



Advanced User Guide

Promoting Your Online Presence

This guide is one of a series of “How To” Guides” produced by Enterprise Ireland to meet the needs of Irish companies, particularly our client base, the majority of whom are small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in manufacturing or internationally traded services.

They are designed for non-IT professionals charged with developing and/or implementing eBusiness/IT strategy in their companies. Hopefully they may also be of use to IT professionals.

These guides are only one of a range of eBusiness resources provided by Enterprise Ireland. Most of the other resources, can be accessed through our eBusiness webpages

www.openup.ie

Here you can access more guides and cases about eBusiness and related topics, details of solution providers, access to our free eBusiness e-zine and discussion forum, eBusiness events guide and links to interesting reports etc.

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If you are prepared to invest in developing a website, then be prepared to budget for promoting it. Build it and they will not come! You will probably need to allocate a budget at the time you launch the site and for most businesses, there will be a need to allow a budget for ongoing maintenance and future site developments. Think of website developments as an evolving process that enables your business to compete more effectively -not a one-off project. The good news is that if you invest wisely in a website, the benefits can be enormous and even better, your investment can pay for itself over and over again.

This guide is designed to help you get the very most from your site so that you can maximise the enormous opportunity it presents.

1. Preliminary Considerations

If you are promoting a new site or development, before it goes live, go through the following checklist;

- Return to your site objectives; does the new development meet these?
- What's on the site that's relevant to the target market; is it useful/up-to-date and accurate? Is it "sticky" i.e. will visitors want to keep returning and stay on your site?
- Test every link both for functionality i.e. that it does click through to another page and for accuracy i.e. that you arrive at the right page
- Don't leave any "work-in-progress" on the site, such as a note that says "under construction". Simply remove/hide the link - the information will simply not be on your site but there's no need to highlight this fact to others. If the whole site is unavailable, then put up a simple holding page, with your business contact details.
- Are the images/photography appropriate - e.g. don't use photos of US business people if you're targeting the Japanese market. At this point you will not be rebuilding the navigation however if quick-fixes are available, take them.
- Make sure that the company's contact details are on the home page, that you have a link privacy policy readily accessible on it and that you offer visitors the ability to opt-in to email communications.
- Ask your developer to include the date on the home page as this gives the site a current "feel"
- Give staff and other relevant people a pre-view of the site so that they are familiar with it if they have any queries on its content, once it's launched.
- Finally, ensure that you have adequate tracking facilities. Often the report-tracking offered can be difficult for the "non-techie" to understand - talk to your developer and make sure the information will be accessible in a suitable format.

2. Promotional Tools

2.01 Arrange a launch event

If you have just undertaken a revamp of the site or developed a new one, a launch event is a great opportunity to meet up with your customers and prospects. If you already have an opt-in email database, ideally invitations would be done online as response rates can be higher (primarily because of the easy and instantaneous ability to respond). However depending on the industry you're in, even if you do have an email database, you will find certain people are more comfortable responding to the printed word. At the event, use a digital projector to display the website and leave a few laptops at the venue so that visitors can surf the site at the event (watch out for security though!)

If you do have a launch event, use a subsequent promotional device to ensure attendees go onto the website back at their businesses and that those who did not attend are aware of the development. This promotion could be an incentive e.g. €5 donation to a charity for each visitor, an email thanking guests for attending with a link to the site ("Now's your chance to see the site for yourself" etc) or extremely compelling content e.g. revealing a new product development that will reduce customers costs, announcing a speedier service options, revealing new industry developments etc.

2.02 Use existing marketing material

As soon as your site is up and running, add your site address to your stationary, business cards, invoices, packaging, facsimile transmissions, brochures, exhibition posters and other promotional materials. Also consider putting it on your vehicles and in your "Golden Pages" or other directory entries. As a good rule of thumb you should promote your web site in print every opportunity you get!

2.03 Search engines and directories

A common website promotional tool is to get your site listed in search engines and directories. While search engines sort by key words, directories facilitate buyer search by compiling lists of buyers and sellers by product, service and industry. Search engine optimisation covers the full range of measures taken to ensure that when a potential customer keys in words relevant to your products, your site is listed early on i.e. near the top of the list or in the top 10. Depending on what you are trying to sell, there may be many thousands of other companies all working away diligently, trying to come top of the list for your target key words or product category. They cannot all be in the top ten and some of the others may have far more resources than you. Even if you do get near the top, unless you keep devoting staff or consultants time to tweaking your site, you will tend to slip back down the rankings.

Depending on your particular circumstances, the benefits of staying near the top of the lists may or may not justify the costs involved. Each company, therefore, needs to make a business decision as to the appropriate level of resources, if any, to devote to search engine optimisation. If you do decide to go down this road, here's some useful guidelines.

- If you do decide to go down this route, the first step is to take time to determine the keywords to use in describing your site to search engines and the categories under which you will submit to directories. The main question is, when the people whom you would like to attract to your site are searching the web, what key words are they likely to use?
- Some lateral thinking may be needed. For example, imagine a company trying to sell a new coating designed to protect the paintwork on new cars, to people who might not have thought of buying such a coating. They might get more business by using key words aimed at those searching the web to find a car, than by focussing on "coatings", "protection" etc.
- Talking to staff and clients can be a useful way of finding out how they think when it comes to your company, its products and services. It can help to identify where and how they most often discover web site addresses and affiliated announcements.
- And of course certain online tracking./reporting packages will list the key words used to find your website. Check out your facilities and if you have access to this data it can be extremely useful.
- Talk to your suppliers, industry sources and customers and see if you can have a link on their sites as the more relevant sites you are listed on, the higher your ranking may be in certain search engines.
- Make it your goal to register your web site address with as many of the free popular online navigational guides that will accept your listing. In addition, check for industry comparison-shopping sites and add your site to the directory. Some announcement lists may require you to subscribe in order to submit your announcement. There is a variety of software available that will submit your site to thousands of search engines.

The way you submit information to these indices and the content and wording of your site, will influence how your site is categorised and ranked within its category. You can use software to analyse your search engines positioning and to indicate possible ways of modifying your site to gain more targeted traffic. This task is possibly better outsourced since search engine listings are based on complex factors that change over time. Alternatively, it may be done in-house by people who are computer literate (but not necessarily IT professionals) with occasional specialist outside help.

Accurate and complete records of your site submission activities are critical to successful search engine

optimisation. These records should include when the site is registered, where it can be found, any password or user ID's needed for changes, any special comments noted during the submission process and any correspondence that transpires regarding your site submissions. Continue to make sure that these records are correct and continue to verify the status of your original listing at least every three months.

2.04 E-mail as a promotional tool

The potential with Email is enormous and most Irish businesses have only scratched the surface of this facility. In promotional terms, email offers everything the marketer has ever dreamed of - low cost, direct access, higher response rates than conventional marketing (e.g. higher than direct mail), the ability to directly track responses and of course, speed. If you haven't tried email marketing, what are you waiting for?

From a marketing perspective you'll find that if you can get people to voluntarily choose to receive your email communications (called opt-in or permission email databases), response rates will soar.

The current legislation (as at October 2003) allows businesses to take an opt-out approach to email marketing (check out the Advanced How To Guide on eBusiness and Legal Considerations) This means that you can email without permission if you follow certain rules (e.g. allow people to opt-out etc) Keep a watching brief on this as further legislation is in progress.

Although you could theoretically make opt-in a term of doing business with you and incentivise this e.g. lower rates if you opt-in, in practice on each email you must allow the recipient to opt-out therefore this approach may not be effective.

So how can you build an opt-in database?

- invite people to register for your online communications on the home page of the website. Generally it's best not to make them register too many details unless absolutely necessary as it will put people off (you can track their activity through email delivery software anyway).
- Ask the sales force to encourage all those they meet to sign-up. You could issue a standard opt-in form in hard copy (but make sure you keep a record of these and the client/prospect signs them). You could incentive this for the sales team
- If you exhibit at exhibitions/shows, sign-up everyone who visits your stand (although watch out for competitors!)
- Include a pre-paid response card in your conventional mailings, inviting recipients to sign up by posting it back (or to go directly online and do so) and incentivise this - you'd be amazed at the power of a freebie. One marketing agency offered a free mug on a similar campaign and got over a 100% response rate (where friends had encouraged others to register)
- Develop a set of specific offers that are only available online via your email communications - this will encourage people to sign-up.
- Have all staff with e-mail add a hyperlink to the registration box on your website - on the "signature line" or "autosignature" at the bottom of every e-mail they send out, possibly accompanied by a slogan urging readers to sign-up. An autosignature is a message that you can devise which can be automatically added into the end of every email you send out. This can be done on a group basis i.e. for everyone on a network or on an individual basis. Autosignatures are a powerful marketing tool, cost nothing and are totally under-utilised by Irish companies.

Planning your Promotional Email Activity

Once you have a database in place, how can you build an effective email marketing strategy? Hey, if you're thinking like this, you've got the right attitude! A one-off email is about as good as trying to telephone a prospect once, leaving a message and expecting a high percentage to call straight back. Why bother?

- a. Have an objective - what do you expect your email marketing efforts to deliver? This may be online sales, customer retention, lead generation, general customer enquiries, event registration etc.

- b. Over what timeframe will you measure success?
- c. How many emails will be delivered in that period (don't send too many emails; treat frequency with respect; once a week/month/quarter may be right - depending on the circumstances; if stock price notifications are being delivered then this will need to be timely and possibly very frequent. The trick with frequency is clear; set the customer expectation at the outset - state the likely frequency or what would trigger an email (e.g. whenever you launch a major new product); this will be re-assuring and will also help you to focus your activity.
- d. How will you measure success in relation to the objective; identify these metrics at the outset and decide the specific goal for each.

If you work with a professional agency, they can guide you through the process as they will have been through it numerous times before and should be able to steer you in the right direction. Also you should consider that professional email marketing requires a broad skillset - marketing, graphic design and technical (for the build). If you send out emails yourself, make sure they project the image of your company effectively. Do not send out promotional emails with attachments as many are blocked and attachments are notorious for carrying viruses.

If you plan on doing a lot of email marketing consider making use of the specialised software that has been developed for this purpose, either by buying it or by having a company with this software send out the e-mails for you.

What makes a Great Sales Email?

If you want to generate sales or enquires through email, experience has shown that the following elements are critical

- Set a deadline for recipients to respond
- Make certain offers only available through the email
- Use images and make it colourful but optimise graphics so that it is not slow to download (an absolute maximum size of 60k)
- Make sure there are plenty of links in to your site as these are buying opportunities
- Make sure at the top right-hand side you include a "buy now" type link as recipients may not scroll to the end.
- If your company is recognised or the brand you are selling is recognised, use this recognition extensively e.g. in the email address of the "sender", the subject heading and the imagery.

Viral Marketing

One of the reasons why email is so cost-effective is that when a company sends an email to a group, effectively it is only sending a single email (although a send to a large group will take longer, the associated costs are minimal) However when each recipient logs on to pick up his/her email, he/she is effectively paying the telecom delivery costs to receive the email - despite the fact that no permission may have been given to send it in the first place. This is one of the reasons why permission email is important.

However the fact that the delivery cost is picked up by the recipient affirms email as a hugely cost-effective tool. Marketers have used "viral marketing campaigns" to leverage this advantage. A viral marketing campaign involves delivering a message online and enabling the recipient to deliver it on to others. Typically it will have extremely compelling content. Charities such as The Hunger Site have grasped this opportunity, for example, by encouraging recipients to forward the email on to colleagues and friends with the incentive that a donation is made to the charity for every click into the site.

If you can come up with an idea for an effective viral campaign, it can take on a life of its own and generate enormous interest in your company.

2.05 Online communities and reciprocal links

There is probably an e-mail list or Usenet group or discussion forum about your industry. Enterprise Ireland run an eBusiness Discussion Forum which you can register for at www.openup.ie

It makes sense to use online communities as a resource to keep up with what is going on and to contribute where possible. Good online business practice recommends that you should not use these forums to directly promote your business but they can offer valuable insight into the minds of your customers and good contributions (complete with your website URL in your autosignature) can build your profile. Make sure that any associations you are a part of know that you have a site and see if they can add a link to your site from theirs. Reciprocal links or co-branding, whereby companies agree to promote each others sites, are a relatively low cost form of online advertising. Starting an affiliate program (where you formally agree to encourage and reward other businesses for sending you online customers) can also help. Customers may be actively involved in online discussion groups or have key contacts they may be willing to share.

2.06 Banner Advertising

Internet advertising can take the form of banner ads - used to drive traffic to sites by placing ads on specific-interest sites or displaying ads when particular keywords are entered. Banner ads can be placed through traditional advertising agencies since many are now trying to integrate the Internet into their work. There is also a range of specialist agencies that place banner adverts. The power of banner ads is that they can be targeted to a particular audience. They are also useful in allowing the company to deliver more detailed information when a person clicks on the advertised site. In a similar vein, online ads can incorporate Web Response Forms (WRFs), which enable buyers to request product information and sellers to qualify sales prospects. The ability to obtain specific information about the wants, needs and motives of the buyer makes a WRF a useful information-gathering tool. Ads can be placed not only on sites, but also in E-zines (online newsletters) that cover your industry.

Attracting attention whilst not overwhelming your audience is a good principle to abide by. The development of banner ads should receive as much care and attention as the development of offline ads. The content should be right to give the audience what they expect after clicking on the various elements of the ad. Do consider carefully whether the online advertising justifies its costs in your case. Consider running some low budget trial ads and carefully monitoring the results, as described later, before committing to significant expenditure.

2.07 Alerts and ezines

Some Irish companies issue their own ezines (online magazine). They can be a very powerful tool for keeping their company in the readers mind and/or drawing their attention to specific issues. However, they must be relevant and of good quality. This generally demands a lot of work, although you may be able to arrange to use some content generated by others. Costs are nearly the same, irrespective of the number of readers. Thus, ezines are mostly, but not always, issued by large organisations. Specialist contractors can write, manage and issue your ezine for you. However, for best results you need to work closely with them. Sites can be designed so that visitors can ask to be alerted (i.e. notified automatically by email) when a particular event happens, e.g. a particular item comes back into stock or a new catalogue is published

Some ezines take advertising and if you are considering an ezine ad the following information is worth knowing:

1. Does it focus on your target market?
2. How many subscribers does the newsletter have?
3. Did they opt in to subscribe?
4. How many ads are run in each issue?
5. How frequently is it published?
6. What position will your advert have?
7. Who else will be advertising in that edition?
8. What tracking facilities are supplied?

In terms of costs, ezine advertising rates are nearly always negotiable - in particular if you plan to buy a series of adverts, state this at the outset and negotiate a deal.

2.08 Offline promotion

It is important to remember that most people spend most of their time off-line and offline promotional tools remain a vital resource for exposure. Promotion works most effectively when online and offline techniques are combined to give a consistent marketing message. Make information about your web site and email address as visible as possible. Unique, attention-grabbing announcements in addition to the lure of special incentives (discounts, free trials etc.) assist in driving traffic online, but do bear in mind the potential adverse impact on brand image which can be created by frequent discounting.

A press release is another means to achieve maximum exposure and publicity, often with minimum cost and effort. However, with so many sites being launched on a regular basis you will probably need to come up with a newsworthy angle. It is important to focus on the benefits to the client of using your site. Highlight your ability to deal quickly with problems, provide customised care etc. In addition, highlight the advantage to clients of being able to reach you and your products outside of regular hours.

3. Considerations when promoting your online presence

3.01 Tracking Promotional Impact

A key advantage of online promotion is that it is possible to set up systems that allow you to automatically track the impact of the different promotional activities. You can electronically monitor how many people click through from a particular online ad to your site, which article in an ezine generates the most interest, how many people visit your site and which search engines referred them, etc. There are elements that cannot be definitively monitored, such as the exact location of the visitor when he/she went online.

While marketing staff may not be involved in generating these reports, they should be involved in deciding what is to be tracked and in using the resultant information to make decisions about future promotional efforts. The marketing people need to fully understand the meaning and limitations of any reports that are generated. For example, a "click through report" describing "5,000 page impressions per week" may not be as impressive as it first sounds, when you realise that only 100 visitors created them. Reporting systems should be set up before the relevant ezine, advertisement etc goes out.

There are a number of different ways of setting up the monitoring systems. Sometimes the company arranging the advertisements will provide monitoring as part of the service. Your web hosting company or IT department might do so also. Even when your website developer or hosting company set up the tracking systems, it may be more cost effective to have the ongoing reports generated by a bright, but relatively junior, computer literate member of your own staff. Ideally, they should have access to external advice as and when needed. It is an idea to discuss these issues and the associated costs with potential website developers and/or web-hosting companies before building or upgrading your website. Tracking techniques can facilitate testing an advertising campaign before committing to significant expenditure.

They can also be used to run ads with different wording for a short period of time, to see which wording produces the best percentage response.

3.02 Site Name

If you are targeting existing customers, using your existing off-line name is probably best. Otherwise, pick a name that is appropriate from a marketing perspective and easy for people to remember and type in accurately. Sites such as www.register.com and www.register.ie will tell you what names have already been taken and may suggest alternative names. Having your own domain name and email address is easy and cost effective, often making a better impression than establishing a site address within someone else's domain. In other words www.widgets.ie is a more credible address than www.we-host-other-peoples-websites.ie/widgets. Check out www.domainregistry.ie if you want to register an .ie site

Consider also whether you want a .ie/.com./net etc address. This will depend entirely on your target audience and marketing position. If you are marketing in the US, you'll need a .com address - unless of course you are marketing Irish goods in which case you'll probably need both. Work this out in advance and don't leave the decision to the web developer as it is a marketing consideration.

3.03 Building Trust

It is important to remember that, in the online world, people may not be familiar with your company. People will be reluctant to place orders and give credit card numbers to a site, which for all they know, is being operated by a professional con man.

When trying to sell online to new customers, building trust has to be done before any attempt at a 'hard sell'. Both your site itself, and where possible your promotional material, should work towards this objective. Steps to improve trust could include:

- Publishing physical addresses (not PO box numbers), phone numbers, photographs of the factory, biography of the MD or other material that gives confidence that you are a real life company.
- Testimonials from people or organisations whom the customer is likely to trust.
- Evidence of membership of respected trade bodies, regulatory approval or of being long established.
- Clear, customer friendly policies concerning privacy, security, after sales service and returns (this is a legal requirement).

3.04 Keeping Up to Date

Review your web promotional plan often in the light of customer feedback, ongoing online tracking reports and changes in your company's overall marketing strategy. Web promotion techniques are still evolving. Find out what is working and what isn't for other companies through accessing popular online publications and network with other web publishers in your local community. It is essential to keep your site up to date. Customers will not be impressed if they click on broken links or phone a number that is posted on your site, only to find it has not been in use for the past year. Obvious problems, such as an item about a "forthcoming event" that happened last year, may cause only minor damage to your image. However, out of date prices or product specifications that only come to light after the product has been delivered can pose the risk of more serious conflicts. This issue is not just confined to those who buy online. It can also arise where a customer looks up information on your site, and then buys the products offline, without telling you that they based their purchase decision on information from the website. The site content will go out of date unless vigilance is exercised and systems and resources are put in place to keep it up to date. These might include regular audits of your site to analyse its effectiveness. Depending on the size of your site it may be in your best interest to enlist the services of professional web site auditors.

The time to set up systems for staying up to date, is when you are establishing your site. If you are following the general principles for successful web publications your site will always be changing. Remember that keeping your site interesting means paying attention to both the content and the appearance. It is essential however that your audience perceive your site as finished, polished and professional.

First impressions can and do last so it is important to construct your web site with promotion in mind.

3.05 Promotion of Intranets/Extranets to Staff /Third parties

If you have developed specific areas of your website for access by certain groups only, then ensure that you have a communications/training strategy in place as appropriate. Just because its there, people will not necessarily use it. Unless they are aware of the specific content relevant to them, it may be left unused. Awareness activities such as promotional mouse mats/inhouse posters/a graphical email can help. Training may also be necessary. You will need to consider this at the outset of the development and budget for it.

4. Some final words of advice

It is important to be aware of what your competitors are up to online if you are to position your own presence to your own advantage. Also, it is worth taking the time to visit the search engines and directories to see how many times your organisation comes up in the search results.

It is essential to develop realistic goals and expectations for your web promotion efforts and to have a strong sense of what you want your web site to do. Examples may include building a stronger business identity, developing

brand image or taking better care of customers. Being realistic also means budgeting in terms of time and money to implement and maintain your online promotional strategy. Software packages can help with registration and promotion but you will need to learn more about the ongoing process. In addition it is important to consider how funds will be allocated between site development, site maintenance and site promotion.

Preparing for success and ensuring that you are capable of delivering on your online promises are also essential to maintaining the good name and reputation of your company. Putting in place the necessary operational and logistical support is vital. In short, take the time to ensure that your online presence meets the quality standards that you would traditionally apply to your offline offering.

The appropriate method of promoting a website, as with all other key website related decisions, varies significantly by company. Ultimately, decisions of this nature have to be made by the company's senior management. They also have to make the necessary resources available, and to ensure that the decisions they make are implemented, and continue to be implemented, after the initial interest in building and promoting the new website has worn off.

Useful Links

www.cyberatlas.internet.com

Internet statistics and demographics.

<http://www.spiderpro.com/pr/prstgm001.html>

100 Dos and Don'ts in web design

www.wilsonweb.com/wmt

A monthly newsletter in e-mail and online format that contains links to a number of recent articles and reviews on methods for promoting your business online.

www.topica.com

A list of existing e-mail discussion groups and the ability to create your own new lists.

www.searchenginewatch.com

A good place to learn about search engines, how they work, and how to customise your web site to work well with them.

www.o-a.com

on the ups and downs on online advertising.

www.mii.ie

The Marketing Institute

www.idma.ie

The Irish Direct Marketing Association.

Irish Office Network

Office Telephone

Fax

Address

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Cork	+353 21) 800 200	+353 21) 800 201	Rossa Avenue, Bishopstown, Cork.
Donegal	+353 74) 69800	+353 74) 69801	Portland House, Port Road, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.
Dublin	+353 1) 857 0000/808 2000	+353 1) 808 2020	Glasnevin, Dublin 9.
	+353 1) 857 0000/206 6000	+353 1) 206 6400	Merrion Hall, Strand Road, Sandymount, Dublin 4.
	+353 1) 857 0000/808 2000	+353 1) 808 2802	Wilton Park House, Wilton Place, Dublin 2.
	+353 1) 609 2150	+353 1) 609 2151	35-39 Shelbourne Road, Dublin 4.
Galway	+353 91) 735 900	+353 91) 735 901/2	Mervue Business Park, Galway.
Kerry	+353 64) 34133	(353 64) 34135	57 High Street, Killarney, Co. Kerry.
Louth	+353 42) 935 4400	+353 42) 935 4401	Finnabair Industrial Park, Dundalk, Co. Louth.
Sligo	+353 71) 59700	+353 71) 59701	Finisklin Industrial Estate, Sligo.
Waterford	+353 51) 333500	+353 51) 333501	Industrial Estate, Cork Road, Waterford.
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