

COLUMNS

Is your Web site holding you back?

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Consumers, on average, spend more than eight hours per day consuming media. We keep mobile phones glued to our hands, stare at a computer screen all day at work and automatically connect to Wi-Fi in every building we enter. With every device we use from the television to the refrigerator becoming "smart" and smarter it is no surprise that customers turn to the Internet first for almost every decision they make.

This is how your Web site instantly becomes your digital storefront. Whether you want to drive people into your physical store or you conduct your business entirely online, a good Web site is critical. A few mistakes can make the difference between a new customer and a lost opportunity.

It is not good enough to have a Web site for the sake of having a Web site. It is true you need a Web site. But an ineffective Web site can do more harm than good.

So, is your Web site holding you back?

Design

Consider the mantra "Image is everything." Just like you would not meet a customer in your pajamas, your Web site needs to be dressed for success.

If your site looks like it came straight out of the early 1990s, potential customers will think your business is dated and out of touch.

If your site is cluttered with hard-to-read information, your visitors will think that you are unorganized and lose trust in your business.

The design of your Web site must reflect your business. It should appeal to today's customers and give them a strong, positive impression that makes them want to do business with you.

Message

Does your Web site have the same boring content as any other generic business? If you have a template-based, cookie-cutter Web site, the answer is probably yes.

The content on your Web site is just as important as the design itself. In a matter of seconds, a potential consumer will make a snap judgment about your business. If they cannot find the information they are looking for, they will turn away.

Many business owners make the mistake of writing their Web site content for search engine optimization (SEO). Sure, it is good to understand and use keywords. And yes, you want your Web site to rank. But if the content is stuffed with search terms, keywords and data only a search engine could appreciate, your Web site will turn away every new

person who finds it.

The message in your Web site must represent your unique business. It has to reach out and take the hand of the customer, guide them down the path to success and conversion, and build a relationship from the first moment they land on the homepage.

Usability

Let us be honest almost no one will come to your Web site, look at every page and read every word. They want to find the information they need quickly and easily to get back to their busy lives.

That is nearly impossible to do if your Web site is not mobile-friendly. A responsive design is no longer simply good practice it is necessary.

Imagine your ideal customer pulling up her phone to search for a business like yours. If she has to pinch, pull, zoom and swipe just to see your home page, she will bounce right off and move on to the next Web site and give her business to your competitor.

What is more, the much more likely scenario is that consumers will not even find your Web site if it is not mobile friendly, thanks to Google's algorithm update from April last year.

Search

SEO is a double-edged sword. If you write your Web site entirely for the search engine, you will be penalized. If you ignore search engines entirely, you will not see any Web site traffic.

To our benefit, SEO continues to evolve. With every update, search engines prioritize the experience for the end user your customer. A Web site designed with your customer at its heart, with marketing as the spine, will align with the search engines, too.

Bottom line, your Web site needs to be found. If you are making any of the errors above, you are working against yourself. You cannot rise to the top with an anchor around your neck.

Ask yourself the question: Is your Web site holding you back?

If the design is dated, cluttered or does not put your best foot forward, the answer is yes.

If the message does not grab their attention, build a relationship and lead them to the sale, the answer is yes.

If the Web site is difficult to navigate, ignores mobile users or takes longer than a few seconds to find the right information, the answer is yes.

If your Web site cannot be found in search engines, the answer is yes.

THE INTERNET is inescapable. A Web site can be the difference between your business' success and failure. If you are not sure if your Web site is helping or hurting you, ask an expert to review it.

Every aspect of your Web site from design to optimization should work together to set your business up for success.

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