

Small Businesses: Add “Manage Online Presence” To Your To-Do List

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(NAPSA)—Small- to mid-sized business (SMB) owners wear multiple hats, but the only one most ever wanted on their heads was that of “successful business owner.” However, today’s SMB owners typically manage countless functions that fall outside and can detract from their core products or services, including one they may not know is critical in today’s business landscape: managing their company’s online presence.

Most SMB owners can’t rationalize investments that don’t boost their bottom lines, and many are unclear about whether being active online can grow their businesses. However, data suggests an online presence makes good business sense: According to Mediabistro, 50 percent of small-business owners have gained customers through social media.

Meanwhile, consumers increasingly prefer businesses to communicate with them online, as opposed to one-direction, traditional marketing methods like direct mail. The combination of these trends presents a sizable challenge for the SMB owner: With so many hats and so little time, how does the small business optimize and manage its online presence? Consider these tips:

• **Keywords are key.** SMBs should identify keywords that customers would utilize in an online search and incorporate them in their websites and their domains (e.g., www.raleighaccountingfirm.com), if possible. This approach increases the chances that the URL will rank high on search result lists.

• **Get social.** “Go where your customer is” has never been truer. According to The Nielsen Company, the U.S. Internet user averages three times more minutes on social networks and blogs than on



A helpful tool can simplify the process of monitoring the online presence of a small business.

e-mail. Smart SMBs are participating in social networking sites where customers frequent, including obvious choices like Twitter and Facebook and fast-growing sites like Pinterest, LinkedIn, Foursquare and Yelp.

• **Go ahead...ask.** Because consumers place unparalleled trust in the opinions of other consumers, SMBs should ask satisfied customers to post reviews on social sites or write testimonials for their websites. Loyal customers will be happy to promote reviews and experiences via “share” buttons for Facebook and Twitter.

• **Allow someone else to wear the hat.** It can be helpful to use a tool such as Brandify, which simplifies the building, evaluating and monitoring of an SMB’s online brand. SMB owners can log on to the Microsoft-sponsored site quickly and for free to receive a score of their company’s online presence. Based on the SMB’s online strengths and weaknesses, Brandify then recommends simple steps for improvement. The dashboard also offers real-time insights as to how an SMB’s online activities impact its overall Web presence score and adjusts over time based on improvements to the company’s profile or actions of competitors.

For more information on how Brandify can help manage an SMB’s online presence, visit www.brandify.com.