



Business Strategies

What's Your First Impression?

In today's marketplace, a company's website is their first impression with prospects. What does your prospect see when they look at your website?

By Michael Hammond

When did you last update your website? And did you update for the right reasons. In an article that I recently read called, "Is It Time For a Website Re-design?" by Drew McLellan, he rightly notes that "In today's marketplace, a company's website is their first impression with prospects. It's a rare purchase today that doesn't begin with some sort of research or due diligence. And as consumers (both B2C and B2B) find themselves more time starved and more Web savvy – the research tool of choice is often a Google search.

"Long before they'll set an appointment for a consultation or walk into your retail establishment – they're scoping you out on the Web," he continues. "It makes sense then, that when it comes to your Web presence you'd want to put your best foot forward, doesn't it? And yet, if you spend any time on the Web – you run into a lot of stale, outdated websites."

I can't agree more. Your website is your face. It's what initially attracts others to you in an increasingly Internet-centric age. That being said, you would think that companies would pay closer attention to their websites, but amazingly, they don't.

When asked why companies cling to stale sites, companies say things like: We don't have the time to devote to it. We don't have the budget. We don't want to add interactive elements because we don't have time to maintain them. The last redesign was such a painful process, we can't think of going there again.

All these concerns are legitimate, but the alternative is just as painful. You don't want to be giving up on getting more deals across the finish line over the look and feel of your website. In his article McLellan notes, "If you've got dated copy or information (many websites make it pretty obvious they haven't been updated in years... their latest newsletter issue is from 2008 or the last bit of news in their newsroom is from three years ago) what you're saying to visitors is that

you aren't so hot when it comes to follow up and pay attention to detail. If your design is tough to navigate (you know...you just keep adding a page here or there, but there's no organizational structure) you are going to frustrate that potential customer before they can figure out if you have what they want to buy."

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"You don't have to build the Taj Mahal of websites," McLellan pointed out, "but you do want something that speaks to your professionalism, and functions the way you want it to. Are you wondering if your website is working as hard for you as it should? See how your site matches up with these stats. Websites with blogs get 55% more traffic (Are you sharing your expertise and taking advantage of the organic SEO value of that effort?). Companies that blog get 79% more followers on Twitter (How does your stale website encourage me to connect with you on social networks like Facebook, Twitter and other interactive spots?)."

Still need convincing? Consider what a website redesign can mean for you and your business. When done right a website re-design can help you:

- 1. Manage your website easier.** Content Management Systems (CMS) have been steadily improving their user interface for convenient and easy website management. Gone are the days of having to pay someone else to manage your website on a daily basis. Today you can add and edit pages with just a few mouse clicks and zero html knowledge. Updating

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your site regularly will help with your search engine rank, as well.

- 2. Give your users a better experience.** New technologies make sites more interactive at less cost, and enable users to have a good experience on both desktop and mobile sites. If your site is clunky and hard to navigate, you may be losing business. Get a fresh start with a new menu system and ways to interact with your current and potential clients. Especially with older sites, the important information can be images. It's really important that phone numbers, emails, and addresses are text. This ensures that people can easily contact you or find directions.
- 3. Optimize for mobile devices.** With 69% of people surfing the Internet on their mobile device, chances are your outdated site isn't giving them the easy access they were looking for. Clients on mobile devices want to be able to click on your phone number, email address, or address and immediately be connected with you or given directions. Sometimes websites are also "broken" on mobile devices, making them extremely hard to read and navigate. Your clients and customers should be able to access all of the same items they can from their computers, but in an easy to



navigate format. There are multiple options for catering to mobile devices, but the new trend right now is responsive design. This means the design changes depending on what size device the user is visiting on, but the content never changes.

- 4. Make less work for your clients and customers.** Make all of the most-needed items available on your website. There are a lot of features that

are available on a CMS for a fraction of what it would cost to custom-program these options. You can add event registration, slideshows, maps, directions, forms, blogs, commenting, photo and video galleries, document management, and even donations. Aside from these commonly requested features, there are a lot more options out there, as well. People want to quickly be able to do everything online, and with all of this new technology available on a small budget there is no reason you shouldn't take complete advantage. If you have a larger need that may require custom programming, we can handle that as well.

- 5. Secure your website.** Websites with outdated code or old versions of content management systems are extremely vulnerable to attacks. Languages and content management systems are both regularly updated to squash vulnerabilities. If your website is using old code or an old version of a CMS, you are a big target for easy hacking. Especially with a CMS, you should be updating to the latest version every 3 years even if you don't redesign your website. With custom-programmed solutions, you should have your site adjusted every time there is a major release for the language your site is coded in. Be sure that your web host has the proper versions installed on the server.

In the end, the number one attribute people want is a website that is easy to navigate so they can quickly find the exact information they want. They don't want to have to click four times or guess which heading the information is hiding behind. People want contact information so they can call, write or drop by. This floors me, but many companies do not include offline contact options to their Web visitors. Keep the distractions at a minimum. People want to be able to scan your page and figure out what's there and where to go next. If you pack every bit of space with information, you actually get in their way.

Remember, your goal is not to tell them everything so they don't have to call. Your goal is to tell them enough to make them want to call. Your website is your introduction to many of your potential customers. Is it the way you want to be introduced, or is it time to consider a facelift? ❖