



Top Ten Web Mistakes

Abstract

Leveraging the Web is more important than ever as more people start their purchasing process over the Internet.

In the B2C world, consumer online research is becoming increasingly relevant to retailers: for 70 percent of households with incomes of more than \$75,000+, the Internet is the primary source of information about products and services according to eMarketer.

Those purchasing habits have extended into the business world as well. Buyers search for a new product or service in one of two ways: they go online 30 percent of the time or they ask for advice from a peer or consultant 40 percent according to research from B2B Online. The website becomes even more valuable during the decision stage for many purchases such as technology.

Whether potential customers start their purchasing process online to determine decision making criteria and the relevant industry players or consult the web as part of their evaluation due diligence, your organization's perception and credibility in the marketplace is determined online.

The keys to leveraging the Web include being found, professionally represented, engaging, and credible.

Your firm's online persona (brand and credibility) are more than the images and text on your website. In today's Internet world your online persona needs to be as professional and effective as your organization is offline.

Organizations today must use the web to encounter prospective customer at the critical moment when they begin to pursue purchasing options. This article highlights the most common mistakes made by organizations that can reduce a website's effectiveness and a company's long-term growth prospects.

Leveraging the Web Checklist

- Potential customers find your organization first before they find your competitors
- Your website represents your brand, products, and services online as they are offline
- Your website starts a sales dialogue and/or engages prospects
- Online information, news, and postings about your organization are accessible and positive

If your organization cannot check all four boxes your missing out on customer opportunities.

About Liquid Development: We Simplify Technology.

For almost a decade, Liquid Development has simplified technology for medium and Fortune 500 organizations by providing best-in-class application development and web content management technology and service. For a no-obligation technical assessment, contact us at www.liquiddev.com.



Introduction

This article provides information on web trends and best practices for medium and large organizations. It offers ten tips to help utilize the web and avoid costly mistakes for your organization.

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Mistake: Multiple Website Objectives

Sometimes a website can look great, have the latest technology, and a full support team but still fail to produce expected gains.

This is a typical problem and forming a committee will not solve the issue because the problem is not the execution of the website, but its lack of a primary objective.

In the early 90s websites were largely informational brochures, which morphed into today's sales and ecommerce, lead generation, or topical content websites, blogs, and communities.

Failure to pick a singular objective is failure for a website. A recent nonprofit we advised wanted to drive leads and promote its philanthropic activities as well as educate teachers and students. Talk about confusing! It tried to do all three simultaneously and failed. The nonprofit could have picked one objective and created a purposeful website and supported the other goals of the organization through a portal, site map links, community, or sister sites.

To define a primary objective, first and foremost, determine your organization's target audience. Second, what is the main point of the website experience?

- Lead generation (Exchange contact information for knowledge)
- Branding (Learn about your company and what it stands for)
- Sales or ecommerce
- Sales support (testimonials etc.)
- Other?

When your website is not providing value to your organization's bottom-line or performance is falling short of expectations, it is time to evaluate the website's primary objective.

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Mistake: Creative Over Functionality

Ninety percent of all websites created start with creative design. This may make sense for a design firm, but does it apply to an energy, services based business, or technology firm?

"Failure to pick a singular objective is failure for a website."



When evaluating your website ask the following questions?

- What is the primary objective of the website?
- What key messages should visitors leave with?
- What actions should visitors take?
- How should visitors interact with the website?
- What content and functionality does the website need to meet its goals?

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Mistake: Building a Website Users Cannot Manage

Technology should be an enabler not a time waster. If only web and IT personnel are responsible and can manage the website will it achieve its objectives?

Today, all sorts of web and Internet tools, applications, and content management systems exist that make it simple and easy for anyone who can type to manage and improve a website's user experience.

IT should not be needed after a website goes live. Department heads, customer support staff, or sales should be utilizing the web to improve your bottom-line or create a better web experience.

"Technology should be an enabler not a time waster."

If your website or CMS is so complex that IT or the original vendor are required to keep it current then evaluate your alternatives.

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Mistake: Lack of Defined Quality Control Process

While creating a website that is difficult to update is crazy so is granting everyone access to make changes without a standard quality control system. Defining roles and responsibilities for the website is the most critical component of ensuring that your website is properly managed and maintained.

For complex organizations technology content management systems exist with workflow processes and signoffs that can be customized for your organization.



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Mistake: Not Building for Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Building a restaurant in the middle of a forest does not make much sense either. On average companies invest less than 5% of their marketing budget on their website and less than 1% on natural or organic search engine optimization.

The trouble is, pay-per-click searches cost money each time somebody visits your website, and click costs are rising in many sectors. Natural search engine optimization should be completed to capitalize on every marketing dollar spent.

Flash and animation are cool, but use it sparingly to add value to a website. Websites can be search engine optimized AND flashy.

Without an attractive, dynamic, helpful, and optimized website customers will not find or buy from your organization.

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Mistake: Lack of Measurement and Metrics

Analyze inbound and outbound traffic to improve your website's performance.

Routinely customize the top inbound pages to direct and convert visitors to prospects.

Fix or improve the top exit pages with A/B testing. Once a baseline is established, start optimizing the page by making *one* change at a time. More than one makes it impossible to determine which change actually made a difference.

Search Engine Marketing Best Practices

While over 100 factors impact search engine optimization (SEO), these top ten are the first place an organization should start:

Top Ten Website Optimization Best Practices

1. Links: Add a site map

Approximately 80 percent of your search engine ranking is based on the number and relevance of the links in your site. Adding a site map will make it easier to search your site and find all the keywords, content and links your site has to offer. Plus, a site map adds more links! Create a site map page with text HTML hyperlinks to every page on your site. Make sure to add your top four keyword phrases below. Then submit this page to major search engines.

2. Optimization: Pick four (4) keyword phrases

Search engines rely on keywords and links to ascertain both the theme of a given web site and its popularity. Using "anchor links" (an anchor link is a link with a popular keyword phrase) will increase page rankings. To determine how many times per month a given phrase is searched for go to: <http://www.inventory.overture.com/>. Create a list of the top 10 - 20 keyword phrases.

Then do a search in Google for these top 10 - 20. Then pick the top four to optimize for your organization.

Add your four keyword phrases as both text and links to the main pages of your website.



Mistake: Shameless, Selfish Web Writing

The average web page is NOT designed for the visitor. Many pages are designed to promote products or services similar to a brochure.

The average browser spends eight seconds per page and prefers to scan short paragraphs and bullet points. The purchase process starts with an information search and needs clarification. Is your website designed to fit your potential customer's needs?

See the disconnect? Most visitors are looking for information to determine if they first have a need and second if your organization should be in the final vendor evaluation list.

Create content that is both relevant and compelling to your target audience and they will seek out your organization repeatedly.



Mistake: Too Many Bells and Whistles

Is your website clean or cluttered? Keep your visitors in mind at all times when designing your web pages. Keep content on topic, useful, and related to your target audience's interests.

How many options does your website provide from the home page? Research studies show that it is best not to confuse your visitors with too many options. Limit the number of offers, products, and services on each page to one product if possible.

Functionality that is relevant, compelling and enhances the user experience can stay – get rid of everything else that distracts from the user experience.

Search Engine Marketing Continued...

3. Code optimization: Add keyword phrases to title tags in website code

Targeted keywords are the terms people use to locate your services. Place your keywords (up to 12 words) in the HTML Title Tag on every page of your site. The title tag keywords should match up with both the URL and text on the page (i.e the word in the URL should be in the title tag and as both text and a link on the page). Each page will have a title that pertains to the content on that respective page.

Also, make sure the graphics have ALT text descriptions that includes a keyword phrase that relates to the image (IMG SRC="logo.gif" width="10" height="10" alt="keyword phrase").

Also, to see how Google views your page go to <http://www.smart-it-consulting.com/internet/google/googlebot-spoof/index.htm>

4. Add an offer such as "Free Demo" or "Free Price Comparison" or "Free White Paper Download" to main pages of the website in exchange for interacting with your organization

5. Site submission: Resubmit to all major search engines

"Search engine submission" refers to the act of listing with search engines.

Once optimized the major search engine "crawlers" should find your website and rank it higher than it would have been without optimization. However, it cannot hurt to manually submit your website(s) to the major search engines.



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Mistake: Not Giving Visitors a Reason to Return

When's the last time your organization added something fun, interactive, or knowledge oriented for your visitors?

Five Simple Sticky Tips

- a. **Add a poll or short survey.** This can be done inexpensively and makes your site interactive. Plus, you can use the poll results for your eNewsletter or an Internet release.
- b. **Let your employees choose** sections of the website to be responsible for updating regularly.
- c. **Update content regularly.** The idea is to develop quality content that will result in return visitors. Is your content worthy of an RSS feed? If not then change it.
- d. **Take advantage of your content.** Add your press releases to your website as both HTML and PDF. Also, submit the releases to public relations websites. There are a number of press related websites like PRWeb that will result in good quality incoming links back to your website. Also add your press release to an RSS feed. Not only will this communicate to your customers that new products or updates are available, but you will also benefit from RSS search engine and directory links.
- e. **Add a community forum.** Amazon was ridiculed when they added a forum allowing visitors to post positive and negative comments, but it greatly improved sales.

Search Engine Marketing Continued...

6. Send two (2) monthly Internet releases
Internet releases are the most cost-effective way in 2006 to increase number of inbound links to your website and thus drive traffic. They can be sent through PRWeb.com.

With an Internet press release, you are aiming for the members of your target market who search online. The nuts and bolts are as follows:

- 1. Craft a targeted release of 400 words
- 2. Place the release on your website; simultaneously send out email campaign to lists advertising the release
- 3. Drive (link the release) people to your membership page (and capture leads)
- 4. Follow up with informative email or phone call

A well written Internet press release can generate over 100 links and hundreds of leads.

7. Add online products to eBay and Google's Froogle

8. Linking program

Go to a major search engine and type in keywords. Consider getting some of the top ten sites to link to your site. The more sites that link to your site, the better your site will be ranked. Obviously competitors will not link to your site but you may find a few sites that will (e.g., a directory site or association).

9. Tracking

Go to "Google Analytics" and add this tracking tool to your website. Monitor site traffic for trends and constantly improve your site!

10. Other SEM & SEO Tools

- <http://www.seochat.com/seo-tools/pagerank-search/>
- prgooglebar.org
- toolbar.google.com
- directory.google.com



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Mistake: Confusing Navigation

A great website provides simple navigation, great search, and a consistent user experience.

Here are a few simple navigation tips:

- Add search functionality (good search functionality has been shown to increase website conversions up to 27 percent)
- Link to all your content from your site map page
- Put all the main navigation links at the bottom of the site in tiered rows

Regarding navigation and layout, keep your browsers experience in mind at all times.

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