

You Can't Judge A Business by it's Cover, Or Can You?



They say you can't judge a book by its cover, however, prospective clients will judge you by your website in less than 30 seconds. You can only make that all important first impression once and increasingly your website will be the first thing prospective clients 'meet'. An amateurish website or no website at all is not the type of impression you want to make with a potential new business client or employee.

Increasingly your marketing efforts will revolve around technology and a website is an absolute necessity for any accounting practice in the 21st century. How often do clients ask - Do you have a website? What's your web address? I'll check out your website. I suspect the answer is "fairly often" and if you don't have a website you might feel quite uncomfortable with this line of questioning. The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest that 81.3% of businesses in Australia have internet access. Clients know you heavily rely on technology and expect you to have a website.

To some extent, the introduction of GST nine years ago has disguised the need for marketing. Think about it, there is no longer a quiet time courtesy of quarterly BAS's but the truth is, marketing should never have been off the agenda. You need to constantly appeal to the next generation of younger clients and if the demographic of your client base is mainly the over 50's you might find the only buyers for your practice are going to be financial planning groups.

The internet has transformed the way we communicate and do business with clients. Ten years ago accountants relied on word of mouth, advertising, referral networks and seminars to attract new clients. Today potential clients start their search for a new accountant on the internet. Think about how you search for suppliers, you go to the internet and research what's available and the prices. Your website should tell people who you are, what you offer and why you should be their accountant.

A properly constructed website can be a marketing magnet. Available 24/7, easily accessible and highly visible it gives you the ability to present your firm and the services you offer in the most positive light. The web provides a level playing field so you can compete with larger firms and attract clients based on the quality and content of your website. With around 32 billion web pages, your website needs to be more than a static billboard and it is absolutely essential that your site stands out from the crowd.

While referrals remain the most important source of growth for accountants the following statistics support the fact that the internet is growing in importance.

- 58% of buyers indicate they are "very likely" to identify and learn more about service providers from their website
- 80% of buyers typically visit the service provider's website before buying
- 83% of buyers report that the website holds at least "some influence" over their decision to engage in an initial discussion with that service provider (increased from only 69% in 2005)
- 74% of buyers said that the service provider's website holds at least "some influence" over their ultimate decision to buy services from the provider (increased from only 51% in 2005)

A quality, well-designed website can attract valuable, targeted clients as well as improve client retention. Over the past few months I have written a large amount of content for a website that has been developed in conjunction with the team at Cashflow Manager. This website has a real marketing edge and is now available complete with content that specifically targets niches including business start ups, tradesmen and clients buying a negatively geared property.

There are no more excuses for the 90% of accounting firms in this country that don't have a website. Your practice can be live on the net in a few days with a quality, inexpensive, professional website worthy of a 'big 4' firm at a fraction of the cost. You can read more about the website later in this newsletter or call us today on (03) 9824 5300.