

Have you visited your own website lately?

It's a simple question, but one with significant consequences. Today, a website is the first, primary, and sometimes the only exposure a potential customer has with a company. Yet many organizations leave their websites in a state of neglect, with poorly designed functionality, out-of-date information, and a negative experience in the mind of a prospect that came to the website looking to do business.

You need to look at your website the way a customer looks at it. If it's frustrating for you to find what you're looking for on your own website, then it is twice as frustrating for them. One thing is for certain: prospects and customers will not stick around long to try and make a meaningful online connection to your business. To improve the user experience on your website, try visiting the site yourself and ask the following questions:

- Does each page have a clear title, and a clear explanation of its purpose and benefit to the user?
- Does the page have simple, understandable navigation that will take you to the main areas of the site, without hitting a dead-end or having important information that is difficult to find?
- Is there a clear, compelling value proposition on each page, as well as a solid, motivational call to action?
- Have you simply checked your site for correct grammar and punctuation, and have you tested all links, addresses and phone numbers for accuracy?

Spiraling Momentum

Internet commerce is on the move. According to a PricewaterhouseCoopers report commissioned by the Interactive Advertising Bureau, U.S. Internet advertising revenue hit a record \$26 billion in 2010. This represents 15 percent growth from 2009¹.

If the answer is no to any of these questions, then it may be time to reevaluate the effectiveness of your website. The best place to start is with usability and the navigation structure of your site. Usability means what it says: If customers cannot effectively use your website in an intuitive manner to find what they are looking for, they will look to another business. And a clean navigation structure is one of the keys to enhancing usability.

Links to all the main sub-sections of the site should be clearly identified with simple, straightforward titles and appear on every page. As a general rule, the main navigation should not contain more than six links. Each main section should contain a sub-navigation that enables you to drive deeper into information-rich content. To ensure reader engagement, each page should be around a 250-word maximum (also a general rule), so break into sub-pages frequently to prevent content overload. The navigation and page naming structure should be consistent site-wide; a user needs to get comfortable navigating your site and they need to stay that way.

The content should be crisp and engaging. That means that it should be on-target to communicate clear differentiation and a straightforward message. Each page should have a well-defined purpose, and



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try to avoid extraneous details. Links to other areas of the site should help in driving cross-selling opportunities and to reinforce the overall value of the site. Most importantly, there should be a strong call to action and an opportunity to reach a representative of the company directly on every page.

Online Marketing Strategies

How you market your business online involves the use of different tools to engage the prospect interactively, and the use of tools beyond your website. Web research company, siteIQ, has identified a recommended position of various online marketing strategies in the B2B selling process²:

- An active presence on social networks, mentions in heavily trafficked "expert" blogs, high 'news' visibility on popular search engines, and traction on the growing number of news aggregation sites are the tools companies need to move out of the shadows and make it onto the "long list."
- Making the "short list" requires an additional set of tools that educate buyers, including video data sheets and customer testimonials, short podcasts and on-demand Webinars, and a variety of company-operated communities.
- Once a company makes it into the finalist circle, the big guns come out. Interactive demonstrations and product tours (usually video). Live Webinars that allow task force members to pose questions. Try and buy options and short-term SAS subscriptions. Sales chat and other call to action behaviors that encourage task force members to engage with the company's sales force.

Andy Suggs, Lead Designer for Web Design firm The Visualab³, encourages a flexible strategy when approaching online marketing. "There is never just one right way," he shared. "It still is the Wild, Wild West out there with constantly emerging technologies. Before site construction begins, you need to clearly define what you want the online user experience to be, as certain online strategies require specific functionality and coding for the best support. It's always best to plan for that in advance rather than to try and retrofit a website."

Suggs also suggested not relying only on traditional search marketing techniques when trying to put your website out in front of prospects. "Leverage third-party endorsements as much as possible," he recommended. "Google has wised up to people trying to cheat organic rankings through keyword, meta tag and back link manipulations. The search engine now heavily weights social comments and discussions on your company, as well as relevant topics. Be sure your business is part of these discussions — acting as an industry leader — and encourage positive communications about your company in any way you can."

¹ "US Internet Ad Revenue Hit Record in 2010," Associated Press and CBS News, (April 13th, 2011), <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/04/13/ap/tech/main20053686.shtml>

² Marty Gruhn, "Why Social Networks, Communities, and Web 2.0 aren't B2B Shotguns," siteIQ, (April 7th, 2010), <http://www.siteiq.net/2106/why-social-media-not-b2b-shotguns>

³ <http://www.thevisualab.com/>



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