Marketing PowerBoost

How to Ensure a Dynamic Web Site

Proven strategies to drive repeat visitors to your site

By Susan Baka

Could your business use a marketing powerboost? In this article, I explore one of the most effective marketing tools at your disposal – your web site. It has the potential to be your most powerful marketing tool, yet too often is the weak link in the marketing chain.

Unlike printed materials, a web site can be a dynamic source of two-way communication between you and your existing – and potential – customers. But it can be a double-edged sword: a poorly designed site with out-of-date information will frustrate visitors and convey an unprofessional image of your company. Conversely, a well-planned and crafted site with good navigation, content and design gives visitors a reason to keep coming back.

Based on my experience in launching and redesigning web sites and writing content for many clients, let me share these *do's* and *don'ts* of site make-up and design:

5 Top Web Tips

1. *Determine your objective before you launch or reposition your site*. Do you want to inform, educate or sell? Design your site and write content with your goal top of mind, hiring web experts to help who are savvy in both design and information architecture. It's worth the investment to do it right upfront.
2. *Make your home page an invitation to explore.* Ensure that it clearly states what your company does and that it provides a comprehensible means of navigation to ensure information is easy to find. Including banners and buttons adds excitement and interest.
3. *Give visitors a variety of ways to navigate your site.* For example, the liberal use of hyper-links - in-page, in-site or links to other sites – allows visitors to "jump" from one word or idea to an associated idea, subject or related page in seconds.
4. *Respond to inquiries in a timely fashion.* Respond to Contact Us and electronic questions within 12 hours or next business day.
5. *Commit the resources to update your site content regularly*. It's important for you or someone on your staff to take ownership. Develop an updating routine and schedule. Outsource to web experts if you lack time or skills in-house.

5 Web Traffic Stoppers

1. *Treating a website as brochureware*. Create a compelling experience for visitors rather than an electronic version of your print brochure. Showcase your expertise with tips and articles related to your market.
2. *Keeping out-of-date information live*. Nothing loses visitor trust like stale news.
3. *Using flash introductions*. These once nifty, cool flash introductions have become a time-consuming annoyance to many.
4. *Making people search for you*. There's nothing more frustrating for visitors and potential clients if they can't figure out how to contact your company. Ensure a Contact Us button is part of your navigation menu.
5. *Introducing your site with a bang…and then walking away*. The biggest mistake I constantly see clients – both big and small – make is launching or redesigning their Web site with a great

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flourish and then failing to populate it with fresh, new content regularly to give visitors a reason to return.

Remember, it's foolish to make the up-front investment in a site if you do not maintain it as an ongoing, dynamic entity. Check it weekly, remove outdated information and add new content regularly. If you or your staff are too busy, contract the services of a web content writer. And periodically review your entire site from the eyes of a visitor – even invest in a critique from a web expert – to ensure it continues to send a strong, clear and compelling message about your company.

Information specialist and marketing expert Susan Baka, President of Bay Communications & Marketing Inc., has been providing innovative marketing communication strategies and vehicles – including content-rich websites - for clients since 1991. Visit www.baycomm.ca to get free sure-fire tips on how to boost your marketing.

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