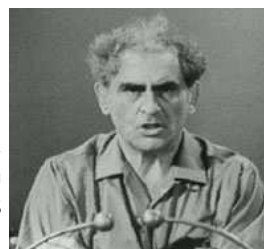


## Websites - Why Is It So?

The latest ABS statistics suggest 81.3% of businesses in Australia have internet access yet less than 30% of accounting firms in Australia have a website. In the words of the late Professor Julius Sumner Miller, “Why is it so?”



Clearly a lot of accountants don't recognise the purpose, value or potential of a website. The fact is, most accountant's websites in this country are best described as 'electronic billboards' that simply provide the 'who, what and where'. In my opinion, the primary purpose of an accountant's website is to generate new business leads.

You can only make a first impression once with a prospective new client and increasingly your website will be the first thing people 'meet'. An amateurish website or no website at all is not the type of impression you want to make with a potential new business client or prospective employee. What do the 70% of firms without a website say when clients ask, “Do you have a website?” or “Can I check you out on the net.” You can only tell them, “It's under construction” for so long.

If you have an ageing client base that needs an injection of fresh blood, you can't afford to be without a website. It should sell your services to potential clients and also offer benefits to existing clients. It should tell people who you are, what you offer and most importantly, why you should be their accountant. Readily accessible, available 24/7 and highly visible your website gives you the opportunity to present your firm and the services you offer in the most positive light. It needs to be more than just a billboard and should 'talk' to your niche markets with relevant content.

In addition, given the shortage of quality staff in the accounting talent pool your website should also double as a recruitment tool. The traditional employment ad is of limited benefit in today's competitive environment and without a website you have virtually no chance of attracting the best Generation X and Y candidates. They will thoroughly review your website before applying for a position including the staff and partner profiles. They will check the careers section to see if you offer ongoing training and staff incentives. As such, your website must appeal to this demographic, send the right message, sell the career benefits you offer and be up to date.

If you're not convinced about the marketing and pulling power of websites let's look at a case study of one of my clients, Linda McGowan. She is a sole practitioner based in Brunswick, an inner city suburb of Melbourne and in the past 12 months her website ([www.lindamcgowan.com.au](http://www.lindamcgowan.com.au)) has generated more than \$100k in new fees. Fact. As her website started to gain traction with some of her niche markets (business start ups, negative gearing and trades people) Linda decided to add content for another niche - musicians and artists. To date this has already generated more than \$28,000 of new fees and while musicians may not be your cup of tea, it illustrates the potential of having a website that targets niche markets. With similar case studies available why are so many accountants in denial or simply building billboards?

So many firms look for a quick fix and buy a website 'off the shelf' that contains nothing but a series of outbound links to the ATO website. I can tell you, your clients don't want to read content from the Tax Office website and being 'outbound links' they generally don't help your search engine ranking. These websites don't attract prospects and because they all look the same, it defeats the purpose of differentiating your firm in a crowded market.

If your current website isn't driving new business, it's time for a new website. Creating quality content that targets your niche markets takes time and the truth is, your website will always be a work in progress. As your website generates more new business you can

invest in some additional features. For example, Linda McGowan has recently added a secure client log in area and added some downloadable e-booklets and e-brochures to her site.

Without doubt, content is king when creating your website but building a great website is obviously pointless if no one finds you on the internet. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is a very important part of the website development process but is a topic for another day. Start by identifying your niche areas (both industries and services) and create some quality content that resonates with the target market by including keywords and phrases they are likely to type into the various search engines. From there you can start building inbound links from dozens of other websites (hotfrog, true local etc.) that will lift your search engine rankings.

There are lots of marketing groups that want to work with you to grow your accounting firm. Some promise a quick fix but in reality, there is no marketing 'silver bullet' for accountants. You need to recognise that all your business resources play a role in marketing including your staff, right down to your logo, slogan, letterhead, business cards, signage and the reception area. For accountants, without a website you are not in the game.



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