

Websites Revisited

The website has undergone a number of transformations. There was a time when the website was an afterthought, thrown together without any genuine understanding of its value, but created nonetheless because it was a business necessity. Soon after, it was understood that the website is an essential business tool, and companies began to give the website the attention and resources necessary for it to deliver on its promise. Recently, there has been a new wave of web apathy, with many companies either failing to update their existing websites, or creating websites that are reminiscent of the day when they were deemed less critical.

What has happened that has caused this wave of apathy? Has the importance of the website diminished as the internet becomes a fact of life? Are there genuine business consequences to having a poorly structured and designed website?

The arguments for a good website are as relevant and critical today as they were 10 years ago when the internet started to gain momentum as a business tool. Certainly the hype of the day back then, which led to some web development companies demanding (and getting) millions of dollars for website development, has led to some disgruntled buyers. The exaggerated expectations of the internet, trumpeted by trendsetters and visionaries, were not completely wrong. Certainly the internet did not replace traditional commerce, but it did revolutionize it, and in this way, much of what was promised has in fact been delivered.

Is there any doubt today that prospective customers check out a website before calling a company? Is there any doubt that information gathering regarding products and prices is a common practice among even the most unsophisticated customers? The fact is, that the website is truly the window to a company and how the website is structured and designed speaks volumes about the company, its marketing approach, how it feels about its customers, and how it approaches business.

It is not an exaggeration to exclaim that a poor website hurts a business, while a good website enhances one. So, if this a business reality, why are there so many lousy websites?

The answer is an anomaly that has long puzzled Tudog. We see it in so many different avenues, including brochures, packaging and others. The reason is that while intellectually company leaders understand the need for premium materials, they don't really believe they make any real difference to them. In their minds, they know how a company looks is a key selling factor, yet they don't really believe it matters for them. It is one of the oddities of business Tudog has confronted, and we are seeing it more and more with regard to websites.

So what are the elements of a website that you need to revisit with an eye toward making sure your website is up to it maximum performance? Start with the following 4 critical components:

1. Content

The content of your website is perhaps the most important component. You need to be certain that your website is communicating your offering in a distinctive, yet simple manner. Also, you need to be certain to provide all the information a prospective customer may wish to learn about you. If you are leaving out specifics regarding who you are, what you do, your track record, or other vital facts, their absence may be perceived by the visitor not as an oversight, but rather as an indication of an intentional omission. This can, and most likely will, harm your chances.

2. Structure

The structure of your website has to do with how the website is laid out and how easy it is for people to pass from one group of information to the next. There needs to be an easy of navigation to your website, otherwise people will abandon it in either frustration or lack of resolve. In either case you have missed a chance to transfer information to someone who was actively seeking to learn about your company.

3. User-Ability

User-Ability has to do with the logic of your website construction. There are certain natural paths of information and certain links that are better placed through one path as opposed to another. The user-ability of your site, or user friendliness of your site, is important because it will encourage people to spend more time exploring while also delivering the sort after information more immediately.

4. Design

There is no way around it, and as much as you hate hearing it, how you look matters. How you look projects your level of professionalism, your concern for your company (and by extension your customers), and your business savvy. If you designed your website yourself, let your child in high school do it, or farmed it out to an amateur, your website will have the look of the unprofessional job it is. Problem is, so will your company.

The website and its central role in business needs to be revisited. Too many companies have allowed their site to sink into a static template, while far too many others are launching amateur sites thinking they can do the job of a professional. Too much about your business rests on the example your website shows. You may understand this to be true about other businesses. Now you have to understand it is true about your company too.