

THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

Making Money Online

A 2015 Redshift Research Survey (sponsored by GoDaddy) found that nearly 60 percent of small businesses don't have a website. When I first read this shocking statistic, I couldn't believe it. One in five small businesses consider themselves to be too small, too poor or too technically-inexperienced to have even the most basic Web presence. Unfortunately, these businesses are at a competitive disadvantage according to GE Capital Retail Bank — whose 2013 Major Purchase Shopper Study found that 81 percent of consumers research major purchases online before ever setting foot inside a retail store. But, it's not enough to just have a website. Your website should be a profit center in its own right, bringing in new customers, regularly engaging your loyal client base and paying for itself with a healthy e-commerce income. Does this sound like your experience on the Web?



‘Think of your website as an island — once you get people to it, you don’t ever want to send them away.’

If not, don't fret. Here are four things you can do to make your website a more powerful business tool:

Mobile-Friendly Design. According to Google Analytics, over 40 percent of the people who accessed my company's website in the last 30 days did so on a mobile device. That made the small amount of money I spent making my site "responsive" (meaning it changes to suit the device) well worth the expense. With a little

creativity and a great SEO partner, I have managed to duplicate much of the in-store experience online and, now, on mobile devices as well! Why not spend a little time and money upgrading your site to a responsive design? Doing so will increase your site traffic and boost your search engine results.

Search Engine Optimization. SEO is a vital part of modern Web design. None of us can afford to advertise as much as we'd like, but, with a highly-effective Web design, we can use organic search to drive incredible

amounts of traffic to our businesses. SEO strategies are constantly changing, so it's a good idea to find a local partner who can help you navigate the changes Google, Bing and other search programs implement over time. Just remember that good content is king. Make

sure your blog, paid advertising, social media sites, free listings and even your email all have links to your website.

Planned Traffic Flow. One of the biggest opportunities small businesses miss when they build websites relates to traffic flow. We all spend so much time and money bringing people to our websites ... and then once we get them there, we link to content on someone else's site and wave as our hard-earned Web traffic leaves our site for someone else's. Think of your website as an island — once you get people to it, you don't ever want to send them away. Build individual pages for the products you carry and use original photos, text and video to keep people interested in what you have to say. Always include a "contact us for more help" link so your visitors will have no trouble interacting with you online.

E-Commerce. My company is a piano store, and we don't encourage folks to purchase pianos without playing them in person, so we're not expecting to make a killing on our website, but, thanks to Cart66, we are able to sell just enough online to pay for our website expenses each year. We also use our e-commerce solution to pull income from social media and even Craigslist. **MI**

James Harding is a 15-year piano industry veteran, social media expert and swing pianist. Email him at jharding@gistpiano.com.