Small Business
Marketing Guide:

12 Golden Rules For Your Website

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Just like everything else in life, websites have rules.

To ensure your website does what it's intended to do, there is a set of "golden rules" that should be followed. From choosing an easy-to-remember URL to which pages are essential for your website, understanding how to design your website will help your visitors have a memorable visit to the site.

Here are 12 "golden rules" of small business website design to follow, whether you are building the website yourself or outsourcing to someone else.

1. Make sure your website address is easy to remember

Your web address is not the place to be too clever—you want to make the site easy for potential customers to find. Avoid numbers, which confuse web surfers, and dashes, which can be problematic for SEO (Search Engine Optimization). Also, go with a .com or .ca domain if you can. Those are the extensions people recognize most.

2. Use navigation methods that are clear and straightforward

The days of fancy Flash presentations and one-of-a-kind web design are over. Going back to basics allows your site to load in every browser. Customers should find what they are looking for quickly.

It's best to use standard practices when it comes to site navigation:

- For your navigation bar, use dropdowns with clear headings that appear on every page
- Make sure the search bar is easy to find (the top right-hand side of a page is a good rule of thumb to follow)

3. Post your company's contact information

What good is your website if no one knows how to reach you? Include a page with your address, phone number, and email address. Make sure there is a prominent link to your contact information on your homepage. The best place for the contact information is the top left or top right corner of the homepage. It is also a good practice to include contact information in every page of the website in the footer or sidebar, or even in the top right corner, which helps the visitors to find it more easily.

4. Ensure a great user experience for your visitors

Regardless of whether visitors are coming to your website by way of a mobile device or a desktop, your website should communicate the message as quickly and clearly as possible. Your website should have quick calls to action and an effective homepage that describes how your business helps solve a problem for your customers. Each page of the website should be linked to every other page to ensure your visitors aren't lost and they always have somewhere to go.

5. Include FAQs

Including a page with frequently asked questions allows your target customer to quickly find the information they're looking for, day or night, without having to call or email your business. It's also another chance to help establish and build your brand on your website.

6. Include customer reviews and testimonials

Honest feedback about your product or service not only helps customers decide if that is exactly what they're looking for, but it also makes your business more tangible. Customer reviews offer insight into your business that you might not have thought to include in other areas of the site. Capture client testimonials and be sure to post those visibly for your visitors to see.

7. Include social links

You will be marketing your products and services on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Pinterest. Build up your followers and reach customers where they spend their time by including icon links to your various social media efforts. Include sharing features on your content pages so visitors can easily "Like" a blog post, "Pin" a picture, or "Tweet" about a cool product you have.

8. Include an information capture form

Even if your business is only open during the day, Monday through Friday, new customers are visiting your website 24/7. Give the impression that you are always open by including a form on the site that new and existing customers can fill out to ask questions, seek quotes, or provide feedback. You will get the added benefit of collecting valuable information

(e-mail addresses, phone numbers, etc.) from the people who are interested in your brand.

If you are building an email list, be aware of Canada's anti-spam legislation. Always ask permission—to learn more visit the Government of Canada website.

9. Create an About Us page for your site

Customers love being able to put a face to a business. Make sure to add information about the people behind your company, its history, and what drives it. It will help differentiate your site from others, and make your business seem more legitimate and relatable.

10. Pepper your website with various calls to action

After customers have found the information they need on your site, tell them what to do next. Sign up for your newsletter, request a free estimate, follow you on Facebook, download an e-book – anything to get them to engage more with your business.

11. Provide useful content to visitors

Beyond information about your business, give your site visitors a reason to come back. You can become the go-to source of information about your field by providing original, well-written articles or blog posts. Think beyond the specific product or service you offer for ideas on what might be of interest to your site visitors. If you run a local farmer's market, offer a harvest calendar and recipes. If you run an online fashion store, maintain a blog about fashion trends.

12. Use a responsive format

People rely on their smartphones more than ever when it comes to finding businesses, so your website should be mobile-friendly. The use of mobile searching will only increase as time goes on. A responsive design means the website detects the visitor's screen size, whether it is a tablet, desktop, or smartphone, and changes the layout accordingly.