

## Setting Sights on Your Website: 8 Ways to Make Yours Better

Have you decided to take the plunge and claim your corner of the world wide web? Or do you think your current site doesn't make the grade? If so, hang on to your hard drive. Here are eight simple ways to make sure your web investment doesn't end up gathering dust.

### 1. Just the facts, ma'am.

Everyone likes to read a good story, but not everyone likes to read a good long story...especially online. Use short sentences, short words (which don't require a dictionary) and bulleted copy so that visitors aren't overwhelmed by your content. To illustrate, think about the fact that Readers Digest has more than 100 million readers. Something tells me Tolstoy can't say the same for *War and Peace*.

### 2. Where are the bread crumbs when you need them?

How easy is it to find things on your website? Does your navigation make sense, or do visitors need to hack through the jungle of your pages? Remember that if it's too hard to find an answer to their questions, visitors will just go on to the next site. Be sure that your navigation is creative, not confusing. Categorize information in commonly recognized patterns. To test yourself, ask someone who doesn't know your business to take a look and give you their opinion. Just make sure it's someone who will be honest.

### 3. Narcissus had a point.

For whom did you create your website? If your answer is, "our company and employees," you're on the wrong track. The most successful websites are designed and written for only one person: the user. Everything must be geared toward making their experience easy, interesting and engaging. If the only people that love your website are me, myself and I, it may be time to make a change.

### 4. Your teacher was right after all.

Did your school reports always say something like: "Johnny is a wonderful student, but he needs to practice his listening skills"? Those skills are even more valuable now. Knowing what your clients and prospects want applies to all aspects of your business, from the products you offer to the services you provide to the website you own. Make a habit of asking your clients regularly what they like or don't like about your site. Their answers may surprise you.

### 5. Content is king. And queen. And duke. And...

With your company website, your mission is to differentiate yourself from the competition, so focus on your strengths. What do you do well? Better than all the rest? If someone has ten different options to buy the same product or service, why should they buy from you? What makes you special in the first place? And keep in mind that if you don't have anything new to say, don't say anything.

### 6. Do you have an ugly pet?

If you show photos of your pet to coworkers and they cringe, you know what I mean. The same can hold true for photos of your products. Keep in mind that site visitors are often making purchasing decisions based on the pictures they see. If your product photos make them cringe, they won't be as likely to buy from you. (No matter how lovable or loyal your products may be.)



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### 7. Fast forward five years: does your site still work for you?

Do you want your customers to be able to order online in the future? Do you expect to add more products to your inventory? Do you anticipate hiring more staff? If you plan for those additions now, your site will really work for you, and you'll save yourself a big investment down the road.

### 8. Y'all come back now...ya hear?

How often do you update your content? Do you give your audience a reason to come back regularly? Think about adding some "stickier" content like a blog where you can post original thought about your industry or community. If you're not a blogger wannabe, try adding a news/events button that is frequently updated with your press releases or local happenings. And don't underestimate the value of a quarterly email directing clients and prospects to your site where they can read about a great new development in your company, community or industry.

Like any marketing vehicle, remember that your website is not a once-and-done thing. Rather, it should be a constantly evolving part of your marketing mix...one which can pay huge dividends as your company grows.

Next month, we'll look at how search engine optimization can drive more traffic to your site.



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