketing strategy, costs and budgets are obviously major considerations. As with any marketing plan it is advisable to consider all options available and then opt for those that offer the most value," says Govender.

The first things to think about when getting started with digital marketing are:

- To consider establishing a business website. This will require initial design and set-up costs, and then a monthly fee to ensure that the site is hosted. This is generally the most effective way to enter the digital market.
- Using key search words to attract people to the site. The costs of this approach, usually via Google or other search engines are negotiable. Key search words can be regularly changed so that the best phrases for your business can be developed on a trial and error basis.
- Setting up accounts on social media platforms, such as Facebook and twitter, which does not involve set-up costs. Time is required to ensure that sites are refreshed on an ongoing basis and that information remains useful to readers.

LinkedIn, a service for business to business contacts, that lists who you are and what your company provides. "Although all these options provide easy entry into digital marketing, it is worth spending time to research what other companies in your line of business are doing from a digital marketing perspective. Then use this research to address the gaps you may see in their strategies.

"Add in material, such as illustrations of completed projects, or tools that will assist customers to plan for their needs. Then keep content up-to-date and the chances are that you will attract customers and get real value for your advertising rands," concludes Govender.