

Internet Attracts Customers

Business owners often wonder what they can do to get the people who drive by on the highway to stop at their store.

Visual merchandising is a crucial tool, according to Glenn Muske, rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist for the North Dakota State University Extension Service. . Does your store attract potential customers? Does your signage make people want to stop and explore?

“But today, business owners have another tool that is rapidly growing as a, or maybe the, means of attracting customers to your business,” Muske says. “That tool is the Internet.”

More and more people turn to the Internet as they look for places to shop, eat and find entertainment. The Internet is no longer an option but a necessity for the business owner.

Travelers are a major Internet user, often looking for lodging and eating establishments. Research shows that people also look for unique places to shop, as well as for general merchandise they need. And with the development of smartphones and tablet computers, the search for auto supplies, hardware and clothing is common for travelers.

“Today the Internet can bring the public off the interstate or other highway that passes your town and your business,” says Muske. “Having an online presence becomes important for all business owners.”

The most common online presence is a Web page. For more information about how to get started, visit <http://srcd.msstate.edu/ecommerce/>.

“Remember that when developing your website, all of the visual merchandising elements apply here,” Muske advises. “Also, as you think about the traveler, remember that people are looking for an ‘experience’ and something ‘real.’ This starts in the section you often see titled ‘About Us.’”

The second step is to claim your place on Google and the other search engines. You can find more information on how to do this at <http://bit.ly/mUBdEq>.

To learn more about visual merchandising, go to <http://bit.ly/qfmMEen>.

Other resources to help you develop your online presence include your local Extension Service office and NDSU’s Small Business Support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness. The national eXtension website for entrepreneurs at www.extension.org/entrepreneurship also has links to more information and an “Ask the Expert” section. Your local Small Business Development Centers and colleges and universities often offer classes in Web development.

###

NDSU Agriculture Communication

Source: Glenn Muske, (701) 328-9718, glenn.muske@ndsu.edu

Editor: Ellen Crawford, (701) 231-5391, ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu