

**Necessity is the mother of invention**

Whatever the size of your business, the internet offers you a potential worldwide audience of over 400 million people. In the UK over 70% of the population has access to the internet. This new way of conducting business offers you a chance of improving customer service at minimal cost and with faster communication times.



**i e-novice?**

If you don't yet have a website or email you're not alone. However, you are missing out on potential business. It's simple, quick and inexpensive to get the basics in place and there are many sources of information available. The key things you should have are:

**An email address** – this is the quickest, most cost-effective method of communicating with your customers and suppliers. You can personalise email as you would a letter and offer individual responses to individual customers. Email provides a written record of what was agreed in the case of any dispute. And email reduces postage, telephone and stationery costs.

**A website** – this is an advert for your business available 24 hours a day with up-to-date information about prices, facilities and pictures. Even with no other features, this should instil confidence that you are trading and that you operate professionally. Your website promotes

your business your way. You can have it designed professionally. Or with some training you can do it yourself. You just need to be prepared to learn new jargon like *search engine optimisation* and *website accessibility*. Research your options or attend an e-business training workshop available across London through Business Link London.



“Our website is available in 13 different languages and we also have an accessible version for those with visual impairments.”  
Serena von der Heyde,  
Georgian House, Pimlico.

Make your website easy to use. Not every potential customer has a high-speed broadband connection, perfect vision and speaks English as their first language. You can apply the same reasoning to the search engines that present your website to customers. If the website is designed to be accessible, the search engines will find it easily and quickly. This means that search engines will give your site a favourable position in their listings.



## e-experienced?

You have a website and are comfortable with web jargon. You're ready to move onto more advanced e-commerce and email marketing.

Email marketing is the simplest way to raise awareness of your business, create a demand for it and encourage sales e.g. when you want to promote a special offer to fill a quiet time. You send a tailored message to an interested audience with one click. There are some legal issues to be aware of such as data protection and customer privacy. However these are quite simple to understand and follow. The Business Link London website has good summaries [www.blondon.com](http://www.blondon.com). Professional software systems for designing and sending e-newsletters and managing your contacts database cost £400 - £500 per year.

Online booking needs a website that inspires trust, shows integrity and is transparent and simple to use. About

80% of shoppers abandon trying to buy something online because of websites that are complicated to use. The golden rules are:

- Design a site and ordering process that are easy to use
- Inspire confidence
- Check out competitors' sites and the most popular, famous sites
- Talk to your customers to find out what works for them

Money from online transactions can often be in your business bank account before ordinary credit card transactions.

Visit London offers its partners a simple online booking service that can help you reach a much larger market. You need an email address and then you simply let them know when you have rooms available.

## Useful websites

[www.tourismtrade.org.uk/Businessadvice/producingawebsite.asp](http://www.tourismtrade.org.uk/Businessadvice/producingawebsite.asp)  
[www.blondon.co.uk](http://www.blondon.co.uk)  
[www.frontdesk.co.uk/eviivo\\_frontdesk](http://www.frontdesk.co.uk/eviivo_frontdesk)

## London knowledge

Architects of the new planetarium at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich designed the visible elements to relate to its astronomical as well as local context: the cone is tilted by  $51.5^\circ$  so its central axis points to the North Star. The sliced-off end of the cone is parallel to the celestial equator and mirrored to reflect the northern hemisphere of the night sky.

Allies and Morrison.

