



The Small Business Guide

TIPS TO START & GROW YOUR
ONLINE PRESENCE



Introduction

Whether you run an online business or one with a physical location, your web presence is important to your growth and success. In this guide, we'll go through the major points of developing an online presence for your business, including how to build a strong social media presence, how to build a website for your business needs, how to spread the word to attract new customers, and how to prepare your site for growth.

If your business is brand new, this guide can help you figure out the basics of a digital footprint. A good starting point is to ask yourself what success looks like and what you hope to achieve with your website and social media activity. This will help you determine where to invest your resources and where to start once you've finished reading this guide.

If you already have a website, this guide can offer you fresh perspectives on optimizing your website and boosting growth. Read on to find out how you can improve the performance of your website and your business through smart marketing tactics and website optimizations.

At SiteGround, we've spent many years helping small and medium-sized businesses get a stable and hassle-free online presence with our hosting service and easy site management tools. We would like to share this experience with you and pass along a few tips and tricks.



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1

SECTION



Getting Started With Your Online Presence

Building an online presence for your business is an important part of growing your brand awareness, engaging your customers, and generating revenue.

However, many entrepreneurs wonder if they should build a social media presence or a website to reach their target audience. **The answer is a combination** of a beautiful and powerful website along with a cohesive and thoughtful social media presence.

Why Does Your Business Need a Social Media Presence?

Building a social media profile on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Yelp is free and chances are your current customers are already using these tools. Getting on social media is an investment that you should consider for the following reasons:



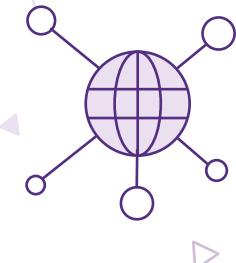
1 / It legitimizes your business

The bigger your online footprint, the more your business will seem real, professional, and trustworthy. Customers expect to see their favourite brands on social media and may be wary of a business with no presence at all. It also helps you claim your business name in the public space and begin building brand recognition.

2 / It's a space to inform and converse

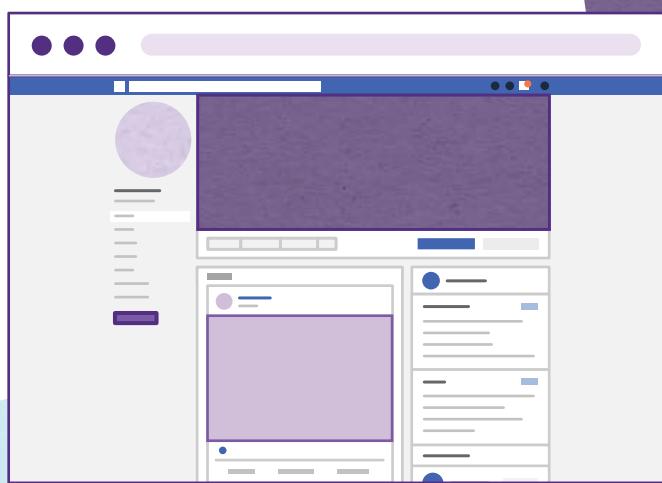
On social media, you can make announcements that reach your audience immediately, usually at a time when they are relaxed and available to listen and engage. At the same time, your customers may want to reach you to ask questions and share feedback. By joining social media, you're opening up a dialogue between your company and your customers and you are able to address their concerns in a timely manner and gain insights that can help your business.





3 / It's an advertisement platform

These popular platforms have large user bases and offer an exciting opportunity to reach new customers through advertising. Keep in mind that organic growth on social media can be difficult and savvy entrepreneurs should set aside a visibility budget to spend on boosting posts, promoting their page, and creating ads within these platforms.



What Should You Publish On Social Media?

You don't have to be on all the social media platforms to be successful. Pick the ones that make the most sense for your business, target customers, and resources. It's easier to start with one or two channels and do them well than to spread yourself too thin.

Here are some ideas of what to publish on your social media profiles:

- Product or service updates
- Answers to frequently asked questions
- Behind-the-scenes look at your business and team
- Interviews
- Helpful and relevant articles
- Case studies
- Giveaways and contests
- User-generated content like reviews, testimonials, and photos

Whatever you post, make sure you use eye-catching photos, proofread for typos, and answer as many comments on your post as possible. Most social media algorithms will see this as positive engagement which will boost your profile's visibility.



Why Does Your Business Need a Website?

We believe social media is a powerful tool for businesses to engage with their customers, however, it cannot be a substitute for a website. With a website you can:

1 / Increase search engine visibility



A website is the most effective tool for being found in online searches. People search using keywords in search engines like Google. They type “Italian restaurant” for example and expect to find recommendations in their geographical area. Facebook pages or other social media profiles don’t necessarily show up in those searches. A website with relevant content does! You can control how your content appears in these searches through effective website Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Publishing regular content updates on your website such as blog posts, can improve your ranking and help potential customers find and trust you.

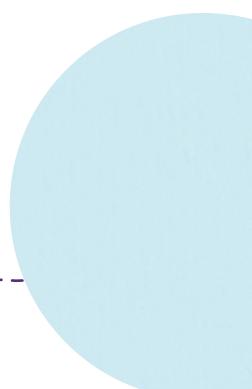
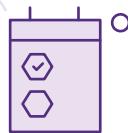
2 / Control your content

You have total freedom and control over your website, how it looks, and its content! Your website makes you look professional since you don’t have to adhere to the limitations found on social media. You have control over your marketing messages and call-to-action buttons. With this freedom, you can experiment and improve the experience for your users and increase your conversion rates.



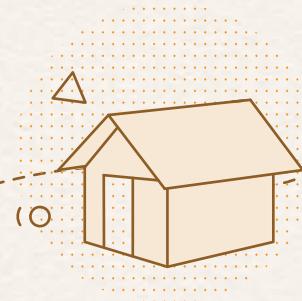
3 / Customize your site

You can add features to your website like a shopping cart, contact forms, booking tools, and build an email list to launch a newsletter. With a website, you can customize your tools to match your business needs and maximize success with the audience you reach. Most importantly for your marketing budget, it gives you the opportunity to remarket to the same visitors. Remarketing can convince them to become clients over time with repetitive contact or sell additional services and retain them as clients.



2

SECTION



How to Build a Business Website

There are a few different ways to build a website. The most popular ones are:

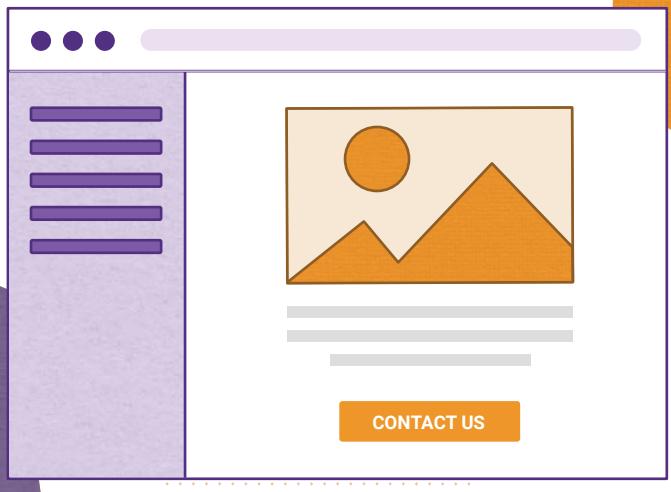


1 / A site builder

Site builders are an appealing solution for beginners because of their curated templates and easy-to-use interfaces. Usually, these site builders are limited in functionality or ask you for additional fees when you want to add new features to your site. At SiteGround, we offer the [Weebly site builder](#) for free with all our plans, which is one of the most popular and feature-rich tools for beginners.

2 / Content Management System (CMS) with web hosting

There are hundreds of content management systems, but the most popular one today is WordPress. The combination of a CMS like [WordPress](#) and a web hosting provider like SiteGround offers the ultimate control over your website and your content. You can use the [SiteGround's WordPress Starter](#) to quickly build a great website using the WordPress software, themes, and plugins. Or, work with a developer to create a custom website that meets all your business needs. When you build your website and host it with a hosting company, your content and data belong to you. You have the freedom to save backups, download your content, and move your site whenever and wherever you want.





3 / A designer/developer/agency

Many businesses put off launching a site because they think they need to hire a professional to build it, which is the most expensive option of the three. We strongly recommend you to start in a fast, easy, and cost-efficient way using a site builder or a CMS. Over time, you can look for a developer or an agency when you decide you need a fancier and more complex site.

The Anatomy of a Business Website

SIX ELEMENTS EVERY WEBSITE NEEDS.



How to Get Started

Regardless of which approach you take, the steps to building a successful website are the following:

1 / Choose a fast and secure hosting environment

We recommend you pick the host first because many providers offer site-building solutions as a package deal with their service. Also, you need the hosting environment/ platform to work on and deploy your website so what you build is online and accessible over the internet.



You should be extra picky when it comes to selecting a host however. Your success will be directly affected by the performance of the host server. In addition, you'll want to pick a hosting provider with expert 24/7 support so you never get stuck solving problems on your own. Check out [SiteGround](#) hosting and learn why our service is one of the best-rated in the industry!

2 / Pick a domain name

Your domain name is your address on the web. Choose one that reflects your business and is easy to remember. At SiteGround, you can purchase your domain during signup and conveniently manage the domain and site from one place. You can also start by browsing and trying different names to see which ones are still available. Check your domain [here](#).



3 / Choose your site-building solution

It's time to decide whether to go for a CMS or a site builder. You should base your decision on the features of the software and your specific needs. We recommend choosing a site builder if you're building a simple site that won't require frequent updates and doesn't need online store features. Choose a CMS like WordPress if you plan to grow your site over time.



If you host with SiteGround, you get a wizard in your Customer Area that allows you to choose between Weebly, WordPress, and other CMS' and will install the one you choose automatically.



4 / Select a theme/design for your site

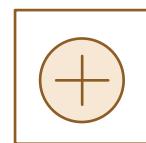
The theme you choose defines how your site will look. Many people get stuck on this step, so keep in mind that regardless of which software you use, you can change your theme whenever you want.

With WordPress, your theme is more than just a design, it also impacts how your site behaves, so pay attention to the features specific to each theme. Make sure you pick a theme from a reputable source or use the SiteGround's WordPress Starter to build a site using custom-built themes for SiteGround by OceanWP.



5 / Add features to make your site dynamic

To make your site engaging for your visitors, you need to add features like a contact form, photo gallery, and more. Thinking about what you want to show on the site will help you define what features you need to add. Most site builders and CMS's have the most popular functionalities built in or are easy to add.



By default, WordPress comes with lots of great features and there are many free plugins which give you even more at no extra cost. When you use the WordPress Starter plugin on a SiteGround account, we'll ask you what features you want and the corresponding plugins will automatically be installed on your site. For example, you can add a contact form, a shopping cart, or an email signup form in a few clicks.

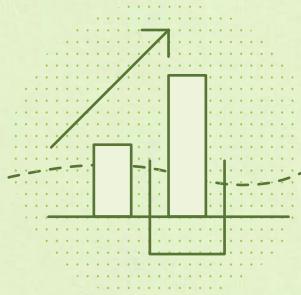
More Resources:

- [Building a Website With WordPress Tutorial](#)
- [Building an eCommerce Shop With WooCommerce](#)
- [SiteGround Web Hosting Packages](#)



3

SECTION



How to Grow Your Traffic and Sales

Now that you have an awesome website for your business, you want people to see it. Increasing your website traffic begins with optimizing your website to help potential clients find you through search engine queries. You should also consider using other platforms and outreach methods to spread the word.

Search Engine Optimization

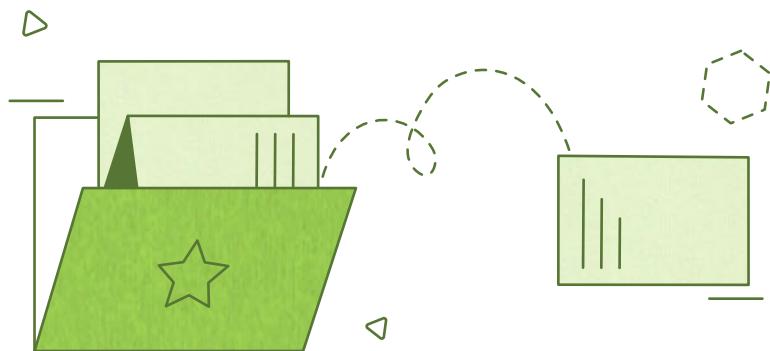
MAKE IT EASIER FOR POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS
TO FIND YOU IN SEARCH ENGINES!

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a series of tweaks you can make to your website to help search engines like Google read your data more easily, match it with internet queries, and show your website in the results page the person searching sees. This is helpful for business sites looking to expand their reach and attract new customers through internet discoverability. Search engine optimization is still the cheapest way to be found online. Here are four ways to make your website more search-engine friendly.

1

/ Write quality content your customers want

The best-performing websites on the web are full of high-quality content that provide information and answer common questions. The first thing you should ask yourself when optimizing your search engine visibility is whether or not your website has enough text. Starting a blog, publishing online resources, and making sure each page has at least 300 words is a great place to start. Check that each post and page has a relevant title and uses keywords in the text that match your site's content and the popular search



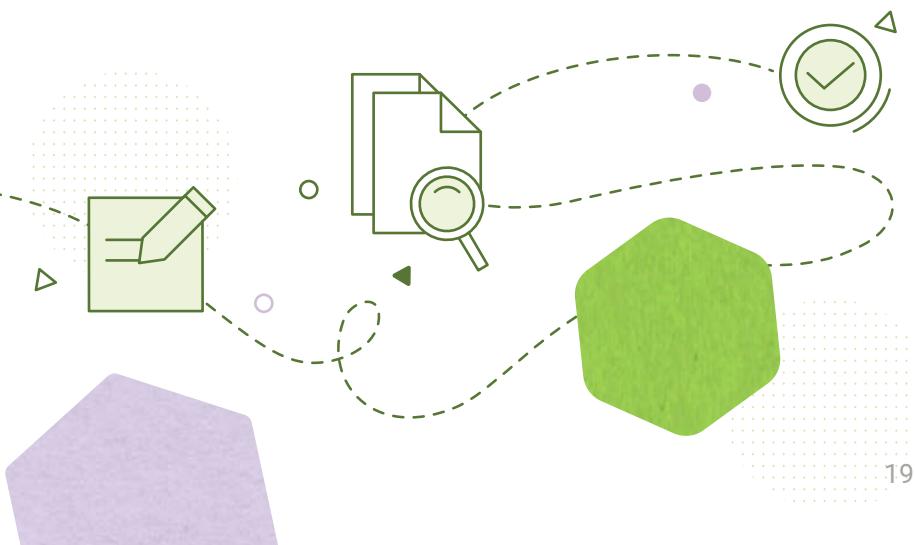
queries in your industry. Search engines reward sites that are updated often and boost the rankings of pages where viewers spend more time engaging with the content. That's why many online businesses today have blogs and include a content strategy in their marketing plan.

2 / Optimize your meta descriptions

You should enter a meta description for each one of your pages. Use simple but informative sentences. The search engines will check how relevant your description is to the actual content of your page so make sure that you describe only the current page and avoid adding irrelevant information in the description. Try to use the most important keyword on which you wish to rank high in that meta data.

3 / Optimize your URLs

If you use a CMS like WordPress, it is possible that the default URLs of the pages and posts you create are not friendly to search engines. That's why you need to look for settings that allow you to overwrite these default URLs with readable ones. In WordPress, these are called "permalinks". Learn how to set permalinks [here](#).



4 / Optimize your images

It is essential to have the "title" and "alt" tags specified for each one of the images you use in your posts. This helps search engines know what the image is supposed to represent and acknowledge the image as valid content.

Providing title and alt tags for each image you use, however, can be a time-consuming task. For WordPress, you can use the handy SEO Optimized Images plugin.

5 / Use Headings to optimize your WordPress content

You should use the `<h1>` tag only for the titles of your posts and pages. You should use a few `<h2>` tags and as many `<h3>` tags as you need for the other headings in your posts. Doing this will allow the search engines to index the important information from your website better. A good document has headings and subheadings, because headings make it easier to determine the subject of the page. Make sure you include the most important keywords in your h1 titles.



Marketing Ideas to Spread the Word

SMART WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR CUSTOMER BASE

The most effective business websites don't exist in a vacuum. They're part of a marketing strategy that harnesses popular digital tools like social media, advertisements, and email marketing. Here are some tips to help you get started with your marketing plan.



1 / Let people know about your website

Make sure your website URL is listed in important places like your social media profiles, your email signature, and business cards. Share your website content on social media, so you're pointing followers back to your site.

2 / Give customers a reason to come to your site

Part of the sales process is educating customers about what you offer and how it can help them. That's why many businesses maintain a blog full of interesting and relevant content that informs and engages current and potential customers.





3 / Invest in advertisement

Many social media channels are great for beginners, since they have advertisement tools that are easy to use and don't require a large investment to get started. Try playing around with Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter ads. Google Adwords is also a great way to reach visitors, though costs are higher than on social media platforms.

4 / Become an opinion leader

If you're trying to create a buzz about your business, you need to be part of conversations online in your industry. Join forums like Quora or Reddit to share your expertise in your areas of interest while drawing attention to your business.

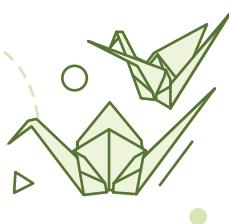


5 / Grow your email list

Add an email sign-up form on your site so you can build an email list. Contact subscribers with new offers and promotions which can bring them back to your website or just remind them of your existing at the right moment. Make sure you get their explicit consent to receive promotional emails from you because there are laws that protect the privacy of consumers.

6 / Organize a contest

Draw attention to your business by giving away freebies! Engage your audience through a contest or a giveaway to drum up interest and excitement around your product or services. You can also ask for submissions from fans to collect user-generated content for your social media profiles.

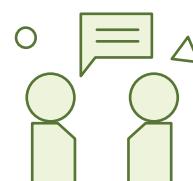


7 / Launch an affiliate or referral program

A recommendation from a friend is worth a lot, so encourage your clients to share your business with their network. Make it easy for them to share your site's address with the click of a button and offer them perks or freebies in exchange. You can check out [SiteGround's affiliate program](#) to see how we set ours up.

8 / Reach out to influencers

If you have friends in high places, invite them to try your product or service and share their opinion publicly so their networks get introduced to your brand. If you're trying to tap into a certain market niche, identify important voices in those communities and let them try your service or product free of charge.

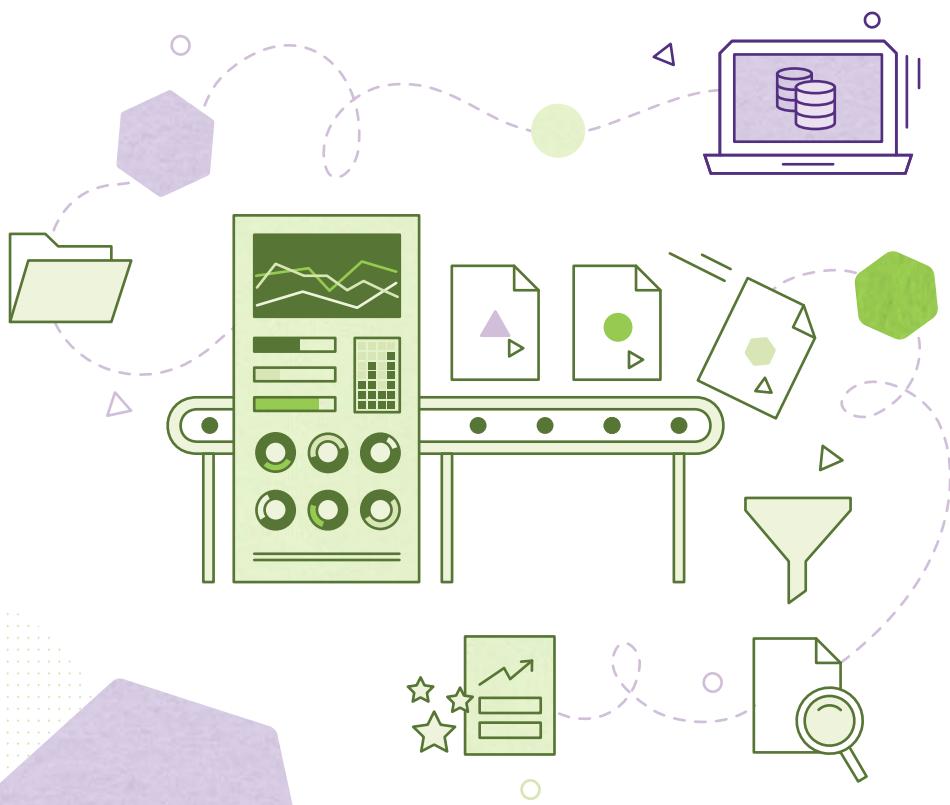




9 / Develop partnerships

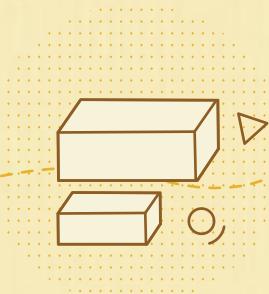
Finding complementary businesses to partner with can open your business up to tons of potential revenue. Analyze the consumer behaviors of your target customers to identify potential collaborations that are mutually beneficial.

Don't get discouraged if growth is slow and steady at first. Successfully building up your business using digital tools requires commitment and persistence.



4

SECTION



How to Optimize Your Site for Growth

You've built an amazing website. Congrats! You may think the hard part is over, and in some ways it is. However, websites aren't static. A successful business website should be regularly maintained for performance and safety and updated with fresh content as often as possible.



Optimizing Your Site Speed

MAKE YOUR SITE AS FAST AS POSSIBLE.
YOUR VISITORS WILL THANK YOU!

Many tests and studies show that a slow website is the greatest turn off for online shoppers. Technology is getting more sophisticated, attention spans are getting shorter, and websites only have a few precious seconds to grab and retain a visitor's attention.

Whether you sell goods, offer services, or have a simple landing page, the challenge is the same. If your website is slow, you could lose traffic, visitors, and potential income. Generally, if your website takes more than a second to load, it's slow and needs optimizing.

At SiteGround, we've developed a platform that optimizes speed and applies performance-enhancing technologies. On top of that, we provide several tools and techniques you can use to improve the speed of your WordPress website specifically. An easy way to get started is by installing the [SG Optimizer](#) plugin on your website.

Last but not least, as your website's content, functionality, and site visitors increase, you may have to consider upgrading your hosting plan to match your growing needs. You will know when it's time once your site starts getting slower and returns errors instead of properly

loading the content. At SiteGround, we offer multiple plans and solutions for various types of websites so the switch will be easy when the time comes.

For a detailed list of optimization and speed-boosting techniques, check out this [eBook and tutorial](#) on website speed optimization.

Boosting Your Security

KEEPING YOUR SITE ONLINE NO MATTER WHAT

Now that your website is growing, you want to make sure it's always available for your expanding client base. When your site traffic grows, so do the demands on your website performance and so do the risks that something could go wrong. How do you keep your site safe? Here are three ways to get started.

1 / Keep your software up to date

If you're hosting your website with a high-performance and secure hosting provider like [SiteGround](#), there are lots of built-in tools to keep your site online and secure. One of them is auto-updates, which keep your site software up to date with the most recent version, including all security patches that are released with each new update. That includes WordPress, PHP, and other software updates on your website and at the server level.

2 / Create automatic backups

Choosing a secure hosting provider minimizes the risk of hacking and malware but accidents and human errors can still happen. That's why keeping regular backups of your website that are easy to restore is key. Most hosting providers have built-in automatic backups or you can choose to install a WordPress plugin to manage this for you. Either way, make sure you have an option like SiteGround's 1-Click Restore tool, because backups are useless if you can't easily and quickly get your site restored and back online.



3 / Only install trusted themes and plugins

There are millions of third-party plugins and themes for WordPress websites and online stores, both free and paid. Not all of them are high-quality and some of them can actually cause vulnerabilities on your site. Make sure you only install trusted plugins and themes with high ratings on the WordPress.org repository. If in doubt, you can build your site with the WordPress Starter, a guided site-building process that only offers fully-vetted themes and some of the highest-rated plugins in the business.

For more advanced WordPress security tips, download our [security eBook](#).



Tracking Your Progress

SETTING GOALS AND MONITORING YOUR SUCCESS

Quantifying your online success begins with setting goals and implementing the tools to track your progress. We recommend [installing Google Analytics](#) on your site, which includes lots of useful tools for traffic optimization. For example, monitor where your traffic is located in the world, so you can make sure you're being found by your target audience. Make changes to your site if your efforts aren't yielding the desired results.

The Traffic Sources feature allows you to closely monitor the number of visitors a website refers to you. This can be useful if, for example, you are in the middle of a paid advertisement campaign. You'll be able to track which sites and which campaigns are giving you a return on your investment and build on those insights for your next campaign.





Conclusion



Building an online presence for your business is exciting and hopefully this guide has prepared you to take on the task with confidence. From starting a Facebook page to implementing sophisticated SEO strategies on your site, we believe any business owner can become well-versed in managing a high-performance online presence that will lead to more visibility, more sales, and business growth.

This guide was designed as a starting place on the road to a robust web presence that includes a faster and safer website, whether you're running an online shop, monetizing a blog, or maintaining a static site. There's real value in understanding the fundamentals of digital marketing and the role a website plays in your business growth, which is why we encourage all entrepreneurs to become comfortable in the first steps of launching a site.

We also believe that business owners who are confident in their understanding of the requirements of a successful website are more likely to make informed decisions that save time and resources. This includes choosing a hosting provider that offers a strong foundation to business sites of any size and is designed to scale with you as your company grows.

If you've been sitting on your next business idea, start building it today. There's no better time to carve out your space on the web and start generating revenue.

Did you find this guide helpful?

Let us know by tweeting at **@SiteGround** and telling us about your business!



