

3 Grave Reasons You Need a Website to Compliment Your Retail Store And why you need to keep it up to date.

- By Jeff Haefner

Brick and mortar establishments, in order to be competitive, should seriously consider a good website to stay competitive. Here are 3 reasons why:

1. Online shopping is the present and the future of any retail business. According to Forrester research, E commerce transactions are expected to reach 316 billion in 2007. And by 2010 it is predicted that e-commerce will have a 14% compound annual growth rate.
2. Unlike many misconceptions, the young and web savvy aren't the only people shopping on the web. In fact, rich consumers are more likely to shop online and the more affluent a person is, the more likely they are to buy from online merchants.

Not convinced that you need a website? How about this?

3. Jupiter research states that 43% of internet users bought products at brick and mortar establishments AFTER viewing them on the seller's website. And like the previous statistic, the wealthier a person is, the more likely they are to research products and potential purchases on the internet.

To be competitive, to be profitable, to reach your target market, and to broaden your customer base you MUST have a website.

Your job doesn't end with a website launch.

In order for your website to make money, you must:

- Keep your products updated. As new products come in, your website must be updated to reflect any changes. This means removing the items that are no longer available too.
- Reflect in store promotions online.
- Maintain your client database by integrating your online customer list with your in store customer list
- Make your site accessible to search engines so that potential customers can find you.
- Track web statistics to make sure you're reaching your market.

Keeping your website up to date is vitally important for your success.

In order to stay competitive you must make sure your in-store inventory, including all new items, is reflected on your website. Imagine what would happen if a customer saw an item on your website and when they came into your store, it had been discontinued. Unhappy customers are bad for business. Happy customers make repeat purchases.

In order to reflect accurate sales numbers you must keep your online inventory up to date. Without accurate tracking, customers will be placing orders for items that are out of stock. It can be a real mess and a customer service nightmare.

In order to make sure your marketing promotions reach all of your customers, on-line and in-store, you must make sure that your customer lists are integrated and kept up to date. When a customer receives several copies of the same mailing, it appears unprofessional. Likewise not sending some customers special promotional messages can result in lost profits and potentially unhappy customers, if they find out about the promotion after the fact.

The bad news is that these website tasks can be time consuming and difficult.

The good news is...

Your POS system may be able to help!

Many point of sale systems have ecommerce features. These features can help you keep your website up to date.

Point of Sale Ecommerce features can:

- Offer [shopping cart software](#) for online purchases
- Create and post website orders in your POS system instantly
- Create and post website orders with an automatic polling system
- Provide website order notification
- Allow you to select products to be displayed on the website directly from the inventory module
- Provide real-time stock availability updates on the website
- Provide stock availability updates with an automatic polling system
- Automatic customer email notification for back orders, stock availability and shipping information
- Consolidated customer history and tracking
- Provide defined shipping rates
- Support back orders and partial shipments
- Allow returns to be processed from the website
- Support auction management and posting (eBay)

These automated features make maintaining a website virtually painless and certainly significantly easier than doing it all by hand.

Jeff Haefner, is a retail technology consultant and nationally recognized author. He has been working with computers, retailers and POS software since 1993 and he runs a retail technology consulting and software selection service. For free tools and information about POS software and retail technology, visit <http://www.possoftwareguide.com/freestuff.html>