Crash Course: Using the Internet to Leverage Your Business

(Links and resources mentioned in the Webinar)

Website

Even with the explosion of social media sites and other places to get your business seen online, the humble website is still the most important place to start for the majority of businesses. This is your 'home base' online and is something that you control rather than a service that you use (eg Facebook).

The value proposition for a website is that you are adding a 24/7 salesperson to your business for a fraction of the cost of an employee.

If finances are tight and you want the lowest cost solution that will allow you to improve your website incrementally over time then the links below will help.

You typically need three components for a website.
Domain name + Hosting + Website Software

GoDaddy claims to be the world's No.1 **domain name registrar.** They are probably right! The trick with GoDaddy is that they continuously have sales so just check back there on occasion. You can get a .com domain name for less than $12/year. I don't recommend you get hosting there and don't get the 'build your own website' options. Use Bluehost, Host Gator or an Australian company for hosting and Wordpress for the website.

For .com.au **domain names** try:

Ziphosting - don't host website here, have had problems with Wordpress SEO settings here.
CheapDomains
Crazydomains
MelbourneIT - expensive...
Google 'cheap domains'

Bluehost and Host Gator are two cheap and reliable **website hosting** solutions. Both offer 24/7 support, unlimited space, unlimited bandwidth, unlimited

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emails and unlimited domains for less that $10/month. Importantly both Bluehost and Host Gator include 1-click Wordpress install features from their control panel.

For Australian based hosting solutions check the reviews at the [Whirlpool Forums](#).

Note: If hosting with your web designer make sure they are not just a reseller of another service but in fact add value in terms of customer support and some monthly maintenance if they are changing a premium.

Strongly recommend [Wordpress](#) as the website platform of choice. Free, open source, huge user and developer base, always improving and evolving, plugins to add almost any additional functionality you can think of - shopping cart, SEO, backup, video players, Facebook integration...

It is also **Free**. Hosts such as Bluehost and HostGator above provide for a very easy install process right from their control panel. If you are using Google to find the Wordpress site just be aware of the difference between WordPress.org and Wordpress.com - both are owned by the WordPress group but WordPress.org is the software that you want to install on your own server as a business.

WordPress allows you to apply themes to change the look and feel of the site without having to re-create all your text, images and pages. [ElegantThemes](#) is one place you can look for themes. You can also try [here](#) , [here](#), and [here](#) for more theme ideas. For a more powerful but more knowledge involved solution look [here](#). If you Google 'free wordpress themes' then you will also find a huge range.

Lastly, WordPress is used by many many web developers so you are never locked into using the company that first designs your website but can go to the open market each time.

[WP101](#) has some excellent low cost training videos videos for Wordpress. If you search on YouTube you'll also be able to find videos on most things that you'll want to do with Wordpress.

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Google Places 97% of consumers search for local businesses online. Be there when they're looking for you with Google Places for business - a free local platform from Google. This will get you in the local map search results area. It is also vitally important to start collecting online reviews here from your customers.

Google Adwords If you want to be on the top of google search results than Adwords will get you there in a few hours. This is the paid adverts that you see showing on the top and to the right of Google results. There are all kinds of strategies but generally you only pay when people click on your ads. This is a focused marketing channel that concentrates on return on investment. There is a very low cost to entry so worth looking at. Most online marketing companies can set you up with some initial free credit in your account.

Facebook Ads have been called the most advanced direct marketing platform ever invented by some people in the industry. Only want to show your ads to males over 50 living in Brisbane who are interested in fishing? Done. Only want to pay if someone follows your ad to your website? Done. Facebook is only getting bigger so now is the time to try out Facebook Ads. Like Adwords it has a very low cost to entry and focused on results.

Press Releases are a great way to generate fresh content for your website and to post on social media sites. By their nature they will be rich in keywords around your business and the field you operate in. This provides additional chances for the search engines to display your business in the search results. In fact many Search Engine Optimisation packages now include press releases in their mix for this very reason. There are numerous free press release websites on the web where you can post your press release and have them host it for you. Paid press release distribution options such as PRWeb can help do some of the heavy lifting and distribute your press release to media clearinghouses where journalists can pick it up. If the media does pick it up then you'll get some great free exposure.

Social Media Relevant Links

Create a Facebook Page for your business.
Rules around Facebook Pages. A must read for all Facebook page admins. Link your Facebook Page to a Twitter account so that when you post on Facebook the same message goes out on Twitter at the same time. Its more visibility for the same effort.

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[Google+ Business Pages](#) are Google's equivalent of the Facebook Page. These are going to be more and more important for online rankings and advertising. Get in early and setup one up. Its free.

LinkedIn is the world's largest professional network. Most business owners will want to have a basic profile created here if only for the reason that when people Google your name, your LinkedIn profile will often be one of the first search results returned. This give you a chance to control what people see about you online. Creating a [LinkedIn Company Page](#) further expands your online footprint making your business easier to find.

[Foursquare](#) is not going to be for every business but its worth looking at especially if you are in the food service industry. It is location based platform aimed at mobile phone users. You can motivate customers to 'check-in' to your business on multiple visits to unlock specials. In the process they are virally promoting your business to their network and other Foursquare users.

[Knowem](#) is a service that allows you to look up available usernames on hundreds of social media sites. For almost all of theses sites its a case of 'first in best dressed' with regards to usernames. You want to go and grab your preferred username for your company before someone else does. Even if you aren't ready to do anything with it now at least you'll control it in future when you do have time/resources. Securing the same username on as many different sites as possible maintains a consistent branding for your business and looks more professional. [Knowem](#) also provides a paid service where they will go and create all the accounts for you and populate them with your company information, logo and website link.

[HootSuite](#) is a website and online brand management service, which publishes to websites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare, MySpace, and WordPress. You may find this an easier way to manage your social media rather than visiting each site individually. If you are mainly just using Facebook then I'd recommend that you post direct to Facebook than via Hootsuite due to something called Facebook [EdgeRank](#)(video).

[BufferApp](#) is a useful tool that allows you to 'buffer' social media updates. You can sit down in the morning and create several posts that will then go out to the world over the course of the day. This can be a more efficient use of your

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limited time as a business owner. Hootsuite has a similar scheduling ability but I find Buffer quicker for this.

Directory Listings

TrueLocal, StartLocal, HotFrog, Superpages, Yelp, AussiePages, IGoLook are all examples of places that you can get free business listings. Take some care to make sure that your business name, address and phone number are entered exactly the same as they are shown on your Google Local listing. This helps with your local map ranking results. Many of these directories will approach you to upgrade to a paid option for more visibility. There is generally no need to and the money may be better spent promoting your website rather than theirs.

Webinar Software

Webinars are becoming increasingly popular as an education and marketing tool. Take a look at MeetingBurner and GoToWebinar. The ability to present to multiple people in different locations, record the presentation and then replace it later builds in significant time leverage for the business business owner.

Online Magazine Publishing

If you are looking to add some bling to your client newsletter then take a look at Issuu. Issuu is an online magazine publishing service. One of their abilities is to convert any PDFs, Word docs or Powerpoint files already on your website into a format that will open in the browser and looks great.

QR Codes

Mobile devices will be a growing theme this year. You can't escape them. QR Codes (mobile phone barcodes) are a great way to leverage this trend. QRStuff makes it easy to create QR Codes that you can use on your business cards, flyers, signage, point of sale, invoices + more. These can take your customers to your Facebook page, a video, your website or to any location or document online. i-Nigma and RedLaser are two free popular QR Code readers for mobile devices.

Augmented Reality (AR) is cutting edge at the moment but won't stay that way for long. Layar is the leading platform for business use of AR. There are two main flavors - bringing print media alive and location based augmentation. This all hangs off mobile phone technology and as futuristic as it looks is already being used by local Redcliffe real estate agents to overlay homes for sale and contact information on top of the real world.

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HARO (Help A Reporter Out) and SourceBottle are two sites where publishers and journalists go to seek expert opinions or people to interview for their articles. In return for helping to provide content for a journalist you get the chance to **gain free media exposure** for yourself or your business.

Event Ticket Sales and Management
Eventbrite is well worth a look if you holding an event. The website will assist to automate much of the administration involved with handling tickets and attendees.

If it is a regular event that you run weekly/monthly etc then also look at Meetup.com as a tool to manage RSVPs, reminders and event/location information. You can have message boards for discussions, group emails and the platform itself helps people find your group by suggesting it to people with similar interests.

Conversion from Visitors to Customers

Website Testimonials and **Frequently Asked Questions** (FAQs) - Video Labs is an example of a video production company that can produce video testimonials and FAQs for your website and social media sites.

Authority Badges can increase the willingness for people to purchase online from your website if you have that facility. TRUSTe, Trustguard and VeriSign are examples of these services. This is all about reducing the perceived risk for the buyer about dealing with you online. Also consider including logos of clients that you have worked with as their brand recognition can help yours - a process called 'brand hugging'.

Timebridge, Tungle.me are two tools to help schedule meetings or allow people to book themselves in to meet with you. There are restaurant and accommodation specific services out there that you can bolt on to your existing website and allow visitors to manage their own bookings. This might be(probably is) cheaper than paying commissions to Wotif and similar sites.

Visual Website Optimizer allows you to **test different versions** of your webpages to see if there is any effect on visitor behavior. Something as simple as trying a different headline, a different image or even changing a button colour can produce different results. If you could increase the number of website visitors that call you or leave their details by even just 4% wouldn't you want to know?

Zentester is a similar and alternative solution.

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Measurement is the next easy consideration. For most people the free Google Analytics is all you will need. This [plugin](#) makes it easy to integrate with WordPress.

If you really want to get into your visitor behavior then you can totally geek out with [CrazyEgg](#) and [Woopra](#).

A [Live Chat](#) facility on your website can help you answer visitor questions on the spot and turn them into buyers. Not only that you can see what search engine request brought them to your site, what pages they are browsing and if they login via Facebook then you'll know their names. As an added bonus you can do this on the go via mobile devices if you choose.

If you've ever lost track of a customer issue or complaint email or perhaps its sitting in an employee's inbox while they are on holiday then you'll 'get' where an **online support desk** comes in. Online support desk software like [Zendesk](#) provides one central place to manage customer interaction and keeps it out of already busy email inboxes. Support tickets can be allocated to staff but remain accessible to others and carry their history with them. You can see exactly where every customer case is up to and what has transpired. No surprise by now - you can manage your support desk on the move via mobile devices.

[Google Alerts](#) and [Social Mention](#) are just two of many **online reputation management** tools. Both are free and will email you when new mentions of your name, company name or competition etc are found online. If someone has had a bad experience or is talking about your business online then you can find out and join the conversation to offer exception customer service. Its also just handy to know what is happening in your field and keep up on industry news. If you have money to burn or are just super paranoid then [Radian6](#) can probably tell you want your customers are thinking even before they type it.

Email Marketing Platforms not only assist you in staying compliant with SPAM laws but provide a great source of leverage in your business along with improved email deliverability rates.

[Aweber](#) and _[Mailchimp](#)_ are two email marketing platforms that will allow people to subscribe to your list from your website, produce formatted newsletters and keep you compliant with Australian Spam Laws. If you are still using Outlook to manage your mailouts then these platforms are worth a serious look.

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A more serious(and expensive) platform is OfficeAutoPilot. They do have a smaller product in Sendpepper if you think you might grow into the larger setup one day.

Survey Monkey is an online survey management tool that will allow you to poll and get feedback from your future and current customers. You can use surveys to see what features or what information your audience is interested in and then use that to build a better marketing plan or customer experience. It is possible to run a similar survey using Google Docs.

Business Revenue

Freshbooks is probably the easiest solution for invoicing work out there. It creates sharp, clean invoices that are sent by email and can be paid online or via bank transfer. Send a job estimate and if the client accepts turn the quote into an invoice with one click. Freshbooks keeps track of what has been paid and what is still outstanding. When you receive payment it takes a few clicks and a receipt is on its way back to the other person. You can also see exactly what time and date the other person has opened your invoice so you know they have received it! Saves time and paper, keeps records online.

Xero does much of what Freshbooks does but is more of a full service accounting package with the ability to import live records from bank accounts, payroll, expense claims, inventory and cashflows. See all the numbers for your business from the mobile app that goes with it. Snap photos of receipts on your phone, upload them to Xero and then throw them in the bin. There is a bunch of videos showing elements of Xero in action.

Time Doctor is a service that I've only just started using and I'm loving it. If you've wondered where the time in your day has disappeared, if you've got side tracked on browsing the web or responding to emails or need a quick and easy solution to track billable time per client then this is where Time Doctor comes in.

If you are in the market for a new **Point of Sale** solution then online alternatives offer real alternatives to dedicated installed software or hardware solutions. Take Vend for example which will allow you to setup a sales terminal with nothing but an iPad and provide customer management, inventory control and receipts. It also interfaces with Xero for your accounting.

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Business Administration

LastPass Password Manager is a freeware password management program developed by LastPass. It is available as a plugin for Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome and Safari.

Microsoft Office Alternatives *Google* has a large range of products that can be used for productivity. We touched on Gmail, Google Alerts, Google Reader and Google Docs.

Open Office is another great free alternative to MS Office for small businesses.

Photoshop Alternatives *Pixlr* is a free online photo editor. Edit, adjust and filter your images. It has many features found on desktop software such as layers, filters and adjustments but runs in your browser. Awesome!

GIMP is another free graphic editing tool. This one is more featured than Pixlr and runs from your computer.

Dropbox is an **online file syncing & storage** service that lets you bring your photos, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily. Never email yourself a file again and stop carrying a USB stick around.

Project Management

Basecamp track projects, to-dos, files and messages between multiple staff members in one platform rather than have your projects live in inboxes. "Is this the most recent document version?" - if you've had that problem then consider giving Basecamp a free trial. Accessible from computers and mobiles - anywhere you have a web connection.

Do.com is a free tool that provides a social media feel to tracking your projects and assigning tasks to staff members. Again - designed to be used on the go from mobile devices.

Work Wiki's

Just as Wikipedia has done a great job of collating collective human knowledge on a massive range of topics - you can use a wiki style platform in your business. The idea here is to document your processes and capture how-to information - getting it out of your team members heads and somewhere that

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other people can refer to. Being online you can embed videos into the pages along with images, text and links to additional information. Lock this information down so only employees with the right access can see it or change it. Access it from any internet connection and always have the most up to date version of your procedures and systems in place.

Google Sites and BackPack are two offerings to checkout for this.

Shoeboxed transforms your paper clutter into a secure, searchable online database that you can access anytime, anywhere. It is the easiest way to organize your receipts, business cards and important paper documents- no scanning or data entry required! Just drop it in the mail and get it back digitally.

Location Tracking *Google Maps Coordinate* is a workforce management tool that improves the efficiency of your mobile teams. People are shown on a Google Map, making it easy to assign jobs to the nearest available team member. By getting real-time visibility into where teams are and what jobs they are doing, work can be scheduled in a smarter, more efficient way.

Media Templates

Chances are someone has already created the document you are about to start from scratch. And they probably did a better job than you can. Same for photos.

DocStoc

Stock.xchng

iStockPhoto

Instant Messaging

Skype is a software application that allows users to make voice calls over the Internet. Calls to other users within the Skype service are free, while calls to both traditional landline telephones and mobile phones can be made for a fee using a debit-based user account system.

If you aren't using Skype or want another solution then Trillian covers just about anything you can think of in an instant messaging client.

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Disaster Management

Carbonite is an online backup service that runs automatically so you don't have to remember to backup and archive your business files. It stores your files online so you have an offsite backup should disaster strike the office/store. If you can get to an internet connection then you can restore individual files or the whole lot to another computer. Unlimited disk space.

JungleDisk is another alternative and operated by Rackspace, one of the largest online storage providers at the enterprise level.

Training *MySpeed* from Enounce lets you change the playback speed of Flash video without any loss of audio quality. (No chipmunk sound.) It's like speed- reading for video! If your Windows PC or Mac can view videos on YouTube, MySpeed will work.
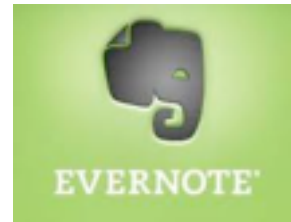

Udemy - Large and growing collection of online courses both paid and free.

Lynda.com - If you have office software on your computer that you and your staff aren't getting the most from then this should be your first stop.

Misc

Evernote is a suite of software and services designed for notetaking and archiving. A "note" can be a piece of formatted text, a full webpage or webpage excerpt, a photograph, a voice memo, or a handwritten "ink" note. Notes can be sorted into folders, then tagged, annotated, edited, given comments, searched and exported as part of a notebook. Evernote supports a number of operating system platforms and also offers online synchronization and backup services.

Add visuals to your online conversations. *Jing* captures anything on you see on your computer screen, as an image or short video, and lets you share it instantly.

SaneBox acts as a personal assistant for your inbox. It learns as it works with you and will keep unimportant emails out of your inbox. On a schedule that you set it will email you a summary of all the emails that it has removed. From here you can quickly send individual emails back to the inbox to read or (more likely) just trash them all with one click. Turning out to be a real help in getting through the pile of emails that keep arriving.

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Wufoo Forms - Quickly create good looking online forms. Could you save time if your customers could complete forms online via a link rather than physically mail them out and have them mail the forms back in?

LogMeIn is a suite of software services that provides remote access to computers over the Internet. You can access your home PC from your iPad while traveling for example or access the work computer from home.

FreeMind is a mind-map application that is free to download and is written in Java.
A Mind-map is a diagram that explicitly, but somewhat informally, records concepts and the associations between them.

Want to learn more about online marketing of your business? Join the community of like minded local business owners at

www.redcliffesocialmedia.com

redcliffemarketinglabs.com.au

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