
Keys To An Effective And Profitable Web Site

by PETER KOEPEL

Gone are the days when having a web presence was something only for multi-national companies with huge marketing and technology budgets.

In today's business environment, having a web site is a must for any business, no matter how large or small. In fact, not having a web presence is like having a storefront in a busy shopping district, yet always having the "closed" sign displayed and the doors locked. So while people may have heard about you, they have no easy way to buy from you or to get more information about what you do.

Even if you currently have a web site for your company, have you analyzed it lately? Have you looked at it from today's perspective of web design? Have you thought about your web site from the perspective of your current customers or clients? For many businesses, the answer is "no." That is, they may have created a web site several years ago, but they have made little to no changes to it since then.

In order for your web site to be a true asset to your company, you need to follow some web site development guidelines. Following are the top tips to building a dynamic and profitable web presence for your business.

- *Whether you're designing a site from scratch or revising an existing site, you must first have a thorough understanding of the business, product or service your web site is going to promote or sell.* A good starting point is to research your competition and see what their sites look like. What about their sites do you like and dislike? While you don't want to totally

copy your competitor's web site, you can get pointers of what works and what doesn't work based on their design.

- *Make sure your web site is visually appealing for the target customer you have in mind.* Realize that unless you're targeting a very young demographic, cool graphics and flash animation typically turn off a lot of customers.

Also, avoid having too much clutter. Doing so can overwhelm or confuse people. However, you don't want too much empty space either. That may make you appear as if you don't have anything meaningful to say. It's a fine balancing act, but one worth mastering.

- *Give your web site a consistent look throughout.* If your home page is red and has a navigation bar across the top, then every other page must match that style. Designing every page differently confuses people. As they click from page to page, they may



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think they left your site. Other ways to ensure a consistent look include using the same font, graphic elements, color scheme and layout.

- **Design your site so it's easy to read.** If you're targeting seniors, make the font larger than if you were targeting teenagers. Use bullet points and lots of short paragraphs to break up the text. Additionally, keep the length of the text in your main message to one screen shot. Having a page that rambles on forever makes your site appear complicated. Keep your messages short and easy to understand.

- **Remember that usability is more important than aesthetics.** If a web site looks beautiful but doesn't convert prospects into buyers, then it's not an effective web site. Blend your message and the technology used to deliver it seamlessly. Your site needs to engage the target consumers so they can interact with the site almost effortlessly. When that occurs, consumers will have a better feeling about your product, service or brand, which will lead to a higher conversion rate.

- **Speaking of conversion rates, one of your site's main goals needs to be converting prospects into sales.** To make that happen, you need to give visitors to your site a satisfying experience. This means having the technology that makes the site secure so people feel comfortable shopping there and giving out their credit card. So while you want your site to be entertaining, you don't want people to be too distracted from the goal of learning more about your company or buying your product.

- **Be sure to work with a web designer who can analyze your site's performance and analyze results to improve the conversion to sales ratio.** Remember, your web site should not be a static type of marketing tool. You need to constantly review and update it so you can improve it over time. The most successful internet marketers frequently update their site and make it more usable.

Web Site Rewards

While web site design can be a complicated topic, it does follow some basic rules that anyone can master. So if you've had your web site for a long time, now is the perfect time to analyze it and make changes as appropriate. And if you're creating a new web site from the ground up, keep these guidelines in mind so you minimize your learning curve. Taking the time to analyze and plan your web site effectively will enable you to experience greater results and higher profits in the future. □

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