

## 21 Action Steps for online business success

Establish a clear vision, objectives and purpose. Prepare a business plan paying particular attention to financial targets and, most importantly, to your cash flow projections.

Identify target market and define audience profile. It is critically important that you clearly identify who your customers will be.

Undertake market research and analysis of customer needs. Identify the problems that your customers face and clarify how your product or service will help to solve those problems.

Develop "Theme" and identify appropriate keywords & keyword phrases. Your approach should be aimed at a specific market niche and, therefore, your efforts should be focussed on a "theme" rather than on a generic offering.

Create design specification for web site and promotional material. The design should appeal to your target market and you should design with your customer in mind.

Choose a relevant domain name, preferably a name that includes your primary keyword and a name that is short and memorable.

Choose a reliable web hosting provider who can offer you a professional hosting package. Do NOT use a low cost or free hosting provider if you are serious about your online business

Write web site and other promotional content based upon your "Theme". Your web site content should be written to maintain customer interest and to get each visitor to take action. This may be to request information, subscribe to your newsletter or, ideally, to make a purchase.

Design optimised web site to fulfil vision objectives and purpose. Pay close attention to your most important keywords and design the site for both visitors and search engine spiders. Do NOT try to trick search engines it is simply not worth the risk.

Ensure the infrastructure is in place to manage and respond to enquiries. You may wish to set up dedicated telephone numbers, specific email addresses, auto-responders and of course you must have the ability to make sales or fulfil orders.

Undertake offline promotion through appropriate media including the addition of web address to stationery & vehicles; advertising and through a public relations campaign.

Submit your site to key search engines and directories. Prepare a keyword rich title and description in advance, have a list of your five most important keywords at hand and record everything that you do. Your record will help you to follow up and check that your submissions have been accepted.

Seek opportunities to promote site through online forums and newsletters. A search on Google for your theme word + forum should help you to identify appropriate online promotional opportunities. Ensure you have your web site address in your signature file, don't overtly promote your business but do offer advice that adds to your credibility.

Join appropriate offline associations and groups and use networking techniques to develop relationships and referrals. Again offer help and advice, people will always refer to someone who has proved to be helpful rather than a pushy salesman.

Establish a permission orientated database of enquirers and build relationships. Ensure your web site includes a newsletter sign up facility and that you only send emails to people who have given you their permission. Do NOT send UCE (Unsolicited Commercial email) otherwise known as SPAM.



Regularly refresh your web site with news, special offers and case studies. Providing new content will encourage people to re-visit and they are more likely to refer their friends and colleagues to a site that regularly offers something new.

Seek inbound links from relevant web sites. Link popularity is becoming an increasingly more important factor in the algorithm used by search engines to rank your web site. The more relevant incoming links you have the better. Relevance is critical, do NOT submit your web site to link farms or link exchange web sites.

Monitor the performance of your web site to ensure that your customers always have access, ensure that download speeds are maintained and that links are fully functional.

Use your web logs and statistics to monitor traffic, to identify other useful data such as search term used and to evaluate the effectiveness of specific sources of traffic.

Consider participating in PPC (Pay Per Click) programmes such as the Google AdWords scheme. Be sure to calculate the maximum amount you are prepared to pay before you bid for specific keywords. Profitability is more important than the number of sales made!

Consider the use of an affiliate scheme where you pay other people a commission for every sale generated by their efforts. This can prove to be very successful if you are prepared to fully support your affiliates with promotional material, special offers and, most importantly, by treating them fairly.