

**2015**

Small and Medium Business Websites – A Short Guide by Buddy Web Design

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1. **Introduction**

In this Short guide we explore business websites for small and medium business, specifically for small and medium businesses in Cape Town, South Africa. The one thing almost all business owners have in common is that time and money are scarce resources. For most the initial investment to have their own website is a big expense and often for many the return from the investment is close to zero. Why do some websites do well on the internet while others hardly get noticed? Should one not rather advertise on online directories like the Yellow Pages or should a small business not make use of Social Media like Face book?

We explore these problems and questions in this short guide and we hope to show you that instead of viewing the Internet as a problem or mystery that the Internet presents small business owners with an opportunity and that it is not so difficult to understand. The cost of getting a website has come down with technological advances over the years as well. A whole new world awaits those business owners who are willing to invest a little of their precious time to market their business the right way through the Internet.

In this guide we have tried to strike a fine balance between covering the most important aspects and the time available to business owners to read trough a guide of this nature.

Please note that this guide is aimed at our typical small medium business client in Cape Town. We aim not to impress highly skilled web developers or programmers. We keep the information in this guide relevant to small and medium business owners who partly rely on a skilled web design company to address more technical issues.

We cannot however be successful if our clients do not assist us with providing great website content and we hope by explaining how search engines work we get our clients to provide us with the right information and or to embark on a program where their websites are updated and developed on a regular basis, either by us or by our clients themselves.

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1. **Understanding some basics of websites and SEO**

People use search engines like Google to find information or products and services on the internet. Search Engines like Google are electronic librarians providing their users / clients with the information they think is best fitting to what the client were looking for. Alongside the requested information they will also display those companies who advertise with Google.

A website is a collection of individual web pages. These pages would typically be a Home Page, about us Page, Products and Services pages, Frequently Asked Questions, Newsletter/Blog, References and Photo Galleries.

Web pages and websites are designed by Web Designers. Once the website has been designed and signed off by the client a web address will be registered e.g. Our Cape Town based web design company web address is [www.buddywebdesign.co.za](http://www.buddywebdesign.co.za) . A website address is also called an URL or Uniform Resource Locator. The individual web pages which make up a website each have its own unique URL / address.

Search Engines are websites such as Yahoo, Google and Bing which people visit when they are looking for specific information or products and services. Google is by far the most popular search engine around. It is hard to imagine a world without Google, a word which has been included as a verb in dictionaries. More astounding is the fact that Google was only established in 1998 and yet it has a market capitalisation of 378 Billion US Dollars!

The process of doing well on search engines such as Google is called SEO or Search Engine Optimisation. Search Engine Optimisation is a fast evolving industry on its own with people specialising in the industry being called SEO experts.

Google only presents pages in their search results which have been indexed by them much like a librarian can only present you with the books which have been indexed by them. There are more than 200 factors which Google considers when to present which website in search results. These questions are also called algorithms. In this book we focus on the areas which Business Owners generally have control over and which has the biggest impact on search results.

One of the biggest indicators Google uses is to determine what the page rank of each webpage is by looking at how many, and the quality, of other websites linking to a website. A link is like a recommendation from one website to another. Link building was for years seen as the most effective SEO tool available and a lot of SEO services on offer were actually link building services. The Google came up with a major algorithms update called Penguin which seeks to penalise websites with a high number of unnatural or low quality websites linking to them. Suddenly the same companies offering link building schemes were now selling link removal services!

Why did Google introduce these “penalties”? Because Google wants to presents their users with the best search results and these websites were playing the algorithmic workings of Google instead of focussing on quality content or information on their websites which is what Google wants.

Google makes its money by selling advertisements next to the best search results. These adverts are done via Google Ad Words program where the highest bidder for a specific word or search term on a particular moment get’s the best display results. You can select your daily budget and your bid for each keyword or search term. For people to keep on returning to Google for search results Google needs to keep on providing accurate search results.

Some of the more important general questions Google will ask when returning search results include:

* How many times does this page contain a Keyword?
* Is the Key Word in the title?
* Is the Key Word adjacent to the title?
* Is the Key Word in the URL?
* Does this page contain synonyms for the Keywords?
* Is the page from a quality website or is the page / website low quality or even spammy by nature?
* How old is this web page?
* What is the page’s page rank – how many outside links point to it?

Some of the most common and important mistakes business website owners make includes:

* Not having a website at all
* Not including the right words (words people use when searching)
* Not including those right words where search engines can find them
* Embedding important words in images or flash which search engines can read but requires too much processing power so is ignored generally
* Not making use of Google’s free resources like Google my business and Google Webmaster Tools
* Not linking your Google + and Google My business and Face book pages to your website by adding your website’s URL
* Relying only or too heavily on search engines for marketing the website
* Having a website which is not Mobile friendly. (Google plans to penalise websites which are not mobile friendly come 21 April 2015.)

**Please note:**

Reference is made to keyword a couple of times. Be careful not to try and fool search engines by keyword stuffing or by spamming. You are not writing for search engines but for humans who will find keyword stuffing or spamming irritating and they will leave your website. That is if Google does not penalise you first.

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1. **Website Copywriting**

On Site SEO refers to the process of optimising your website’s content where off Site SEO will refer to practises such as getting quality websites to link to your website. Google wants business owners to focus on quality content so that other websites naturally link to their websites and not to get involved in link building practises which try to manipulate the way Google operates.

Website Copywriting is perhaps the most important tool available for white hat SEO. White Hat SEO is acceptable SEO where black hat SEO such as unnatural link building is unacceptable. Google constantly fight against spam and black hat SEO. Other practises which might see your website get delisted altogether from Google’s index are the hiding of website text. (Where text is the same colour as the background of the website and is not readable by the human eye but readable by search engines.) Another practise frowned upon is keyword stuffing where keywords are stuffed on website pages without it making sense.

CMS refers to Content Management System. Business Owners who have access to manage the content of their own websites have a distinct advantage over website owners who have to rely of their webmasters to make changes for them. Simply because of the time it usually takes for a webmaster to add your content and the cost involved to get a highly skilled programmer to do the basic work for you.

Google looks and judges the freshness of content on websites to help them decide how relevant a website may or may not be. Fresh content could be a weekly or monthly blog/newsletter. You could also continue to list examples of your latest work / clients or add your weekly special or a new product or service.

When considering Website Copywriting it is important to consider the following basics:

* Headings are important. Any page on your website can be indexed. All of your website’s web pages headings should carefully be considered.
* Introductory paragraphs of your important pages are important. Your website’s home page and about us page are some of the more important pages of your website. Start off and be to the point. You can share your vision and mission and fancy English further down the page. An example would be: “Buddy Web Design designs websites for clients in Cape Town. Our offices are in Bergvliet in the Southern Suburbs”
* Instead of having hundreds of photographs on your website rather have fewer photographs but describe each photograph. It is an easy way to talk in a natural way about your business. It does help to save your photographs with an Alt tag.
* A romantic writer might not be the best person to employ to do website copywriting for you but rather a person who understand the basics of how a search engine operates.
* The best person to do the copywriting is normally the business owner but if the business owners lack the skill, time or confidence it is time to seek the services of a website copywriter.
* Do not assume that people who visit your website has a basic knowledge on your specialist field. You can describe some of the most basics and it will be appreciated by some. Others with that basic knowledge will simply skip to the more advanced sections.
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1. **Google’s free resources**

Google’s Gmail services are a popular and well known service used by many small and medium business owners. It is quick and easy to view your emails no matter where you are on what device you are working and it is possible to search for important emails going back years using the search function if you do not make use of the labelling system to organise your emails. This free platform offers Google another platform on which to display advertisements. Some of our clients from Google Ad Word campaigns told us that they saw our details while reading emails from other web designers they had approach for quotes for web design services. Here are some of Google’s other free resources which are not to be ignored:

**Google Webmaster Tools**

Google Webmasters offers tools for website owners to see how Google sees their websites. By using Google Webmasters you eliminate guess work and you should have a clear understanding on how well your website is performing for a variety of search terms. You should submit your new websites sitemap to Google using Google Webmasters or when your content of your website has drastically changed you can ask the Google Robots to crawl and index your website, which should happen if it meets Google’s quality guidelines.

**Google my business**

Google my business is a free offer by Google for businesses to list their details and appear across all search results including Google Map searches. It is like a mini website which the average person can populate within a few minutes. It does benefit your website’s SEO to have a Google my business listing if you link your Google my business page to your website. Google verifies these listings by either my phone or by posting a postcard with a verification code to the specified business address.

**Google Analytics**

Google Analytics provides some fascinating insights into how people behave on your website, their demographics, whether they are first time visitors or recurring, from which countries, the number of pages visited by session, whether they entered your websites URL or whether they found your website via search engines, the devices and even the operating system used to browse your website. The information can even be provided in real time.

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1. **Select the right web design company and software**

By selecting the right Web Design Company and software in the first place one can win half the battle of marketing your business through the Internet. Here are some of the questions to ask:

* Can you show me some examples of work you have done, of websites doing well in search results? (Get an idea of the price of each example shown.)
* How quickly can the website be up and running?
* How long have you been in business?
* Can you provide me with a list of references?
* Will you come and visit me in person and offer training on site?
* Will I be able to easily manage the website’s content myself?
* How easy / difficult is it to master the CMS?
* Do I get unlimited pages?
* What company back up and technical support can I expect?
* What contingency plans are in place if you stop doing websites?
* Is your designs responsive, display neatly on most devices?
* How expensive will it be to add shopping cards and payment gateways?
* How expensive will it be to change the look and feel of a website if I want a fresher look?
* How much do you charge for updates if we are too busy to do it ourselves?
* Can I consider a demo website before making a financial commitment?
* Do we get a free email and Sms system included?
* Will my website SMS or email me when someone interacts with the website and enquires about my products and services?

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1. **You need to commit time and manage your time well**

Small and medium business owners need to spend time on their websites, whether they do it all themselves or whether they employ someone to do everything for them. You still need to provide the website copywriter with information about your business, what makes your services unique, your list of satisfied clients and their testimonials, a list of frequently asked questions and answers etc. No one can write sense about your business and highlight that which sets your business apart without having the knowledge first.

Getting good results via search engines is not something which happens overnight and it is something which needs to be kept working at. At the very minimum a monthly newsletter/blog or adding photographs, with text, of new projects need to be added to the website. Your competition is searching for the same clients you are searching and once they have an edge on search engines it is difficult to claw back grounds. Google does not like duplicate content and copying from other websites will see your website being penalised and your website could even be removed completely from Google’s Index.

It is a good idea to spend time researching the websites of your competition doing well on the internet and to see what information and sections they have on their websites. In doing so you will have a realistic benchmark of what needs to be done in order to appear with or higher than them on search results.

It is important to know how much you are benefiting from SEO (Free traffic via search engines) and what grounds can be gained by spending more time on improving the content on your website before overspending time on On Site SEO exercises.( Website Content Development) Certain industries like web design and tourism are just so competitive that you can literally write books of information and add it to your website but not get the return you expect. In the web design industry we believe this is largely because of the industry not being cleaned up of unnatural link building schemes. Google will get this right eventually. In the tourism industry one is often forced to join the popular directories like Safari now, where to stay because of these websites occupying page 1 and 2 of search results. These companies have professional website copy writers in full time employment and a small /medium business owner will often be better off in joining these companies as opposed to writing books of information to add to their website. Just as important it is to realise how important SEO and a good informative website can be is it important to realise the limits and the costs (your time) of SEO. A balance has to be struck.

By using Google Webmaster Tools you should be able to access over a relative short period of time the benefits gained from spending time on the content of your website and accordingly adjust future efforts.

In the following sections we will deal with alternative means to market your business website as well as with Social Media which could be used to market your business and or business website. All of these activities are time consuming activities which competes with time which, we believe, should first be spend on doing the basics of your website well.

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1. **Alternative means to market your website**

Besides search engines there are numerous ways to market your website:

* Business Cards and Company Stationery
* Sharing on Face book groups
* Online directories like Yellow pages, Safari now
* Vehicle signage
* Newspaper and magazine adverts (Both print and online)
* Shop signage
* Email Signatures
* SMS to potential clients
* Promotional Items like T Shirts, Mugs and Fridge Magnets handed out to clients
* Try and talk to the media, maybe get time on air
* You can join the Google Ad Words campaign

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1. **Social Media Marketing**

Social Media Marketing includes Social Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Linked In and Instagram with the most popular Social Media platform being Facebook. Although we ourselves have gotten business from our Facebook activities we believe that time and money should first be invested in your website before paying a Social Media expert to handle your Social Media profiles.

We are not against Social Media marketing but we see far too many examples of where the costs exceed the benefits gained from Social Media activities. There are exclusions to the rules especially for celebrities and sport stars or people in the fashion and modelling industries as well as photographers. Either you will love Social Media and already be using it but if you are reading this guide to find out more and consider using Social media to market your business you will probably end up paying someone to do it for you or delegate the responsibility to an employee of your company with potential negative effects.

Once again we have recently seen a negative comment on a Facebook page of a Cape Town Restaurant not being attended to for months by the business owner’s wife. In this case having a Facebook page actually worked against them.

The cheapest fees we have come across for Social Media management start at R500 per month. That’s really entry level fees and you can expect to get what you pay for. We would rather see small and medium business owners pay money towards their website copywriting or for professional graphics or professional photographs before investing money in Social Media marketing.

You will basically be paying someone to be yourself on Social Media. It does not really make sense for small and medium business owners. I leave an open invite for Social Media marketing experts to supply me with examples of success stories.

Advertising with Twitter and Facebook is a different story but not further discussed in this short guide on small and medium business websites. We will only discuss the most popular platform, Facebook, in a little more detail:

Facebook can be a great place to get new clients or to have a presence on the Internet but it should always compliment your business website. Facebook offers free tools like business pages, groups and individual profiles. People voluntarily disclose a lot of their personal information on Face book such as employment status, gender, marital status, places visited as well as where they reside. This allows Face book to allow advertisers to market at these specific demographics.

Clever Facebook marketing can get you some free mileage even if it is trough your personal Face book profile. Face book needs to generate advertising revenue and they actively encourage business page owners to boost their posts by paying them. Even if you can manage to get 10,000 likes for your business page Face book determines in how many of those likes your business page’s post are shown.

On the down side your posts can be displayed over and over again to the same audience. Some people have started very successful community Face book pages which focus on specific areas of interest or geographical areas. A lot of business leads can be gathered but usually these leads are controlled and guarded by the persons who started these pages and who are the administrators of these pages.

Individual profiles are not indexed the same way as Google indexes websites. It is always better to ad information onto your website before sharing it on Facebook as the work you do on your website may be indexed by Google for your benefit for years to come.

By having an active Facebook page which links to your business website you are helping with your website’s SEO.

On some community pages people ask for references of specific industry experts. I often smile when I can share one of my clients website’s as opposed to other people only being able to supply a name and telephone number.

The time and depth of involvement one should exercise on Facebook marketing depends on a number of factors e.g.:

* Will people mind being tagged in your companies photographs e.g. a local nightclub or restaurant can offer prizes for people tagging themselves in photographs of social evenings
* Whether you enjoy spending time on Face book
* The type of industry you operate in
* How interesting your work is. EG a nature photographer should get a lot of mileage by sharing some of his work on Face book where a dentist might expect a lot less
* Will you benefit by advertising to certain preselected demographics at a price?

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1. **Other technical factors**

We purposefully set out to write a short guide and we hope we have covered some most of the important basics, those factors which are relevant to a small and medium business owner in the sense that he has control over them. Our guide is aimed at the South African environment. The USA and Europe has a vastly different business world, especially in the size of economies, markets and size of the businesses which operates in these environments.

We are backed by highly skilled technical company who have developed the World’s Easiest Web Design software. There are a lot of factors which are automatically taken care of by using the Kwikwap Software.

This means that the business owner can now become an active partner in the website’s SEO. The business owner actually has become the most important partner when it comes to SEO.

 Your website will only be as good as the content it contains.

People are not interested in the mechanical workings of a Television set or a DVD machine. They want to plug it in and expect it to work. That is what one can expect from technological advances. The same has happened with websites. Unfortunately the one ingredient, that is good quality content cannot simply be plugged in.

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1. **Measure, Adjust and Repeat**

Having a business website and using it to market your products and services should be viewed as an ongoing process which is why it is vital that you are able to measure actual results and act accordingly.

You need to understand Google Webmaster Tools and maybe even Google Analytics. You can also test your own websites presence on the internet by using your computer to search for search terms you would like to be found for. Please remember that your search results can be influenced by your computers cache (memory of websites visited frequently) as well as your Google+ circles.

If you are not being found by search engines keep on studying the websites of your competition and see where you can do better than they when it comes to the quality of information which they have on their websites. It could be that you should consider the number of websites linking to your website as opposed to the competition. Be careful with unnatural link building. We are still expecting some industries to be cleared of unnatural link building schemes.

Please realise that it takes between 1 and 6 weeks for search engines to index new content which has been added to your website.

By diligently adding new and relevant, fresh content to your website you should over time see an increase in your website traffic. It also should happen that other companies naturally start linking to your website which could increase your page rank and thus your number of website visitors.

Monitoring your results using Google’s free tools, adjusting and improving your website’s content and repeating this process should become part of your normal business processes especially if your website is bringing you in new business. Just be careful if you operate in an extremely tough competitive environment to spend too much time on SEO related activities.

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1. **Advertising with Google or other payments**

All businesses should consider advertising with Google. Chances are your competition might already be advertising. If they are doing it shouldn’t you consider doing it? What’s great about Google advertising is that your website is presented at the same time as a potential customer is considering buying.

You should also consider advertising on Facebook.

Your time is your money and you should consider spending more time on your website in order to get more website visitors.

How much should you spend?

That is a question we often get asked. The answer is not so simple. You need to understand that by advertising with Google or on Facebook or by spending time on your website or by doing a combination of everything you will get business income which would otherwise never have existed in the first place. Those who realise this principle of advertising also realise that they need to re-invest some these additional income in their advertising expenditure in order to get more business income.

You should try and establish what your gross profit per client is and then try and measure the cost of getting the client to visit your website and buying. That should guide you in determining how much you should spend on advertising / time you should spend on your business website.

It is also important to note that when you are attracting new clients you are also adding to the goodwill of your business. Goodwill is an intangible asset which can be included in the selling price of your business when you want to sell for whatever reason.

Especially start up businesses should budget much more for advertising when starting out.

When you view these expenses or payment of your time correctly you should start viewing these expenses as investments, investments in your future business success.

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1. **What can be expected during 2015 and beyond**

Websites which are not mobile friendly can expect to be penalised in favour of websites who are mobile friendly from about 21 April 2015. The growth in the mobile internet industry in South Africa has surpassed most expectations and it is where the biggest growth is expected. Nowadays everybody accesses the internet via a smart phone, tablet or I Pad. For this reason Google has decided to favour websites which are adapted for viewing on these devices. It would be a good idea to have a look at your website using these devices. Besides being penalised by search engines you are possibly already losing possible business.

On the design front the trending designs are those designs, designed to scroll easily by touch screens. This can be expected to continue.

Google can be expected to rid the internet of spam and black hat SEO like unnatural link building. A lot of these practises are still abounding. Google representatives have advised people during live webinars not to partake in any link building schemes but rather to focus on quality content. How Google will suddenly ignore one of their most important indicators and rely on self determining the quality of content on websites is another question. The days of artificial intelligence are upon us. It can reasonably be expected that search engines will get much better at judging quality content using their ever improving technology.

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