

FEATURE ARTICLE

Put Your Best Foot Forward: Your Website as a Marketing Tool

Too many websites look like strange hybrids of information, advertisements, and brochures all wrapped up in a video game. Visitors want information, and they want it now. When writing web content, think “short attention span.” As with any advertising medium, you have one-fourth of a second to grab a visitor’s attention. For example, magazine articles are most often viewed rapidly by readers if they can glance at a headline, photo, caption, or sub-head before speeding on to the next article or advertisement. Instant messaging is the name of the game.

A web page is not a blog, term paper or an essay. It is not graded on how many words are strung together to make a short story long. Visitors are driven away by long-winded company missions, credentials, product descriptions and lengthy news stories about the company or product. Remember to include content that answers the question, “What will it do for me?”

Beyond Your Homepage – Which Way Did They Go?

After viewing the website’s homepage, visitors decide where to go next. Once you capture their interest, now they’re ready to find out more about you, your product or your service. An appealing website design invites visitors to:

- Contact you.
- Make an appointment.
- Buy your product(s).
- Give you their contact information.
- Tell you their needs/interests.
- Provide you with research data.

If your homepage navigation is well designed, visitors will be able to easily find and click on their next area of interest. Here’s where special offers, incentives or other benefits come into play. Put your navigation bar on the left or at the top of the page, in easy to spot locations. Additionally, place a navigation bar at the bottom of each page so visitors do not have to continually scroll back to the top of the page to further explore the website.

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TPS WRITING SERVICES:

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What They Read... Is What They Get

Website visitors who are faced with heavy text are easily lost. Use these ideas to break up blocks of text to help visitors immediately locate their areas of interest on the page:

- **Subheads:** Put these in a different color from the text to help define the wording below them. The subhead can be used as a guide to locate quickly that part of the text of interest.
- **Bulleted Items:** Break apart a paragraph that contains a list (benefits, uses, services offered, credentials, clients, etc.) by using bullet points. This approach enables information to pop off the page.
- **Secondary Navigation:** If there are lists of services or types of products, employ a secondary navigation element to the page, often on the side of the page. This allows visitors to narrow their searches quickly and get right to what they are looking for.
- **Special Effects:** It's okay to use a few special effects. Any more may divert visitors from the main emphasis of the website. A word to the wise, if graphics require long downloading times, they may drive visitors away from the website in frustration.

In an uncertain economy, it is imperative for companies large and small to remember the foundation of positioning that is the backbone of their very existence. That's one reason why it is helpful to conduct an internal analysis of positioning and branding in order to determine if one or both have been corrupted by counter-productive growth-based decisions. A team-building

exercise on this very subject needs to look seriously at such issues as clear and easily understood delivery of messages, credibility in the marketplace and engendering customer loyalty. Positioning will always be the foundation and branding its reinforcement. Neither one should be taken for granted.

Eliminate the Negative – Color Tips

Avoid blocks of copy in reversed type. White on black (or white on any other color) is difficult to read in quantity. However, color is important. For example, use color pictures and illustrations or use different colors in the headers, subheads and text. Good design means picking a color scheme and sticking with it. Create contrast on the website by using different font types and sizes. Finally, depending on the background color, ensure that website links are visible both before and after being clicked. For example, most websites put links in blue before they are clicked and in burgundy after they have been clicked. If using a dark background, use light colors for the links.

Visitor Drop-Off – Lines Too Long

Two-thirds of the way across the line of type visitors drop off and lose track of what they are reading. This reader drop-off rate is relative to the length of the line of text and the size of the type. If you must run text the full width of the page, then increase the type size to balance the length of the line.

Drop-off is a significant design factor for the new wider website standard for the larger monitors now in general use. It's important to balance artwork, sidebars, navigation columns, and the use of shorter columns to avoid a layout that requires

the reader to scan a full length wider web page.

Call to Action

Remember to use a “call to action” on your website. This is where visitors are asked to contact you, provide you with information, and better yet make a purchase. A “call to action” can appear on the homepage or on any page where it is probable that visitors might be receptive and ready to take action. Use phrases such as: “Buy Now” or “Call Today” or “Contact Us.”

Many websites are not set up for on-line sales. Instead, the main goal is to generate enough interest to get a visitor to make an appointment or respond to an offer. If they are on your website, they are already a warm lead and you want to capture their contact information to re-contact them. Remember, your site was not only built to inspire confidence in your products or services, but as a lead-generating or income-generating tool to grow your business.

Get Help

If your website is not measuring up to expectations and generating solid leads to new clients, you may need help from a professional design group with proven success in upgrading website effectiveness. However, remember the most important part of your website is the content. Make certain it is accurate, interesting and updated as well as provided in a professional manner. In this way your website will supply visitors with the information they are seeking while bringing you potential new clients.

Article Source: Bruce Rigney, owner of Rigney Graphics. Rigney Graphics provides graphic design and marketing materials for businesses and individuals. Visit www.rigneygraphics.com.



TPS MARKETING TIPS:**TPS Blog Announcement: Trade Secrets**

Are you bogged down by blogs? Tired of reading someone else's political opinions, watching tacky YouTube videos, or reading another banal Facebook update?

So are we. That's why Trade Press Services has started Trade Secrets, a blog for business leaders. Every week, we offer tips, insights, humor, and valuable information that can help you get your business out there where it belongs - in front of your customers and prospects.

So come visit us at blog.tradepressservices.com. We promise: no ranting, no raving... just content that makes sound business sense.

RECOMMENDED READING:

1. *Creating Web Pages for Dummies*, Bud E. Smith and *Web Marketing for Dummies* by Jan Zimmerman
2. *HTML & XHTML: The Definitive Guide* by Chuck Musciano and Bill Kennedy
3. *Web Design in a Nutshell: A Desktop Quick Reference* by Jennifer Niederst
4. *eBoot Camp: Proven Internet Marketing Techniques to Grow Your Business* by Corey Perlman
5. *Internet Marketing Methods Revealed: The Complete Guide to Becoming an Internet Marketing Expert* by Miguel Todaro

QUARTERLY QUOTE:

I Wish I Had Said That

“Make it simple.

Make it memorable.

Make it inviting to look at.

Make it fun to read.”

-Leo Burnett

Pioneer American advertising executive, 1891-1971

**BUSINESS RESOURCES:**

Here are some websites to check out to learn a little more on building and marketing a webpage.

1. **About.com: Marketing** provides many links and resources for learning how to use the Internet to support a company's marketing objectives.
2. **Smashing Magazine** is an online-only magazine created to inform readers about the latest trends and techniques in Web development. Read their article on “10 Principles of Effective Web Design”. <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2008/01/31/10-principles-of-effective-web-design/>
3. **About.com: Graphic Design** contains information on all types of media graphic design, including website design. Read their article on “Five Rules of Effective Website Navigation”. http://graphicdesign.about.com/od/effectivewebsites/a/web_navigation.htm4
4. **The Webby Awards** is the leading international award honoring excellence on the Internet. Visit their website to view award winning websites from this year as well as previous years. <http://www.webbyawards.com>

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2854 Sapra Street
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362
Phone: 805.496.8850
Fax: 805.374.9167
www.tradepressservices.com