

SPECIAL EDITION
MAJOR BANKS RANKED

The Adviser

MAY 2011
ISSUE 5.5

\$8.95 (inc GST)

The magazine for Australia's mortgage and finance brokers

THIRD PARTY BANKING REPORT:

MAJOR LENDERS

Brokers rate the big banks on their third party operations

Plus

WEB SAVVY

Why your website speaks volumes about your business

LOCAL LEGEND

How one brokerage is thinking big on a small scale with its marketing strategy

ISSN 1838-6636



838 663002



ON THE WEB

A professionally designed website can help brokers attract new clients, market their services and gather helpful information about visitors to the site

A BROKER'S website is often the first contact a client – or a potential client – will have with them.

The site's appearance reflects the face of the company as well as the message its brokers are trying to convey and it should therefore be considered a high priority.

Creating a company website might cost upwards of \$5,000 and on top of that there will be around \$400 per annum in hosting fees. That might sound like a lot, but given the importance of having a professional-looking web presence it's money well spent and should be considered a priority.

A site that looks 'tired', fails to reflect a professional image or is difficult to get around does nothing for a broker's reputation – particularly in the eyes of younger, web-savvy potential clients who might be eyeing their first home purchase.

MONEY WELL SPENT

Alison Whittle, director of operations at brokerage Tiffen and Co., says at the outset the cost of creating and establishing a website might appear substantial and therefore a low priority.

"However, once in place, the ongoing costs are relatively low," she points out.

"Our website is professional yet informative and I believe it caters to a whole range of demographics," she says. "It is an extension of our corporate image."

The younger the client base, the more likely its members are to research goods and services – via websites – to communicate, and to make transactions online.

It's therefore less a case of brokers needing to keep up with technology; rather, the clients of the future will have a preferred way of doing business and if brokers don't respond then they won't get the business.

"Our website is a valuable tool for both new and existing clients," Ms Whittle says. "Not providing a more technologically contemporary means of communication could alienate an entire generation."

As well as communicating a broker's image and message, a website can also be an invaluable marketing tool, playing an important role in promotional and marketing strategies, Ms Whittle says.

"Securing an online presence makes a powerful statement about your business and shows you have planned your business for the future," she says.

"From my perspective, if a company doesn't have a web presence I would certainly question their professionalism."

A good website will deliver new clients, build brand equity and make a customer feel involved in the daily operations of the business.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

Tiffen and Co. commissioned Canberra-based group Coordinate to design and build the company's website. The site now includes a 'submit an enquiry' feature, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube connectivity and a media centre that hosts articles and company newsletters.

"A good website updated regularly with quality content will have a better chance of ranking in search engines, allowing new customers to discover the business," Coordinate digital manager Andrew Kominek says.

"Mortgage brokers operate in an industry that requires a high level of education. The website should have informative, easy to understand advice for customers looking to invest in a home or property.

"The services and types of loans available should be made clear, and a loan calculator should be available," he says.

The site should broadly reflect the values of the business and its ability to meet the needs of the customer. It should have simple, descriptive language supported by relevant and engaging visual content.

Some of the best websites go beyond basic information to tell a story and take the visitor on a

journey. A unique background or interesting story can add depth to a broker's website.

A decent site would cost a minimum of \$5,000 and should not cost more than \$15,000, depending on the scope and requirements. Domain and hosting should cost approximately \$400 per year and should come with a minimum of five email addresses.

FROM VISITOR TO CLIENT

Tools that allow brokers to view poll results, visitor traffic and feedback are also valuable ways to keep up with the needs of clients.

"We review data from our site on a monthly basis, which allows us to identify areas that require development," Ms Whittle says.

"For example, our most recent report shows high traffic to our website as a source of obtaining contact details."

As a company grows, so must its online 'equivalent'. A web designer will need to update information regularly, add new features and develop the site to suit the changing needs of its visitors.

"I think it's vital we continue to develop our website as the demographic of our client base evolves," Ms Whittle says. ■

WEBSITES

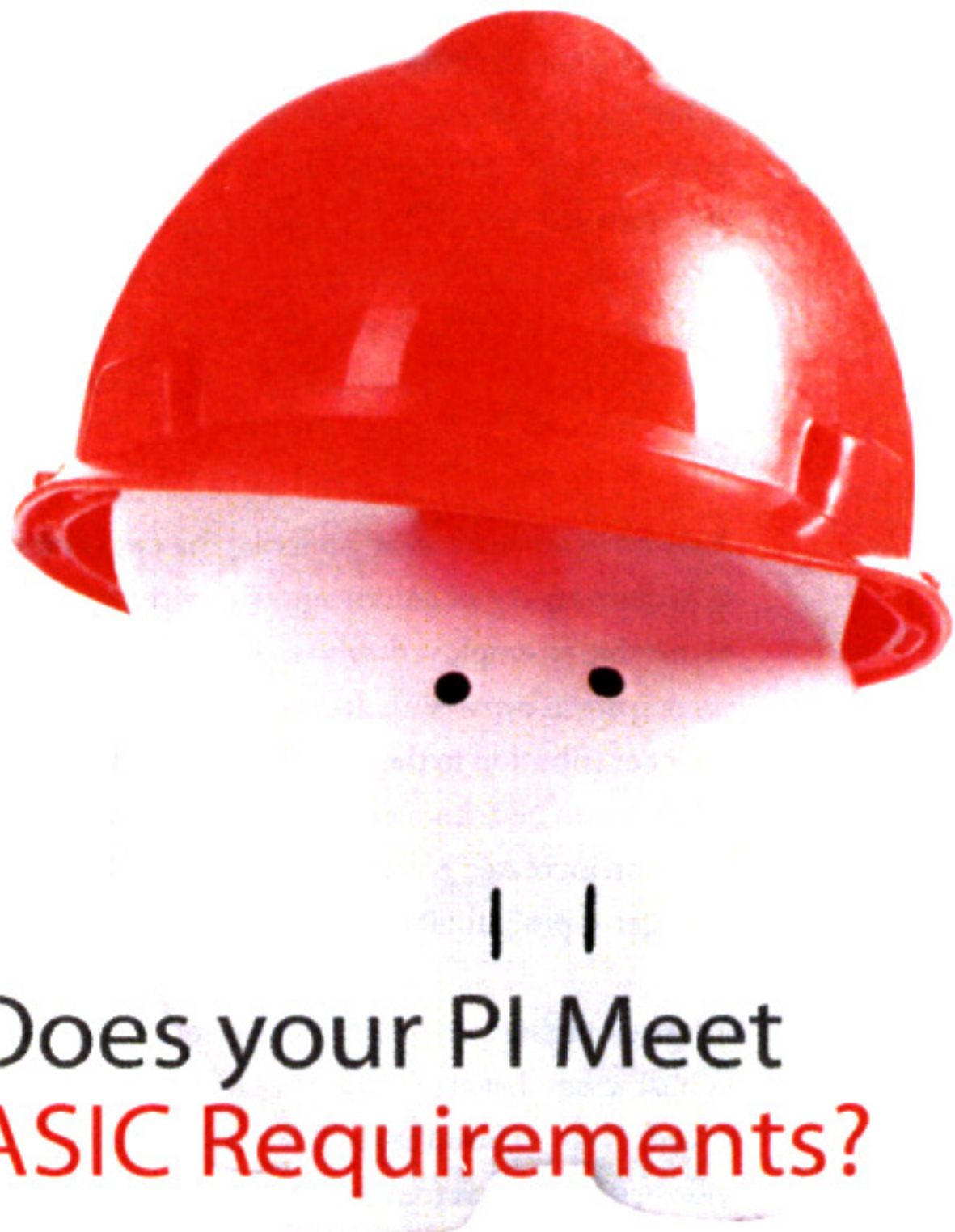
Given the significant benefits, creating a website is money well spent towards your strategy for ensuring the success of your business:

LOW COST – from \$5,000 for creating the site, plus \$400 annually for hosting fees.

BENEFITS – allows the customer to know the who, what, where, when and how of the business; having a website also means the business is effectively available 24/7.

OPTIONS – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other media links; the option of including opinion polls and user-generated content for feedback and enquiries.

TOP OF MIND – a website should be consistent with the company brand and designed around the values of the business and needs of the customer; a site map should be developed, containing a clear navigation pathway and the relevant information.



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