



Need a Website?

One of the most often asked questions these days is, surprisingly, “Do I really need a website?” The answer is, not surprisingly, “No, you don’t need one...unless you’d like to stay in business and reach your potential clients.”

In other words, yes—a website is absolutely essential for creative professionals today.

A website is one of the most important marketing tools any creative professional business can use, and it’s one of the most cost effective, too. The greatest cost you will encounter is the original design and programming of your site. Once that is done, the actual “maintenance” cost is minimal—yet the payoff is enormous.

This holds true for all the major creative disciplines: photography, illustration, design, and writing. Writers, in particular, seem to be the worst about exploiting this marketing medium, which is particularly sad since it is a fantastic forum to show off their abilities! Think about it—it is almost impossible to have a wordless website, though it is entirely possible to have an image-less website (unless, of course, you are in an image-based discipline).

As important as it is, though, the website is still only one part of your marketing mix. Just because you have a fabulous site doesn’t mean that you’ll get more (or better) business. You still have to drive clients to that site or else it’s just as useful as that fantastic portfolio that you have on the shelf over there—the one that hasn’t left your studio in weeks because you haven’t done anything to promote it.

Without a full marketing plan that uses a mix of tools, any one tool will probably not make any sort of significant change in your business.

So, how do you get traffic to your site? Through other marketing tools like e-mail promos, sourcebook ads (especially online sourcebooks), press releases, and the good old traditional mailed promo campaign.

Yes, those cards really do lots of good. In a recent interview in PDN Online, William Nabers of Fortune was quoted as saying, “I can’t tell you how important they are [...] It’s how we hire people here. It’s how you capture our interest.” In fact, if you read any of the interviews with creatives in publications like PDN and/or Communications Arts, you’ll find many similar quotes from creative services buyers. So don’t discount those “old fashioned” promos!

One marketing tool that is still getting mixed reviews, though, is the e-mail promo with attached images or documents. Many potential buyers immediately filter unsolicited e-mails with attachments to the spam folder or directly to the trash. Either way, they do not get seen. And don’t think embedding the image in the text of the e-mail will make it any better—technically that is still an attachment and the e-mail won’t get through.

The best option for e-mail promos is to do a special web page and include a link to that page in your e-mail promo. Another possibility is to ask the receiver if s/he would like you to send any sample images; however, the return-rate on this approach will probably not be as high as the click-through rate for the linked website.

Also, one other important note about e-mail promos: some clients do not want them at all. Make sure you give your clients every opportunity to opt out of e-mail promos and respect their wishes on the subject.

Remember: make it easy on your potential clients to see your work and to hire you—that's why a website is such an important tool to be exploiting. It's a very easy way for clients to see your work, to get to know you, and to contact you for your portfolio or additional samples. If you keep your potential clients in mind throughout designing and executing your marketing plan, you will see more and better sales.

