



SCORE column: Having a website gives credibility to businesses

In last week's column, the topic was the use of technology for small businesses and the free training provided by SCORE at ebusinessnow.org. While most businesses have started putting together a technology plan, many are still hesitant.

Jothi Nedungadi, chairwoman of the Fox Cities SCORE Chapter and owner of Competitive InfoSearch, says that many of her SCORE clients feel overwhelmed by technology and don't know where to start. She believes it starts with a website.

"I don't think websites will go away," she said. "The other [vehicles](#) like emails, blogs, and Facebook pages are driving traffic to your website. If there isn't a legitimate website, people feel like it's a scam. You need to drive them somewhere so they can learn more about you."

A good website will get a person's attention fast. Nedungadi noted that people spend an average of four to six seconds once they land on a page, so it is vital to be creative and visual. The new convention says that less is better.

"You want a dashboard feel so that customer can get to what they need quickly," she said.

Achieving this type of site requires solid communication with the website designer who will help a business tell its story.

Trying to save money by going with the lowest price or designing [your own site](#) is rarely advised. The business may end up with a site that is hard to find and visually unappealing.

Part of the problem is not understanding what the designer will do for you. Nedungadi cautions against signing a proposal that lacks detail.

"Many companies do a one-page proposal," she said. "I think it's all about the details and how much information you can get."

"You need a very clear proposal that defines that scale of work. It should state the length of contract, ongoing costs, recourse if there are problems, timelines, and assumptions on both ends."

Nedungadi provides an eight-page document that explains the scope of work, the client's goal and the solution. There is a cost and delivery summary, contract terms, benefits, authorization, a non-disclosure, and description of support. Part of the web designer's role should be to explain terms like search engine optimization (SEO), hosting and registration of a [domain name](#).

"Many clients don't know what it means to transfer a domain name, for example," she said. "A web designer might fail to convey that there are ongoing fees for registration, hosting and analytical tracking."

The ultimate goal should be a site that stands out and draws traffic. The website is the cornerstone of an Internet strategy that also embraces social media.

"It all adds up to a well-defined strategy," Nedugadi said. "You need to have an Internet presence, and the longer that a business waits, the further behind it will get. My advice is to get started, even if it's in a small way."