



Guest post by

Ellie Becker and Bernadette Nelson | August 13, 2010 |

<http://bit.ly/bxpVHN>

Top 10 Website Mistakes to Avoid

In consulting with small businesses and entrepreneurs about their websites and online presence, we're often called in to help resolve problems resulting from earlier bad decisions. We share these top 10 website mistakes so that you may avoid them.

1. No help with strategy.

It astounds us that many businesses have received little or no help from their web vendor with overall online/offline marketing strategy. No one has asked about business objectives, audiences, other marketing efforts – the basics. If a web development or online marketing firm doesn't put their work into the context of the bigger picture, find another consultant.

2. Cumbersome design/coding services.

Many graphic designers or design firms don't do the actual HTML coding of websites. Ask your designer if coding is handled in-house or outsourced. There's nothing fundamentally wrong with outsourcing, but be clear what it means to your website project and ongoing updates. What's the time frame for work and updates? Does your designer's business demand priority status? Will you have direct access to the vendor? Can you post immediately in an emergency?

3. Look/Feel is inappropriate.

The visual impact of your website is often the first impression a visitor has of your company. Colors and images can convey many important messages – both positive and negative. What works for your audiences? Dignified? Precise? Playful? Edgy? Straying too far from customers' visual expectations of your industry can be a turn-off.

4. Vertical solutions fall short.

For almost every industry there are firms focused on creating websites for many companies within that industry. It may seem efficient. But, understanding your industry doesn't mean understanding your specific business. We've seen a sameness to vertical market sites that interferes with market differentiation. Content provided with a broad industry brush stroke may not be relevant to your visitors, increasing your bounce rate. The 'efficiencies' don't necessarily mean 'cost effective'. A good generalist firm can often make you an industry-standout at lower cost.

5. Don't know SEO.

We recently saw an elaborate new website with virtually no meta data. That's the code that tells search engines what each page is about so that it can be included in search results. Creating and coding relevant meta data is a building block of search engine optimization and requires specialized expertise. What good is a fancy new site if no one can find it?

Continued

6. Too much solution for the problem.

A company starting an ecommerce business hired a web design firm that created a proprietary shopping cart for them at a huge investment of time and budget. By using an off-the-shelf shopping cart solution, the company could have been up and running much more quickly with greater functionality at a far lower cost.

7. Low-quality content development.

One CEO we spoke with recently contracted with a web firm that included content creation in the budget. The vendor's writers lacked the talent and knowledge to do an effective job. She ended up writing the content herself — as much as she had time for. Some pages remained blank — not a good image to the world.

8. Too hard to update.

Website content has to be dynamic and easy to update. Your web developer must be available to quickly update the site for you. Or, build your website with a content management system. This might add to the initial cost, but can be less expensive going forward. There are varying levels of content control depending upon the back-end system being used. Discuss your needs and expectations at the start to make the best decision for you and your company.

9. Not Web 2.0 enabled.

The days of website as online brochure are past. Take advantage of functions that enable a two-way exchange — rather than a monologue — with your audiences online. From buttons for sharing content, to RSS feeds, to newsletter subscriptions, to blogs, your web company should be able to help you determine the best tools for building relationships through your site.

10. Navigation not user friendly.

Visitors leave websites where it's hard to find the information they're looking for. The trend in smart web design is simplicity. Make it clear that visitors are in the right place and easy for them to navigate to what they need. Usability testing pays dividends. Make sure your site is user friendly before going live.

Do advance research to avoid these and other pitfalls. Look at lots of websites and be able to show web design firms what you like and don't like. Ask questions about the vendor and its processes. Look at its work for other clients, get references and check them. Let these lessons learned by other businesses help you avoid the same mistakes — and get better return on your online investment.

Ellie Becker and Bernadette Nelson are co-authors of a monthly column Working the Web for www.westfaironline.com publishers of the Fairfield County Business Journal (Conn.) and the Westchester County Business Journal (New York).

Ellie is president of E.R. Becker Company, Inc., an online marketing consultancy. She is a Certified Inbound Marketing Professional. Contact her at www.erbeckercompany.com or follow her on Twitter @elliebpr.

Bernadette is principal of Studio B Visual Communication. She's been a graphic designer and web developer for more than 20 years. Contact her at b@studiob-ct.com or on www.studiob-ct.com

Brought to you by Network Solutions®

