

For many companies, the meaning of the Internet implies an interest in finding customers in Zaire instead of their local community. There are still some who think a website should get millions of hits each month to be worthwhile. I disagree. In fact, earlier this year I did a series of webcasts for a national bank. They invested a lot of money into each webcast that is posted on their website. When I asked how many folks they thought would see the program they estimated that about 500 viewers would see the program immediately. If you think about it, if only 20% of the 500 become new small business customers and generate \$1 million in revenue annually and deposit in that particular bank, the bank's webcast investment will have more than paid off.

Now, that example is on a large scale. To take a look at a smaller scale, let's look at my experience on a recent trip to the hair salon. I overheard the receptionist taking a phone order. At the end of the conversation she asked the caller how she had heard about the salon. When she hung up, I asked her how the caller had located them. She said, "The Internet. The caller lives in Illinois and wanted to get a gift for a friend who lives in Pittsburgh and uses the salon, so she ordered a gift certificate for her friend."

The salon uses the site to display its price list and offers the virtual visitor an opportunity to purchase gift certificates for services from massage therapy to hair styling. The salon would probably not have reached that customer in Illinois without having a website.

I stopped at the local dry cleaners the other day to drop off clothes. When I return to pick up my clothes I will have a discount coupon for that dry cleaner that I print from their website. I can also e-mail them for pick-up and delivery when I don't have time to stop by.

The dry cleaner uses its website to communicate discounts and specials to its customers.

I have a friend who is in the speechwriting business who saves thousands of dollars in printing costs and postage by using his website as an electronic brochure to showcase his services.

A website benefits both large and small businesses by increasing visibility and profits. It can both satisfy current customers and attract new ones.

The Internet is a wonderful place that allows you to showcase your business in many creative ways. This could range from a simple, but colorful and eye-catching Web page to presentations that embrace animation, sound and-or video.

You no longer have to spend thousands of dollars to have a website. And some places make things easy by offering Web space for you to build a do-it-yourself site. You can take a look at yahoo.com or check out your service provider; most offer you a few web pages at no cost.

The Internet will continue to impact the economy, and entrepreneurs both large and small should take every opportunity to market their products and services. Having a website is one very important step in that direction.