



## Working the Web

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### Seven Tips for Engaging Your Website Visitors

When potential customers hit your website, you have just a few seconds to capture their interest. Once they know they're in the right place they'll stay longer, giving you more opportunity to engage them and help them do business with you. Here are seven tips for turning "traffic" into customers.

#### A different view

People read websites differently than the printed page. First, they scan to quickly figure out what the site is about. Use headlines and boldface type – particularly to highlight key words.

#### Placement is key

Studies have shown that people tend to begin scanning websites in the upper left-hand corner. So, put keyword-heavy content there. If images are in that area, use captions beneath them and alt text – the code that brings up a text description when you mouse over an image. For visitors with slower Internet service, these words will come up before the actual image, telling them quickly what the picture will show.

#### Get to the point

Put your most important messages first. Subsequent information can be bulleted or offered as links to additional information. Make it look accessible.

#### Simple language

Websites attract visitors at all educational levels. Use words with fewer syllables. Make sentences short. Even if you have a fairly educated or technical audience, make your copy understandable to everyone. Microsoft Office versions from 2008 include the Flesch Reading Ease test as an option in Word. The higher your copy tests on this 100-point scale, the better.

#### Simple design

Keep your design and navigation simple. Make it easy for visitors to find their way around the site. We favor navigation on the left-hand side. Navigation across the top – especially when sub-menus drop down – can obscure copy and make it difficult to read.

#### Tell them about you

Tell visitors what they can find and what they should do on each page. Prominent calls to action are helpful, i.e.: Click here to learn about our team; Fill in your email address to receive our enewsletter. Each page should give a brief sense of what your company is all about. Visitors often enter a site on a page other than the home page.

#### Test it out

Do usability testing to learn how users navigate your site and to lead the way to improvements. Research by usability expert Jakob Nielsen shows that you only need to test five users to learn most of what you need to know.

There are numbers of free or low-cost testing products available including userfly.com, Google Website Optimizer, feedbackarmy.com and usertesting.com. Some require installing a bit of Javascript in your website's source code and others are provided as a service. We think userfly is amazing. It plays back each visitor's session on your site as though you were looking over their shoulder.

If you're planning to update your current website, run usability testing on it first. What you learn will help you plan your new, improved site and build in better ROI.

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