

# THE RIVERTOWNS Enterprise

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## THE BUZZ ON BUSINESS

### Designer charts online roadmap for small businesses

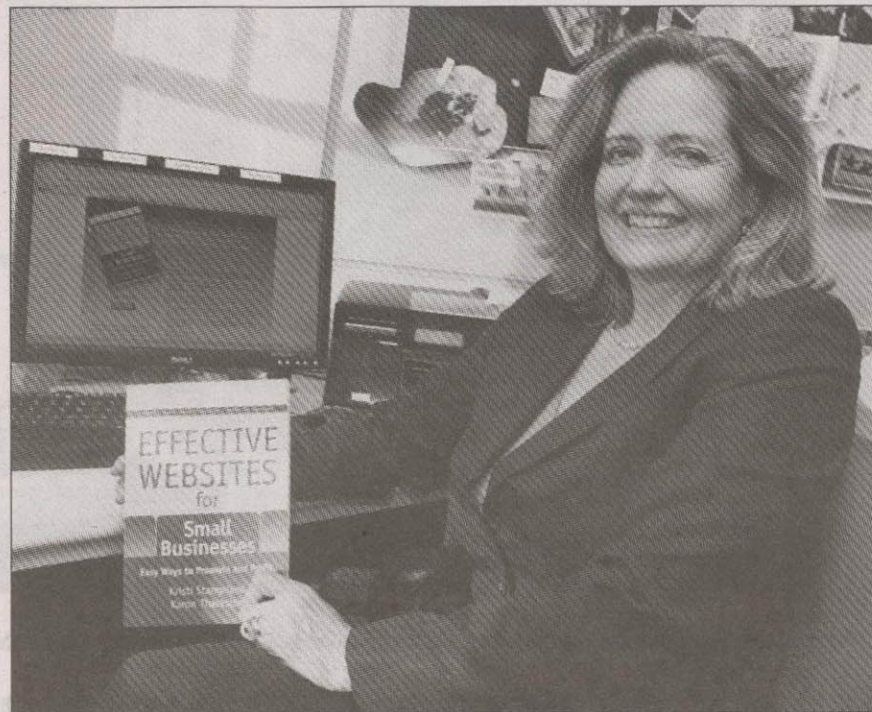
By David Maggiotto

These days most businesses have a Web site. All are not created equal, of course, and a poor Internet marketing strategy can render even the sharpest design ineffectual. Hastings resident Kristi Stangeland recently published a book, "Effective Websites for Small Businesses," which addresses this issue in detail.

Co-authored by Karon Thackston, the how-to guide provides small business owners with the framework for maximizing the utility of a business' online presence. "The book guides [business owners] through the process and helps them make informed decisions," Stangeland said in a phone interview earlier this week. She is the founder of Mustang Web Designs, and while her company builds Web sites for its clients, the book stops short of teaching web programming.

What Stangeland offers are strategies to most effectively promote a business on the World Wide Web. One key method is Search Engine Optimization (SEO). "There's a real art and science to it," Stangeland said regarding the esoteric practice of determining how a Web site rises to the top of a pile in a search field. She explained that programmers at Google, the most predominantly used search engine, design algorithmic formulas to determine which Web sites will be favored.

While these algorithms are not public, Stangeland explained that software programs have been designed to help decode the terms and phrases that would be



JIM MACLEAN/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Kristi Stangeland holds a copy of her new book, "Effective Websites for Small Businesses."

most beneficial for a particular Web site. Once these terms are identified, they must be inserted into the copy of this Web site to draw the attention of the search engine. Another way to draw Google's gaze is by providing links to other Web sites, and vice versa. Stangeland said that links to and from a business' Web site will factor favorably into a search engine's ranking criteria.

One way to use a Web site to market a business is to encourage visitors to leave their e-mail addresses behind before they browse away. "The best trick is to offer them something they might value," Stangeland said. She called e-mail newsletters "an underutilized area," and believes that they greatly increase the likelihood of a potential consumer returning to a business' Web site.

Stangeland also recommends small businesses sign up with Google places, which allows Web users to view a business on Google maps, thereby providing a link to the business' Web site. Other Web sites Stangeland recommends for providing links are social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, all of which can be used to market a small business' Web site.

Stangeland has been honing her expertise in Web design and research for more than a decade. She founded Mustang Web Designs in 2000 and continues to manage the business from an office at the home she shares with her husband, Peter Hinman, and two daughters in Hastings, where they have lived since 1995. What began as a one-woman operation has grown to include two part-time employees. Initially she programmed clients' Web sites herself, but now she outsources much of this work to freelancers. "You can't grow the business if you're constantly doing all of the work," she said.

Prior to the Internet age, Stangeland had a successful career as a certified public accountant for the finance departments of large businesses. In 1997 she quit her job as chief financial officer of Trinity Real Estate in Manhattan in order "to figure out the next step." She focused on her family and took classes, both in metal sculpture at Purchase College and online in HTML and Web programming. "Programming felt very natural," Stangeland said, and she saw Web site building

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## Stangeland

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as a means to marry her technical prowess with a creative vision.

"Effective Websites for Small Businesses," published in June 2010 by RJ Thompson Publishing Co., is Stangeland's second book. While it borrows some content from her first, "Effective Websites for CPAs," published in 2006, Stangeland pointed out that the Internet landscape has vastly changed in five years, notably with the rise of social media and blogging, neither of which were even given a passing mention in her first book.

Eight years ago Stangeland encountered Thackston's Web site, marketing-words.com, and the two have collaborat-

ed on various projects since then. Thackston, who lives in South Carolina, specializes in SEO copywriting. Stangeland said they worked on their book together for about a year. Effective Websites for Small Businesses is available on Amazon.com, or by visiting [effectivewebsitesforsmall-business.com](http://effectivewebsitesforsmall-business.com).