

Making the most of the net

A How to do more business with business mini-guide

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Just about every learning provider organisation has a website these days, and websites have come a long way since their job was just to demonstrate a presence or to act as an on-line brochure.

Today businesses use their websites to fulfil a range of functions, but they use them most often to:

- provide useful information to customers and prospective customers
- present a positive image of themselves
- encourage visitors to the site to take action.

Does your website do all these things for you? Check it out by asking the following:

1 Supply useful information

When employers visit your website does it catch and hold their interest? Is there a message on the front page for employers, ready to whet their appetites, or does the site assume that learners and prospective learners are the only ones doing the browsing?

Is there useful information for employers on the site? Is there a section, or a related site, especially for employers? Is the content helpful and informative? Can employers sign up for a value-packed newsletter that will bring them up-to-date information about subjects that matter to them?

Above all, through the quality of information on your website do you start to build relationships with employers, and begin to draw them to you?

2 Present a positive image

Visitors to your site are making judgements about you all the time. If you fail to give them what they want, in the manner that they want it, and quickly, they will click away.

Have you made sure you display excellent content? Have you focused on having interesting text and avoided becoming enamoured with colours, graphics and flashing effects? Can visitors use your site easily? Are contact details accessible and clear? How many pages does someone have to work through to find them? Is your information up-to-date? Whatever is noted as being forthcoming, is the text changed once the event has taken place?

Just how quickly do you respond to queries? If you take several working days to reply, what impression do you think that makes?

By visiting your site will employers gain a good impression of you? Following their visit, will employers be more or less likely to want to do business with you?

3 Make it easy for employers to initiate action

Websites fulfil a very important function. They create warm leads for your business. Every employer who is browsing through your web pages has chosen to learn more about you. Your site must work hard to keep employers on your site and encourage them to take action. In many cases this just doesn't happen. There is nothing to encourage employers to enter into a dialogue with you or even to come back to the site again. Too often, employers slip away without leaving their details, or making any commitment to begin a relationship with you.

Do you encourage interaction between your organisation and employers? Can employers buy products, services, programmes and other items on your site? Can they book appointments with your staff? Can they make commitments to attend your events?

These things matter. With the internet changing the way businesses work your website is becoming more important than ever to the survival of your business. Who knows, with the pace of change increasing, maybe next year you'll need an employer blog and a social networking site for your employers as well as an effective website. So take the plunge. Make the most of your website and update it now.

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