**Untap your online potential**

Don’t slip up when it comes to your business’ website, maximise its potential and reap the rewards.

A website is as fundamental a requirement for a modern mortgage advice business as a phone and a car. But how can you make sure the investment you put in to your business site will pay off? We asked the experts for some tips to maximise your online presence.

**Keep it simple**

If you’re trying to attract new clients to your website, you need to make it as easy-to-understand as possible.

Use your homepage to state who you are, what you do and how you can help potential clients.

Add a photo of yourself so would-be customers know who they will be talking to when they pick up they phone or send an email - but be wary of relying too heavily on stock photos, you don’t want to look like every other site out there!

Teresa Watkins, of website design firm Monster Graphics, said business owners should convey their expertise and knowledge to give clients confidence in what’s being offered.

She said personalisation was particularly important for mortgage advisers who were relying on their own names and reputations for their brand.

“Videos are gold,” she said. “Talk about your hobbies, your family, what you like to do at the weekend.”

She said New Zealand businesspeople sometimes seemed particularly reluctant to personalise their sites but it was the difference between one that was mediocre and a successful site. “People don’t like putting a photo up, let alone a video or information about their families – people have the most reluctance there but these are the important things in creating a successful website.”

**Make it easy to find what customers are looking for**

Do not force people to scroll endlessly or hunt through lists of links to find what they are looking for.

Think about what your potential clients most need and provide that in the clearest positions.

**Make it adaptable**

It’s no good having a beautiful website if it only works for people viewing it on a desktop PC. Your website should adapt to the device that is being used. Many people might find your site through Facebook while using their iPads, for example, or want to click on your phone number to call you direct from your site via their phones.

**Focus**

Would most people come to you because they need help getting a mortgage? Or because they want to make sure they are getting the best deal? Or are your clients self-employed or in unusual circumstances that require expert help?

Don’t try to be everything to everyone. Watkins said people should research their target markets and work out what they would want to know.

 “If you’re trying to rattle off how great you are and all your qualifications you’re not solving anyone’s problem.”

Once you know who you want to target, set up your website to speak to them.

If you want to appeal to first-home buyers, focus on avoiding jargon and explaining in straightforward terms how you can help them navigate the property purchase process process. If you cater for investors, talk about how you can help them find their way through rules and regulations to get deals done.

Can you give away something your ideal client would want? You could offer downloadable free guides to making an offer or finding the perfect house. Can you negotiate a discount for your clients with a valuer, or a property inspector?

Watkins said websites should answer questions before people even knew they had them and work to have a conversation with clients to keep them engaged.

**Build trust**

Use your website to build connections with potential clients. Showcase your credentials, including any relevant association memberships or qualifications.

Watkins said small businesses should always include testimonials from clients on their sites, preferably with videos.

**SEO**

Don’t be tempted to skimp on your website content.

Have it written by someone who is confident about crafting search-engine friendly copy, without making it read like a collection of keywords.

A website with good search-engine optimisation should appear further up the rankings than competitors. You will need target keywords in the first few paragraphs of your website content.

You may need to be tactical with these – in an industry such as mortgage broking, there is a lot of competition. While featuring “home loans” as a key word probably will not make you stand out against competition from banks and big lenders, targeting an area or type of borrower might give you more success.

**Update**

Don’t let your website get old.

There is always something to say about mortgages. Update your blog regularly, even if it’s something as simple as posting links to news articles about interest rates that you think are useful. If there’s a tip you can offer clients to get a deal across the line, offer that.

Let them know about any great rates you’ve been able to access. Tell them what an OCR decision could mean for them. Keeping your page fresh will help it rank better and also ensure you maintain your status as an expert in the field.

Watkins said people should also start pushing their site out via social media channels, Google ads and other advertising. You can use your website to judge the effectiveness of your marketing campaigns.

 “You need to be proactive and promote it,” she said.

“It’s one thing having a good website but it’s pointless if no one knows about it.

PULLQUOTE: Do not force people to scroll endlessly or hunt through lists of links to find what they are looking for.