



# Promoting your business online

In the second part of his two-part series, Bill Hilton shares ideas for marketing your business on the internet.

One of the fastest growing areas of marketing for all businesses – from small operations like yours to global giants – is the internet. These days, it's one of the first places people look when they are after any kind of local service. The good news is that this kind of marketing needn't be complicated or costly. Check out these ideas to get your business online.

## Building a website

This isn't as complex as you might think, and it's pretty much essential if you're going to do any online marketing yourself.

Your website doesn't have to be flash. As long as it's easy to use and looks neat and tidy, you only need

something fairly basic. If you don't want to do the hard work yourself, shop around for a web designer. Personal recommendation is best or online forums such as [www.ukbusinessforums.co.uk](http://www.ukbusinessforums.co.uk) are a good starting point. Just sign up, and ask for a recommended web designer – quite a few people should pitch in. A decent designer will set you back several hundred pounds, but you can be reasonably sure of getting a good result. Just remember to keep these things in mind:

**Make sure you have a way of updating your site yourself.** This will preferably be by using a basic content management system (CMS). Be wary of

designers who ask you to give them a call when you need to add or remove information – they may charge for such a service. If they don't charge for it, then it's unlikely to be high up their list of priorities.

**Don't forget you have to pay for web hosting.** The pages that make up your website need to be stored on a computer so that people can access them via the internet. (It's not practical to store your site on your own computer – it would need to be switched on all the time, and you'd need a very high-grade internet connection for it to be reliable.) This process of paying somebody to store your site for you is called having your

site “hosted”, and the company that offers the hosting is called a “web host”. It’s usually a separate cost from the design phase, though some designers will offer all-in-one design and hosting packages. Hosting will be an ongoing yearly cost (probably in the region of £50–£100 for a reliable host). Make sure your designer gives you a copy of the hosting account details if he or she sorts it out for you.

**Try to get your own domain name:**

[www.childmindingbysharon.co.uk](http://www.childmindingbysharon.co.uk) sounds much better than [www.yourfreesite.com/domains/sharon](http://www.yourfreesite.com/domains/sharon).

**Design and build your own website.**

It’ll take a little bit more time, but it’s a cheap option and it isn’t particularly difficult, especially if you use a low-cost template. You will find lots of different “build your own website” pages on the internet that allow you to create your own fairly decent web pages.

**Top tips for site content**

- Successful marketing is all about trust. Include a photo of yourself, information on your background and testimonials from (named) satisfied customers (with their permission).
- Your website could also include pages on the following: a page listing your services in detail (your fees, contracts, hours of working, what you provide – such as meals and equipment – your daily activities and how you provide education); and copies of policies and procedures in your setting, such as sickness and health and safety.
- Don’t include photos of the children you look after, even if you have written permission from their parents. Keep them for your own professional albums, or for the parents.
- Make sure your contact details are easy to find, but for reasons of safety

don’t include your full address. If possible, include both a phone number and an email address. By all means use your mobile number, but include a landline as well – it reassures potential clients.

- Be sure to include a privacy policy page, outlining how you deal with personal information. A good web designer should be able to advise on this. If you’re DIYing, there are plenty of generic privacy documents available for free on the web.
- Have a sensible email address: [hotlipzmagraw@hotmail.com](mailto:hotlipzmagraw@hotmail.com) isn’t going to inspire much confidence in potential customers. The same goes for your voicemail greeting on the phone number you advertise – keep it mature and professional.

**Social media marketing**

Don’t neglect the advertising opportunities that social media sites like Facebook and Twitter can offer your business.

The first, obvious step might be to set up a profile for your business on one or more of the main social networking sites. This allows easy communication with potential clients, and is also a great way of making new contacts in your local area. You can find details on how to set up a Facebook business profile in the help centre on [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com).

NCMA recommends that you keep your business social networking site separate from your own personal profile. It’s a good idea to keep your private life and your business apart – and you probably don’t want parents looking through all your photos to see what you get up to in your spare time! Even on your business site, don’t post any photos of the children you work with.

Did you know you can take out adverts on some social networking sites? Facebook is one of the best,

because costs are low and you can set up your “campaign” so that your ads are only displayed to potential customers, i.e. Facebook users of a certain age, employment and family status, within a specified distance of your home. You can find out more at [www.facebook.com/advertising](http://www.facebook.com/advertising). ●

**Using the internet for networking and support**



Mumsnet is well known as a website that provides help and support for parents – but it might surprise you to learn that it is also a great source of information and chat for registered childminders and other childcare providers. Its “Childminders, Nannies and Au Pairs” chat topic area ([www.mumsnet.com/Talk/childminders\\_nannies\\_au\\_pairs\\_etc](http://www.mumsnet.com/Talk/childminders_nannies_au_pairs_etc)) is a hive of advice, brainstorming, reassurance and friendly conversation.

On the day of writing, active threads included: “What do you do when you have one vacancy and two parents who want it?”, “Child carer in Ealing wanted”, “Can I link parachute play to creative?”. Childminders who use the Mumsnet talk board are full of praise. One childminder using the site says, “There’s always someone on here who has been through what you’re going through. I have picked up some really good ideas for crafts, activities and general paperwork as well. All the childminders on here are willing to help each other out, as they know what a tough job it can be at times, and that support is vital.” Visit [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) to get involved and find out more.

**Handy hint:**

Register with Google Local Search by visiting [www.google.com/local/add](http://www.google.com/local/add) and entering the details of your business. This will really boost your visibility to parents looking for local services.

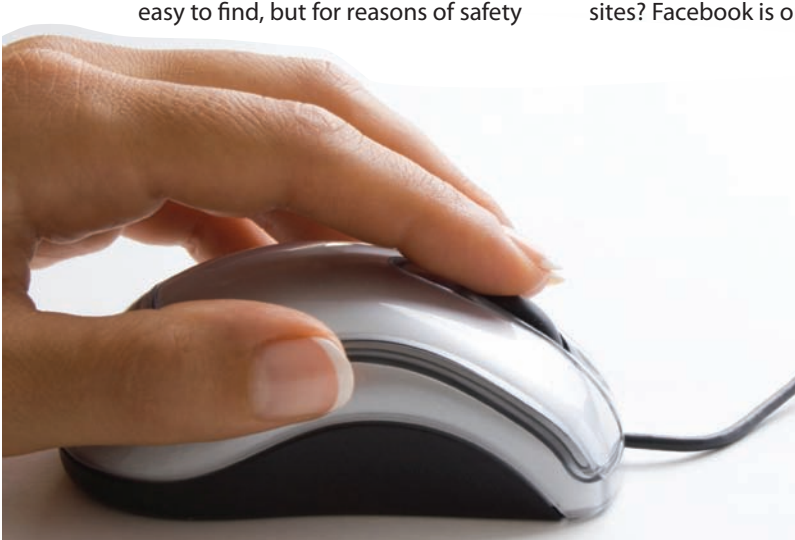


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