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ON-LINE BUSINESSES MUST MEET 4 -SECOND CHALLENGE

Businesses feeling the pain of the economic downturn are re-evaluating the importance of an on-line presence to increase their reach and accessibility.

Guennadi Moukine, managing director of web and email hosting company FAST.hit said having a website was now a necessity for most businesses – from large telcos to small retailers. But websites had to have a clear purpose and effective structure to deliver good business results.

Mr Moukine said a report by on-line content delivery service Akamai indicated that on-line shoppers were only willing to spare four seconds to explore a new website.

“If a site is too slow or too hard to navigate, people just don’t bother and move on,” he said. “You may not be aware of how many potential clients you may be losing just because your web site does not pass the 4-second attention span challenge.”

Mr Moukine said simply having a website would not result in a miraculous sales increase or reduced operating costs. But companies that followed common sense and simple guidelines were achieving amazing results around the clock by running well designed and structured web sites.

FAST.hit worked closely with many Australian web development firms and web site owners to provide quality web site hosting, backup, email and troubleshooting services and had identified the following basic rules for a successful on-line presence:

1. **Purpose** – determine exactly what you want to achieve with your web site. If it is sales, make sure it is easy to browse your products and complete the transaction. If it is information, make sure that the web site has your contact details on every page. Make it easy for people to follow.
2. **Usability** – build a relationship with the company that hosts your web site. When something goes wrong and you are unable to contact your web developer, your host may be your saviour.
3. **Speed** – you may not be aware that your web site is hosted overseas. Apart from support and security issues, this has an impact on speed. Move your web site to a local hosting company with a proven reputation, uptime and good back-up procedures.

4. **Reporting** – make sure your site has good reporting tools (eg. Google Analytics) that show the pages people enter and leave your web site. Use this information to improve it.
5. **Optimisation** – think of the keywords people would use when searching for your products on search engines. Use these keywords in the web site text. Talk to your web developer or hosting company about what else can be done to make your web site findable on the Net.

FAST.hit provides shared, dedicated VPS and co-location services from Perth and Sydney datacentres to businesses across Australia.

It is also a strong supporter of the web community and a platinum sponsor of the WA Web Awards held in Perth this week (www.wawebawards.com.au).

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