

Businesses neglect websites at own peril

By **RICHARD DUPLAIN**
rduplain@dailygleaner.com



Internet expert Mike Dawson, an Internet consultant with WSI in Fredericton, told a Chamber of Commerce luncheon that companies with websites owe it to themselves to have current information and easy-to-use navigation tools. The Daily Gleaner/Richard Duplain Photo

A website that displays outdated information is useless to consumers and counterproductive for companies, says a leading Internet consultant.

"Many companies don't realize the importance of having an up-to-date website," said Mike Dawson, of WSI Internet Consulting and Education, at a Chamber of Commerce business education luncheon Wednesday.

WSI Internet Consulting and Education is the leading international Internet consulting firm according to Entrepreneur magazine. Its Canadian head office is in Ontario and certified consultants have offices throughout Canada.

"A company that neglects its website may be committing commercial suicide," he said. "Websites are increasingly the gateway to a company's brand, products and services.

"A useless website suggests a useless company - and a rival is only a mouse-click away."

Dawson said a company's website represents its image.

"A business should put its best foot forward," he said.

Dawson said companies should strive toward developing easy-to-use, visible websites.

"Companies must have accurate up-to-date information on those sites," he said.

Clearly defined objectives, focus, well written material, pleasant designs and functionality are some of the key areas where companies can improve their websites, he said.

"Websites should have a call to action and they should clearly instruct visitors to a particular course of action whether it's to download a file or make a purchase," Dawson said.

"The Internet is said to be a giving net ... Companies need to give something in return for a person's visit to that website."

There are tens of thousands of websites on the Internet and visibility is crucial to a website's success. "Often websites are invisible or difficult to find on the Internet," Dawson said.

"Having a low-visibility website is like going out and getting a nice colour brochure then returning home and hiding it in a closet," he said.

Dawson said 90 per cent of Internet users rely on search engines to find websites.

A major drawback for many companies is failing to keep the sites operating properly, he said.

"Sometimes links don't work, information is outdated and images are poorly reproduced," he said. "Companies need to institute a program of frequent checks and updates or people will move on to another site."

Dawson said companies face many business challenges, but one on which they could concentrate is developing a mechanism to measure their return on their website investment.

He said websites can cost between \$100 and several million dollars.

The website formerly known as pets.com cost \$190 million, he said.

"Companies need to see a return on their investment and there's two areas where measurements are needed," Dawson said.

He said direct returns can be measured by the number of online orders and numbers of visits.

Dawson said many websites don't need a major overhaul.

"They may need to be refreshed and updated," he said.

For more information about website effectiveness and WSI Internet Consulting and Education, see www.wsiwebsthatwork.com or contact Dawson at 452-8478.
