

# Five Ways Local Businesses Can Market Themselves On The Web<sup>TM</sup>

(NAPSA)—Local businesses need to be creative and smart to compete in the fast-moving digital economy. Today, consumers turn to the Internet first, rather than the Yellow Pages, to find everything from a good restaurant to a local hardware store. This makes it essential for local businesses to advertise on the Web, and in doing so, they directly reach a wider audience of potential local customers at a fraction of the cost of print advertising.

While there are numerous opportunities for Internet marketing and advertising, there are five methods that are proving to be the quickest, easiest and most cost effective for local businesses to reach new customers, as well as expand relationships with existing customers:

**1. Blogging**—Short for Web log, blogs originated as a way for people to disperse information they wanted to share with others—pictures, travel diaries—in one easy-to-locate online space. The small-business community very quickly picked up on the value of blogging and almost overnight small-business blogs were born. Blogging provides local businesses with a tool for giving their customers daily (even hourly) information on everything from new products to management changes. Meanwhile, consumers are given an interactive venue for offering up product suggestions or requesting particular merchandise. Consumers can even interact with each other, enhancing the shopping experience before walking into the store.

**2. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**—Simply defined, search engine optimization enables a Web site to show up on the first page of listings within a

search engine (like Google or Yahoo) whenever a search is done. This helps local businesses' Web sites show up when consumers search for related information and keywords. Because search engine optimization can be complicated and often takes a time investment, it is best to look into hiring an outside SEO vendor (or bringing an SEO expert in-house) to handle all of your optimization needs.

**3. Online Coupons**—Everyone loves a discount. A local business can use online coupons to provide special offers to customers in its neighborhood, in this way offering benefits to repeat customers while enticing new ones. For example, Google recently began offering print-at-home coupons for business listings found on Google Maps.

**4. Newsletters**—Like blogs, newsletters offer small businesses inexpensive but effective ways to keep customers apprised of daily business activity. In this way, a local business can stay top of mind with current customers and encourage repeat business.

**5. Networking**—Many sites allow small businesses to set up online business networks. In this way, a business can link with other local businesses (often neighbors and friends), allowing it to give and receive customer referrals, partner on joint specials and/or share innovative business and marketing tips.

By incorporating these five simple strategies into a business plan, a local business can increase its visibility on the Web and thus reach a much larger range of customers within its local market. The end result is simple: more business.

For more information about marketing local businesses on the Internet, visit [www.merchantcircle.com](http://www.merchantcircle.com).