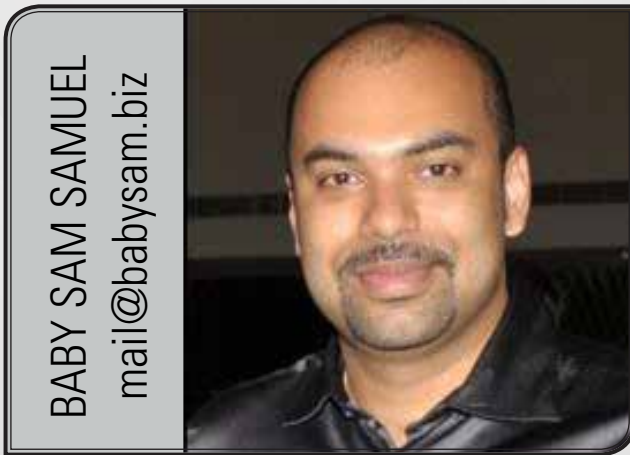


OPTIMIZING WEB PRESENCE FOR BUSINESSES

The world that once viewed internet as a novelty, as something of a luxury, is not the world we live in now. As World Wide Web turned 25 in March 2014, its birthday offers us an occasion to review its significance for businesses and organisations.



Around 2.5 billion people — roughly one-third of the world's population — can now be found online. Smart devices surround us; it's not just phones, cameras and televisions that are internet enabled but a whole host of devices from tooth brushes to medical equipment. Internet has thus penetrated every sphere of our lives. A recent survey by ITA reports that as many as 80% of households in Oman have access to internet.

An online presence is thus vital for the success of any business or organisation.

WHERE DOES ONE BEGIN?

Quite obviously, with a website. Despite all the hoopla about web and websites, there are still small to mid-scale businesses and organisations in Oman that do not yet

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- Content - Relevant, timely information regarding the products and services.
- Compatibility - Optimized for viewing on various devices like smartphones, tablets etc.
- Technologies – Strong architecture that is reliable and scalable, with or without a content management system
- SEO – Search Engine Optimization

own a website. While this may be surprising, it is of equal significance that many companies with websites do not realize that maintaining a website means more than just keeping it 'live', with many of the existing sites haven't had seen an update in years.

This lackadaisical approach may, in part, be due to the preconceptions regarding websites' affordability, combined with a lack of understanding of its importance in building and maintaining brand image and an ignorance of technological advances in general.

Websites are not just the first point of reference, but also a sign of credibility. It can be the best display shelf for your products and services, enabling information to be accessed globally. From DIY websites to professionally designed ones, there are a multitude of choices for affordable websites built upon the latest technologies. A website isn't just a static page anymore; it is a whole world of dynamic interaction governed by the quality and relevance of content.

Websites are the primary mode of digital presence for most organisations as must rightly be. But the question is, is this enough? Shouldn't web presence be, as the words suggest, all over the web, percolating across the very fabric of internet?

WHAT CONSTITUTES WEB PRESENCE?

The answer is an endless array of online activities across web platforms such as e-commerce, social media, search engine, web application, and advertising platforms, to name a few.

SOCIAL MEDIA – NETWORKING & MARKETING

Social Networking sites have invaded the world and our lives and have brought in a multitude of ways for a business to connect with its potential and intended consumers. Although by far Facebook, with 1.23 billion active users and 1 million active advertisers, is the most popular among these, there are several social media channels that fit the unique needs and scope of a company. Some businesses have found their niche through photo & video sharing sites like Youtube, Instagram, & Pinterest whereas others focus on the microblogging site Twitter or the business networking site LinkedIn. The explosion of social media has led to the creation of innovative marketing strategies that can enhance branding and convert engaged audiences into revenue regenerating ones.

OPTIMIZING WEB PRESENCE FOR BUSINESSES



BENEFITS OF SMM

- Direct & interactive engagement with customers
- Increased exposure & branding
- Market & customer insight
- Cost effective marketing options
- Revenue creation

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

The next step is to get the website in front of the targeted audience. This is possible by optimizing the site content & leveraging social media such that the site gets placed higher in search engine rankings. Search Engine Optimization exercises are now part and parcel of web development and go hand in hand with every other online activity that the company engages in.

Blogs too offer scope for SEO while also providing a medium of engagement between companies and customers. Linking the company website to a blog providing good quality, updated content is a great way to pass on information about an industry, product or service relevant to the audience.

One of the common myths associated with SEO is that it is either too expensive or not worth the effort for small & mid-scale companies. With customers out there searching for products and services, there can be tangible benefits and significant ROI by improving prevalence on search engine results pages (SERPs).

ONLINE ADVERTISING

Internet offers a range of low-cost means for boosting online presence and reaching large audiences through

marketing options including display advertising, search engine marketing, mobile advertising and social media advertising.

E- COMMERCE PORTALS

E-commerce platforms promise new business opportunities for established businesses as well as budding entrepreneurs. The ITA survey pointed out that the Oman audience haven't as yet caught on to web based transactions; additionally, the number of services in Oman running on e-commerce platforms are too few and far between to create significant awareness. With the ITA offering technological assistance to merchants in setting up e-gateways for online transactions, e-commerce portals may soon capture the Oman markets and pave way for internet-only enterprises.

MOBILE & WEB APPLICATIONS

With the right kind of web based and mobile based applications, companies can broaden their customer engagement with location based, real-time services like customer service and support. These apps can also act as means of promotion and sales and can be an extension of e-commerce portals.

The World Wide Web presents a level playing ground for businesses; an optimized web presence is therefore essential not just for large established companies but also for smaller businesses and start-ups. Embracing the wider aspects of the web is the only way forward for businesses to keep ahead of competition and ensure the visibility of their brands, products and services in a world that's drowning in information.

