

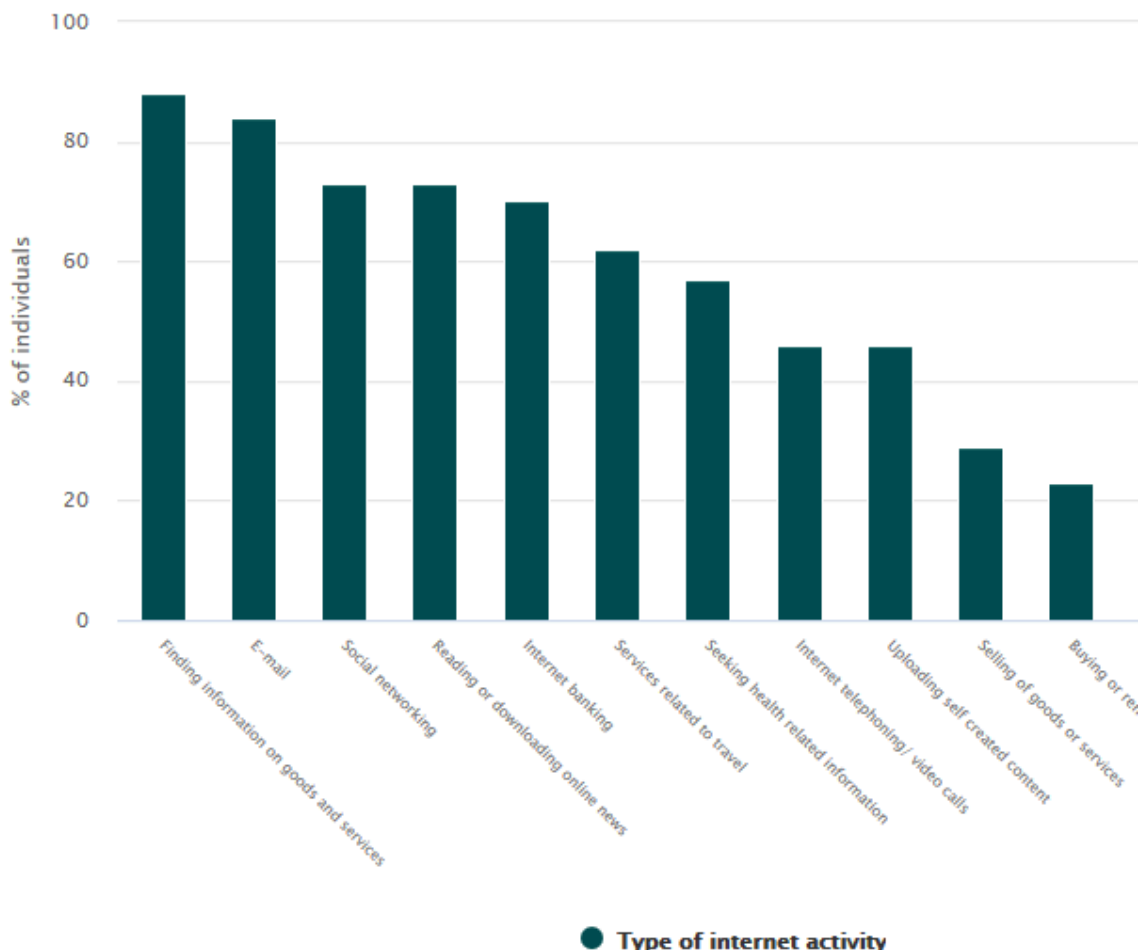
Building An Online Presence

We all see the significant impact the internet has had on consumer behaviour. But believe it or not, it is not uncommon for small businesses to continue to operate without an online presence that can help hugely in boosting revenue and profits.

Why Businesses need an online presence

You could be losing out to your competitors if you do not have any online presence.

The table below from the CSO (Central Statistics Office) gives a good overview of what people are using the internet for. The most popular activity shows 88% of individuals use the internet to find information on goods or services before they buy.



When potential customers want to find out about your product and services, they will check your website first.

If your business is unable to 'close the sale' there and then, then you could be at a big disadvantage and missing out on valuable customers that are interested in what you have on offer!

Cost

Building a website can be expensive and the cost usually depends on the functionality of the website. If you need a basic e-commerce website (enabling your business to sell online) you can shop around and find a freelance web designer or an agency to build your website at a relatively low cost versus the return.

Things you should bear in mind when choosing between a freelance web designer and a design agency:

	Freelancer	Agency
Design	Cheap and cheerful	Custom and professional
Development	Limited functionality	Bespoke and skilled functionality
SEO	Basic implementation	Advanced techniques
Social Media	Includes integration	Integrated with marketing plan/advice
Training	Little to no training	In-person, followed by videos and online documentation
Marketing	Not included	Dedicated team of marketing experts
Warranty	30 days or may not be offered	Anywhere from 30 days to one year
Support	Not included	Phone and email support
Communication	One freelancer split between many clients	Dedicated project manager devoted to your company
Teamwork	May only be interested in their next paycheck	Wants to work with you long term and see your business succeed

(Source: When potential customers want to find out about your product and services, they will check your website first.)

If your business is unable to 'close the sale' there and then, then you could be at a big disadvantage and missing out on valuable customers that are interested in what you have on offer! If you are investing in a website that will enable you to trade online, you may also be eligible for financial assistance for up to 50% of the costs through your Local Enterprise Office (See next section)

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

If you are an established business and have been trading for 6 months or more, you may be eligible to apply for a Trading Online Voucher Scheme

This scheme is designed for small businesses to enable you to expand your reach by offering grant assistance of up to €2,500 along with training and advice to help your business set-up and trade on-line.

The scheme works on the basis that if you spend up to a maximum of €5,000 on an e-commerce website, you can claim up to 50% of the costs through your Local Enterprise Office (LEO).

Remember: Microfinance Ireland provides loans from €2,000 to €25,000 which can be used to fund the initial outlay to get your business trading online voucher.