

## **Small Business Technology: More Than Just Websites**

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Carlos Moreno

For more than 10 years, I've been building websites for small businesses of all types – from oil & gas companies to lawyers, doctors, and lawn care companies, restaurants, gift stores and real estate developments – the list goes on. Over time I've seen improvements in technology, and in the way that businesses are using software tools to achieve their goals. In this article I'll showcase a few web-based applications and the advantages for your business.

Recently one buzzword that's gained press and popularity is "web 2.0" What does web 2.0 mean? As with most buzzwords, ten different technology experts are going to give you ten different answers, but what resonates the most for me is that web 2.0 means a greater level of communication and collaboration, both within your organization and with your customers.

### **Collaborate anywhere, easily**

Lately companies have been creating online versions of typical applications that most companies use every day – spreadsheets, word processing, accounting, and time management tools. A great on-line tool is Google Apps: <https://www.google.com/a/>. I can create a document quickly from my home in the morning and send it to the office (and it won't get lost in my huge pile of email). I can also share my list of leads with sales reps so that each one of us knows what potential clients have been contacted. The ease of use and low cost of implementation (many of them are free) of these office applications allows small business to be more flexible than ever before.

### **Sift through the clutter**

Another great development in web 2.0 has been the advancements in blogs and RSS feeds. These tools allow you to keep up-to-date on new information that is posted to your favorite web sites. You no longer need to constantly scan web sites to keep track of new industry information. Now it's possible to have the most current information in one place. What a timesaver! For businesses, I see blogs and RSS as a means for sifting through the clutter, allowing you to focus on the topics and the industries that you need to know about. Give it a try. Go to a website called Feed Reader: <http://www.feedreader.com/>, or find an RSS aggregator via Google, Yahoo, or MSN, and give it the RSS feeds of a few news sources you frequently check. You will find that some news sources even allow you to create your own RSS feeds by giving them an industry or a few key phrases that you would like to keep up with. Every time a new news item comes out with those words, you'll be notified of it.

**Be the authority**

What happens when you've searched high and low, gathered together your news feeds and find that *you're* the expert in your industry? What a perfect opportunity! One of the greatest assets a business can have in this age of information is to be the best source on what your customers want to know. If you can provide those gems of information to your customers, not only will they keep coming back to you, but you'll stand out from the crowd as being the best at what you do. Web 2.0 can help you here as well. Easy-to-use tools such as Campaign Monitor: <http://www.campaignmonitor.com/> allow you to publish an email newsletter to your client base, and then track the results, letting you know how many people have opened your email, gone to your website, even bought a product you might have been promoting. Bottom line, to be competitive in this day and age you must take advantage of technology, your competitors are!