

Website Overview

Love it or not, technology has changed dramatically the way most of us live, work and play. Just take a look at your golf equipment, cellular phone and home computer and think back 10, 5 or even two years. It's amazing isn't it? Wonder what will happen over the next 5 years?

Leveraged properly, the Internet can be tremendous business partner, regardless of your industry. Return on investment multiples for some online endeavors are staggering. And there are many success stories beyond e-Bay, Amazon and Google.

While you may have no interest in the mechanics of developing a website, we ask that you take a little time to review the information that follows, before completing the enclosed questionnaire. We have found that the investment of time clients spend in this early planning phase to get up to speed on some basic concepts, yields tremendous rewards both in terms of their new website, and in how effective it becomes in growing their business. Let's maximize this opportunity that technology has presented!

Important - there are 3 parts to every website and they must all work together

Design is the look and feel - includes colors, font size, number of columns, styles, etc

Content is king – it doesn't matter how pretty a website is, make the content of value to the visitors

Functionality is how it performs - navigation, forms, e-commerce, videos, signups, membership, etc

Planning

Determine Goals

What you would like your site to accomplish?

Who are your customers and what are their needs?

What can you put on your site to meet these needs?

Targeting new customers

Use testimonials and photos of your work

Differentiators - what makes your business unique?

Include a map of your location

Managing existing customer relations

Post information specifically for your existing customers

Online form for new clients

Consider a blog, membership areas, forums, photo gallery, polls

Structure

Make it easy for visitors to find info - navigation

Standard pages to include: Contact Us, About Us, FAQ, Privacy Statement, Sitemap

Include on every page – phone number, email address, link to home page, location if appropriate

Content

All content should have value and purpose

Provide differentiators

Involve your customers

What they would like on your site

What is working well?

View other Web sites (search related sites)

Website Overview (continued)

Content (continued)

Include as appropriate:

Contact form - mailing list for newsletters and promos

Business hours and address

Include map

Sell products or services

Shipping and return policy

Overview

First impressions are key, home page (first page) needs to:

Send the right message

Convey the purpose and personality of your business

Be informative and concise

In general, your website should

Serve needs of both existing and new customers

Provide basic description of what your business does

Provide clear navigation - links to other sections for more detailed information

Update frequently – keep them coming back.

Graphics

Display company logo

Images of your work, products, establishment

Animations – very limited if at all - never more than one per page

Colors

Background - neutral colors (same throughout)

Limit black to picture display (makes text harder to read & difficult to print)

Blocks of color to highlight important content

Organization

Divide content into short, logical sections

Provide submenus to ease navigation

Open any external links in a new window to keep visitors on your site

Links to information about packages, philosophies, contact us, etc

Links should appear in same place on pages

Link to home page on every page

Design allows page jumping to find exact info visitor needs

Provide site map

Consistency - repetition

Branding

Background color

Navigation bar

Company logo

Features remain consistent in size and location

Website Overview (continued)

New customers

- Sell your company's strengths
- Post client or customer testimonials
- Quotes from press coverage
- Business and philosophies on 'About Us'
- Pictures of work samples
- Literature: brochure, catalog

Existing customers

- Create "member only" area w/information, photos, news, specials
- Provide content which helps develop and maintain the relationship
- Offer specials to develop loyalty
- Online newsletter they can forward to their friends

Structure (pages)

Home Page - Index

- Brief overview of what you do
- Links to pages w/complete info
- Photo of business
- Company logo
- Email Signup

Products & Services

- Description and photos of offerings
- Photos of your work, office, or products
- Buy buttons for purchases

About Us

- Description of when and why – business founded
- Employee biographies
- Links to press

Contact Us

- Address - phone numbers - e-mail links
- Online form
- Map

FAQ's

- Questions/answers for prospective and existing customers
- Answers to questions commonly asked by current customers

Pricing

- Package and pricing options

Portfolio/Clients

- Photos or samples of your work
- Customer testimonials

Website Overview (continued)

Layout

- Direct people to particular place(s)
- Make it easy to find (ie the products page)
- Prominent and easily visible link on all pages
- Place most important information above the fold - easy to find
- Navigation menu
- E-mail link prominent on every page
- Rollover effects & special graphics for polished look

What to Avoid

- Animations (seldom)
- Scrolling, Blinking, Moving text
- Bright, garish, or clashing colors - choose colors wisely.
- Hit Counters
- Under Construction signs

What to include

- About the Company
- FAQ page
- Contact information
- Customer testimonials
- Memorable address

Images

- Can make Web site attractive, visually appealing
- Use images to enhance aesthetic, navigational or informational viewpoint
 - Help visitors navigate
 - Convey important information
 - Build your brand - company logo
 - Animations (sparingly) to call attention to critical sections
 - Professional look results from significant portions of white space
- Don't have appropriate images?
 - Use stock photos
 - Scan photographs, drawings, etc into digital format.

Advertise

- Incorporate your Web address everywhere
 - Yellow page ad, brochures, mailings, fliers and any other advertising
 - Include Web address as a part of your e-mail signature
 - Company letterhead

Search engine optimization (SEO)

Section devoted to SEO

Page display title – concisely communicate what is on your page.

Meta tags - words and descriptions embedded in HTML code on each page

“Keywords” and “page description” are used by search engines and web directories

Internet Advertising

Internet advertising is becoming more sophisticated every day. It used to be that you could just put some keywords on your pages and Google would find them. Well, you still need to put keywords on your page, but it's important to choose the right words and track the keywords and search statistics on a regular basis – tweaking as necessary. This is primarily SEO, but it has become more technical than just including keywords – it's how you include them, where you include them, naming your images properly, careful link distribution, etc.

You can also pay to advertise on the major search engines, but just as SEO has developed, so has the importance of choosing which keywords to pay for, how to write your ad copy, PPC (pay per click), PPV (pay per view), etc You also must decide whether to advertise through Google's Search Network or Content Network, as well as other search engines, Yahoo and MSN. There are others, but these are the critical ones.

Example: There are more than 100,000,000 searches for the word “Golf” in 1 month and the competition for that word is tremendous. The amount you would have to pay per click to appear on the first page would be ridiculous AND you would have many people clicking your ad, just to see what was there without even contacting you. If you didn't put a daily limit, you could lose thousands of dollars! That's a fast way to blow your budget without a return – not very good value.

There are a variety of ways to avoid that example, as well as a lot of ways to have people find you on the internet which cost very little or nothing at all. One of the latest strategies is Social Media Marketing – not only do you need accounts on the primary social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, etc, but you also need to know how to take advantage of them and not turn visitors away.

Social Networking has become a separate tool which when used properly can have incredible results. You should also have a blog to link all your networks and website together. Now that you have your blog and setup your social network accounts, it's time to develop a strategy.

I used to include a small section for Social Media Marketing in this overview, but to manage it properly has become a very involved proposition which I will describe in more detail in a separate article.