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I'm on Instagram. Do I also need a website?

Complementary channels, control of information and decision criteria for small businesses

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English

Abstract

Choosing between a presence solely on social media and creating a website involves decisions about discovery, trust, the organisation of information and business continuity. This article develops a narrative review of the literature on customer experience, official statistics on digital adoption and technical documentation on search and accessibility. The analysis distinguishes a channel's popularity from its suitability for a task and separates statistical association from causal effect. It proposes a matrix for identifying when a website adds operational capacity, an illustrative journey between Instagram, search and contact, and a 30-day evaluation protocol. The central argument is that a website's usefulness depends on reducing specific questions and obstacles: stable information, a presentation of services, commercial terms, contact and, where relevant, a transaction. The investment should be sized according to the work the business needs to do and monitored through indicators of qualified demand, rather than justified solely by follower numbers or the existence of competitors with websites.

Keywords: digital presence; Instagram; websites; customer experience; small businesses; multichannel strategy.

1. Introduction

A small business can showcase its work, reply to messages and receive orders through Instagram. For anyone already operating in this way, the relevant question is: what additional capacity would justify creating and maintaining a website? Answering requires observing how customers discover the business, which questions they seek to resolve and where the commercial relationship breaks down.

A digital presence spans several touchpoints. A recommendation may lead to a profile; a photograph may spark interest; a search may confirm opening hours; a services page may allow alternatives to be compared. The customer may return days later through a different channel. Consequently, attributing the entire sale to the last click simplifies a journey that includes exposure, evaluation and decision-making.

Lemon and Verhoef frame customer experience as a process involving multiple touchpoints, both within and outside the company's control. This perspective helps assess consistency between channels, rather than choosing a universal winner between social media and a website. The contribution is conceptual: it does not demonstrate that adding a website to any profile produces a particular increase in sales. (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016)

2. Method and scope of the analysis

A targeted narrative review was conducted, with sources consulted on 20 November 2026. The search focused on customer experience, business digital adoption and technical website requirements. Priority was given to scientific articles identifiable by DOI, Eurostat statistics, OECD reports and original documentation from Google, the W3C and the .pt registry. Search terms included “customer journey multiple channels”, “enterprises website social media” and “SME digital transformation”.

Commercial estimates without an accessible methodology and claims that a website alone multiplies turnover were excluded. There were no interviews, collection of customer data or conversion experiments. The matrices and example presented are original analytical proposals, not validated instruments. This selection is suitable for an initial management decision; it is not a systematic review of all the available literature.

3. What digital adoption allows us to conclude

In 2025, 79.01% of the businesses covered by the European statistics had a website and 63.57% used social media. The two indicators coexist and should not be added together: the same business may fall into both categories. Coverage generally concerns businesses in certain sectors with at least ten persons employed; it does not directly represent self-employed professionals or microbusinesses as a whole. These figures describe adoption without demonstrating that either channel caused better performance. (Eurostat, 2026)

The OECD treats digital transformation as a combination of technology, skills and reorganisation. The interpretation applicable to a small business is that acquiring a tool should be accompanied by a process: who updates the information, who receives enquiries and how the team follows up on the response. An outdated website and an unattended inbox are organisational problems, even if the tools work technically. (OCDE, 2021)

There are therefore three distinct questions. The first is whether the audience uses a channel. The second is whether that channel allows the task to be completed. The third is whether the business can operate it well. A rigorous decision considers all three. The fact that a social network reaches many people does not automatically resolve the need to present detailed terms; the existence of pages on Google does not guarantee that someone can get a response after completing a form.

4. Different functions in the same journey

4.1. Discovery and interest

Instagram allows a business to present recent activity, show its work in context and talk to people who respond. For visual businesses, this sequence can be particularly useful: a haircut, a decoration or a dish makes the service observable. The content should, however, enable an interested person to find current, consistent information when they decide to take the next step.

A website allows pages to be organised around needs: a service, a location served, a type of project or a purchasing question. Google recommends helpful content, descriptive titles and links that allow pages to be discovered. The practical consequence is to write for recognisable customer questions and make the answers accessible. The documentation does not present publication or SEO as a guarantee of a specific ranking. (Google, s.d.-a)

4.2. Stable, comparable information

An old post may continue to be viewed after a price or opening hours have changed. It is useful to establish a main source for commercial information and check that the other channels point to it. A service page can bring together scope, exclusions, price or the basis for a quote, timescale and the next action. The social media profile can lead to that page while retaining its role in presentation and conversation.

Table 1. Roles of the channels in the customer journey

Customer task	Instagram's contribution	Possible website contribution
Discover the work	Reels, photographs and recommendations	Service pages and search results
Confirm information	Bio, highlights and replies by message	Stable, organised content that can be updated
Compare options	Posts and conversation	Tables, frequently asked questions and terms brought together
Take the next step	Message and profile link	Contact, form, appointment booking or purchase, if implemented
Return later	Saved or followed profile	Direct address and specific pages

Table 1 note. Original work. The functions depend on the actual configuration and the availability of services; the table does not attribute causal superiority to either channel.

4.3. Control and continuity

Having a website allows a business to decide its structure and retain copies of its content, if the contract ensures this. That control still depends on domain, hosting, maintenance and payment providers. The evaluation should identify the domain registrant, administrative access and export formats. Under the .pt rules in force since July 2026, the registrant acquires an exclusive, renewable right to use the registered name; this is not a perpetual acquisition independent of the rules and renewals. (Associação DNS.PT, 2026)

For a small business, the operational question is simple: if I change provider, can I keep the address, recover the content and maintain the contact channels? The answer should be documented before entering into a contract. The same care applies to the social media profile: access, authentication and recovery should be held by authorised people and should not depend on a team member who has left.

5. Decision matrix before investing

It is recommended to start with tasks that are still poorly resolved. The following table serves as a diagnostic worksheet; it is not a scientific scale and does not require a universal score.

Table 2. Diagnosis and a proportionate response

Observed sign	Check to carry out	Proportionate response
Repeated questions about services and prices	Review recent messages without exposing personal data	Short page with answers and terms
Interest from people who do not use Instagram	Test access to information without signing in	Public information at the business's own address
Services that are difficult to explain in a post	Ask someone to compare two options	Specific pages or sections
Enquiries get lost among messages	Follow an enquiry from the start through to the response	Form or tracking system
Need for sales or appointment booking	Check rules, payment and confirmation	Dedicated functionality, tested from end to end
Inconsistent content	Compare opening hours, price and contact details across channels	Main source and a person responsible for updates

Table 2 note. Original work. The solution may be one well-built page; the diagnosis does not assume an extensive project.

Priority should go to the obstacle with observable consequences. If an interested person already finds the company but does not understand what is included, clarity of the offer is more urgent than multiplying pages. If they cannot send an enquiry on a mobile phone, correcting that journey comes before a campaign to increase visits. If the business is not yet able to respond, capacity and responsibilities need to be defined.

6. Applied example: a florist

Consider a fictional florist that posts bouquets on Instagram and receives enquiries by message. Some people discover the work in a Reel; others search for “florist in Coimbra” because they need a delivery. A useful page brings together the florist's own photographs, bouquet types, the actual delivery area, the advance notice required, the price or how to request a quote, and accessible contact details.

The profile and website should communicate the same terms. If delivery depends on confirmation, the button should allow that confirmation to be requested. The page should distinguish an illustrative catalogue from actual availability. Showing a bouquet does not demonstrate that it is in stock, and sending a message is not the same as completing an order.

The flow can be designed as follows: discovery, viewing the relevant page, clarification of the terms, request, human or transactional confirmation and fulfilment. Each stage needs an action and a person responsible. The expected improvement is a reduction in questions and unviable requests, a hypothesis to be checked using the business's own data. This example does not represent a Lyntev customer or result.

7. Minimum quality and a 30-day evaluation

A website should allow people with different abilities and devices to read and use it. WCAG 2.2 provides testable accessibility criteria. In this context, it is relevant to check keyboard navigation, heading structure, contrast, alternatives to images and labelled fields. A partial checklist helps identify problems but does not allow full conformity with the standard to be declared. (W3C, 2024)

An initial evaluation over four weeks is proposed. In the first, record repeated questions and test the contact journeys. In the second, correct the main information. In the third, follow up on enquiries with the team. In the fourth, compare what people can do and which questions continue to arise. This window organises the work; it may be insufficient to estimate commercial impact, particularly with few visits.

Indicators should have explicit definitions: valid enquiries received, proposals sent and confirmed sales. A WhatsApp click is only a sign of intent. To compare weeks, it is important to record changes in campaigns, seasonality, availability and price. If the number of contacts

increases during a promotion, it is not possible to attribute that increase solely to the new website.

The content should continue to work when someone declines optional statistics. Measurement based on consent represents a subset of visitors and should be interpreted as such. Supplementing it with brief questions to customers, observation of tasks and minimal commercial records makes it possible to understand the journey without collecting unnecessary information.

8. Discussion and limitations

The decision depends on the sector, the complexity of the offer, the frequency of updates and operational capacity. A professional with a full appointment calendar and a simple offer may initially benefit from a short page. A clinic, a shop with payments or a service with several conditions may need a more extensive structure. The number of pages should follow that need.

This review does not estimate a universal return or demonstrate that businesses with websites causally outperform businesses without websites. Businesses that invest in digital presence may also invest more in customer service, staff or distribution. The European adoption indicators have coverage limitations, and the diagnostic proposal requires local adaptation. Usefulness should be assessed through the tasks and results observed in the particular context.

9. Conclusion

Instagram and a website can perform complementary functions within a coherent digital presence. Investment in a website becomes more justifiable when it resolves an identified need: making information public and stable, explaining an offer, facilitating an enquiry or supporting an operation. The decision should begin with the customer journey and end with an implementation scope, a person responsible for maintenance and a way of evaluating the result.

Appendix A. Worksheet for a decision meeting

1. What information is repeatedly requested, and where is it published today?

2. What task should someone be able to complete without first speaking to the team?

3. Which channels bring suitable enquiries, and how is this known?

4. Who confirms availability, responds and follows up on each enquiry?

5. Who will hold the domain, access credentials and a usable copy of the content?

6. What specific improvement will be evaluated after publication?

Editorial disclosure

Institutional authorship and editing: Lyntev. A narrative review and applied analysis, prepared with artificial intelligence support and not submitted for peer review. Frameworks and scenarios identified as our own do not constitute empirical research results.

Lyntev provides website and software services and has a commercial interest in these topics. The cited sources do not assess or recommend Lyntev or its products. The articles provide general assessment criteria; technical, legal or clinical decisions require consideration of the applicable context.

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