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## A STRONG DIGITAL PRESENCE IS NOW A NECESSITY

There was no way for businesses to predict the global pandemic. COVID-19 came into the world as a force, disrupting everything we've ever known about operating a business. Now that it's been here for a few months and we are in the early stages of learning to live in the midst of a pandemic, there are steps you can take to fortify your business against a more uncertain future.

Many industries have been working toward online business models in recent decades, ramping up digital marketing budgets and building a space for themselves on the Web. It has been a fast but strategic shift into e-commerce.

Once COVID-19 hit, a strong digital platform became more than just desirable—it became essential. By prioritizing the following five items, your business can become a strong digital player in the COVID marketplace.

### A streamlined e-commerce site

Seemingly overnight, bricks-and-mortar businesses went from being essential to a luxury. In the weeks and months that followed the lockdown, businesses scrambled to adjust. If you already had a thriving e-commerce site, you were one step ahead.

If you didn't have one before, that's okay—but you need to build one now. With the future of face-to-face business still so uncertain and changing every day, ensuring you have a solid e-commerce website and marketing strategy is essential to maintaining your business.

### A strong social media presence

It is often said that the most powerful form of marketing is word of mouth. Social media marketing is essentially word-of-mouth marketing online.

There are many reasons to invest in a strong social presence, but this one alone speaks volumes.

Social media platforms are an advertisement for your business; a direct line to customers; a megaphone for your brand; and a sales platform on their own. So much so that over one-quarter of internet users discover new products and services on social media.

Who you are on social media matters. It's not enough just to exist, create accounts and leave them. You need to nurture and feed them constantly, to build a platform where people trust you. If you come across as too sales-y or post too infrequently, you will lose your audience. Without an audience, social media won't do much for you.

Engage with your customers; post relevant materials; nurture that human-to-human connection; and let your social media channels become another way to boost your business and brand awareness.



## Relevant products and services

Stay relevant to your customers by featuring timely and relevant products—for example, COVID-19-related health and safety products that are essential to workplaces. There is a plethora of manufacturer and wholesaler-supported marketing materials; you can repurpose them or go the extra mile and create your own. From hand sanitizer and PPE to barriers, dividers and new workstations—provide what businesses need most right now.

Once those products are up on your website, promote them everywhere. Put them on a banner at the top of your page; add a specific dropdown to your navigation bar; create a series of social media posts and email blasts to keep the message in front of customers and prospects alike. People are looking for these items—be the resource that supplies them.

## H2: A search engine-optimized website

Let's say you've made a huge jump into fortifying your business's online presence. You invest in a beautiful website, line up your products and services in an accessible way, and post beautiful pictures of them on Instagram with all the right hashtags.

You excitedly launch, and then... crickets.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a crucial component in making your online business a success. It's complex and layered; but essentially, a well-implemented SEO strategy means that when people search for a product online, your site will be on the first page of results.

SEO is an often-overlooked component and may be why your site is not experiencing the uptick in sales that you expected. Most people never get past the first page on Google. Appear earlier in search results (the

higher up the page, the better) and you will see an increase in visitors, sales and leads.

## H2: An amazing user experience

You've taken all of the steps to get customers and clients onto your site—now you have to make sure they buy.

Converting a website visitor to a paying customer involves many moving parts, but that doesn't mean it has to be complicated. Fine-tuning your website to make it user friendly is one of the easiest things you can do to ensure that visitors convert.

Whenever users end up on your site, you want to be sure to keep them there.

To begin, make sure your page load speed time is two to three seconds or less. In today's content and media-saturated world, you simply have too much competition to risk a higher site load time. It won't matter what else you have done; if people have to wait too long, they will be gone before you even have a chance to prove yourself as a business.

Next, think about the actual experience of using your site. Is it easy to navigate? Can you find information or products easily? Do you have a clearly defined "About" section that

explains who you are? Customers will not fight to purchase something from you. It's up to you to make it as easy as possible for them to do so.

Lastly, your site has to be mobile-friendly. This means more than just loading nicely on a phone: it must be just as easy to navigate the site, submit a form and make a purchase on a mobile device as it is on a desktop. By 2021, mobile e-commerce sales are expected to make up over half of the market's total sales. If you don't set yourself up for mobile sales, you could lose out on 50 percent of your potential profits in the coming years. Make no mistake, this holds true for lead-generation websites as well.

As businesses struggle to maneuver through a COVID-19 world, stay focused, flexible and competitive. If you build yourself an interactive, user-friendly, well-established and consistent digital presence, you will be in a better position to survive and maybe even grow your business through this pandemic.

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