

[Back](#)

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Effective websites key to boosting client base, says BIM::

By Alex Wright

Businesses in Bermuda need to ensure they have an effective website and Internet marketing strategy in order to boost their online presence and attract more new clients.

That is the view of Lorraine Silvia, online copywriter and search marketer at Bermuda Internet Marketing (BIM), who has just launched a seven-part series on the key principles of online marketing which is dispatched on a bi-weekly basis to a wide customer base in a bid to make firms more aware of their websites and how to use them to best effect - starting this week with the topic of focus.

In August, *The Royal Gazette* reported on a survey by the Economist Intelligence Unit which revealed that Bermuda had slipped down the world rankings for e-business readiness, but remained in the top 25 countries. The report showed that in 21st place, the Island was still ahead of Japan, but down four spots from 2008, with the country's profile in the categories for connectivity, legal environment and Government policy and vision comparing favourably with other jurisdictions

But Ms Silvia, who is part of a four-man team at BIM including husband and co-founder Edward and web designer and Internet marketing specialist Matthew Earle, believes there is a lot of room for improvement for the Island's companies to bring themselves fully into the 21st Century.

"In order for Bermuda Internet Marketing to effectively reach our goals, we need to make sure that our customers (Bermuda businesses) are educated about the need and benefits of having a very good website and effective online marketing," she said.

"In terms of Bermuda being ready for e-commerce, there is a lack of confidence by many of the businesses here to manage their websites and online presence, with some companies outsourcing their entire website and development to overseas firms.

"There is still a lot of room for growth in this industry in Bermuda and basically what they need to know is that really, in this day and age, in order to attract new clients and retain existing ones, you have to be able to operate effectively online and if you can offer those services and it is easy to find all of the information they want at their fingertips you will do so."

Ms Silvia said that there was a lot to be positive about Bermuda's website and Internet offerings, including Butterfield Bank's payment services department, which had made it easier for customers to do their banking online.

However she added there were a number of downsides to doing business on the Island, ranging from the high cost of setting up domain names to employing hosting services.

Ms Silvia said it was vital for companies to optimise their presence on search engines, citing several organisations who were losing out to their rivals as a result of being absent from Google searches and through a lack of online advertising and banner advertisements.

"I think that the more education they get the better that it is not just about their website, but also what it does and can offer in terms of being well designed," she said.

"A lot of Bermuda companies are not exposed to or aware of what they need to do to compete with their rivals in real terms - there are a lot of huge companies in the public and private sector who have an awareness that they need to have a good website, but they have no idea to what extent that means.

"They need to be able to offer their clients the ability to do so much of what they don't want to do any more over the phone to save time - a lot goes into a good website and I think that is where we do so well because of the technical skills that we use we are able to make them very user friendly."

Ms Silvia, who is also a part-time English teacher, first got into websites and online marketing when working as a freelance copywriter while studying for her English and Literacy Education degree in Boston and returned to Bermuda to continue to ply her trade and develop her skills, including a stint at the Bermuda Small Business Development Corporation, prior to teaming up with her husband and sister Marina Mello to combine their IT and public relations expertise to form BIM in June 2008.

Today the company covers everything from website design and development and search engine optimisation to online marketing, content management systems, electronic advertising and analytics programmes to study such factors as demand and profitability generated from Internet coverage.

Its client base ranges from re/insurance and financial services companies to quangos and small businesses, but one common theme throughout all of them should be to have the same philosophy on their website and online marketing from the top to the bottom, according to Ms Silvia.

For more information call 300-8082 or visit the live chat room on the website at www.bermudainternetmarketing.com
