

Digital transformation should be a priority for small businesses in South Africa

 By [Stefano Maruzzi](#)

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When a water pipe bursts in your home one morning, your initial reaction will probably be to grab your smartphone and search Google for a plumber nearby.



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Perhaps there is one just around the corner, but you wouldn't know about them if they don't show up in your search results. This scenario sums up why a good digital presence has become a must for small businesses in South Africa. The internet – and almost any business opportunity - is where the customers are.

According to the [2019 Global Digital Report](#) prepared by We Are Social and Hootsuite, 54% of the South African population are internet users. This means there are 31 million people in South Africa who are searching for products and services online; 29 million of them are active mobile internet users. With numbers like that, digital transformation is critical for any small business that wishes to find more customers and grow.

First step on the road

We believe the journey of digital transformation starts with creating your own online identity. This is creating a place of your own online, starting with a website, and letting people know who you are, what you do, and what you offer. Think of it as your mobile storefront or your online business card. Start small and grow over time: no need to overengineer or overspend.

Website builders can help you get a professional-looking website up and running in a short amount of time, even if you don't have a big budget or any technical skills. And it will look amazing on a smartphone, not just yours. Once you've created your website, you can start looking at using tools like social media, search engine optimisation, and e-mail marketing to help reach new customers and stay in touch with existing ones.

Thanks to the internet and the digital tools available today, it's not as hard or as expensive to create and promote your brand as it once was. First, a solid strategy is important, and it should include ways of showing your target audience what makes your brand and products unique.

Here are some other tips about how you can get value from your digital presence:

- **Mobile continues to rise:** As we've mentioned before, more than 90% of internet users in South Africa are mobile. You should focus on improving site speed, navigation structures and readability on mobile devices, and look to optimise your website from the start for the mobile experience.
- **Simple design:** This is an extension of creating mobile-first experiences, and it's important that your website looks and works great on all screen sizes. This year, web design will focus on relevant and catchy content as well as design to help ensure you catch your users' attention.
- **Feature "platforms".** What do I mean by platforms? This includes maps, payment solutions, food delivery services, and shared rides fall into this definition. Our friend the plumber might not need these for his website, but a restaurant could truly benefit from adding maps, partnering with a booking or reservation service and even a customer rating solution.

With an increased number of data breaches occurring, protecting your new website and your customers' data has become even more important for companies of all sizes. Whether or not a website has an SSL Certificate, it can affect your search rankings, so you should ensure your site has the added SSL Certificate protections.

Voice search and chat – are they in your business's future?

Looking to the future, we can expect to see the digital world evolve at breakneck speed. Two trends to be on the look-out for in the not-too-distant future are voice search and chatbots. Currently, one out of every five internet searches come from voice queries, which means people are speaking their searches into their smart devices.

Therefore, while optimising your website and content for search engines, it will be important to do it for voice searches, keeping in mind the growing use of virtual assistants like Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant and Cortana. We can also expect to see more businesses using chatbots powered by AI on their websites, as well as social media profiles and applications, to provide instant assistance for their customers.

Perhaps your small business is planning to start implementing these tools during the year. Or it could be several years before these features are on your radar. Either way, they highlight some potential ways your evolving digital presence can allow you to find and interact with customers in new powerful ways.

ABOUT STEFANO MARUZZI

As more small companies look to establish their online presence around the world, GoDaddy is expanding its European operations and has appointed Stefano Maruzzi as its Vice President of EMEA (Europe, the Middle East and Africa).

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