

Information is power

If you are not plugged in to what's going on you may find it harder to keep ahead of your competitors

In a rapidly changing business world we all have to keep abreast of what's going on – and the World Wide Web offers a quick and inexpensive way of accessing the information you need.

These needs change as your business develops and grows. A new business's requirements can be very different from a business that has been running for a decade and is undergoing expansion. But no matter the size of a business, or what stage it is at, there's no doubt the Internet can be an invaluable resource.

To help ensure that the Royal Bank is giving you the very best service possible, we are practising what we preach and have redesigned our own website to give you free access to the very best in business and financial advice and information.

Online advice clinic

As well as a whole new look and easier navigation, the Royal Bank's site also offers a Small Business Clinic. Aimed at new and expanding businesses alike, the clinic offers advice on: where to find further business advice; drawing up a business plan; sources of funding; bank accounts and franchising; and the pros and cons of different trading structures such as sole trader, partnership or limited company amongst others.

You can also read current and back issues of *Royal Business* online at the new site.

Free research tool

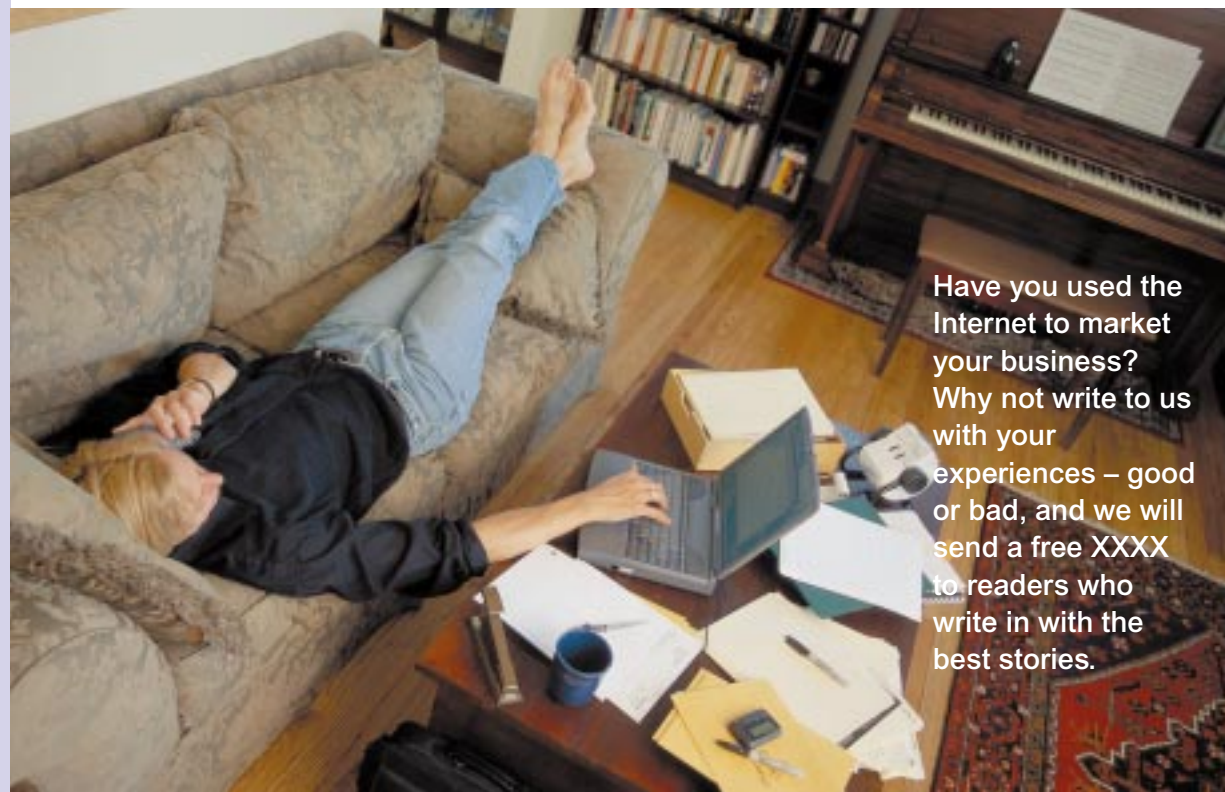
To help you keep ahead of the pack, the site also contains a powerful tool enabling you to track the business performance, and credit-worthiness, of up to 50 of your customers or suppliers – for free.

Created by D&B, the world's leading provider of business information, the D&B Small Business Centre contains the latest facts, figures and background on 2.3m UK businesses. This can help you to spot new sales opportunities, identify business risks and stay ahead of the competition.

The tracker service allows you to choose up to 50 companies for monthly monitoring. You will be notified by email, free of charge, if there have been any significant changes in the companies selected – such as changes in ownership or key performance indicators.

If you wish, you can then purchase the full details for just £9.95, plus VAT. This report also gives you D&B's risk rating of the company, maximum credit recommendation, past payment performance and other key data. You can also purchase other individual company or even partner reports at prices ranging from £7.50 to £15, plus VAT.

Check out our new website and these new features at www.rbs.co.uk/business



Have you used the Internet to market your business? Why not write to us with your experiences – good or bad, and we will send a free XXXX to readers who write in with the best stories.

Connect with your customers

Just as putting up a sign outside your premises can bring in new customers, so could your presence on the Internet be an effective promotional tool

It's not just as an information source that the Internet can help your business. It can help promote your business to a wider audience. In fact, there may be people online right now searching for products or services such as yours on the Net, but will they find your business there?

If the answer is "No", perhaps you should consider the marketing opportunities offered by the medium, allowing your services and products to be marketed while you are asleep or on holiday, 24 hours a day 365 days a year. And utilising the web need not be as daunting as it may at first

seem. So how do you get started?

Get surfing

The first step is simple. Get online and start surfing. Search engines such as www.yahoo.com and www.google.com enable you to quickly find what you're looking for through typing in a few keywords. Try searching for similar businesses to yours – not just in your area but beyond. Even looking at how similar businesses market themselves in different parts of the world could spark off some ideas of your own. For example, there are various online directories

which list businesses by area and nature of business, for example www.scoot.co.uk. Registering with one of these, and tracking the responses you get could give you an idea of how much demand there is from Internet users for information on your business area.

Depending on how this goes, you could then investigate starting-up your own website. Although a directory can list your business address and phone number, including a link to more online details makes it much easier for a prospective customer, and could stop you losing prospective customers to a competitor who has a website.

Aim big, start small

If you decide your business could benefit there are different routes you can take. You could aim for a comprehensive website allowing customers to access your details, contact you and make purchases or

order goods and services online. Or you can start small and create a simple marketing site, perhaps only a handful of 'pages', offering information on your company and details of how to contact you.

Your budget is an obvious factor. It is possible to build your own site – particularly a small information site – but unless you are confident about your abilities you may be best to source a professional website designer.

Before commissioning someone to create your website, make sure you are clear on your objectives, and supply a detailed brief of what you want the website to achieve and how it should contribute to your business.

Look out for articles in future issues of *Royal Business* for tips and advice on getting your business online. And Streamline from the Royal Bank is a service which may be of interest. Covered in previous issues of *Royal Business* it provides a range of options designed to get your business trading online.

Follow the rules

Whatever you decide, there are a few factors to consider to help ensure you get the site you need:

- **Your image.** Cheap and cheerful? Professional? Cool and trendy? If you already have marketing literature, the website should reflect the same look and feel, to ensure you are presenting a consistent image.
- **Loading time.** If your site takes more than a few seconds to load many people will simply move on elsewhere.
- **Grab their attention.** Your first page should make it clear just what your

business has to offer and what makes you different from the competition.

- **Keep it clean.** Avoid cluttered background images and colours.
- **Make it easy.** Site navigation should be simple and straightforward.
- **Update.** The information on your site should be updated regularly. Regular visitors should be able to find something new each time they click on. You can use special offers, product news, surveys and competitions to hold the attention of your visitors.
- **Contact point.** Provide an email address so customers can contact you directly. Also include your address, and even a map and directions.
- **Security.** If you are looking to conduct transactions online, security is a factor. Again Streamline can help – why not ask your Business Relationship Manager for details.

Market your site

Once your site is up and running, you still have work to do. People need to know that your site exists, so make sure you put your web address on all of your marketing literature, adverts, invoices and emails.

The Internet needn't be feared. With some thought and research it can provide more choice for your customers, and help grow and expand the reach of your business. Thanks to the web, the world has become a much smaller place.

For more information visit www.streamline.worldpay.com. Alternatively you can request a leaflet by returning the attached response card, or calling free on 0800 521 607, quoting Ref. No. RB20.

Jargon buster

Baffled by some of the jargon on the Internet? Don't be. Here is some of the most common terminology.

Banner Ad

Advertisement seen on many Web pages encouraging users to click straight through to another site. They usually lie along the top or bottom of the page and can include moving images as well as text, for example a banner ad stating "Looking for a cheap holiday – click here" could take you through to a Tour Operator's website.

Browser

The browser allows the user to search the World Wide Web. Examples are Microsoft Explorer and Netscape.

Bookmark

Virtual bookmarks record a URL or web page to enable you to refer back to it at a later date.

Domain Name System (DNS) rbs.co.uk is a domain name. The first part is usually the business name and the .co.uk stands for a company in the United Kingdom. There are many variations, for example .gov.uk indicates a government website. Every Internet address must be unique.

E-commerce

Conducting business transactions over the Internet, such as buying products or services from Web sites.

ISP

(Internet Service Provider) An organisation or business which provides access to the Internet, usually for a fee, eg Freeserve.

Search engine

A device that enables you to search the Internet for a specific file.

URL

(Uniform Resource Locator) A unique identifier, or address, assigned to a web page, eg. www.rbs.co.uk.