

10 Reasons Why Websites Fail

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- "Website strategy is the key to making your website "work smarter, not harder""
– **Sam Saltis**

Introduction

Every day thousands of new websites appear on the web that are destined to have limited impact on the businesses they represent. Yet there are businesses with websites that have transformed the way they operate through additional lead generation, customer satisfaction or online products sales. There is no new business paradigm that defines how to succeed in the web environment. However there are some fundamental mistakes made by businesses in setting up a web presence. Below are ten reasons websites never achieve maximum impact.

1. The site is developed without clear strategic objective

Many companies construct their first website without any real planning. The initial aim they have is to replicate their current sales brochure or to detail a list of products or services the company has to offer. A year down the track after the business has received a limited response from their website they conclude that the site is of little value.

This pattern can be seen by many sites that exist on the web including some large organisations with multi-million dollar turnovers. Often these sites are an exact replica of the organisations marketing brochure with an introduction page and some contact details constructed using Flash technology. Most these businesses conclude that the web has no impact for their business and are resistant to spend any more in upgrading or enhancing their site.

The reality however is that every business can benefit from the Internet. The key is to understand what your customers, suppliers or organisation really want from your website. To do this, you need to define a clear strategy. This plan will involve the participation of a number of key staff including sales, marketing and operations. Once you have completed this internal exercise, you should then consult your customers and suppliers to understand how you can provide an enhanced service to them through your site.

As with any planning initiative, this is an iterative process where you learn and refine as you go. Your website should be a work in progress that evolves as your business evolves.

2. The site is not adequately maintained and information is out of date

One of the key reasons visitors leave web sites is that they contain poor or outdated information. If you compare this to your business, it would be like stocking products that are out of date. Customers will realise the poor quality product you are

delivering and never return. In the same way, if your site is poorly written and contains grammar or spelling mistakes, it will immediately turn visitors away.

Achieving accuracy and completeness of information requires accountability within your organisation. Someone should have responsibility to manage the information on the site and respond to client requests to ensure that the information remains fresh.

With today's advancements in technology, the management of website content is simple and does not require technical expertise.

3. The site is invisible and can't be found on search engines

Many companies spend tens of thousands of dollars constructing and launching a great website, only to then assume that the technology will market itself.

Search Engines have become the gateways to the Internet. The most popular sites are search engines. It is therefore important to make sure you have registered your site with one of these search engines. Many companies offer a service that register your web site to thousands of different search engines. There are however only a handful of sites that you really need to submit to.

Having submitted your site to a search engine does not guarantee success. A recent client experience supported this argument where the client (a wig manufacturer) submitted their site to a popular search engine only to find that there were nearly 18 million wig related sites. Most people using a search engine will not go past the third page of search results and so positioning is all important.

To achieve better positioning, you require specific search terms related to your business that are used by the search engines to index your site.

Search engines recently introduced paid placement that allows your website to be positioned as the first result when specific search words are chosen. If a visitor clicks your link, you pay the search engine for the click through. Paid placements are an efficient way to reach your target market. They have advantages over traditional advertising in that visitors have an interest in your product/service through the choice of search terms they have input.

4. Emphasis on appearance more than business value and functionality

Through our experience we have found that most customers spend 80% of the implementation for a new website by discussing the look & feel and 20% discussing the functionality of the site.

Although the look of your site adds legitimacy and is a reflection of your brand, graphically intensive websites can be too large for today's consumer. This slows interaction with the visitor and potentially distracts them from their primary objective of visiting in the first place.

Ensure there is a balance between the look and function of your web site. Help visitors by ensuring that the navigation of your site remains constant throughout every page. Make it easy for them to get information or interact with you. Learn from your sites statistics what is popular and should be further developed. Internet visitors are not patient and so making them wait too long increases the chances they will leave and surf to a competitor's site. Your goal is to have your customers stay and return to your site as often as possible.

5. The site does not have clear calls to action

The main street in Las Vegas is the perfect model for calls to action. Bright neon lights, continuous shows and spectacular fountains are all designed to get a visitors attention and draw them into the venue.

The web is an endless street of competition. If someone visits your website you have a limited amount of time to get their attention before they surf elsewhere. Ensure that your visitors know what they're supposed to do at your website, make it easy for them to find information or request it from you.

Fulfilling the needs of your customers requires you to learn from them through feedback, customer polls and targeted pages that are easily accessible. Have an obvious theme and immediately let your visitors know what you are selling or promoting. Usually the best way to do this is by briefly describing the purpose of your website, and including product photos that can help people understand your company. Remember the self serve aspect, when I want to buy I can.

6. The site is only considered as a marketing brochure

Most business will replicate their marketing material directly on the web when they establish their first site. The material will have pictures of products or services and some information about the history of the company. Such websites are not seen as a valued strategic asset but more a distraction that is designed for promotion of the business and nothing more.

The Internet has the power to transform your business by enabling your customers to gain controlled access to company information. It can also give your suppliers an ability to interact with you in a much more efficient manner. The Internet also acts as a distribution channel to attract new customers.

Companies today are using their websites to:-

- generate business and leads
- provide higher service levels to their customers
- improve supply chains
- reduce organisational overheads

Such companies consider their website as an extension of the business.

7. Control of the website is through a technology group instead of the core business group

For many years, owning a web site was seen as being difficult to manage and requiring technical expertise to build. Consequently many companies left the development and maintenance of their website to a technical division.

Although a technical division will create a great solution, their knowledge of your products and services can be limited. Successful websites must be controlled by the core business group, usually the marketing or operational team. The managers of these teams are then best able to control the content, direct marketing campaigns and client relationships. The technology department should support the business outcomes as required but really only act as the workhorse for delivery of these outcomes.

8. Businesses don't learn from their visitors nor understand their needs

Your online presence is an evolving environment. What you start with today will not be what you finish with tomorrow. The secret of success websites is their ability to engage the visitor and learn what they are interested in achieving. Taking this information and understanding the visitors' needs is vital to then adjusting your site to meet those needs.

A recent example we give was a client that had established a simple site with a prominent feedback form. After a month the feedback form was one of the most popular pages. By analysing this feedback, it was discovered that visitors were asking questions about the clients' products. The site was then altered to have a comprehensive help area that provided all the product information and answered questions relating to the product. This adjustment ensured that visitors would find what they were seeking.

9. The authenticity of the site cannot be gauged

The Internet has suffered and continues to suffer from issues of trust. Successful sites provide the visitor with ample information to gain legitimacy. This includes contact information, privacy statements, company history, management information, customer guarantee programs etc.

The aim is to have enough information for your visitors so that they feel the company he/she is interacting with is a legitimate business with proper policies and procedures in place. Successful sites often obtain security accreditation from bodies or associations that provide standards and auditing to ensure that visitors feel safe leaving their information or making a purchase.

10. The site fails to personalise information for different visitors

The internet is the ultimate information resource. Visitors have endless options when it comes to finding out exactly what they need. When establishing your site you should consider what information visitors want and the different market segments of visitors. Your ability to tailor information and services for these different interest areas will win you their loyalty. This loyalty will result in repeat visits, which ultimately helps generate revenue opportunities for your business. The one size fits all solution will leave the door open for a competitor who has the ability to provide tailored services and solutions for each market segment.

11. Conclusion

There are millions of business related websites on the Internet. If you wish to have a successful web presence then it is vital you give your customers what they want. Unfortunately they won't always tell you what they want. However by understanding and avoiding the 10 most common mistakes above, you will go a long way in ensuring you gain an edge over your competitors and give yourself the best chance of success.

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