

Getting the Most out of Your Store Website

by **Stephanie Bond**

If your store doesn't have a web presence, get one! Even if you don't sell products on-line, readers depend on websites for retail locations for information, such as store hours, location, maps and directions, and notice of upcoming events. A web presence will make your customers feel more connected to your business because you'll be "open" twenty-four hours a day/seven days a week.

Where to go for help: Ask around! You might be surprised to discover that one of your employees or customers is a closet website designer...or they might know someone who will create your web page at a reasonable price. You could also call a local high school or university and ask for names of students who excel at web design. Or, if you're interested in learning yourself, buy a book and dive in...or take a class! You don't have to be a computer programmer to learn how to create a website—a computer, curiosity and a willingness to learn are enough.

What to include: Here are some ideas, moving from bare bones content to features that will wow your readers and have them coming back regularly.

- store logo
- description of store offerings
- contact information
- map and directions
- description of discount programs
- special order services
- upcoming store events
- staff-recommended books and synopses
- bestseller lists
- lists of required reading books for local schools
- special books/events for children
- community bulletin board
- available autographed books
- join e-mail mailing list
- author interviews
- information on joining reading groups
- reading group guides
- trivia/quizzes

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- printable bookmarks
- search of store inventory
- printable newsletter
- the ability to e-mail pages to friends

How to get the word out: A website is useless if people don't know about it! Reserving a domain name that is as close as possible to your store name is a good idea. Then put your website address on all store materials—ads, paper bags, bookmarks, fliers, sidewalk tent, sales receipts—and verbally invite customers to visit your website. Hang a big banner on the outside of your store. Consider setting a computer on the counter displaying the home page of your site. If you feature community events on your site, ask the organization for a reciprocal link to their site, or ask them to let their members know about your website. If you feature recommended books, let the author know and request a link from their website to yours. When you send notices of store events to newspapers and community websites, include your website address. And consider offering website-only contests and coupons to entice customers to sign up for your e-mail list.

Special note for chain store managers: If your company's website doesn't allow for location-specific pages, ask for an exception if you provide all the content for the page to the website coordinator. If you make a case that an individual page for your store will help you improve sales, you'll be hard to refuse...and your page might even become a model example that the company can build upon. ~SBond