

## E-Commerce: Friend or Foe?



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We're all shopping online. It's quick, easy and convenient, best of all we can either do it from home, the office or anywhere with an Internet connection. It's easy for both the supplier and the customer. The question has been raised why have Geelong suppliers been so hesitant to provide online shopping as a buying option to their clients? I thought I'd weigh in on the debate and provide some thoughts and feedback on the subject.

As a designer and web developer, I've found there are three main reasons that suppliers are hesitant about making the commitment to selling online.

1. Cost: In Geelong, whilst we have many excellent businesses and business people, for the most part businesses are small to medium-size, who, in the past have had only limited exposure to the Internet and online technologies. E-Commerce sites are fairly costly to implement (initially) and the retailer simply has not budgeted for the online commitment. When we are working in the business, as opposed to on the business, it's hard to see past the setup costs, so we overlook the potential to expand our operations beyond the shopfront and the area in which it is located.
2. Fear of the Unknown: Sure, we know what the Internet is, but is it safe? After all, the mass media is constantly bombarding us about having our credit card details stolen online, or how easy it is to for others to get into our computers without us knowing. The retailer then makes the assumption that this is the norm rather than the exception. True E-Commerce sites have very secure connections to protect the consumer and provide your



- potential customer the ability to visit your shop any time, day or night secure in the knowledge that their credit card details will not be compromised.
3. My Business is too small for an online shop: Try telling that to Pierre Omidyar who started a small website to sell his personal items in 1995 called AuctionWeb. Today AuctionWeb is popularly known as eBay, a name given to it by Omidyar in reference to Echo Bay, Omidyar's consulting firm. Today eBay is one of the highest trafficked sites in the world and has portal sites across the planet, generating millions of dollars in sales for both the company and eBay itself. The lesson we can learn from this? Start small and think big, a solid presence online can present you with massive opportunities to attract new business. Whether you are an established business with a traditional shopfront or just getting started working from a shed or room in your home, it boils down to having a great looking site, backed up with the best customer service and support that you can possibly provide.

In summary, the Internet brings us opportunity to expand our business beyond traditional borders. Having an E-Commerce enabled site allows visitors access to a world of products and services that may not be available in the area in which they live, or because they just don't have time to shop in traditional working hours.

Today, software developers and designers have addressed concerns about setup fees for online selling and there are many "out of the box" online shopping software packages, that your web designer can fully configure to look like a custom made site for your business. They can also usually be added to an existing site.

They are cost effective, easy to work with and make it possible for a non-technical person to maintain and operate them. A basic knowledge of email is practically all that is required in some cases to successfully conduct online business.

E-Commerce: The opportunities are out there. Go grab them.

Till next time,

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