

BUILDING WEB SITES

Peter Stuivenberg, Maaïke Kallenborn

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1. THE WEB

The World Wide Web can create brands through its own unique communication channels. In our digital age the strong brands will be those that best utilize the Web as a building tool. The growth of the Web as a brand building vehicle is on a fast track. The Web reached 50 million households in 5 years, compared with 13 years for television and 38 years for radio. Leading is China with 80 million web surfers.

The Web has the unique possibility to communicate with customers on-line. In the Web environment the role of the audience is an active one: a lean-forward attitude. The audience mostly has a functional goal in mind - looking for information, entertainment, business and transactions - and ignores anything that doesn't deliver!

A web site can be a key part of a brand-building program because it can transmit information, impart experiential associations and leverage other brand building programs. Web sites are powerful because of the site experience and the fact that its associations can be controlled and are strongly linked to the master brand. The risk of 'A great ad can't recall the brand' problem is reduced. When the web site involves e-commerce activity or frequently updated information, a superior experience is often rewarded with significant loyalty. However keep in mind that a brand should build on web sites through personality, community content, entertainment, longer visits and loyalty.

Communicating via an interactive and involving web site means that the brand has to deliver rich and detailed information to strengthen the brand-consumer relationship. Besides the fact that a web site has to be made search engine friendly and needs to be market efficiently (so-called SEO marketing), we will mention some key-note guidelines:

1. The web is about experience. Build a brand by linking the experience with the brand.
2. The web site should address the audience in their own language: be multilingual.
3. The web site should reflect and support the brand with an adequate look and feel (the customer is part of the brand's world) and a source of information even beyond the limitations of the brand. So-called authoritative information provides the brand with credibility and authenticity in a way that it would never achieve directly from its own sources. The brand might participate or interact in a person's lifestyle using a language and emotional feeling that connects. These brand-building objectives are difficult to achieve when the site feels like a sales tool.
4. Look for synergy with other communication vehicles. Don't create isolation but find integrated communications to achieve synergy around all brand messages. Some ideas:
 - a - Provide a flagship-store. A powerful concept is adding life, vitality and tangibility to the brand.
 - b - Use the web as a supporting device for television, billboards, point-of-purchase displays and print advertising. The web adds flavor and content-rich info to the limited content of the advertised messages. The impact of advertising is magnified when exposures occur in multiple contexts.
 - c - A web site support sponsorship by providing schedules, background info, human-interest details, news, real-time video (the strongest emotional glue) and associates persons with the brand. The site adds value and make the link between sponsorship and brand stronger and richer; in addition the master brand can count on consumer satisfaction. A creditability beyond expectations.
 - d - A web site can support a master brand and promotional activities with a web quiz and publicity. One role of publicity is to create news around the brand. Because of its on-line existence a web site plays a key role. The site can reach fast, flexible a large audience.

5. Make the site a home base for loyal supporters. Nurture the persons that feel strongly related to the brand with Club facilities. Be aware that fans want to know everything about the brand! Its heritage can turn a functional relationship into a connection with depth and emotion.

6. Become a differentiated site by providing rich content that others cannot duplicate without significant costs! A silver bullet branded benefit is a powerful device to represent master brand. Undersigned knowledge about electronic marketing might be used to give answers on each and every on-line question regarding this subject. We provide a visible representation of the brand 's expertise and leadership in a rich flavored business arena. As a classic silver bullet we represent the essence of the brand. Competitors can duplicate the functional benefit but they will have a hard time to substitute her knowledge.

7. The web can benefit from web paid branded presence like banner advertisements.

2. TWELVE COMMON WEB DESIGN MISTAKES

Are people visiting your web site but leaving without feed back or buying? This may be a sign and the time to do some redesign of your web site. Often you are so close to what you have created that you can't see obvious design mistakes. I often do the same when writing an article - everything looks fine when I have finished, yet when I review it the next day I'm amazed how many mistakes I have made. Let's look at some of the most common Web Design mistakes:

1. Sloppy Web Site Copy

Your heading and first paragraph should clearly indicate the purpose of your web site. "Content is King" on the Net, so make sure there is plenty of focused information for your visitors. The content should draw the visitor through the site to take action in the end. Include contact information on every page in case people have questions.

2. Bad Color Coordination

Avoid using dark text on a dark background. Use dark text on a light background, such as black on white. Use colors that blend well together - observe nature or look at paintings to get some idea of good color combinations.

3. Pages Load Too Slowly

Using too many images or inserting large images on a web page, slow down the loading time of your web page. Optimize your images (reduce their size) before you insert them on your site, otherwise your visitors will leave before your site is loaded.

4. Poor Navigation

These means visitors can't easily find the information. They experience broken links, error pages or discover too many moving objects (animations, flash, scrolling text, marquees) - all these will annoy the visitor and cause him to click elsewhere. Keep your navigation simple by creating clear links on all web pages.

5. Orphan Pages

These are pages other than your home page, where the visitor has no idea how it fits in with the overall structure of your web site. You should always have a link to the homepage, so visitors know where they are on your web site.

6. Long Scrolling

The visitor has to scroll horizontally, or many pages vertically to view the whole web page. Create the width of your web page to fit on one screen, to avoid horizontal scrolling and have a maximum of 3 pages to be scrolled vertically.

7. Meta Tags Missing

Without optimizing your web page with a description or keywords, people can't find you on the search engines. Research key words or phrases relevant to your site content. Include them in your title, description and Web Site copy.

8. Lack of Marketing Strategy

A beautiful lawn without sun or water will soon die. A Web Site without visitors will soon die also. They are the life blood for your web site. Create numerous marketing strategies to attract visitors to your web site - you never know which one will be the most effective.

*Ask for a free analyze of your web site on html, navigation, meta tags, content, artwork and traffic.
We advise how to e-market your web site improving the relationship with your target audience.*

9. Poor Layout and Design

Create an aesthetically pleasing design to keep the visitors on your site. Create enough white space between your text and images by using margins. Don't overlap text and images and avoid capitalizing all text. It gives the impression you are shouting at your visitors. Use font type such as Arial or Verdana to make it easier to read on your computer screen.

10. Avoid Using Frames

Frames don't allow you to bookmark the page or return to it and sometimes the URLs stop working.

11. No Cross Browser Compatibility

You may be losing many customers if your web site is not compatible to the browsers most people are using. Internet Explorer (IE 4, 5, 6 etc) is currently the dominant browser, and most users are displaying 800x600 pixels or more, with a color depth of at least 65K colors. Therefore check your design with these statistics in mind.

12. Outdated Information

Your web site is like a garden. If you allow weeds to block out the sun and take over your garden, it will be destroyed. Attracting and keeping web site visitors, means continually adding new information (i.e. latest news), deleting irrelevant, outdated information and removing broken links. Continuous maintenance of your web site is crucial to attracting and retaining visitors. If you don't have time to do it yourself, hire a web designer to keep your site looking fresh, clean and fast loading.

3. DOWNLOAD TIME OF A WEB SITE

Have you ever experienced the frustration of waiting for a web site to download, then giving up and moving on to another? This is because most web users lose their attention **after 10 seconds**. If your site takes longer than this to load, you will be losing many visitors. This means that the web designer must use images sparingly and choose file formats carefully.

How to Calculate Download Time

First check the size of the HTML file and any associated images, files or programs. You can do this by right clicking on the file or image and reading its properties. For example, you may have a page that consists of 10 files, for a total of 84 kilobytes (KB).

Then determine the speed of your network connection. Some of the more common speeds are:

14.4 Kbps (kilobits per second) - slow modem speed.

28.8 Kbps - typical modem speed for some users.

56 Kbps - typical modem speed for most users with a dial-up connection.

1.544 Mbps (million bits per second) - full T1, enterprise grade network line (equivalent of 24 phone circuits).

For this example, we will use 56 kilobits per second (Kbps). The connection speed and file size must be converted to a common unit of measure for division: either bytes or bits. Remember that 1 byte equals 8 bits. The connection speed is already defined in bits: 56 kilobits = 56,000 bits. To convert the file size to bits, you should first convert it to bytes (84 kilobytes = 84,000 bytes). Then convert the bytes to bits by multiplying 84,000 by 8 (1 byte = 8 bits), which results in 672,000 bits. Divide the file size (672,000 bits) by the connection speed (56,000 bits per second). The bits cancel out, and the result is 12 seconds. This is the amount of time it will theoretically take to download the web page.

Remember that the figure derived from these four steps, is a theoretical measurement. It does not consider certain factors, such as the fact that 56 Kbps modems rarely operate above 50 Kbps. Nor does it consider network overhead, such as noisy phone lines, or network congestion.

Therefore the best way to determine how quickly users can download your web sites pages, is to test them in a real-world setting. For example, test your web site by accessing it through a dial-up (i.e., telephone) connection. That method will give you a much more reliable estimate.

Factors that Affect the Download Time of Your Site

1. Optimizing Images

This refers to the process of striking a balance between file size and image quality. Your images should not be too large or have too many on your web site. This will cause your pages too long to come up in the users browser and they'll lose their patience. Of course, if your images are too poor (too small, or with too low of a resolution), your site will be unattractive and it won't matter how quickly the site loads. You need to seek the perfect balance between size and quality.

2. File Formats

There are two main types of images on the Web: GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) and JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) files. Each format compresses files differently and each exhibits different strengths and weaknesses. The GIF standard works better for images with large areas of similar, flat colors, such as logos, drawings and diagrams. JPEG is better at compressing photos and images with complex and widely variable colorings. Within each standard, you can adjust quality settings.

Those adjustments will affect file size and image appearance. The key to optimization is to try out all the different options to achieve the smallest possible file size while maintaining an acceptable level of quality.

3. Reuse Your Images

Increase the efficiency of your site by making intelligent use of the fact that browsers usually cache (save for later use on the user's hard drive) downloaded files, including Web site images. Therefore, when a page calls for an image that's already been used, it loads and displays much more quickly on subsequent page views because it is coming from a local hard drive rather than the Internet. Therefore, one of the wisest things you can do is to reuse images; whenever possible, use the same logo on multiple pages, the same graphic buttons and the same graphic dividers. After the first time a user loads these elements, they'll pop up very quickly on subsequent pages.

4. Text

Text on pages loads far more quickly than images, permitting you to convey more information more efficiently. Don't have a page on your site that makes the user scroll down several times. Too much text on one page will slow the download time of your site. It will also make it very tiring for your visitor to read all your text.

5. Web Site Enhancements

There are hundreds of other elements you can choose to include on your site. This may include such things as: search boxes, pull down menus, opinion polls, hit counters, rotating banner ads, associate programs etc. You can have a multitude of options to add virtually unlimited functionality (and clutter) to your web site. To sort out if you need any of these extras, ask yourself the question: How does it help me accomplish the purpose of this web site? If you can't think of a good answer, chances are you don't need the extra element. Make sure they fit into your site's overall aesthetics. Check how they affect load times. By reducing the download time of your web site, visitors will return because they remembered how fast it was to find what they wanted (rather than the slower site of your competitors). This may ultimately increase the number of your visits, feed back and sales.

4. EFFECTIVE WEB SITE NAVIGATION STRUCTURE

A ship captain traversing the High Seas without a good navigation system will surely get lost. Maybe he'll strike sharp rocks and his ship will sink. A visitor, who arrives at your site and can't navigate it for the information they seek, will surely get lost also and leave in frustration. Your ship (your web site) will also sink if this continues to happen. Good site design means a good navigation structure for your web site. This means the visitor can find the information with ease. Put yourself in the shoes of your Grandmother. Would she quickly and effortlessly be able to find the information she wants, or know what to click on to make the purchase? Don't think that just because it is easy for you, it will be easy for others. Visitors should not need to click more than three times during their navigation, to find the information they are searching for.

1. Navigation Styles

These can range from navigation buttons, navigation bars, plain text links, fancy animated graphics or drop-down select menus. You can also use illustrations, photographs or graphic images to show your visitor around. For example, an image map contains one graphic with different "hot spots"(invisible buttons) that link to other pages.

2. Primary and Secondary Navigation

Primary navigation consists of the navigation elements that are accessible from most locations within the site. Secondary navigation elements allow the user to navigate within a specific location. For example, many sites have a page that offers information about the company. The primary navigation element may be an About Us link. Once the user arrives on the About Us page, there will be other links (secondary links), which navigate within the About Us page. These could be links to Press Releases, Corporate Locations, Investor Information and so on. These links are secondary navigation elements because they are relevant to the About Us page but not the other pages of the site. Therefore, these links will not be found in other areas of the site.

3. Guided Navigation

This is a popular technique, in which you guide the visitor through your site. Links are provided for the next step and establishing links that keep the users on track continues the process. These links should supply the necessary information, as well as an alternate course clearly marked to allow the visitor to exit. For example, an online purchase should lead the user through shipping information, then on to payment information, then to receipt information.

4. Creating a Navigation Action Plan

Determine goals and needs of your audience. Decide what the purpose of your site is and who your target audience will be. Learn from navigation that works. Visit several successful sites that show good navigation. Generally, good navigation includes several characteristics:

- Offers easy to learn elements
- Remains consistent
- Provides feedback
- Appears in context
- Offers alternatives
- Provides clear visual messages
- Offers clear and understandable labels
- Remains appropriate to the site's purpose
- Supports visitors goals and behaviors

Providing feedback has the biggest impact on users. Navigation should tell people, where they are and if possible, where they have been. Visitors should also be able to easily determine linked or clickable material. They need to know whether they successfully made a purchase, conducted a search, or completed some other task. Navigation that allows visitors to find information easily and quickly will contribute to your web site's success. Ask your grandmother (or someone who is not familiar with the Web) to navigate your site. If they can find the information they want within 3 clicks, your navigation structure must be a success. Congratulations!

5. Sketching it out.

Take one sheet of paper, draw a circle in the middle - this is the subject of your homepage. From there, draw branches, which have more ideas about your topic. If any topics are related in a more definitive way, create another branch off the current idea branch. Within minutes, you will see your web site develop into a dynamic sketch. You might find that a standard sheet of paper is not enough to contain all your thoughts. Use more paper, create more branches, and keep the ideas flowing. Once you have sketched out your site, use separate sheets of paper for each web page. Make sure you define a heading for each page and decide how it links to the other pages. This exercise will help you to decide how you want visitors to navigate through your web site.

6. What navigation style to use

Decide on which navigation style you will use. This could be a navigation bar across the top, a navigation bar on the left (the two most common styles), or an image map (an image divided into separate links to other pages). If you use graphical icons or other graphics instead of text, then include the text links elsewhere on your site. This is because some people browse with their graphics turned off and this technique allows them to still see and use the links.

7. What colors should you use

If you have a dark background, with dark graphical icons or text, your links will be invisible. When using rollovers (links that change color when you move the mouse over them), be careful that the color of the changed link will not disappear, in case your visitor wishes to return to that link.

8. Navigation alignment

Some sites have the navigation icons or text links lined up against the side or top of the page. Leave an equal amount of space on either side of your navigational links and make sure they are aligned with each other.

9. Repetition and consistency

If the visitor has to search for the buttons on every page, or if the links have different words, techniques or icons, they get annoyed. Don't you? Navigation elements from page to page should be repeated and consistent throughout your site. If a visitor sees a navigation system on every page, it will add to familiarity and orientation.

10. Check your links

Have you ever followed a navigation link, only to find you can't get back to the home page? You may have clicked on a link, only to get a page error - the page does not exist! Particularly if you have linked to a web site outside of your own. With time that site may have disappeared or changed its address. Make it easy for your visitor to find their way around your site, by testing out where your links go and that each of them work. You should do this periodically to avoid the problem of dead or broken links.

11. Testing your navigation structure

You're overjoyed that your site is finally finished, so you tell all your friends and family about it. They politely say it is great, but ask you what it is about and how can they find their way around. Once completed, you need to step back (go outside of the box you have been in) and get others to navigate your site - preferably your Grandmother or someone that has never been on the Net. This is called a usability test. If they have no problem to discern the purpose of your site and can navigate it with ease, you are ready to publish it for the entire world to see. Design your navigation structure with the visitor in mind. Eliminate any obstacles (minefields) that will annoy and frustrate them, causing them to leave and never wish to return. If you make it easy for them to find the information they seek, you will gain many happy customers.

5. DEFINE THE DESIGN OF YOUR WEB SITE

The single most important step before you begin designing your web site is defining the structure and purpose of your site. Once you have your structure planned out, you can unleash your creative genius. What kind of navigation buttons do you want? Would animations, photos or diagrams help get your message across? What sort of layout do you prefer? How will customers navigate through your site? While keeping in mind a few basic guidelines for attractive design, feel free to experiment and be creative with the look and feel of your site. It may help to draw your ideas on paper first. Decide which colors you want to use. Do you already have an attractive logo on your advertising, letterhead or business cards? Use it. Try to visualize any graphics you want to liven up your content. You may be able to find suitable images in an off-the-shelf clip art collection or on the web at one of the clip art repositories. Depending on the size of your company or business and your priorities, you may also want to consider paying a design professional to create the graphics for your site. Alternatively, you could invest some time and money buying and learning to use one of the many commercially available image-editing programs.

Most web sites utilize some variations of the same two or three layouts. The most common is a left navigation setup, in which you place logos and graphics along the top of the page, include links and navigation buttons along the left hand side, and place content below to the right. This layout draws attention to your logo while keeping navigation in a set position. Another common layout places both graphics and navigation links along the top of the page. Focusing activity and attention at the top and creating more room for content below.

Before you get carried away with your newly found design freedom, however, remember that there are a few widely accepted design rules to keep in mind:

- * Make your site easy on the eyes. Use high contrast colors, dark text on a light background is easier to read. Patterned background designs, though an old popular one, are usually more distracting than appealing. You don't want your customers to skip reading about your big sale just because they can't stomach the dancing teddy bears behind the text.
- * Make your site easy to navigate. Place your links or buttons in a prominent place and keep them in the same place on every page. Your design should help users access the information you want them to see. To this end, keep your colors, layout and buttons consistent. Label every page so customers always know where they are. Every page should provide links back to the homepage.
- * Make your site professional and appropriate for your company or business. Your design, no less than your content, should support, complement and promote your business and its products or services. Keep the design clean and simple. Remember, when it comes to design, white space is beautiful and less is more, unless you have a very unique product or service that is well served by something more avant-garde.
- * Check out the other guys. When it comes to design, you'll find that a little time spent looking at what other companies are doing will pay off handsomely. You'll discover for yourself what works and what doesn't. There are, unfortunately millions of poorly designed web sites on the internet - look for them and learn from their mistakes.
- * Write your content. Only after you've defined your goals and fully planned out your site should you actually begin to create your content. Avoid the temptation to just sit down and start creating web pages. If you hold off until you've got a good plan in place, you'll save yourself a huge amount of time and effort in the long run.

* Use your site plan or diagram to identify every page that will be on your website. You can number them, name them or find another way of listing them that works for you. You should already know generally what each page will contain (contact information, list of services, FAQ, products, photos, etc). Now you need to decide exactly what you want on each page. Write all the text that should go on each page. Indicate where you want graphics or photos located. Create captions and sidebars. Organize each page around your navigation scheme, and plug in content where it fits.

* Make it short and sweet. Studies have repeatedly shown that internet users have a short attention span for text on the web. Few things on the internet are more intimidating and less inviting than a long page of text scrolling down into the distance. With few exceptions (articles, white papers or other publications), avoid long, uninterrupted word masses. Break up your content with visuals and decorations. Better yet, be concise. Customers aren't looking for dissertations on your products and services, they just need enough information to make an intelligent decision.

* Avoid scrollbars. Sometimes you'll need to make your visitors scroll down the page a bit in order to see all your content. But, if you have to scroll down more than an extra page height, it's a good indication that you have enough to split between several pages. This will give your visitors manageable chunks of text and keep them interacting with your site.

* Avoid "Click here to enter site". Strange that - "enter site". That's what all your visitors were trying to do when they typed in your web address or clicked on your link.

* Flash intro = trash intro. One day in the future a law will be passed that will make it illegal to use scrolling text, flashing images, rotating heads, animated animals and bouncing cursors on a web site. Your web site is here to do business. It is supposed to be a serious tool in your marketing armory. It should be used to convey useful information to your visitors and convince them that you are worth doing business with. Dress it up with flashing icons, swirling graphics, flashing logos and spinning pictures and the merry-go of visual delights will just make your visitors sick. They will leave your glitzy fairground never to return.

* Check, double check and triple check. Few things are more unprofessional than poorly written or misspelled text on your business web site. And, inaccurate information is even worse. Nothing will destroy your credibility more quickly than misstating the facts. Read through everything you create, have someone else proofread, and run the text through a spell checker. Because not every web editing program includes one, you might want to create your content in a word processor and then copy your finished text into your web pages.

* Gather the site's components. After creating your content, gather all of your site's files together. If you've identified logos, buttons, photos or other graphics that you want to include, either create or collect the specific files you want to use and store them in a folder on your PC. Save the text you've written in the same folder. Keeping your content in one place will save you time and frustration when you are actually building your site.

* Create the pages. You're finally ready to make some web pages. You will most likely be creating your entire web site in HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), so picking up an elementary understanding of the technology behind your site wouldn't hurt. Basically, HTML is a programming language that gives instructions to an internet browser, telling it how to display text and images. You've already created that text and collected those images; all you have left to do is arrange them on each page and define their appearance.

When creating your pages, follow two crucial rules of smart technology implementation:

1. Products should drive technology, not vice versa. When creating your web pages keep both your audience and your business objective in mind. The features you include and the technology you utilize should be appropriate to target your audience. Don't waste time and energy on bells and whistles that your customers won't appreciate or can't take advantage of. If you sell old fashioned widgets to a non-technical customer base, your visitors probably aren't interested in your prowess at creating cute scrolling messages on-screen. They just want to know if you sell the best widgets at the lowest price. At the same time, however, you should be prepared to take advantage of whatever technical enhancements suit your business needs. If you sell services that could benefit from the creation of collaborative and interactive community areas for your site with discussion boards, mailing lists and online customer surveys, then use them.
2. Speed is everything. Make a conscious effort to limit file sizes and keep download times to a minimum. Most web editing programs will estimate page load times, and you can test them yourself (use dial up connection to test) once you've posted each page to the web on your personal host server. Everyone who has surfed the internet has experienced the frustration of sitting around waiting for a site to load. Don't be that site. Optimize all of your images on your site for web delivery, reuse navigation buttons and logos wherever possible (this will improve page speed because the files have already been loaded once), and keep each page small enough to load quickly.

6. TEN HINTS FOR BETTER WEB SITES

Here's a checklist of 10 ways to optimize your web site for peak performance:

1. Load Time

It's probably the most important reason people avoid certain web sites and for sure one of the main reasons for lost sales. The generally accepted maximum time for a page to load is around 10 seconds. Your pages should be no more than about 50/60 Kb in size

2. Browser Compatibility

You may be surprised at how your web pages are displayed in different web browsers or different web browser versions. It's possible that your web pages may not even be visible in some web browsers. Display differences can be the result of how various web browsers (Internet Explorer, Netscape, Mosaic), or versions thereof, interpret HTML code or handle HTML errors, screen resolution, and the computer platform used. You need to look at your web site through other people's browsers. Do this regularly and, on occasion, you'll be shocked with what you see!

3. Browser Safe Colors

The Browser-Safe Palette is the actual palette that Mosaic, Netscape, and Internet Explorer use within their browsers. The palettes used by these browsers are slightly different on Macs and PCs. This palette is based on math, not beauty. The Browser-Safe Palette only contains 216 colors out of a possible 256. That is because the remaining 40 colors vary on Macs and PCs. By eliminating the 40 variable colors, this palette is optimized for cross-platform use.

4. Broken Links

About 4-5% of all links on the Internet are broken. A site that contains broken links gives a bad impression to visitors and is a frequent cause of lost visitors. Also, the major Search Engines and Directories may not list your page if it has broken links or missing images.

5. Meta Tags

What are meta tags? They are information inserted into the "head" area of your web pages. Meta tags, for example, can tell a browser what "character set" to use or whether a web page has self-rated itself in terms of adult content. The meta keyword tag is also useful as a way to help your page come up for synonyms or unusual words that don't appear on the page itself. The Keyword Tag should contain about 5 to 10 keywords that appear on your page. Never include words that do not appear on that page - in some Search Engines your website will be penalized for this. Do not repeat the same keyword - this is called 'keyword stuffing' and is also frowned upon by the Search Engines. Separate your keywords with spaces (not commas). This allows the Search Engines to combine your keywords into phrases, for people who do 'phrase searching'.

6. ALT Tags

What are ALT tags and why should I use them? You have a web site. Your designer did an excellent job and it looks great. You have plenty of images, including one containing your business name, logo and slogan. Though your site may look fine, it's not optimized to score high with search engines. Since search engines don't index images, they won't index any text your web site presents in image format -- in this case the above-mentioned business name and slogan. To fix this problem, there are ALT tags, which are basically image descriptions. Always add ALT tags to your images to make sure search engines recognize all the content on your site. ALT tags filled with keywords can also be used to boost your keyword frequency and help you achieve better rankings. ALT tags also make your site more accessible to visually impaired people using text readers. That's because text readers can't read images, but can detect text in ALT tags.

7. HTML Optimizer

Another way to make your page load faster is to compress (or optimize) your HTML code. An HTML Optimizer removes all blank spaces in your HTML code and also removes certain unnecessary tags. The result is shorter downloading / uploading time. Pages will appear in a client's Internet browser in exactly the same way, but they will be about 20% smaller. A word of caution: in most HTML Optimizers you will find an 'Options' menu that tells the program to ignore certain parts of your code. Make sure your Optimizer does not compress embedded script tags - if they get compressed, the script will usually not work.

8. HTML Validator

Validating your HTML will help ensure that it displays properly on all browsers. Most of validator tools read your web pages directly from your site. Always check the validity of your HTML. Some Search Engines give lower rankings to pages that have poor quality HTML (such as incorrect nesting of elements).

9. GIF (or JPEG) Cruncher

Shrinking the size of your images is one of the best ways to get a faster-loading web page. You can usually reduce a GIF or JPEG image by 40% to 50% without losing any significant definition or sharpness.

10. WIDTH, HEIGHT and BORDER Tags

The WIDTH, HEIGHT and BORDER attributes are essential for each image that you have on your website. When you hyperlink an image, always make sure that the BORDER attribute is set to zero (BORDER=0). If you don't do this, your hyperlinked image will have an ugly blue border around it. The WIDTH and HEIGHT attributes allow your page to load faster, since the browser knows in advance how much space the image requires. To find out the width and height of any image, just double click on the image file. This will automatically open 'Microsoft Photo Editor' - your image will appear, with the width and height of your image (in pixels) displayed on the tool bar.

7. ANALYZE WEB SITE TRAFFIC

Getting traffic to your web site without analyzing it, is like being blindfolded in a crowd. You hear voices, but you don't know which direction they are coming from or who they are. Without analyzing your web site traffic, it's difficult to improve your web site marketing. However first of all you should be aware of the different terms used to describe web site traffic, so as not to be confused about your web site visitors. Here are the main terms used:

Visit - these are all requests made by a specific user to the site during a set period of time. The visit is ended if a set period of time (say 30 minutes) goes by with no further accesses. Users are identified by cookies, username or hostnames/ip addresses

Hit - this is a request to the server for a file not a page. Your page can be made up of different files, such as graphic files, audio files or css and javascript files, resulting in a number of hits for that page. Each of these requests is called a hit. Counting hits is not the same as tracking pageviews. It takes multiple hits to view a page.

Pageview/Impression - this is the number of times a page is accessed as a whole.

Unique View - A page view by a unique person within a 24 hour period.

Referrer - A page that links to your site. By looking at your referrers will tell you who's linked to your site. This can be particularly valuable for seeing where your search engine traffic is coming from.

User Agent - This refers to the software used to access your site. Sometimes known as a "browser" or "client", the term user agent can describe a PHP script, a browser like Internet Explorer, or a search engine spider like GoogleBot. If you can identify what software is being used to access your site, you'll be able to tell if users are abusing it, and when the search engines last crawled your pages.

Then there are some ways to track your visitors:

1. Counters

These are heavily used on web sites by newbies but appear unprofessional. It is very common to go to a page and see something like "You are visitor number 12345 to this page". These numbers cannot be trusted as the page designer has the ability to seed the base number or to alter the counter such that it adds more than 1 each time.

2. Trackers

Tracking software details the path a visitor takes through your web site, so they do more than just count your traffic: they track it. Tracking software tells you more than just the number of visitors -- it can break visitor statistics down by date, time, browser, page viewed, referrer, and countless other values. Counters and Trackers often require you to place a button or graphic on your site in exchange for the free use of their service, which is not ideal for most site owners. So try to avoid using these services unless you don't have the ability or expertise to execute tracking scripts of any kind on your own server.

3. Using Your ISP's Statistical Package

Your Internet Service Provider (ISP) keeps log files, which record every single "hit" (request for a Web page or graphic) on your Web site. Analyzing log data can give you a good idea of where your site visitors are coming from, which pages they are visiting, how long they stay, and which browsers they are using.

Before signing on with a hosting company, make sure they offer access to raw log files. Even if you don't need them immediately, sooner or later you'll be glad to have them. There are also different types of log files - access, referrer, error, and agent are the primary ones.

4. Access log

Analyzing the access log will give you information about who visited your site, which pages they visited, and how long they stayed on the site. This is useful information in determining whether or not your site is working as you intend. The record below shows the visitor's IP number or hostname, date and time of the request, the command received from the client, the status code returned, the size of the document transferred, and the browser and operating system the visitor was using.

```
nas-112-52.slc.navinet.net - - [29/Jan/2000:17:17:12 -0500] "GET page.html HTTP/1.1" 200 23443  
"http://www.mydomain.com/page.html" "Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 5.01; Windows 98)"
```

5. Referrer Log

The referrer log contains referral information - the source that referred the visitor to your site. If the referrer was a search engine, you will also find the keywords that were entered to find your site - very useful information.

6. Agent Log

This log provides information on which browser and operating system was used to access your site.

7. Error Log

The error log obviously provides a record of errors generated by the server and sent back to the client. The record below shows the type of server, date and time of the error, client identification, explanation of the error code generated by the server, and the path to the file that caused the error.

As you can see, log files contain a wealth of information about how your visitors are using your site. Now we will talk about how you get the relevant data extracted from the log files and compiled into a useable format.

Web Traffic Analysis Software

These are programs that analyze your server logs and then create traffic reports accordingly. The quality of the reports generated will depend on what software you actually use. Some log analyzers are free and come preinstalled on many hosting accounts, while others can cost a good deal of money. The Webalizer for instance is a fast, FREE, web server log file analysis program which produces usage statistics in HTML format for viewing with a standard web browser. The results are presented in both columnar and graphical format, which facilitates interpretation. Yearly, monthly, daily and hourly usage statistics are presented, along with the ability to display usage by site, URL, referrer, user agent (browser), search string, entry/exit page, username and country.

8. WEB SITE MARKETING STRATEGIES

If you don't create a successful strategy for marketing your web site, you can't build a profitable online business or organization. Continuously evaluate, test and refine your web site marketing strategies so that you can apply them to any product. These are the keys to building a successful online business.

1. Use Several Marketing Strategies

Don't put all your eggs into one basket by only employing one marketing strategy. You could see evidence of this during the latest Google update in which many commercial web sites which once had top rankings, dropped out of existence, thus instantly losing sales. By creating more than one strategy to market your web site, you can soon see which one works the best by attracting the most visitors.

2. Market With Consistency

Set up a clear daily, weekly, monthly and yearly marketing plan for your web site and stick to it. It is the lifeblood of your business.

3. Test Marketing

Continually test your entire web site marketing strategies to see which one works the best. Eliminate those that are not profitable.

4. Email Marketing and Newsletters

Create a newsletter - most folks don't become a member of your organization or will buy your products immediately but need to be contacted several times to put them in the buying mood. Place a subscription box on every page of your web site. Send out your newsletter every two weeks to keep in touch with your subscribers. Be sure to include original content (not rehashed content) along with new products you wish to introduce to them.

5. Email Course or Tutorial

Set up an autoresponder that will deliver quality information. This means you have multiple chances of contacting your visitor and to promote your product or service at the same time.

6. Ezine Ads

Create an ad for your product and find ezines that cater to your target market. Write several ads and track them until you find one that pulls well.

7. Signature File

Include this in all your online and offline correspondence. Set up your email client so that it does this automatically each time you send out an email. Include your name, who you are, what your business is about, a way to subscribe to your newsletter, your web site address and your email.

8. Write Articles

Publishers are always looking for original content. You can include a link back to your web site in your signature file. If several publishers (that may have thousands of subscribers) publish your article, you can get hundreds of links pointing back to your web site.

9. Reciprocal Linking

Get links from other sites that complement yours. i.e. if you just offer web design and someone else offers search engine optimization, you could exchange links with each other, thus adding to the quality of each of your sites.

10. Forums

Offer your help to other forum participants then leave a link back to your site in your signature file. Popular forums are spidered regularly by the search engines, thus giving your site a link boost.

11. Offline Marketing

Not all your customers are online. Market offline by including your web site information on all stationary i.e. letterhead, and business cards. Place ads in newspapers, trade publications, send out postcards, fliers and get involved in local organizations. You can even set up your own local club or be a guest speaker for others.

9. CONTENT: THE KEY TO INCREASED WEB SITE TRAFFIC

Everyone wants to have a lot of traffic to his or her web site. In order to get this traffic many people try to work on their meta tags or even do tricks trying to get more visitors to their web site. One of the simplest and most solid ways to increase the flow of traffic to your web site is to offer more content. It has often been said that on the Internet, content is king. It is important to understand how more content can bring more visitors to your site and how to generate content that is related to your particular web site.

Why Do You Need More Content

Many websites are actually company brochures that have been adapted to the web. They merely describe a bit about the company or service and then add some contact information. Such websites usually have about 5-10 separate html files. If these pages have a good amount of text it is possible to optimize them for several keywords and web surfers may find the site.

However, if these sites are in highly competitive fields then it may be difficult to build a decent amount of traffic because search engines try to find the most important web sites that can answer a search query. Search engine robots look for keywords in the meta tags and in the text on the pages to determine what the site is all about. However, the search engines also look at the links on the various pages. If your main page is about bicycles, for example, and you have links to other pages on your site relating to the same theme, perhaps, racing bicycles, mountain bicycles etc., then the search engine will conclude that the site is about bicycles. If you have a lot of pages on this theme, your site should rank higher than someone with a company brochure site of a few pages.

In addition each page, with its content on your particular theme, stands out alone as a mini website in itself and may come up in searches on the Internet. Thus people will often enter your site through the "side" or "back doors" and not the main page. The more pages you have the more chances of being found in searches, and the more different keywords you can optimize your site for. So, by building a content rich site on a particular theme, you will boost the chances of your main page to come up in searches and you will increase the likelihood of overall traffic through your other pages coming up in good positions in Internet keyword searches. In addition to this, the more content you have the more respect your page gets from human-edited directories (such as DMOZ -Open Directory Project), and other webmasters. If you have quality content, then you will get more link requests, more requests for permission to reprint your articles in ezines, and more links to specific pages on your site. All of this will result in more traffic.

How To Build More Content

Depending on the type of products or services you are offering, there are several ways to build quality content for your site. Here are a few examples:

Product Reviews

If you are selling other peoples products through an affiliate system, rather than just listing a link to the product, you can write a full review of the product, explaining how the product helped you and what its strengths and weaknesses are. This kind of content actually pre-sells the product, as well as being interesting reading in itself. If you have your own products you could provide background information on or get satisfied customers or users to write reviews.

Background information

Every product or service exists in some kind of context. Suppose you have a hotel in a particular city. Instead of only listing information about your hotel, you could give some pages about the history of the city where the hotel is located or information about popular tourist attractions. The possibilities are enormous.

Questions and Answers

Let your web visitors help you in the process of content creation. Start a questions and answers section on your web site or in your electronic newsletter. Not only will you get insight into what your clientele is thinking, but also by answering these questions you will generate useful content for your site and for your newsletters.

Bulletin Board Forums

Your web visitors can also directly write the content on your site through a bulletin board. Some bulletin boards are searchable by search engine robots, while others are not. If you have good content on the bulletin board you can also re-publish it on the main sections of your website to ensure inclusion in the search engines.

Articles by others

There is no need to recreate the wheel or spend a lot of time writing, if that is not your cup of tea! You can also publish the articles of other people. There is a lot of quality content that is available free of charge. While you usually have to provide a link back to the author of the article, this is a small price to pay considering that some of these articles may pull in tons of traffic.

Finally, if you are wondering how to arrange the increased content, you have two main options. Some people actually build a second content-rich web site to draw traffic and then direct visitors to their sales site. Another possibility is to add an article section to your existing site, or simply to link the new pages to the particular product and service pages that are appropriate. Whichever option you choose, you can expect to see an increased flow of traffic as a result of the quality content that you have added to your website.

How to get visitors to create content

An ongoing challenge for webmasters today is to provide fresh content that gives visitors a reason to return to their site. Unless you have a full-time staff dedicated to creating regular content, the time involved can be crippling. Wouldn't it be great if someone else would write timely, relevant content for you? Sure, but what are the odds of that happening? Well, many webmasters are already enjoying this phenomenon, and I'm happy to count myself among them.

Set up

Whether your site has a catalog of products or a collection of articles, you can design your pages to allow visitors to post reviews of whatever is featured on the page. They can share their experiences with items they've bought or post comments on the information in your site. Don't confuse this powerful tool with a discussion forum. You create the topic of each page, and encourage visitors to post updates with the latest information in this area. The more information you provide on your site, the better service you are providing to your visitors; but they aren't the only ones who benefit from including reviews. It's also a boon to you as a webmaster. Even if you never wrote another line of new copy, your pages will continue to grow with relevant content. Granted you still have to spend a little time reading the reviews and moderating what appears on your site, but the time required is much less than you would spend writing original content.

Why someone else will create content

While the advantages to the webmaster and reader may be obvious, you are probably wondering what incentives exist for the reviewer. A few lucky souls have enough free time to share their opinions online for the mere satisfaction of seeing their own words, but most will need something more tangible before they invest the time to write a useful review. The onus is on you, the webmaster, to create an appropriate incentive. The importance of link popularity in search engine rankings provides a powerful clue. I allow my visitors to post reviews of their experiences with online affiliate programs.

At the bottom of their review, they have the option of including a link to another page that supports what they've written or they can simply include their affiliate link for the program. In this way you give additional credibility of their expertise appearing on a third-party site.

Look at this from the reviewer's perspective. Here's a unique opportunity to gain an external link pointing to the reviewer's web site, but this is far more valuable than a random reciprocal link. Search engines are determining link popularity by examining both the quantity and relevance of links. The page with their link is loaded with keywords related to the product or service, and the reviewer can include additional relevant keywords in their post. The reviewer actually has a hand in creating the page that will link to their site. This is extremely powerful! Can you begin to see how anyone looking to increase traffic to his or her site would jump at the opportunity to create content for your web site?

Now you may have some concerns that allowing anyone to add content and links to your site is inviting your competitors to steal your traffic. If your site has detailed reviews of products on your site, anyone who leaves your site to visit a competitor won't spend much time there before realizing that your site has useful, original content that they can't find anywhere else. If that doesn't put your mind at ease, though, there's nothing to stop you from including a disclaimer when someone submits a review. Explain in this disclaimer that direct references to your competitors will be removed to keep the reviews informative and to avoid marketing hype. You are the webmaster, after all.

You can draw even more traffic by allowing visitors to rate the usefulness of each review. Many reviewers will encourage people to visit your site so they can read and rate the review. More important than just being a gimmick to increase traffic, rating reviews allows you to sort them by quality and expose your average visitors to the best possible content first.

Promote it!

Once you've got the code in place, it's important to publicize this new feature of your website. If you have experience or know someone with experience writing press releases, you may be able to garner attention from news and niche media. Another highly effective form of publicity is to mention the new feature above the fold on the main page of your site.

If you have a newsletter, promote the review process in your next issue. In fact, as you begin to accumulate reviews, they can serve as great additional content for your newsletter. Simply include the best reviews in each issue. As with the reviews on your website, you are providing valuable content for your audience, giving your reviewer great exposure, and saving time for yourself. It's a win-win-win situation.

10. WHAT IS CONTENT?

Browse any webmaster forum or read web tutorials and you will find that nearly all the experts these days recommend that you have lots of good content on your site. Sounds like good advice, doesn't it? But what does it mean? Simply put, content is the stuff on your site. Good content is useful information or tools that your visitors will find helpful. It means different things to different businesses and the bottom line is that what constitutes "good content" depends on the goal of your site. Below, I've attempted to categorize the different types of content:

Core Site Pages

These are the heart pages of your site, the pages that are the core of why you built a site in the first place. They explain your mission or goals, who you are, and detail the products/services/information available through your site. The best place to start with "good content" is making sure these pages are as complete as possible and answer all of a user's potential questions. Typical pages that visitors expect to find on a site are:

- * About Us
- * Contact Us
- * Products/Services/Activities
- * FAQ
- * Shipping Info/Delivery Area/Locations Served

If you aren't confident in your writing skills, consider hiring a professional copywriter to write or rewrite your pages. A good copywriter can tailor the style and the voice to appeal to your customers. It can make a difference between just getting traffic and getting traffic that converts into sales.

Make your core site pages a priority and ensure that they are easy-to-read, complete, and informative before looking at adding other content.

Complementary Pages

Complementary pages enhance and expand on your core site pages. These are the information pages that can really make a difference and help set you apart from your competitors.

For product sites, you might offer detailed product reviews, extensive "how-to" pages for product usage, special print-friendly detail pages, creative ideas for other uses, customer feedback and testimonials, or help pages that go over and above the standard.

For service sites, the complementary pages might deal with how you do what you do, your qualifications, common myths and misperceptions about the service, or do-it-yourself tips for situations where a professional is not needed.

For affiliate or advertising sites, complementary pages are the key element that will set your site apart from the competition. What will attract people to your site instead of the others? Is it a community, more detailed information, news or freebies? Complementary pages can offer additional information about your company such as how long you've been in business, details of the clients you handle, industry recognition and awards, or even statements of your total commitment to customer service. These pages aren't critical to the operation of your site like the Core Site Pages are, but they help differentiate your site from others in the field and give visitors a reason to choose to do business with you.

Human Interest

People love the real person touch. If you don't believe that, watch a little "reality TV"! People just like to learn about other people. How can you relate that "real people" fascination to your web site? How do people USE what you sell? How do your services improve people's lives? A travel service isn't selling a hotel, it's selling fun in the sun or amenities that make your time away from home easier. Accounting software isn't just about the numbers; it's about getting tasks done faster and more accurately with more detail. A sporting goods site isn't just selling fishing gear; it's selling relaxation. When you think about the benefits, about WHY people want what you sell, it's a lot easier to brainstorm creative content ideas. Both search engines and customers love fresh, updated information. Some people groan at the thought of having to work so hard at adding new content, but it's not as complicated as you think!

Fresh Information Weblogs or Blogs

Blogs exploded on the scene about a year ago with services like Moveable Type and Blogger making it incredibly easy for anyone to publish on the web. A blog is basically a series of posts that appear by date posted- the oldest ones scroll off to an archive. It's basically an online journal. Setup is minimal and the interface is easy to learn- it's as easy composing a word processing document and hitting save. BAM. you are a web publisher! Blogs are a hit with people who like to keep an online journal and personal blogs are a huge part of the blogging community. But blogs aren't just for angst-ridden teens and conspiracy theorists; they can help your business too! Blogs can be integrated seamlessly into your site so that they have the same look and feel. You can use a blog to publish a running event calendar or comment on industry news developments. A blog can be strictly professional, announcing specials, daily interest rates, or new product info or it can be casual and create a "personality" for your company or organization. What can a blog do for your business? Think about what your customers want to know.

Newsletter

Start a newsletter! Ask visitors to sign up for your newsletter (never send unsolicited e-mails) and set up a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or quarterly schedule to deliver your newsletter. Then stick with it! I bought some printer ink online from a vendor that offered me the opportunity to sign up for specials. Every month like clockwork, I get the latest specials in my inbox and it always prompts me to check my supplies before deleting it. If I didn't get that e-mail from them, I would have probably bought the next round from whoever came up in a search! Your newsletter may be product offerings and specials mixed in with useful product reviews, or it may be a recap of what's going on in your industry. If you aren't a writer, find articles available for reprint in your industry. Make sure the newsletter has some value to the reader. Archive the newsletter on your site for additional content and make the archives available for browsing. Most web hosts have some sort of mailing list capability, or you can compose and mail your newsletter in Outlook. There are many third-party mailing services that are ideal if you plan for a large list- check out Constant Contact (<http://addme.roving.com/>).

Interactive Pages Forum

A forum is an incredible tool for building content and a community. It's not a task to be undertaken lightly; it requires a lot of time and energy and some technical knowledge (or a tech budget!). If your industry has a need, or your product has a loyal following, a forum is a great tool to build content while drawing like-minded individuals together. A forum is great for market research, technical support, building a fan base, trading ideas and knowledge, and many, many other benefits. Forums work best when you start off with a core group of people willing to post- no one wants to talk to an empty room! Try to get people from similar business or industry experts to post at your forum. It's exposure for them and helps to build a solid foundation for your information. If you decide to start a forum, be sure to use one that is search-friendly and set aside a good chunk of time to promote it and administer it.

Interactive Pages Feedback & Reviews

Unsolicited feedback is a powerful convincing tool! Let your customers tell other customers why they love you. It's much more compelling than your own claims, if handled well.

There are many ways to handle feedback- the easiest way is to simply set up a form to allow customers to submit their feedback. You can then publish the ones you choose (with permission). There are many scripts and other software solutions that will allow people to review your products or service online. This can be risky if you aren't willing to take the good with the bad! Used well, it's a powerful selling tool.

Often people can be enticed to write a review or testimonial for your site in return for a link back to their site. This helps them with link popularity, but it helps your site as well by showing that a real person wrote that review.

Ask The Expert

This is a great idea that I've seen recently. Using forum software, users submit questions and someone at the company answers them. The Q&A are both published on the site for users to read once they are answered in a "knowledge database". This is less time-intensive than a full-blown forum but a great way to keep a finger on the pulse of what customers want to know while still adding content on a regular basis. I've often heard the argument, "My site doesn't need to be informational, I just sell things." That may be true! There are plenty of sites that are lean and mean and built to sell; they usually rely on things like PPC advertising and offline promotions for traffic. That's a viable business model and it works well. But if you are interested in building loyalty and interest in your company as well as repeat business and you want to get increased traffic from the "editorial" or free listings in the search engines, you have to offer more to your users. If you create a plan for content that offers value and interest to your customers, you can have a site that is built to sell AND drive repeat business

11. ESSENTIAL STEPS TO WEB SITE PROMOTION

Web Site promotion should be the major part of your web site marketing plan. It's not enough just to design a beautiful web site and put it on the Net. Promoting your web site has to be done constantly if you want to get a continuous stream of traffic to it. If you don't drive traffic to your web site, your online business venture will soon fail.

1. Create a web site marketing plan

if you fail to plan then you default to a plan for failure. When designing your web site, create a plan on how to market it as well. Try to put yourself in your customers shoes when doing this. It's too easy to just view your web site from your own perspective. You need to have a clear vision for your business, goals (short and long term) you wish to achieve and the strategies of how you will accomplish them.

2. Define your target market

Many online marketers promote their web site aimlessly in a field which is too large i.e. they may use bulk mailing as one of their promotion strategies. Of course you may get some visitors but the chances are you will not make many sales. Why? You have not narrowed your field of customers and targeted them. If you sold Cadillac's online for instance, you are not randomly going to market to every person on the Net. Your target market may be previous owners of Cadillac's, or people who routinely purchase luxury American cars. Getting targeted customers to your web site, will increase sales, because they will have more interest in your product or service than marketing to a general audience.

3. Use several promotion strategies

Don't just stick to one form of promotion because you never know which one will work the best for you. If you use many channels i.e. search engines, email marketing, forums, writing articles etc you have a greater chance of getting more traffic to your web site.

4. Promote continuously

If you want to drive constant traffic to your web site, you must promote it continuously. Web traffic is the lifeblood of your online business. For example, you could constantly optimize your web pages for the search engines, resubmit them if needed, visit discussion forums every day and write an article for online publications every two weeks.

5. Calculate your return on investment (ROI)

This means keeping track of how much money you invested in your marketing plan and what profit you received in return. This will avoid wasting large sums of money thrown aimlessly into advertising. If you calculate it takes 100 visitors to your web site to generate one sale and with each sale you make \$10, then you shouldn't spend more than 10 cents to get each targeted visitor and still make a profit. In order to know which aspects of your marketing campaign bring the most visitors, you must be able to monitor visitor activity to your web pages.

6. Analyze your web site traffic

By analyzing your web site traffic, you can determine what marketing strategies are successful. You can then change them as necessary, to boost the sales or services from your site. Your analysis may include what keywords your visitors are using to find your web site, which web pages are the most popular and where your visitors are coming from. These are essential statistics you should know, instead of blindly promoting your web site and hoping for the best.

7. Test, monitor and track your results

To run an effective online marketing campaign, you need to constantly test what works and what doesn't. Tracking the response to an ad may cause you to refine it until it generates a great return on the money you invested. Once your results are satisfactory, you can then roll out your ads on a larger scale and spend greater sums of money. You should also monitor your site in the search engines, so you can optimize your web pages for higher search engine rankings. This will attract more visitors which leads to higher profits. Web site promotion strategies will differ for everyone, and will depend a lot on your product, web site and your personality. Try everything you can, record the results, and see what works for you.

12. INCREASE SEARCH ENGINE RANKINGS

Search engines are still one of the most effective ways to drive traffic to your web site. This is because it is highly targeted traffic. A person searching for a particular phrase on a search engine, gets taken to your web site. It makes sense then, to make your site as attractive as possible to the search engines, so your rankings will improve, giving you more visitors which leads to more sales - your ultimate goal. Here are 17 powerful strategies you should implement, to substantially increase search engine traffic:

1. **Keyword Density**

The ratio of keywords on your visible page is called Keyword Density. i.e. if you have 100 words on your page and 3 of those words are "boat" or "boats", then you will get a keyword density of 3% of your text for the word "boat". Try to aim for a keyword density on your site from 3-20%. This will give you a good range.

2. **Keywords in your domain name**

Try to incorporate one of your keywords or a keyword phrase in your domain name. i.e. www.isitebuild.com (building web sites) or www.ihost-websites.com (hosting web sites). This may also help people to memorize your name when they are looking for this service.

3. **Page Title**

Write a short descriptive title of 5-8 words for your web site, containing your primary keywords or keyword phrase. The page title is the first thing that people see when your site appears in the search engines. Begin your title with a capital letter, then follow with lower-case letters. This makes it easier to read than titles with all words capitalized. Place your most important keyword phrase toward the beginning of your title tag.

4. **Description Meta Tag**

Some search engines will include this below your title. Choose 20 of your most important keywords and write a 200-250 character sentence about your site. Don't repeat your title description but write a different one with different keywords. Some search engines will just take this description meta tag, some will use both the title and description tags.

5. **Keywords Meta Tag**

Research 50-100 keywords people would insert in the search engines to find your site. Refine this list to your 20 best keywords or keyword phrases. Leave out the commas between your keywords, so the search engines can group the words into any phrases that seem appropriate. This positions your words for minimum space with maximum combinations.

6. **Header tags**

Search engines tend to place emphasis on the header tags so make sure you have your h1 tag at the top of your web page. Use CSS (cascading style sheets) to avoid the problem of the your text appearing too large when just using html for this tag. Use the other header tags (h2, h3, h4) throughout your web copy.

7. **Comment Tags**

The web designer to remind him how to structure the web page mostly uses these. Write a sentence using some of your most important keywords and insert the comment tags in your body copy.

8. **Use the ALT Tag for Images**

Some people surf with Web with the graphics turned off. Therefore placing alt tags in the html code for your images enables them to see the description of that image. Incorporate keywords in the alt tag of your images. Make sure the words relate to the graphic, otherwise you could get banned for "keyword stuffing".

9. Image File Names

Change your image file names to your keywords.

10. Page Link Names

Place a primary keyword in your page link names. Rather than using a link in your navigation bar like "services", add a keyword to that page link. If you offer web hosting services, it could be "webhostingservices.htm". Also use keywords in the page links throughout your copy. Instead of writing a paragraph about your testimonials and linking to the page labeled "testimonials", create a link to a page called "marketing successes".

11. Create a Site Map

Create a site map that contains links to all the sections of your site. Write a description for each section. Place this site map on your home page as some search engines will only index the homepage and not deeper pages in your site.

12. Quality Content

Provide web copy of 250 to 300 words, which are targeted for your web site visitors. Sprinkle your most important keywords throughout your text, particularly in the first paragraph. Be careful not to overstuff keywords in your copy so that it sounds strange when you read it. Get some others to review and edit your pages before you submit them for the world to read.

13. Repair Broken Links

Most search engine directories will not list your site if it has broken links. Also visitors get frustrated when they reach a broken link page (404 error page) and will click elsewhere. Make sure you do a link check before your site goes live.

14. Create a contact page

The search engine directory, Yahoo will not index your page if you don't have a physical address.

15. Reciprocal Links

Search engines (especially Goggle) place high relevancy on links to your site to get a good ranking. Create a links page, which includes links to sites with similar content. Make sure they don't compete with your site and that they are quality links. Preferably find sites that already have a high search engine ranking. Ask sites that link to your competition to link to your site. To find out which sites are linking to your competition, visit a search engine and enter "link:" before your competitors URL

16. Cross linking multiple sites

If you have multiple sites, cross link all your sites and include a description on your web site for each link.

17. Keep your file size small

If you use dynamic html (i.e. javascript, DHTML) it will often push your web copy (containing your keywords) to the bottom of your page. Since search engines read the text that is near the top of your page, that nice piece of javascript you have placed before your web copy, will affect your search engine rankings. You can keep your file size small by storing your JavaScript and CSS code in an external file.

Conclusion

Create a simple, clean design for your web site that is easily navigable. Focus on good quality content with well-written, keyword rich copy, based on how it will benefit the visitor. Implement the powerful strategies outlined above and the traffic to your web site will increase dramatically.

13. META TAGS FOR SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Statistics show that only one of every four Web Sites have Meta tags. However using these tags can give your site an advantage over other sites that do not. Meta tags enable most visitors to initially find your site from the search engines.

What are Meta Tags?

These are HTML tags that provide information that describes the content of the web pages that the visitor will be viewing. Web Site owners use this resource to control their positioning and descriptions in the search engines. Most search engines incorporate reading meta tags as part of their indexing formula.

Where to Place Meta Tags

They should go in between the <head> and </head> tags in your html page.

Types of Meta Tags

The Doctype tag The DTD (Document Type Definition) tag precedes the opening <HTML> tag. It is generally the first element to be used on any page. It distinguishes the version of HTML in use from other versions of HTML and tells the browser what tags to expect when laying out the page.

```
<!doctype html public "-//wc3//dtd html 4.0 transitional//en">
```

If a browser doesn't understand a tag, it just ignores it. This, in effect, renders <!doctype> useless. For the proponents of strict standardization, a statement like <!doctype> would ensure standardization. If a browser didn't recognize the statement, it could ignore the page.

META Tags and Document Identification

The syntax for the <meta> tag is:

```
<meta name="namevalue" content="contentvalue"> or  
<meta http-equiv="namevalue" content="contentvalue">
```

The <META> tag requires the CONTENT attribute and adds either the NAME or HTTP-EQUIV attribute. These define the general information you are creating or changing in the document, and the CONTENT attribute defines the value of the general information.

HTTP-EQUIV Attribute

<META HTTP-EQUIV> tags are equivalent to HTTP headers. To understand headers, you must understand the process that occurs when you use a Web browser to request a document from a Web server. You request information using your browser and the Web Server receives your request via HTTP, the standard Web protocol. When the server finds the page you requested, it generates an HTTP response. The initial data in that response is called the HTTP header block. This header gives the Web browser information useful for displaying the page.

Common Examples of the HTTP-EQUIV Attribute Value Language META Tag

This is an optional tag. It declares to users the natural language of the document being indexed. Search engines, which index web sites based on language often, read this tag to determine which language(s) is supported. This tag is particularly useful for non-English and multiple language web sites.

```
<meta http-equiv="content-language" content="en">
```

Content-type Tag

The Content-Type entity-header field indicates the media type of the entity-body sent to the recipient. This is an optional tag.

```
<meta http-equiv="content-type" content="text/html; charset=windows-1252">
```

Expires META Tag

An optional tag that defines the date when the file will be considered expired in cache and a new page will be generated. Only use when your website is running a limited time event or there is a preset date when your document will no longer be valid.

```
<meta http-equiv="expires" content="Tue, 04 Dec 1993 21:29:02 GMT">
```

Refresh META Tag

An optional tag used as a way to redirect or refresh users to another web page after X number of seconds. This META tag is often used as a "bridge" page which is accessed first by users and are then redirected to another web page.

```
<meta http-equiv="refresh"
content="seconds;url=http://www.website.com/index.html">
```

NAME Attribute

<META> tags with a NAME attribute are used for information types that do not correspond to HTTP headers.

Common Examples of the HTTP-NAME Attribute Keyword Tag Search

Engines that support META tags will often use the keywords found on your pages as a means to categorize your website based on the search engines indexing algorithms (proprietary algorithms which index your website in search engine databases). Ensure you choose keywords that are relevant to your site. Avoid excessive repetition as many search engines will penalize your rankings for attempting to abuse their system. Search engines give priority to the first few words in your description, so focus on your main keywords and then elaborate further by using synonyms or other related words.

```
<meta name="keywords" content = "keyword1,keyword2,keyword3">
```

Commas usually separate keyword values. The maximum keyword allowance is 1000 characters, however, it is believed that anything over 255 characters is ignored.

Description Tag

Search engines that support META tags will often display the Description META tag along with your title in their results. When creating your META tags, make the first sentence of your description field capture the attention of a user and use the rest of the description tag to elaborate further.

```
<meta name="description" content="This camping site is about outdoor camps">
```

Keep this description to no more than 25 words (maximum allowance is 150 characters). Not all search engines recognize this tag.

Conclusion

Don't let your site be one of the four web sites on the Web that do not have Meta Tags. Optimize it now, so you have a greater chance to be listed in the search engines. Getting listed, will bring more traffic which may mean more sales.

14. KEYWORDS TO OPTIMIZE YOUR SITE FOR SEARCH ENGINES

You have designed a beautiful web site and published it for the world to see and visit. You wait patiently, however there is either a trickle or no visitors at all and therefore no sales. You may be 1 of 4 web site owners that has not optimized your site with keywords for ranking in the search engines. You say you have inserted keywords in your site, but are they targeted keywords? Let's take a deeper look at how to use keywords to optimize your site.

What is a Keyword?

These are words or phrases which people would insert in a search engine to look for information contained in your site. The search engine spiders take those words and display the best sites that relate to that information. Depending on the popularity of the word, you may have a million or more web sites to choose from. Ideally your web site should appear in the top 20-30 sites displayed, to be included in the persons search. This would result in a continuous stream of visitors.

Targeting the Best Keywords

If your keywords are not tightly targeted to your site, you will dim your chances of being highly ranked in the search engines. Here's what to do: Insert a word or phrase that one would search on for information on your site.

- Create a table (in MS Excel or MS Word) with 4 columns.
- Insert 200-300 words or phrases in the first column from the results of your suggestion tool.
- Use the second column to record the popularity of each word beside each word in the first column.
- The third column is to determine the competing sites for the words you have listed above. Do a search on a few of the most popular search engines (is Yahoo.com, Google.com) for the words or phrases you have listed above. (i.e. if you do a search on Google.com for "Internet Marketing", your reply will be: "Results 1 - 10 of about 3,280,000"). Enter this number in the third column for each searched word to determine its popularity.

In the fourth column you can enter the results of the other 3 columns. Mark the words in this column that have a high number of searches but have low competition. Utilize these keywords or phrases in your site, so you won't have to compete with the millions of other web pages.

Now you have a list of targeted keywords or phrases that you can incorporate in your web site. Not all search engines use keywords to rank your site, however you have increased your chances for those that do. Doing keyword research can lead to a continuous flow of visitors to your site, and ultimately more sales. Now we wonder where to place the keywords.

Title Tag

This tag should contain your most important keyword phrase. Make the title interesting enough to grab the visitor's attention. Only use 5 to 6 words in your title with your most relevant keyword in the beginning.

Description Meta Tag

The search engines often use this tag when they display the description of your web site in the search results. Try to make the description inviting for your visitors. The length should be less than 200 characters, including spaces.

Keyword Meta Tag

This tag will contain a listing of your keywords and keyword phrases that are relevant to your page and enable a Search Engine to find you.

Here are some things to remember:

- Don't use the same keyword more than 3 times.
- Use keywords that occur in your Title Tag and Description Tag.
- Use only 200 characters for all your keywords.
- Use different keywords for all your pages.
- Only use keywords that are relevant to your site.
- Use lower case letters.
- Use the single and plural forms of your keywords.
- Use commas or spaces between your keywords or keyword phrases.

Heading Tags

These tags hold separate topics between paragraphs and range from <H1>, which is very large and bold to <H6>, which is very small and bold. Your page heading should contain your most important keywords or keyword phrase.

Alt Tag

This tag is used to add text in place of the image. The user may have turned off reading the graphics to make the page load faster. Therefore he will read the ALT Tag text instead. Add short keyword rich text to your graphic links. Make sure the ALT text describes the link destination.

Hypertext Links

Include your keywords or keyword phrase in your link text.

Content

Search Engine spiders put more weight on keyword rich content that is higher up on the page rather than in the middle or lower section. Insert your keywords and keyword phrases in your text at least three times.

Types of Sites that won't get indexed by Search Engines.

- *Flash and Frame Sites pages*, search engines spiders will avoid them.
- *Dynamic Pages*, any web address that contains a question mark (i.e. ASP, Perl, Cold Fusion), will not be indexed by the spiders.
- *Password Protected Pages*, search engines spiders will not index any area that is protected by a password.

Meta Tag Generators

These are tools that can be used to automatically generate your keywords.

Conclusion:

Consumers are 5 times more likely to purchase your products after seeing search engine listings versus banners. Implementing these strategies mentioned, may not get you a number one ranking in the Search Engines, but you definitely have a distinct advantage over those web sites that have not done any optimizing.

15. MARKET YOUR WEB SITE ON A SHOE STRING BUDGET

Here are some of the most effective ways to promote your online business without spending a fortune and gaining great results. To get the best out of these methods, you need to target your market. Make sure you are "on target". Don't try to market to everyone. Promote consistently. Start a daily, weekly and monthly regimen or promotion. Track your progress - test out different ads. Keep a record of your marketing plans and which method is the most effective.

1. An Effective Web Site

I put this first, because even if you get thousands of visitors to your site, if it is not easy to navigate, doesn't look attractive and is not clear in its purpose, you will not have any sales or repeat visitors.

- a. A heading that immediately catches the visitors attention
- b. A description or sales letter that states (in easy to understand words), what your site is about.
- c. Easy navigation - your visitors must be able to tour your site with ease
- d. Ask for your order or what action you want the visitor to take.
- e. Contact information - make it easy for people to contact you.

2. Search engines

If you wish to get listed, here are some very important things to do first:

- a. Have a title that states clearly the benefits of your site containing some of your keywords.
- b. Meta Tag "description" should describe exactly what your site is about, using your main keywords.
- c. Meta tag "keywords" all the keywords that someone may search on to find your site.
- d. First paragraph - should also contain a description leading into your site using more of your keywords in your sentences. Make sure you do not repeat the same keywords in all of your descriptions more than 5 times.
- e. Submit to the main search engines by hand (don't use automated software because all search engines have different requirements.)

3. Opt in Newsletter

Capture names and email addresses on your web site for your newsletter to send out updates, tips, contests etc to your customers. Always offer something for free in return for their email address.

4. Writing articles

Write articles in your area of expertise, submit them to article announcement lists, ezine publishers in your niche market. Put the article on your web site, make your meta tags keyword rich with your article and submit to the search engines.

5. Classified Ads in AOL and Yahoo

- a. These are the best email classifieds on the Net. Create a catchy title for your ad. You can submit up to 10 ads. Create each ad with a different heading or submit to a different category listing.
- b. Use a follow up auto responder to create automatic follow up messages to your responses - one follow up is hardly ever enough for the Internet Marketer who is easily distracted or very busy with other things.
- c. Change your ad title every 24 hours, so that the ad stays at the top of the list.
- d. Track all your ads, to see how many hits they each get, then change the ad until you get a winner - then you can move onto paid advertising.

6. Free Ezine Ads

Here's another way to test market your ads. Submit to ezines that accept free ads in return for signing up for their ezine. An example:

- a. Subscribe to 21 ezines of your niche market - try to go for ones that publish weekly or biweekly.
- b. Track each ad you submit - some will take a while to publish your ad since they already may have back log of ads to be submitted.
- c. Once you have found those ezines that gave a good response, then you can use them again in the future.
- d. Your next step will be to advertise in low cost ezines.

7. Participating in Forum Discussions

- a. Find a forum where your target market visits.
- b. Offer friendly advice (don't advertise), ask questions, provide helpful information, most of all have the attitude of helping others, not taking - this will give you better results and you make friends as well.
- c. Leave an email signature at the end of each message, giving your name, title of your business, web site address and email address. Visitors to the forum will know where to look, if they wish to find out more about you.

If you implement these methods on a consistent basis, you will definitely see an increase in traffic to your web site.

16. Get Your Site Listed in the Search Engines

Getting listed in the Search Engines these days is crucial if you want to attract consistent traffic to your web site. Yet it is not easy these days. A listing in the Pay Per Click Search Engines is beyond the expense of what most small business marketers can handle. Getting listed in the others takes many weeks of tweaking your site and even after all that is done, there is still no guarantee. The answer is to create a Theme-Based Site, which will contain tightly focused keywords centering on the theme of the site.

Why are Theme-Based Sites so important

Search Engines have become wise to the millions of doorway pages being created. Online marketers try to trick the search engines in order to get a high ranking. This has now changed. Search engines are looking at the whole site as one page. Each page must relate tightly to the whole theme. This will allow the person searching to pull up only those sites focused on the subject he is searching for.

How Does This Work

1. The Theme-Based Site focuses on one product or service. You then build all your pages centered around this theme, being careful to create and weave researched keywords throughout your title, meta tags, headings and content. Here's how the search engine indexes your site:

Indexing of site title

Indexing of meta tags

Indexing of major headings

Indexing of text content of pages

Finally the search engine looks at the links on your site.

2. The site should have its own domain name, so it is a stand alone site that then links to your main site. This will be your sales site. This site has all your products or services on it. You can develop a Theme-Based Site for each of the products on your sales site. Each of these Theme-Based Sites will then link into your sales site, driving traffic to it. Here's an example of what it could look like:

car-care.com - your main sales site

interior-car-care.com - First Theme-Based Site

exterior-car-care.com - Second Theme-Based Site

engine-car-care.com - Third-Theme Based Site

All the Theme-Based Sites would contain a link to the car-care.com sales site. Your sales site will contain links to each of these Theme-Based Sites so visitors can go there for more in-depth information.

3. The purpose of your sales site is to make the sale. It does not have to be optimized with keywords because the focus is to get the order. The purpose of the Theme-Based site is to presale the product by providing all the information necessary to put the customer at ease, and bringing him into the buying position.

17. QUICK TIPS

Tips to Brand a Web Site

1. Include your logo in all pages. Position it at the top left of each page.
2. Complement your logo with a tagline or catchy sentence that summarizes your business purpose
3. Create a favicon, small graphic that appears next to the URL in the address bar of Internet Explorer.
4. Have a consistent look and feel in all your pages. Use a color scheme and layout that are clearly recognized across your site.
5. Have an About Us section, that includes all relevant information about you and your business.
6. Include a copyright statement at the bottom of each page.

Tips on Web Site Navigation

7. Design your pages to load in less than 10 seconds (50Kb maximum size, including pictures).
8. Group your navigational options in relevant categories.
9. Use common names for your menu options: Home, About Us, Contact Us, Help, Products. Avoid "clever" or "trendy" alternatives.
10. If your site uses Flash, also provide an HTML version for users who prefer a less fancy, faster site.
11. Provide simple text navigation links at the bottom of long pages, so users don't need to scroll back up.
12. Link your logo to your homepage, except in the homepage itself. Put a link to your homepage on all internal pages.
13. Display a "breadcrumb trail"; it is basically the path from the homepage to the page where you are. A breadcrumb trail looks like this: Home > Section > Sub-Section > Page, and facilitates navigation.
14. If your site is too big, provide Search capabilities. Include a search box in the upper right corner of your home page, and a link to a Search page from your interior pages.
15. Set your search box to search your site, not to search the web.
16. Create a custom error page that displays a simple site map with links to the main sections of your site. That way, you will not lose visitors that have followed a bad link or who misspelled your URL.

Tips On Layout and Content Presentation

17. Save the top of your page for your most important content. Good content must flow to the top.
18. Lay out your page with tables, and set the width in percentage terms instead of a fixed number of pixels. That way, your page will always fit the screen, without the need to scroll horizontally.
19. Optimize your page to be viewed best at 800x600 (the most popular resolution at time of writing).
20. Use high contrast for the body of your page: black text on white background, or white text on black background work best.
21. Don't use too many different fonts in one page. Also, avoid using small serif fonts (like Times Roman): they are difficult to read from a computer screen. Verdana is the most web-friendly font, since it is wide, clean and easy to read.
22. Avoid long blocks of text. Use tools that facilitate scanability, like bullets, subtitles, highlighted keywords, hyperlinks, etc.
23. Avoid amateurish features like: numeric page counters, wholesale use of exclamation points, all caps, center justified blocks of text, excessive animated gifs, busy backgrounds, etc.
24. Don't use pop-up windows. They distract your visitors and are immediately dismissed as ads.
25. Test your site so that it looks good in different browsers and resolutions.

END