

CELEBRATING 5 YEARS AS THE BEST SMALL BUSINESS MAGAZINE

START YOUR BUSINESS

www.sybmagazine.com

£3.25 ISSUE 44



MARMITE NETWORKING
LOVE IT OR HATE IT, THIS IS THE
BREAD & BUTTER OF BUSINESS

LIKE BEES TO HONEY
GIVE YOUR CUSTOMERS
A REASON TO RETURN

THE ESSENCE

BT BUSINESS SEARCH FOR THE UK'S NEXT BIG ENTREPRENEUR

TORTILLA: THE SUCCESS STORY BEHIND THIS MEXICAN EATERY

GOOGLED: GET READY FOR THE EVOLUTION OF SEARCH ENGINES

REDUNDANT?: DON'T WASTE YOUR PAYOUT ON STARTING A BUSINESS

GADGETS: THE NEW SONY VAIO RANGE AND BLACKBERRY PRESENTER REVIEWED

Globalise through e-business

The evolution of the internet and lowering costs of collaborative, e-commerce and online meeting technologies, have given every business an easier access to global markets. E-business strategist Deborah Collier of Echo E-Business looks at how small businesses can go global without breaking their bank balance.

E-commerce, the element of e-business focused on the sale of goods and services over the internet, has for many years allowed businesses to sell products and services to any country where legislation and tax rulings allow. The biggest challenge has been global marketing. Until more recently the cost of international marketing has not been affordable to the average small business or start-up.

Technology is growing at a monumental rate and is now at the fingertips of virtually any organisation with even the smallest of marketing budgets.

The three biggest enabling technologies of today, search engines aside, are social media, web conferencing and online press applications. Social media which includes online video, audio networks, blogs, press releases, business/social networks, is one of the most powerful channels. If done well, you can post your announcements for next to nothing, and then let your global advocates spread the word for you.

The evolution of these tools enable businesses to demonstrate their products, services and know-how to a global audience at an affordable price. What about your business? How can online business enable you to reach untapped markets?

Here are my 5 top tips for going global:

E-Lesson 1: Publicise that you are global

The web is a global medium, accessible to any individual in any country with an internet connection. Have you ever looked at your website statistics and found that the majority of your visitors come from abroad? That means a number of global visitors could be a potential buyer. It's important to advertise that you service international clients on your

website. Depending on what you provide, you may not need a contact address or phone number in each country, but it helps to have international local rate phone numbers, easily affordable through technologies such as 'Skype'. You can also issue online press releases about your products and services to sites with a global audience. Try to place some search engine optimized links within, as that will help boost your search engine rankings.

E-Lesson 2: Investigate localisation

Localisation, in internet terms means providing web content in the language of your audience. In financial terms it means offering multi-currency payments. Depending on what products or services you are offering, it can be an immense business challenge and expense to offer multi-lingual content on your website, intranet or client portal. You need to consider whether the multi-lingual content is necessary, but also whether it will attract clients who will need sales and customer service support in their own language. When it comes to currency, assess the additional costs of offering multi-currency payments to your customers.

E-Lesson 3: Use social media to foster advocates in your target countries

Social media has enabled us to raise brand awareness, drive traffic to our websites, increase our search engine rankings and build global relationships. It helps spread the word about who we are, which in turn helps to generate advocacy. Advocacy and referral are the oldest and most successful vehicles for business and lead generation in history. It's not only potential clients using social media, but those who may help us build relationships in their territory or industry, and who will promote what we do.

E-Lesson 4: Plan for international shipping and taxation

If you are shipping products, ensure that any e-commerce systems you have in place are sufficiently equipped to deal with a variety of international shipping prices and choices. Continually evaluate your audience base by location, and assess where you might ship your products from. Will it really be cost-effective to ship large items from London to Japan, for example, and will your customers pay the shipping costs? Consider taxation also. In the UK, VAT registered companies can only charge 17.5% taxes to those countries in the EU. This has an implication for your e-commerce systems, and should be thoroughly investigated.

E-Lesson 5: Embrace online collaboration and conferencing tools

You will need the tools to interact with your audience. You should maximise your website and make use of the phone and personal email. It's important to look at ways to reduce your meeting costs, present your products and services to a global audience personally and make it easy for customers to come to you. You now have affordable technologies such as 'Skype' for low-cost international calls, conferencing, and workspace sharing. If you are selling an advisory or training service, you can directly leverage these technologies to deliver abroad. As an example, through our training brand Learnbusiness.com, technology has allowed us to offer social media and e-business start-up training face-to-face live online with webcams, shared workspaces, voice and chat. We can also deliver large conferences and presentations to a global audience, all at an affordable cost to our business.

Globalising your business is an opportunity waiting to be tapped into. Businesses seeking rewards internationally can build their empire, by employing e-business strategies and nurturing relationships using the tools available to them on the internet.

Deborah Collier is Chief Strategist and Managing Director of Echo E-Business. For more information visit www.echoebusiness.com.

