



5 ways businesses can benefit from the Web

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Here are five different ways that a small business can reap big benefits by using the Internet.

1. Getting your message out to a potentially global audience.

The Internet is where everyone goes to shop, research, and be entertained. Every small business should have a Web site that provides information about their products and services to customers and suppliers. (To get a Web site, see bCentral's Web Hosting service.)

With a Web site, even a company with two people can make the same impression as its largest competitor worldwide, and reach a targeted audience or a potentially global market for its products and services.

2. Providing goods and services online.

If your mother does her holiday shopping on the Internet and then goes to the office and orders all of her supplies over the Internet, that should tell you something. The odds are good that your customers or prospective customers would want to do business with you on the Internet too.

Electronic commerce (e-commerce), sometimes called electronic business (e-business), is part of the vocabulary of all modern companies, regardless of size. With the right network foundation, you can offer your customers fast, secure, and reliable commerce with your company around the clock and around the globe. (For more information about selling online, check out bCentral's Commerce Manager.)

Consider the example of an 85-person financial services company that uses e-commerce to deliver origination and servicing products that help lenders improve the efficiency and accuracy of mortgage financing and refinancing. Virtually all of this company's business takes place online, enabling the company to reduce transaction times from days or weeks to a matter of minutes, enabling lenders to streamline their own processes, boosting loan volumes while reducing costs. The company is now approaching \$23 billion in loan transactions each month.

3. Improving employee productivity with Internet access.

By giving your employees access to the Internet, they can track competitors, research potential customers, download and share useful news and information, and use e-mail to keep in touch with teammates, customers, suppliers, and other important business contacts.

4. Improving employee and partner collaboration through Internet tools.

The Internet is an incredible tool for one-to-many communication, but it's equally powerful for promoting one-to-one collaboration and team collaboration as well. Once you're on the Internet, you have at your fingertips tools like instant messaging, virtual meetings, and videoconferencing, all of which enable online collaboration and e-learning. This collaboration can apply to internal teams or extend to external business partners and even customers. (See bCentral's SharePoint Team Services solution for software to create private Web sites, also known as intranets and extranets.)



A construction company with 50 employees migrated to the Web five years ago and created a project management and collaboration tool that allows construction-industry professionals to streamline project processes from design and preconstruction through closeout. The company now boasts more than 20,000 user licenses, and its clients include 21% of the top 400 general contractors in the construction industry. The company has grown by more than 100% over the past three years and expects sales to reach \$30 million over the next 24 months. Last year the company's Web site exceeded 2 million user logins.

5. Expanding your business and markets with the Internet

Small-business owners can take their companies to new heights by harnessing the power of the Internet. No matter what size, industry, or competitive landscape, any company has the power to transform its business using the Internet. Once you have the right foundation in place, there's no limit to where you can take your business.

Geography shouldn't be a limit on business. Building on its network foundation, the company is still coming up with new uses for the Internet to expand its business, like adding computer-based training and e-learning tools to the company's on-site classroom so that students can boost their knowledge before receiving instruction in the pool.

Dague, ScubaToys' president, says it best: "The Internet allows a relatively small company to act and operate like a big company. Creativity is the limit."