

Web Savvy Marketing

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Optimized Design

Web Design Strategies That Attract
Visitors and Produce Real Revenue

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Chapter One

Successful Internet Marketing Begins With Goals



When a potential client approaches me about launching an internet marketing campaign, SEO project, or even requests a quote for website design, the first word out of my mouth is usually “goals.” Before I can even begin to contemplate your project, formulate requirements in my head, or provide a quote, I need to understand your business goals. That means you do too.

Why does it really matter? For me, I only want to engage with you if I can help you and help make your project a success. To determine if that is possible, I have to obtain an idea of what success means to you. Most small businesses I speak with have not thought this far ahead. They know they have issues with their current website or web promotion efforts, but they don’t have a good feel for expectations.

An internet marketing campaign can be a huge endeavor or it can be a quick refresh of what you currently have in place. Until a needs assessment is done and a project scope is defined, it is difficult for any website designer or SEO consultant to truly provide feedback on project budget or timing.

Common Internet Marketing Goals and Objectives

A typical internet marketing campaign can focus on improving six or more different goals, although I really think most projects can be broken down into five distinct areas.

1. Revenue

Honestly, this goal is not one of my favorites because I think it is simply too broad. Everyone wants to increase revenue and there are many ways to accomplish this; I’d rather clients be a little more specific so we can truly focus on tasks that will deliver tangible results. Narrowing the revenue goal to something like “increased profits via a reduced sales cycle” would be more

specific and would help us collectively target the right tasks within your internet marketing campaign.

If increasing profits and a reduced sales cycle were your primary goal, we could provide additional information (or better information) on your website for prospects so that they could be better informed before they reach out to you as a new lead. This could be done through navigation changes, defining persona (your target market) and filtering content, or by providing clearer call to actions.

2. Branding

Branding is definitely an internet marketing goal I like and one that is problematic to companies of all sizes. A brand is the idea or image of a specific company, product or service. It is the logo, slogan, or design of the company. The golden arches of McDonalds are a great example of branding. As a child I see those arches a mile away, which gave me ample time to beg my parents to stop.

Most small businesses don't think about branding until they encounter a specific issue or talk to someone engrossed in marketing like I am. I believe in personal branding, corporate branding, and branding of your product or service. For small businesses, the internet provides a world of opportunities for increasing brand awareness.

If increased branding is your goal, you and the marketer can work on your website, your SEO efforts, your social media usage, local search directories, your public relations, etc. The point is that you will have given the marketer a pain point that they can target with a solution.

What I like about branding also is that it is a measurable goal that we can track and quantify. From mentions in social media outlets to inbound links to your website, to searches for your company name or product – you can see changes and track improvements.

When I originally started my business, no one Google searched my company name because it didn't exist until I thought of it. Since creating my company and actively marketing myself on the internet, there has been a steady increase in searches for my company name. This means there are mentions of my company on the internet, someone has read it, and someone is trying to locate my firm to learn more about me or my company. As a small business owner and a marketer, this makes me happy because it shows my efforts are working and I am making progress on my branding efforts.

3. Lead Generation

Increased lead generation is another business goal that is helpful and informative. Lead generation is simply the method of obtaining new potential customers or clients through marketing activity.

Lead generation is not only traceable, it is how I originally found my way to SEO, website design, and internet marketing. Years ago I was a salesperson for a small technology firm. My product was good, so I could easily close new business deals if I had prospects. Unfortunately, I just didn't have enough new prospects and leads. The cheapest route for me to obtain additional leads was to teach myself internet marketing. I'm proud to say I did; I viewed the process as fun, and I found my true passion.

I used a CRM (customer relationship management) software package to track the source of my leads from origin to close. I could tell you exactly how many leads came from the internet and their close rate. The internet leads were farther along in the sales funnel than any other lead source and they had the highest close rate. This only fueled my fire to increase my internet leads. I went from virtually zero internet leads to the internet accounting for the majority of my sales in little to no time. I also helped the company grow 400% in two years. For me this proved lead generation was not only a great goal, but a goal you can obtain and measure along the way.

4. Product or Service Sales

Utilizing an internet marketing campaign to increase product or service sales is an admirable goal. It is both obtainable and there is something to measure, so it leaves me, the marketer, pleased. If you came to me with this goal, I would want to brainstorm to discover why you think your sales are lower than their potential. Is it your website or is it lack of inbound traffic? Either one is fixable, we just need to narrow our focus and plan our attack.

5. Visitor Conversions

One area most small business owners overlook in web design is conversions. A conversion is the method of migrating your website visitors into prospects, sales, registrations, or whatever else you want the average visitor to do once they land on your website. While everyone "gets" the idea of conversions, many people forget about the concept during a website design project.

The key to a strong web presence and functionally robust website is defining your design and navigation around what you would like your website visitor to do upon arrival. Most likely this will include multiple paths built around an individual persona (or visitor type). When you take a moment to consider your options, the process will usually become quite clear.

Small website design changes can have a big impact on how you convert website visitors. An example of this is a newsletter sign up box. A lot of small businesses put this below the fold (low enough on the page you have to scroll to see it), which significantly decreases usage. Move it up to the top of the sidebar and you should exponentially increase your conversion rates. Change your wording to better articulate why people should sign up and this will, again, increase your conversion rates.

I had one client go from about 250 new subscriptions each month to around 700 simply because I changed the sign up box verbiage and placed the destination content more prominently on the website. The change was so drastic I was upset with myself for not thinking of this earlier in the year. This example is a favorite because it shows how three minutes of coding can have dramatic and long-term results.

6. Engagement

Engagement (interaction with website visitors) is a total buzzword these days for us internet marketers. I use it with hesitation because of this painful truth. Buzzword or not, engagement is a valid and measurable goal.

So what does it mean for the small business owner? It refers to your interaction with your prospects and clients. While some will view this as simply “likes” on Facebook or “followers” on Twitter, I view it as page interactions on Facebook, Twitter mentions, content sharing, blog comments, client reviews, etc. The modern web is filled with opportunities to interact with your target market.

While some skeptics view engagement as marketing fluff, internet users in 2012 will expect engagement and interaction from the brands and companies they follow. Actually, they demand it and if you plan on ignoring the goal of engagement, you’ll quickly find yourself in trouble

So What’s Your Internet Marketing Goal?

I really think your goals will vary based on your individual situation, your industry, and your product or service offering. The important lesson in this discussion is that you need to consider your business goals before you spend time or money on any internet marketing campaign.

Chapter Two

A Box for Every Website Visitor



I tend to compartmentalize things and people. I mentally place people in boxes and segment them out into groups like my nuclear family (husband and kids), my extended family, my neighbors, my best friend and so on. I've often referred to these groups as my "boxes" and I do not like them to intermingle or randomly change. These boxes are the structure of my communication and they dictate how I interact with one individual versus another. For example, I know I can tell my best friend anything and she will continue to love me, which is an example of our boundaries and expectations. I know what she expects from me and what she can give me in return; we have a mutual understanding of respect that has grown over the last decade. She does not put me in a box.

Website visitors, however, do not offer the same continuity. Unlike my best friend, the average visitor gives you about thirty seconds before they make a decision and put your website and company into their own personal box for how they think about you. Your box can quickly become the "expert", the "clueless", or worse yet, the "has been." Website visitors have short attention spans, multitasking lives, and they simply have too much data thrown at them to weed through useless rambling and ill contrived text.

When I sit down with a prospective website design client, I always ask about visitor personas. A visitor persona is simply a box for your website visitors. It helps segregate your web traffic into manageable groups similar to what I do in my personal life—separate it into boxes based on what grouping it belongs to. Personas help define your target market and help web designers formulate a design that directs a more precise marketing message to the various personas. When a client and I brainstorm website personas I usually ask a lot of questions and before you know it, we have our personas. Who do you sell to? How would you describe this person? Do you have multiple types of people you sell? Are they young or old? Are they male or female? Are they c-level executives or entry-level employees? Are they educated or technology savvy? Are they only local or can they be located anywhere in the country?

By default, personas vary greatly between B2B (business to business) and B2C (business to consumer) companies. A B2C company will have personas that include characteristics like gender, age, education level, or geography. A B2B company will have personas that include characteristics like industry, management level, and organizational department. Regardless of B2B or B2C segmentation, defining a website's visitor personas will help place prospective users in the appropriate box.

Why would a web designer or company want to segregate their web traffic into boxes? So their marketing message can be tailored to each persona or group of visitors. Once you have your personas defined you can create unique messaging targeted to those personas, you can better articulate your offering, and thus convert more web traffic.

Once you've defined your personas, put yourself into the box. Think about why your visitor might land on your home page, what might they be looking for, and what might they need to hear to encourage them to take action.

Two Very Different Website Persona Examples

- **B2B Example**– Over the years I've worked with a lot of B2B technology companies. Their personas many times become confined to boxes that include IT, finance, users, and the c-level team. Irregardless of services or offers, those four groups digest and respond to information differently. They also have very different “pain points” (aka challenges), and different pain points mean completely different marketing messages.
- **B2C Example**– Since I am a techno-mommy, my B2C example would be cereal. General Mills has placed their target market into boxes; there is the kid box and the mom box. Kids want to hear “tasty” and see colors or chocolate. Moms want to hear nutrition and see grams of sugar and health value. Both are your demographic and both have to be targeted from a marketing prospective. Let me just say, I am certainly not buying Lucky Charms for myself, which proves the five year old is a clearly defined persona.

Figuring out your website personas and placing them in their boxes is the hard part. Once you do this, though, their needs and desires begin to quickly materialize.

I so strongly believe in website personas that I will not even consider the aesthetics of a new website until I do a deep dive into your marketing requirements. If I am not sure who we target or how many boxes we will have to satisfy, I can not begin to think of possible web design options; it's impossible.

So now that you know about persona boxes, take a step back and look at your current website. Do you have them and do they convey the right marketing message? Unlike my best friend, your website visitors are not forgiving and they will not give you a decade to win them over.

Chapter Three

If You Connect With Website Visitors They Will Convert

The Problem With Most Websites

A lot of small business owners launch their website with the simple goal of using the site as an information portal and a mechanism to talk about their company. It is basic human nature to be egocentric—the problem with this methodology is that it is generic. Simply talking about yourself is not a differential for your website, product, or service offering. It does not compel your website visitor to take action.

No matter what the search criteria is, a typical internet user can visit hundreds, or even millions, of websites that all present the same type of information. Users are numb to this approach and their average time on a page supports that they are inundated with bland web copy. By following the same route as the masses, you lack the ability to grab anyone's attention. Because I believe each and every website should stand out and grab attention, I am a huge fan of presenting your offering via a mix of problems, solutions, and requests for action.

The Solutions for Marketers and Small Business Owners

In the previous chapter, I discussed segmenting your website visitors into personas or categories and then documenting each persona's pain points or needs. That, my friends, is only one of the first few steps in my master plan of website design. In the next step, we must move on to brainstorming how your product or services offer a solution to each personas' individual needs.

If you are a divorce lawyer, quantifying a persona's needs is fairly simple. If you are a B2B company and you sell complex products, your task is a bit more difficult. That being said, this step in my web design process is still difficult for both the lawyer and the B2B marketer. Most B2B companies have an internal marketing team which is well aware of each persona's needs. Generally they can articulate and document needs by a given persona if asked. The attorney on the other hand, does not have to segregate his target market, but he lacks a pool of marketing professionals. Thus this task is difficult even though his offering is fairly straightforward.

So what do the B2B marketer and lawyer do? Both should create a matrix similar to the example I provide below. By forcing yourself or your team to document personas, pain points, solution, and calls to action, you begin to formulate your future website map on paper.

Planning Your Website Based on Individual Personas

Client	Persona	Pain Points	Offering	Solution	Call to Action
Divorce Lawyer	Husband or Wife	Finds divorce process confusing, scared of losing time with kids, wants child support, needs divorce expert, etc.	Retainer for Services	Will take control of process, will protect custody of children, will fight for support, experienced with local courts, etc.	Call for Consultation
Document Management Company	IT Manager	Slow processes, data entry errors, poor visibility to data, high processing costs, etc.	XYZ Software Solution	Will reduce cycle times and data entry errors, increase access to data and reports, and most likely reduce headcount, etc.	View Demo

The Service Offering

Let's dig deeper into a sample web design for a law firm. After populating the above table, the lawyer now has a clearer image of what information to present. Now he needs to consider how to present this information.

- If the attorney's target is family law for women, he or she needs to immediately connect with the website visitor on the home page via familiar images and verbiage. One would imagine the images would include women so that a female visitor would immediately see the website in question provides services to women like herself.
- Once the website visitor has been "interrupted" with a graphic, the attorney can present compelling text to encourage the woman to click to a page that will provide further information about her specific pain point. We will assume our female visitor is already divorced and needs a post judgment modification of child custody, financial support, or parenting time.
- Assuming there was text on the home page to quickly illustrate this is an area of expertise and it had proper navigation options, we will also assume the woman clicks the correct link and moves to a page dedicated to this topic.
- Once on this keyword focused page, the website copy should quickly provide a synopsis of her problems and then provide the solution or services which will help provide resolution for her. In this specific case it would be modifications to her existing child custody or support ruling.

- Finally, after presenting the solution, the page copy should offer an appropriate call to action that will encourage the woman to immediately perform an act. In this case, I would imagine it would be to call the law firm for a consultation.

Assuming the law firm has done a quality job in its assignment, the website visitor should take action or bookmark the website for further follow up.

The Call to Action and Close

So how do you know if your current website manages this process correctly? Visit Google Analytics and view your inbound traffic by keyword, the pages visitors migrate to, and the pages of exit.

In our above example, we would view inbound traffic for “child support modifications” and review the path the visitors take. If you received ten visitors for this term and they never move beyond the home page or a keyword specific page, you know you have a problem. You – the lawyer – need to take your own action and you need to consider redesigning your website.

Chapter Four

Have a Seat Mr. Website Owner, It's Time for Introspection



Tell Me What You Don't Like About Yourself

When a client signs a contract with me for a web design, the first thing I do is send them a three page questionnaire and request that they answer as many questions as they deem appropriate. This questionnaire helps me get inside their heads and helps me to better understand their marketing objectives, the opinion of their existing website, and their overall view of internet marketing.

I ask a lot of questions about the current and future state of their sales process and marketing programs. While these questions are informative, I definitely have a few questions that are my favorites. In particular, I am in favor of four specific questions focused on their current website. I like this set of questions because they are very informative and they are “raw.” I can tell many clients write the first thing that comes to their minds, which can be priceless. Some answers have me laughing out loud. I do not mean the “LOL” kind of laugh; I mean the tears coming out of my eyes kind of laugh.

I believe my clients’ candid responses are representative of most small business owners and how they feel about their outdated and lackluster websites. While most small businesses owners do not spend their day thinking or talking about their websites, when asked, they will provide feedback. Unfortunately the feedback is usually far from positive.

Tell Me What You Don't Like About Yourself

To illustrate my above statements, I thought I would first return to my questionnaires and pull a few client responses to my four questions. You will see the average small business owner does not have a whole lot of admiration for their website and their current internet marketing presence.

Below are a few candid responses from real clients:

1. What does your website currently do well?
 - Nothing...Or at least very little. It's a personality free online business card.
 - There is lots of information and it does convey our brand.
 - Well it is doing something right, because we are getting business from it. Other than that, there isn't anything I am particularly proud of.

2. What does your website currently do poorly?
 - Doesn't engage visitors, there are no differentiators, and it doesn't clearly describe our products.
 - The e-store has never generated revenue.
 - It is basic and comes across basic.
 - Lacks traffic.
 - It looks like I did it myself and I did.

3. Are there any aspects of your website that you love?
 - Love might be strong.
 - Not really.
 - No.

4. Are there any aspects of your website that you hate?
 - It is out of date and information is difficult to find.
 - Yes, but can't point to one specific thing.
 - Not necessarily, I think we just need a facelift and a more optimized site.
 - All of it.

If you read through the responses, you will notice how no one is overly excited about what they have presently and no one provided anything very positive about their existing website. The one client who said he just needed a "facelift" received a completely new website and it is actually one of my favorite web design projects because the before and after was so dramatic.

I Love You and Hate You All at the Same Time

As much as I love small business owners, I hate them as much at the same time. I love working with this group, because they need me and they like me. They really really like me, as Sally Field would say. They like me because I am opinionated and I am not just a web designer; I am a marketer, a salesperson, an SEO consultant and a WordPress geek all wrapped up in one. I like the companies who need a lot of help, because I like to help. It is why I quit my real marketing job and started my own firm.

On the flip side, I hate small business owners because so many of them live in a bubble of self-denial. This is even true of my good friend Jason, who is a small business owner here in Michigan. He has weathered through the rough period and will make it through because he is smart and he is a good man, but he is in denial. Jason does not put his website's URL on his business card; he says this is because the website is so bad. His wife, Megan, regularly makes fun of it and we all laugh about it over Friday night drinks.

But the real problem is that Jason needs a new website. He desperately needs a new website and I am almost to the point of designing one for free because his is so bad. His wife and I have talked about hacking his current website and just surprising him with a brand new WordPress site.

Jason says no one goes to his website, so he does not need a new one. Really? Jason, I love you, but no one goes to your current website because it is ghastly and it is not optimized for search engines, visitors, or anything else. And let us not forget you are ashamed of it, so you do not even tell anyone it exists. Jason does not know the potential results a new website could bring, because he is living in 1975. A time when half of America did not use the internet to research and buy things. Just for the record, he is only 36 and he should not be stuck in 1975. I could prove to him that real ROI (return on investment) is possible, but to do that I would have to put down my beer and have a real heart to heart with him. And quite frankly, he is not ready for it yet.

If you are a small business owner, take a moment and look back at the list of comments from my clients. No traffic, no revenue, out of date information, and lack of information are all symptoms of old websites or poorly designed websites.

If you are still reading this chapter, you know in your heart that your website may be bad. It may not be as bad as my friend Jason's website, but you know you have problems. So sit back and take a good look at your website, your current marketing efforts, and your overall internet marketing presence. After doing so, you can tell me what you do not like about yourself and I can tell you what I can do to help.

Chapter Five

The Magic Formula of Great SEO

Search Engines

Dec 1, 2009 - Nov 30, 2010



A couple of years ago, I looked back at SEO related statistics for a B2B website I launched in November of 2009. A full year had passed and I wanted to see the progress this company had made over a twelve-month period. After launching the new WordPress website, the client retained me to work on their internet marketing efforts. It helped free up time for the client, it gave their internet marketing a cohesiveness it would not have had otherwise, and it gave me time to nurture my new baby. I believe it was a good year for SEO and Google Analytics agrees with me.

The Data Doesn't Lie

I decided to dig into Google Analytics and pull data for December 1st, 2009 through November 30th, 2010. Not only is it necessary, but it is fun to review your work and reflect—I have to qualify that, as it was only partially my work. The client did a tremendous job following my suggestions and coming up with some of their own. They were a content machine, which helped facilitate my SEO consulting efforts. Without the collaboration, the growth you will see would not be possible.

SEO Metric	December of 2009	November of 2010	Growth
Visits from All Sources	7,286	19,980	174.20%
Visits from Search Engines	1,932	11,092	474.10%
Visits from Referrals	2,732	4,584	67.80%
Visits from Direct Traffic	2,620	4,286	63.60%
Keyword Combinations (Organic)	1,135	7,985	566.00%

The data shows there was substantial growth across organic search engine traffic, referrals, and direct traffic. As a rule, I would want to see a growth in all three areas because it shows we built branding along with organic search traffic from Google. What I love most is that there was no

pay per click activity after December, which means the traffic was produced entirely by organic search and no traffic was driven from advertising. Since organic SEO traffic grew rapidly, I was able to talk the client into ditching his PPC campaign.

The Formula for SEO Magic

At this point you are probably wondering how we did it—it was not magic or SEO voodoo. We did not participate in any link schemes or comment spamming, or even paid links or advertising banners. We simply focused on providing quality content, while also letting organic SEO and visitor personas (visitor types) lead the way. We tried to consider what our visitors would perceive as valuable content and we tried to make sure we examined all personas that came to the website.

While this list will not cover everything we did, it will hit the SEO highlights:

- We performed a complete keyword discovery prior to website launch
- We selected three critical keywords, ten high additional high traffic keywords, and a bunch of long-tail keywords
- The website and blog were mapped based on visitor personas and keywords
- New WordPress website design and blog
- We focused on one keyword per page
- Each page had a unique and optimized title and meta description
- We included deep internal links through pages and blog posts
- We included keyword rich links that pointed outside the website and kept them to no more than three or so per page or post
- We performed an inbound linking campaign with very targeted pages and keywords

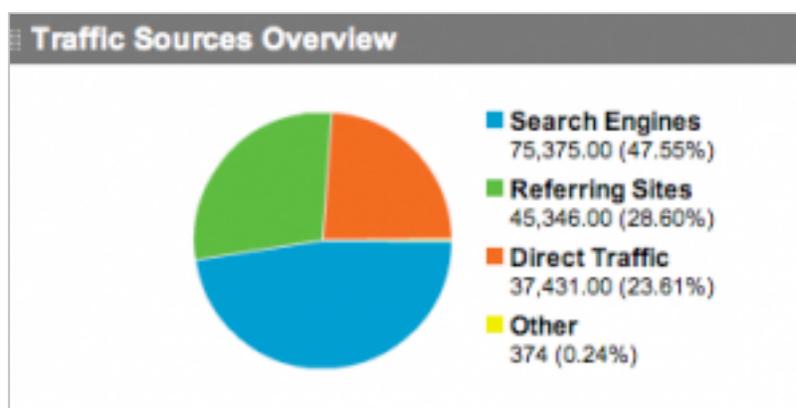
From a content perspective, we made sure we had a diverse set of “things” being added to the website each week. Due to our efforts, Google went from “spidering” (the search engines way of moving through a website and digesting the content) the website occasionally to indexing new blog posts and pages within an hour.

Our keyword rich content included the following types of distribution:

- Two to three blog posts per week
- Monthly press releases
- Bi-weekly webinars
- Polls
- YouTube videos
- Industry reports
- White papers
- Podcasts
- An industry directory with rating system
- Weekly newsletters

A Plug for Social Media

The interesting point to our efforts was the use of social media, which is not always embraced by B2B companies. Of the top five sources of website referrals, four were social media websites. And even more interesting is that Facebook was third on the list.



Neither Facebook nor Twitter had a huge number of “likes” or “followers”, yet both drove a substantial amount of traffic for the site over the year. As I have said previously, social media is conflicting and that you cannot judge your social media success through simple metrics such as likes and followers. This client is a perfect example of why this is the case.

What About Conversions and Revenue?

Now if I were reading this chapter, I would be asking about conversions, new customers, and revenue. So let me qualify the growth by stating that the client had a great year in 2010; the company added significant headcount and came close to doubling revenue.

Whenever we would have our monthly call, the website owner and I would talk about traffic and then I would ask about leads, new customers, and sales. I wanted to make sure the client was getting the right traffic. Although I will admit, as an SEO consultant, your first instinct is to get caught up in traffic numbers. You have to deflate your head long enough to ask the client if the traffic is producing value. You can't just assume traffic growth means you're doing a great job as an SEO consultant. You need to make sure the traffic growth is truly helping the client and attributing to their success.

The Take Away for Marketers

I want to clearly state that this SEO case study is a best-case scenario. The client and I were in complete sync; we knew each other going in, and there was a strong level of trust. I had worked

in his industry and I could run on my own without supervision. This type of freedom in SEO is not the norm. An SEO consultant needs monitoring and the client needs to be involved.

Industry experience aside, the real thing to take away is the content. Without the content, I could not have spun my SEO magic. I had to have content to market and without it, the project would have flopped. I would have had to write the blog posts, which would have distracted me from other tasks and it would have stifled the creativity and momentum.

What's Your Magic Formula?

I believe in organic SEO and while I do not consider it voodoo, I absolutely believe it can do magic when you have good content and the SEO project is executed properly. This client is a perfect example of that magic. It is important to develop your own “magic formula”—what works for you and for your consultant will ultimately end up being the thing that will guarantee success for your website.

Chapter Six

Migrating a Website Owner through The Five Stages of Grief

In college I was a Psychology major until I realized that I'd have to reach a PhD level education to obtain a job with any real earning potential. That meant staying in college and thousands more in student loans. With much sadness I switched career paths and moved into a world of technology.

Flash forward twenty years and I now claim to be an Internet marketer who spends many hours as a WordPress designer and an SEO expert. I love what I do, yet I still miss my first love of Psychology. Recently my two loves collided as I remembered Swiss-born psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and her book *On Death and Dying*. She outlined the five stages of grief a person and their loved ones go through when presented with death. I was reminded of this recently as I spoke with a business owner that reached out to me concerning his outdated website. The discussion and the desire to hang on to something beyond repair reminded me of the book I read so many years ago.



While letting go of your old, outdated website is not as traumatic as losing a loved one, it does represent change. Many of us tend to hang on to what is comfortable and easy and avoid a voluntary jump into the unknown. The small business owner is no different. While he may know his ten-year-old website is horribly outdated, the desire to change it seems overwhelming, unimaginable, and unnecessary. He then steps into the first of five steps of grief.

The Small Business Owner's Website and His Five Stages of Grief

1. **Denial** – My website is fine. No one comes to it anyway, so I'm not going to waste any money changing it. Who really cares about what it looks like? It's my product (or service) offering that makes a difference, not my website.
2. **Anger** – If people don't like my website then I don't need to do business with them. I'm not spending thousands of dollars to have some web designer try and communicate my marketing message. I know what's good for my business, not some graphic designer who

spends his entire day on Twitter. SEO, local search, and Facebook—who are these people and what the heck are they talking about? I don't need any of that stuff.

3. **Bargaining** – Okay maybe my website is a little dated. I think I'll update it myself and tweak it a bit to freshen it up. If I update the pictures from 1985 and put in a few keywords, I'll be good to go. My cousin built his fraternity's website ten years ago, so I think I'll take him to dinner and ask him to help. It shouldn't be that hard. I'm sure I can just make a few changes and get a huge impact without spending any money.
4. **Depression** – Oh my gosh, this website project is a nightmare. I don't know HTML, I can't locate the original website designer, and I have no idea how to strong content that people will actually read. I can't tell the difference between CSS, PHP, and HTML. What do they mean Google doesn't look at meta keywords anymore? I have no idea what meta is, let alone if Google reads it. What is black hat SEO? I don't even know what SEO means, so how am I supposed to know if my website uses black hat SEO practices?
5. **Acceptance** – Yep, completely over my head. Need some help and need it now. My competition is killing me, prospects don't know what I do or when I'm open, and anyone I do get to look at my home page runs away laughing. The time has come to get a professional web designer to overhaul the website and start fresh. 2012 is the year of my Internet debut.

While this list may be praised by some and criticized by others, it is a reminder of why so many small businesses struggle with their web. In the Unites States, 55% of people use the Internet daily with Americans spending an average of sixty hours online each week. With the growing availability of broadband and the increased popularity of smart phones and devices like the iPad, the level of Internet usage will only continue to grow. Small businesses cannot ignore the need for a strong web presence and that having a marketing plan now means reaching prospects and customers through the Internet.

Five years ago I would have agreed with most small businesses owners. Internet marketing was still difficult and not an easy task to accomplish. While I've been working with SEO and website design for years, technology didn't really get small business friendly until the world of open source kicked it up a notch. Websites were expensive, you needed a graphic designer, and you needed an SEO expert to help guide you along so someone other than your employees would find your website.

Enter WordPress, the fast growing, open source CMS package that is launching everything from blogs and small business websites to fancy portals for stars and magazines and television networks. WordPress is my passion and the software that liberated me and countless other small business owners. We are now empowered to take website design into our own hands. Or, at least outsource the creation of the website, then manage it internally if we choose. We have an option; we can create a great new website that is search engine friendly and pleasing to the eye and for a much lower budget than we could ten years ago. We have choices!

If you are a small business owner who is stuck in one of the five stages of grief, visit wordpress.org and learn more about WordPress website design and your options. WordPress will allow you to create and manage your web presence in the same software as CNN, Katy Perry, Carnival Cruises, Lexus, and The New York Times. Best of all it is free and you only need to locate a good WordPress designer to help get you started.

Chapter Seven

SEO Can't Help a Website That Sucks

Each week I speak with potential SEO clients who ask me to “make their phone ring.” It is an honorable request, but I struggle with this because in many cases because SEO alone cannot solve their problems. SEO can help, but once the website visitor arrives to their website, they will run screaming for the hills.

I am not a website snob and I value the small business owner and his desire to bring sales in through the internet. I think internet marketing is critical for many small businesses, because it is relatively cheap compared to other marketing tactics. The problem is that most small businesses owners want you to market a website they designed themselves or one that has not been updated in five or more years. My professional opinion is that although I would love to be their SEO retainer, it would feel as though I was taking their money and providing nothing in return. Organic SEO rocks. I believe in it and I have earned a living off of it for many years. But search engine optimization will only go so far. You have to have a decent website to present to visitors once they arrive.

To illustrate my point, I am going to use Randy as an example. Randy called me on a Monday and asked me to “make his phone ring.” His words. I told him I could, but we would need to address his website and SEO together, as SEO alone will not work. Randy did not believe me at first, so we had a frank discussion about his website and what it presents to visitors.

If a small business owner even thinks about engaging in an SEO campaign, he needs to first look at his website and ask himself a few questions. I think fifteen questions can really help determine if an SEO campaign is needed or if he needs to start first with a website design project. Let's step through my fifteen questions for website owners to see how Randy's current website stacks up.

Fifteen Questions Every Small Business Owner Should Ask Themselves

1. **What is the first impression your website gives to a visitor?** Stress. One word describes it for me. As soon as I arrive at Randy's website a video starts playing and replays everything I hit the home page. I don't like background noise and the video literally stresses me out.
2. **What is the first thing you notice?** Links and lots of links. Randy has done his own SEO and his home page has nineteen links within four paragraphs of text. It is overwhelming and worse yet, it is keyword stuffing. He has multiple links to the same page and simply uses different keywords for each link. Keyword stuffing = Google penalty. It is not helping him from a search standpoint and it does not help facilitate a positive visitor experience.

3. **Does a thirty second review of the home page articulate what your company is all about?** Yes. I definitely know what he's pitching.
4. **Does the website speak to your target audience and/or visitor personas?** Not so much. His text is written for search engines and not the user. As the visitor I see red and lots of it. The text is red, the links are underlined red words, and I struggle to read the actual text. The home page is a flood of information and it does not distinguish one visitor from another.
5. **Does the website visitor have a clear understanding of what he/she should do once landing on the home page?** As the visitor I'm told to "CALL NOW XXX-XXX-XXXX". Unfortunately that is all I see. Randy has a lot of content and videos available, but I struggle deciphering where to go. I'm simply overwhelmed. I believe part of this is because all the lovely red text (yes even content) is centered. The yelling caps is also a problem, as it is an immediate turn off. I don't like people yelling at me. Painful, simply painful.
6. **Is navigation easy and clearly defined for the website visitor?** Yes. Once I get past all the red text and view the navigation bar, my options are clear.
7. **Is it usable and bug free across all major browsers?** No. That would be a big fat no. It is "broken" in Chrome, Safari, and Firefox. I didn't check IE, because I've already validated three browsers, so a fourth is just salt in my wounds. Boxes hang over text, text hangs over text, and there is about eleven inches of a blank page at the bottom of each page. That is just the beginning, but my point is illustrated so I'll stop.
8. **Are the "call to actions" clearly defined and compelling?** I know I'm suppose to call and I know I should "submit a case", unfortunately the submit function on the contact page is covered with text. The bigger issue is I have no compelling reason to call or give my email address.
9. **How does your visitor engage with you?** As I've already stated, there are instructions to call. There is a contact box on the home page, but it just states "Submit Your Information" without explanation on why I should submit. It is more about me giving than the firm actually engaging with me.
10. **Does the website properly project information about your current product and/or service offering?** I think the website does provide information on his service offering, although because of the large amount of coding issues, multiple parts of the service descriptions are difficult or impossible to read.
11. **Does the website discuss your visitor's pain points and your matching solution?** No, not really. The website talks about the services and the industry itself. It does not connect with the visitor on a personal level or try to relate to their problems or pain points.
12. **Do you offer anything to visitors or do you just demand something from visitors?** There is a page of "Resource Links", but these are simply links to industry websites that are not written for the average website visitor. They provide little if any value. So the website itself does not provide or give anything to the visitor. It does demand that I call (in all upper case letters) or give my email address. Since it gives little and wants something as soon as I arrive, I'd be very hesitant to take action.

13. **Is the website Web 2.0 friendly?** There are no references to social media, the blog link takes the website visitor to a completely new URL on Blogger. Instead of using the blog to bring people into the website, it takes them away. There is no RSS feed or sharing options. The videos are hosted on the domain and do not utilize YouTube. This website is barely making it with Web 1.0, let alone Web 2.0.
14. **If you were the website visitor, would you pick up the phone and call?** Nope. The nature of Randy's service offering requires the visitor to feel that Randy's firm is an authority figure in his industry, that he and his colleagues are trustworthy, and that the firm is highly knowledgeable in their area of expertise. In my opinion his website does nothing to convey these characteristics. And, there are plenty of his competitors who do, so I suspect the visitors will simply move onto another service provider.
15. **Does your website help or hinder you from obtaining your company goals?** My opinion is the website hinders Randy's goals. I've talked to Randy and I liked Randy. His website does not make me feel the same way. It is dated, difficult to work with, and does not tell me what I need or want to know. That feeling transfers over to Randy and his firm and makes you feel the firm is old, hard to work with, and will not communicate with me as needed.

To SEO or Not to SEO

When I spoke with Randy, I told him I would not take him on as an SEO client. I said I would take him on as a web design client with SEO at the forefront of our redesign goals.

Why would I turn business away? I only want a client to retain my SEO services if I can help the client obtain their goals. Randy's goal was to make his phone ring. Encouraging Randy to spend money on SEO consulting, while knowing full well his website is horrendous, is unethical. Or, at least to me, it feels as though I am stalking unprotected prey. He would be wasting money, because any traffic I drove to his website would leave and not convert. Thus in the end, my SEO services would not reach his ultimate goal of new clients.

Chapter Eight

Bad Website Architecture: The Silent SEO Killer

My focus is small business marketing, so I encounter a lot of people who have tried a do-it-yourself SEO approach to internet marketing. The semi-savvy business owner thinks his SEO knowledge is pretty darn good, yet he just cannot figure out why he is not seeing increases in website traffic.

In our conversation he provides obscure long-tail keywords to illustrate his SEO tactics are working. He also tells me he lacks traffic and real revenue resulting from all the time he has allocated to his SEO research and implementation efforts. He finally informs me that he cannot allocate a large budget to SEO. Hmm, I think we have encountered a conundrum.



Why is this the case? Is the small business owner really SEO savvy or is he lost in a web of SEO confusion? I would say both. He knows enough to make him dangerous, but it isn't enough to keep him safely in line with search engines and their rules. In general, with small business owners, I see very old SEO practices being used and many times black hat SEO tactics. Duplicate content and multiple URLs are popular trends, as are bold words and keyword stuffing. While duplicate content, bolded words, and keyword stuffing top the list of most used tactics for the do-it-yourselfer, the bigger issue and much more difficult problems reside in the website's architecture.

The website – typically designed and written by the small business owner – is dated and is riddled with structural issues. Content is difficult to locate, duplicated, and irrelevant to the user or keyword focus. There is no hierarchy or silos to the content, the website domain is set to expire, the website lacks permanent redirects, there is no sitemap.xml file, and the in-house SEO (business owner) has never heard of Google Webmaster Tools or Google Analytics.

So what should the do-it-yourself SEO worker worry about? A lot. I do think it is important to mention that the do-it-yourself approach only works if you have little competition. Real SEO is done by an SEO expert who not only is immersed in SEO each day, he spends hours per week educating himself on the latest trends and algorithm changes. Since this is impossible for the small business owner, it is also impossible to expect tangible results from haphazard SEO efforts. Good architecture is the key to successful SEO efforts, and for that you need an experienced SEO worker.

You Need to Open Up Your Website and Look Under the Covers

The following ten questions are just a sampling of architectural SEO elements. If you manage your own website and you are a SEO do-it-yourselfer, you need to know what these questions mean and the answers to each. If you do not know the meaning or the answer, you need professional assistance from an SEO consultant.

1. Have you ever done a keyword analysis?
2. Does your website have a clearly defined structure for assembling pages and/or blog posts?
3. Can you easily locate all the content available?
4. Did you include keyword usage within the meta data and unique to each page or post?
5. Do you have a robot.txt file?
6. Do you have a sitemap.xml file and has it been submitted to Google Webmaster Tools?
7. Are you using Google Analytics and do you know what your current website traffic looks like and how your visitors utilize your website?
8. How long has your domain been registered and how long until it expires?
9. Does your website have permanent redirects in place?
10. Does your website have multiple H1 tags per page?

Most likely you cannot answer these questions and you are still hesitant to spend money on professional SEO help. I encounter this frequently and am often asked to “justify” the cost of my SEO consulting services. When I am asked this I think about my accountant; I have an accountant to do my personal and business taxes, even though I have an accounting degree. The fact is, I do not specialize in accounting and I have no desire to do so. I do not know the latest tax regulations or the ins and outs of the tax code. I do not want to know it, which is the reason I never pursued the profession once I left college. I can no more accurately assemble my business taxes than the small business owner can perform his own SEO. My time is better spent on what I can do well, and for me, that is WordPress web design and organic SEO.

I have justified the cost of my accountant (accounting degree and all), so it is really up to you to justify the cost of SEO services. And just like taxes, doing SEO wrong can be worse than not doing SEO at all.

Chapter Nine

Browser-Based Enlightenment



Open Up Your Browser and Take a Good Look at Your Online Presence

Immanuel Kant defined enlightenment as, “The emancipation of the human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance and error.” The term “enlightenment” reminds me of the small business owner and his undeveloped view of internet marketing, and, more importantly, how he and his company fit within today’s internet dependent culture.

Now, do not take that comment as a negative view on the small business owner or small business in general. I love the average small business owner; I am a small business owner and this segment is my client base. More importantly, small business marketing and, in particular, internet marketing, represent all that is possible in a free market such as the United States. Anything is possible. A newly created or existing small business can obtain substantial sales growth, reinvent a brand, or simply achieve market penetration just by successfully marketing over the internet. What I mean is that a small business owner’s undeveloped view of internet marketing requires a certain amount of enlightenment in order to become the picture of success I spoke of in the preceding sentences.

If all of my pro-internet ramblings are true, then why do so many companies struggle with branding themselves on the internet and bringing in tangible sales? A lot of prospects I talk to claim to have little or no website traffic and no real financial gain from their internet marketing efforts. But why? Why do so many make this brutally honest claim? Because they are not yet enlightened! They remain ignorant of the true meaning of internet marketing and they are immature in the sense that their internet skills has not quite gotten to the point where they are seeing the fruits of their labor—primarily because some of their labor is in vain. They cannot see the true state of their website or how this website compares to the gazillions of other websites on the internet.

I do my best to enlighten people with my overly frank assessment of their website, SEO, and competitive position. Yes my phone conversations are as unfiltered as my blog posts. Even with my openness, I many times fail to reach the small business owner because he/she is not yet ready for self-reflection. They are not yet ready closely review the true nature of their marketing efforts or even look to see what the perceptions of others might be.

If you are a small business owner and you are still reading this chapter, good for you. You have taken the first step onto the path of enlightenment. You have accepted my harsh comments as “passion” and not “arrogance”. My unfiltered assessments are meant to provide value, and my passion exists because I truly believe in what the internet can offer for those who embrace it. When performed correctly, internet marketing can liberate a company. It liberated me and it has liberated all of my clients. It can transform or even create a business in a relatively short period of time. But small business marketing on the internet takes effort and it takes knowledge. You just can not whip a WordPress website or blog up and call it good; you have to extend your reach and touch your audience. You have to work at it and do so in the right manner. So now the question must be asked – have you embraced internet marketing? I did not ask if you had a website, I asked if you have embraced the internet and all it offers you as a small business owner. “I don’t know” is not an acceptable answer. Self-reflection can be both powerful and painful, but the journey of browser-based enlightenment will end with a large reward.

Enlightenment Begins With Ten Simple Questions

1. **Where do you show up in the SERP (search engine results page)?** Think about what keywords or phrases people would use to locate your website and Google these terms to see if your website shows up on page one of the search results. Please do not tell me you are on page three, because page three does not matter. Very few searchers ever look past page one. And please do not search for some obscure term a crackpot SEO consultant told you to optimize for back in 1985.
2. **How many websites (other than your own) link to your website?** If you have a Google account and can use Google Webmaster Tools, the answer is quick and obvious. Since I know most small business owners have no idea what I am talking about, we will go about it the old fashion way. In Google’s search box insert link: yoururl.com. Does anything come back in results? Google won’t show all links, but you will quickly see if any exist. And some should exist.
3. **How many websites (other than your own) mention your website?** You can view this on Google by simply inputting your full URL in quotations. And how many did we find? Five or ten is not stellar performance, so please do not start smiling yet.
4. **How valuable are the links or URL references that you found?** Hopefully you discovered something tangible and not a bunch of outdated or irrelevant information. Or worse yet, a bunch of negative reviews you did not know existed. Inbound links and website references should exist in quality website properties and be relevant to your target market.

5. **How is your company and website listed in local search directories?** I am referring to locally focused websites like Google Places, Yahoo Local, Bing Local, Foursquare, MerchantCircle, etc. Do you have a listing and if so, is it accurate? Remember, if you do not claim your local search listing, someone else can and will.
6. **Are you active on any social media websites?** Social media refers to Facebook company pages, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, etc. Do you have an active account and when was the last time you updated anything? Is your Facebook page filled with spam or is it filled with content your target market would actually want to see? And the most important question – do you interact with your online community?
7. **How is your blog looking?** Yes I said blog, because the world loves blogs and Google does too. Blogs provide a means to communicate with website visitors in a conversational manner. Proper blog management is critical to internet marketing success. So do you have a blog and, if so, how often are you posting fresh and worthwhile content? Do you provide an easy method for visitors to share your blog posts with social media or content tagging websites?
8. **How healthy is your RSS feed?** An RSS feed is a listing of your recent content and/or blogs, which is used to distribute your blog posts to other websites. Do you have one and is it active and accurate? How about an XML sitemap for that matter?
9. **When was the last time you commented in a forum or on another website's blog post?** Again, blogging is conversational, and conversation requires a two-way dialogue. This means you to your visitors and your readers' comments and/or feedback back to you. It also means other bloggers to you and your feedback to the blogger.
10. **Think about your industry's overall presence on the internet. Are you and your company visible?** To be considered an industry leader or even a local industry hero, you have to participate. You have to be seen and you have to engage. While your target market may not be visiting your industry's benchmark websites, the search engines do and they should find you there when they visit.

Most likely you have read through this list and realized your internet marketing activities can be greatly improved. Brace yourself, because we have not even looked at your competition yet. I can only pick so hard and for so long at you without feeling a little guilty.

For right now I will let you stew over my ten questions and in my next chapter we will take a look at your competition. And while you may tell yourself you are as good as your competition, you will be surprised to know you are wrong. Dead wrong.

Chapter Ten

Internet Marketing is a Battlefield

Winning the Internet Marketing War Requires a Marketing Recognizance Mission, Bulletproof Armor, and a Strategic Plan of Attack

Make no mistake, internet marketing is a battlefield. You are going to war against a million other websites and you need to have sufficient weaponry to compete and to walk away unscathed. You need to know your enemy, you need armor for proper defense and you need a clearly defined plan of attack to win the online battle.

When was the last time you performed a marketing recognizance mission? Have you looked at your competitor's website recently? Or even their general internet activity? I am always surprised that many small business owners, CEO's, or marketing executives do not make this part of their overall marketing strategy. I do this with my own company and with every client that contracts me to design a website or engage in an SEO project. I want to know the websites they compete with so I know how to best position them. I need to understand the battlefield so we can plan an effective attack.



If you are a website design client of mine, I expect you to take the time to perform your own marketing recognizance mission. Since I will be doing one for you, I expect you to do one too. I want you to look closely at your enemy and I want you to be prepared as we enter into battle. Why does it matter? You need to intimately know the enemy. Your website visitors will know your enemy, so you should too.

In previous chapters I have mentioned my client questionnaire; I ask clients to complete this before we begin our engagement. In many cases, I email prospects the document with the proposal so they know what they are in for and so that they have realistic expectations of my marketing philosophies, as well as me as a website designer. The vast majority of these people do not "get" why I require this step until they review the questionnaire. It then becomes crystal clear that internet marketing is a war and that they are currently going to battle with a toothpick and not a armored tank.

So do you have a toothpick or an armored tank? Most likely you cannot answer this question yet, so take the time to evaluate your armor.

Review the Website Battlefield

- Identify your key direct competitors
- Identify benchmark companies within your industry
- Review competitors' websites
- Review benchmark companies' websites
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the competition
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of the benchmark companies

Evaluate Your Armor and Prepare to Plan Your Website Attack

- How does your current website and online presence compare to that of your competition and the benchmark companies?
- List elements of your competitors and benchmark companies' websites that you would like to incorporate into your new website design and build.
- List gaps within your existing content that need to be addressed and consider the time frame and resources required to develop said content.
- Evaluate your internal resources and their ability to create a website that can address your gaps and weaknesses.
- Evaluate your budget for obtaining outside assistance for web design, build, and optimization.

Review the Online Battlefield

- Is your competitor using pay per client (PPC) ads and if so, what keywords receive the largest portion of their ad budget?
- Is your competitor's website designed around a set of core keywords?
- How does the competitor score for these core keywords in organic search results (i.e. natural search not attributed to paid placement)?
- Is your competitor active in social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, Quora, LinkedIn, or YouTube?
- Is your competitor actively blogging and/or guest blogging on other websites?
- Is your competitor utilizing content marketing strategies for lead generation and potential sales?
- Is your competitor actively engaged in inbound link building?
- Is your competitor utilizing a drip marketing campaign or regular newsletter campaign?
- Is your competitor active on local search directories and are their profiles optimized?

Evaluate Your Armor and Prepare to Plan Your Online Attack

- What competitor keywords best align with your organization?
- What other keywords should you consider and target?
- Can you afford a PPC campaign?
- Do you have the knowledge and staff for organic search engine optimization?
- What changes to your existing social media activity needs to take place to level-set you and your competitors?
- Do you offer any unique and authoritative content to help differentiate your from your competitors?
- How do your blogging efforts compare to your competitors?
- Are you utilizing content tagging websites and RSS feed automation?
- Do you have the knowledge and staff for a link building campaign?
- Do you have a newsletter and would this apply to your target market?
- Have you claimed your local profiles and are they optimized?

As a website designer and SEO expert I cannot completely prepare you for and fight your battle. This is a joint effort and we need to collectively prepare for and fight the battle together. I can help in your internet marketing war, but I will definitely need you to help in this effort.

One of my first website clients was a referral from a friend. This client was going up against some savvy competitors and I knew he had a steep climb ahead of him. I built him a WordPress website and tried my best to prepare him for the battle that lay ahead. With his new SEO friendly website, I gave him armor. Unfortunately, he failed to plan his actual attack and he did not even walk onto the battlefield. He sat in his little bunker doing the same things he had done for years. He did not take the competitive analysis I had done for him seriously, nor did he believe in social media optimization, inbound link campaigns, or virtually anything outside his existing practices. One year later my friend keeps asking me why the website did not grow in search traffic. What? Really?

In that same time frame I launched a website for another client who did go to battle. He was fighting against some of the biggest companies in America who had huge internet marketing budgets and a large number of internal employees dedicated to reaching page one search results. This client not only went to battle with my armor, he kept me on to help him plan and execute his attack. We were a force to be reckoned with and we beat the snot out of his competition. Everything we did had purpose, we planned our attack and executed it as planned. His search traffic grew by almost 500% in one year, and he even stopped spending hundreds of dollars each month on PPC ads. He reinforced the armor I provided, he prepared a strategic marketing plan, he went to war with eyes wide open and he fought and fought hard.

Initially, the client I feel was a failure crushed me; at first I felt like I failed him. But then a fellow, and very wise, WordPress consultant reminded me that I cannot fight a battle for a client who does not want to go to war. There are potential clients and situations where I have to retreat because I am trying to win a war with someone who simply wants to spend his days sleeping in his bunker. It was a hard lesson, but a valuable one. I try to identify those people early on and I avoid them at all costs; we are not well matched and we have two totally different views of internet marketing.

Do not let yourself fall asleep in the bunker. Rise up, go on a marketing recognizance mission, plan your attack, build your armor, and go kick your competitor off of page one search results. It is possible. You just need to decide if you have the fight in you, and then you have to rise up and fight.

Chapter Eleven

DIY SEO or Professional SEO Consultant?

What is your SEO approach? Are you a do-it-yourself SEO or did you hire an SEO consultant? DIY (do it yourself) SEO can be great because it is a whole lot cheaper than hiring an SEO professional. And, even better, since you are your own SEO expert, you are in control of everything. On the flip side, DIY SEO can also be very time consuming and it can lead you down a dark path of destruction without you ever even knowing. It can also give you a false sense of security and make you believe you know enough to be effective, when in reality you only know enough to be dangerous.

The Case of Harry, the DIY SEO

At one point recently, I had been talking with a guy named Harry about his blog and upcoming website launch. Harry was connected with me via a mutual acquaintance, so I had been reviewing Harry's activities and giving him free advice. This is something I typically do not do, but I like our mutual business partner and I believe in Harry's project.

Harry had an ultra secret website project and he had been blogging in an attempt to drive initial traffic and interest toward the big reveal. Harry knew his competition and he had an idea of what he would search for if he were a potential visitor to his future website. Harry even put those words into Google to figure out the highest volumes.



Harry, like many others I speak with, thinks he is fairly well prepared. After all, he has his eighty or so keywords in hand, he is blogging regularly, and he is considering keyword density within his posts. He is even content tagging and sharing his posts via Facebook and Twitter. He is making progress with inbound traffic, yet none of it is actually coming through his blog posts. By why would this be the case, you ask? He is doing everything right, right? No, not really. Harry's intentions are excellent. And as a person, I think Harry is pretty darn cool. He is trying really hard to read up on SEO topics and learn from SEO experts. Harry is the average "wannabe" SEO expert. Although, in Harry's case, he is actually spending a significant amount of time trying to learn SEO and he has picked up a lot of information on SEO basics.

However, that is the dangerous part. Harry cannot tell good SEO from bad SEO, or white hat SEO from black hat SEO. He cannot tell real SEO advice from regurgitated old SEO advice. He does not know an H1 tag from a meta description or an alt tag from cornerstone content. He does

not know about keyword mapping or XML sitemaps. Harry knows how to blog and blog very well, but that is about it.

His intentions are good and he is putting in a lot of sweat and tears into the process, but he is trying to catch up and compete with SEO consultants (or entire in house teams) who have a decade or so of SEO experience. He is also trying to compete with heavy hitting websites. I looked up the competitors Harry gave me and they are not light weights. I mean they have huge traffic volumes, thousands or inbound links, and, in some cases, millions of indexed pages in Google. Harry is fighting a huge uphill battle. He is not only competing against an experienced SEO consultant and his in house teams of minions, but his competitors already have a ton of inbound links, indexed pages, and web traffic.

So can he compete? Yes he can. He has a different value proposition, he is unique, and he has a business plan. The problem is that he does not have an SEO plan. He has a list of highly sought after keywords and that just is not the same thing as an SEO plan. It is not a strategic, methodical plan to compete keyword to keyword with the big boys. It is a valiant effort, but at this point, it is an effort in futility.

The Case of Rebecca, the SEO Consultant

I have been doing SEO and website design for about eight years, and in the earlier years I made a lot of mistakes. Thankfully, my industry was as new to SEO as I was and my competition was still trying to figure out SEO just like I was at the time. I muddled through, read a lot, and performed a whole lot of trial and error stuff on my own website. Then I read more, talked to some experts, and worked on some more websites.



Then I finally felt like I had it together. I did not just know some stuff about SEO, I actually had a very detailed project plan for building SEO friendly websites and performing ongoing search engine optimization. I really knew my SEO and, better yet, I knew my SEO stuff worked. I had gone against the big boys and I had won. I had bruises and war wounds to prove it. I also had Google Analytics data to prove that I knew what I was talking about. I went to battle and I came out alive and stronger than when I went in.

Remember – my battle and my SEO journey was eight years in the making. And remember, I made a lot of mistakes along the way. While I am confident now, I was not eight, five, or even three years ago. It was not until I started looking at the SEO of other SEO consultants that I began to feel the start of the confidence I have now, and then I knew I had it and I was not just claiming to have SEO knowledge. I started to see SEO everywhere I went on the internet and

could not help being pleased with myself in knowing that not only could I identify it, but I had done it.

But What About Harry and His SEO Efforts?

I tried to get Harry to take a step back and tried teach him some best practices. Unfortunately, I just cannot cram eight years of SEO experience into a few emails over the course of a week. Harry, smart as he is, can only digest so much. And I, giving free advice to a peep, can only allocate so much time.

I do not know what the future holds for Harry and his website. I know his project has some fabulous potential, but I am currently not involved in his website project. It has been in the works for a while and I just met Harry a week or so ago. It is hard to take my 90+ step website development plan and force it on Harry and his team midstream. I would personally suggest the entire group take a time out and sit down so they can reflect and consider the ultimate goal. That goal is to go head to head with the big daddy of their industry and make an impact.

So how does Harry make an impact? To do that, they need a thorough, well crafted, and completely integrated website design, SEO, and social media plan. SEO does not come before or after design, it is part of the entire process from initial thought straight through to the website's end. It is a living and breathing plan that matures with the website, the website visitors, and the industry in which it competes.

SEO is a journey and not a destination. I have chosen to take this journey and to dedicate my professional life to it. I believe in SEO and I truly believe with all my heart that SEO is a journey worth taking.

Chapter Twelve

Keyword Research for the Average Joe

Good keyword research is imperative for organic SEO. We SEO consultants typically view this practice as common sense, but this is only because we do it all the time. In the real world, keyword research is not necessarily easy for the average marketer or webmaster, but keyword research does not have to be some big crazy formula. I read a lot of SEO articles and blog posts and the internet is full of great content and advice for performing elaborate keyword research. While this method of learning works, the activity of keyword research does not have to be so convoluted that the average person could not do it. It just needs to be methodical.



I have worked with or developed both large and small websites. Some have twenty keywords and some have 2,000 keywords. Regardless of the volume of keywords or web pages, my process remains the same because it is scalable. More importantly, it is a process that the average person can perform. And this process is ~~necessary~~ critical if you want to get people to your website via organic search.

Fifteen Steps to Developing a Targeted List of Keywords

1. Write down keywords and/or phrases you would use to search the internet for your products or services.
2. Now go to Google and input those terms into the search box. Look at the bottom of the page of search results and review what Google is suggesting as “related” search terms. Write down those words too. You can also look to your left on the page to see if Google is suggesting “something different.”
3. Your next step should be a visit to Google's Insight's for Search, which shows related terms and trends for a given search term or word. Input your top keywords and document anything of interest.
4. Now consider your existing website. Go to your Google Analytics account (if you have it) and review your keyword traffic for the last year. Do not just look at high volume traffic, but also consider the lower volume traffic that you are not doing very well on from a search standpoint. Document any keywords that you would like to score well on in search.

5. Next you should head over to Google Webmaster Tools and look at your Search Queries. Similar to that of the Analytics data, do not just look at keywords you are performing well on. Look at everything and document any words or phrases that you should score on.
6. Now visit your competitors' websites and write down any keywords and/or phrases your competitors are targeting. If you are not sure what these are, look at their page titles, sitemap, and actual page URLs. Note that this will only work if your competitors have a good SEO strategy.
7. By now you have a fairly long list of keywords. We need to see how these fit into the real world of search. If I have learned anything over the last nine years of SEO work, it is that I do not know what people search on. I can only make assumptions and then validate my thoughts against actual search volumes. I validate my suspected keyword list in Google's Adwords Keyword Tool. To do this, all you have to do is input your list of potential keywords into the box and let it rip. You can either go broad with results or narrow it down to exact. Just make sure you stay consistent.
8. As I pull my keyword volumes, I put them into an Excel spreadsheet and I create one very large list. I do not pay much attention to volume at this point because I do not want to get distracted; I just keep loading up the list with keywords, volumes, and competitiveness.
9. Now that I have my list of potential keywords and volumes, I set this aside. I walk away and move onto something else, because at this point I am fairly burned out on keyword research. When my mind has cleared, I revisit my list. If the list is really long, I remove any keywords on the list that are below a certain level of volume. If I have thousands of keywords, my pain threshold may be 500 searches per month. If it is a small list, this may be reduced to fifty. It is very relative and based on the industry and target market.
10. The next step is to score each word for relevance. You need to look at each word and think about its relevance to your actual products or services. You can give this a high, medium, and low or you can use a number scale. Whatever works is fine, just make sure it clearly shows which words are important and which words are irrelevant or less important.
11. Once I have scored my list of relevance, I create a weighted score for each keyword. I typically take the relevance score and multiply this by the actual volume. You do not have to get overly fancy, you just need to be able to see a combination of relevance and traffic volumes.
12. Now I start ditching keywords. I would like to say I do not, but I do. I have been going at this for so many years, I can just "see" issues or anomalies; I see trends and I can see if something is just not right. Maybe the keyword has other unrelated meanings (you can check this by Googling it) or the traffic volumes are distorted. In other cases, it could be that it is so broad it just does not work. This is where I start overriding my client's wishes; I do so because my instincts tell me to do it and they have hired me because of my experience. So far no one has fired me for this practice.
13. Now I take a step back and I look at the list. What keywords have strong volumes? What ones are closely matched to the client's offering, and are not polluted with excessive targeting by competitors? I view this as "picking your battles", which is similar to what I

do with my kids. You can only win in so many places, so you have to target what is important.

14. Now I pick three really competitive words with good volumes that I believe we can win on with effort. Long-term effort and not overnight effort. These are our big boys and the words we will hammer until we win. Note that the number of three could be 100 if your website is much larger. Again, this process is varied based on industry, geography, and target market.
15. Next I pick about seventeen secondary keywords. These are long tail or less competitive words that are still good, but not necessarily the most important. With these phrases we will be able to win quicker, but they will not have as high of volumes as the three we just picked. Just as I mentioned above, this number varies—it may be seventeen or it may be 2,000.
16. Finally, I go through the list to see what is left. I try and assign these to blog posts, tags, or categories. Wherever possible, I provide clients with suggestions on possible titles for blog posts so we are capturing the keywords and putting them to good use.

Okay I had 16 steps. I tried really hard to stay at fifteen, but it didn't quite work.

Now What?

So you have your list of keywords. Now what? Now you have to take a step back and look at that list and decide if you can create web pages to support the keywords. If you compete in any level of competitive environment, you will need to have only one or two keywords focused per page. In other words, for every keyword you need a page of content. And not only do you need web content, you need to be able to weave those pages (a.k.a. keywords) into a sitemap that makes logical sense.

If this is your first go around at this process, you probably do not have a list that can easily be whipped into a logical sitemap. That is okay. Just revisit the last three steps and adjust.

This is Your Plan of Attack

You have a list, which means you have the start of a plan. This list and your future sitemap should be the basis for all of your internet marketing activity. From your company or personal profiles on social networks to your inbound links on press releases, you need to consult this list. And remember, you need to revisit your list and this process, because people change and search traffic trends shift. Remember Web 2.0? Well, no one talks about it anymore and it has morphed into social media. If you browse my website you will see that references to Web 2.0 have gone away and social media is all over my website.

The important point is that you have a list of keywords and the start of a real plan. If this is the case, congratulations! You are off to a great start.

Chapter Thirteen

Converting With Visitors is Really About Connecting the Website Dots

If you have been made it this far through the book, you may have noticed in many of the chapters thus far that we have been walking through my website design process. It has over ninety lines of to do items for my team and my clients. Yep, I said ninety, with a nine and a zero.

That is a lot, but there is a reason for it. I am methodical in nature and my web design process is too. There are a lot of dots to connect and things to worry about when you launch a new website. That does not mean it has to be scary, it means it just needs to be right.



What we've Learned Thus Far

So far on our journey of web development, I have taught you to:

- Define Marketing Goals
- Identify Your Target Audience
- Review Your Existing Website
- Perform a Competitor Analysis
- Perform Keyword Research

Now it is time for us to prepare our sitemap and requirements list for a new website. I know you are excited; this is the one step in my process that takes the most thought. But do not be scared, I am going to take you through it step by step.

In my last blog post we walked through performing keyword research, so you should have a great list of keywords in hand. That means it is time to create a rock solid sitemap that can support your targeted keywords and convert your traffic into revenue.

Eleven Steps for Creating a Great Sitemap and Connecting All Website Dots

1. **Perform a Gap Analysis of Your Existing Website** – Really, this simply means asking yourself what is missing. There is no need to go into specifics here, but when you look at your existing website, what jumps out at you right away? Or, more importantly, what does not jump out at you, but should jump out and grab your attention?
2. **List Goals and Objectives for the Website** – What does the new website need to accomplish? Capture emails for a newsletter, obtain new leads, sell a product, etc.
3. **Outline Potential Call to Actions and Desired Outcomes of Website Traffic** – If you know what you want your website to do, then you should know what you want your visitors to do. Should they sign up for a newsletter, attend a webinar, register for a white paper, request a quote, purchase your product?
4. **Identify the Path You Would Like Each Persona to Take Once Arriving at the Home Page** – An earlier chapter discussed website personas, so we should know all about them by this point. Once you have already documented your personas, consider what information you need to present to get the visitor to perform the desired action you just documented above.
5. **Develop a List of Functional Requirements** – You have defined your actions or “what” you want people to do, so you now need to consider the “how” they are going to do it. Do you need a protected directory to house high quality documents, do you need an integrated contact form to register leads, do you need an e-commerce store to sell products?
6. **Develop List of Visual Requirements** – Remember to consider personas here because different genders, education levels, and personality types respond to images and visual stimulus differently. Do you need custom charts, photos, or buttons? What about a fancy web form?
7. **Take Inventory** – This is the really fun part, because you are probably going through content that is three years old and now that you look back, you realize it is not pretty. Go through your existing website and list out all content pages, files, images, and forms that you want migrated to a new website. Do not forget your web pages should match up to your keyword list.
8. **Match Content to Personas** – Consider your visitor types, the products or services you offer, and what stage in the buying cycle they may be at when visiting. Now consider the inventory you just went through and match up that inventory (pages, files, images) to your personas. Not to worry; you are going to have gaps and holes that you need to fill. Just remember to keep looking at your keyword list and keep this in mind as you go through everything.
9. **Consider New Content Requirements** – You just identified new gaps in content you were unaware of, so now it’s time to document those gaps so you can address them one by one.
10. **Develop a Website Outline** – We are now creating the sitemap. You were really creating it as you walked through these last few steps, but it is now starting to come together so you can see how the pages and actions fit together to make a cohesive website.

Remember, you need to have one page per competitive keyword and those pages need to align with your visitor personas. The pages also need to represent the information visitors need to see and the actions you want these visitors to take upon visiting your website.

11. **Validate Your Call to Actions** – You have already done this right? Well maybe. But I want you to go back and make sure. Think about what words you can use that are compelling enough to make someone do that action you desire. Have you given website visitors enough “meat” to make them want to do something? Internet marketing is about give and take. You need to give before you take. So before you ask for that email address, make sure you have given your website visitors enough reason to want to give you something in return. If not, revisit your sitemap and make sure you do.

Note of Caution: Make sure your sitemap has a hierarchy that makes sense to you, your visitors, and the search engines. Do not bury content so deep that a visitor needs to click three times to reach it. Keep as much towards the top as possible, while still having a logical flow.

Connection Complete

Are you exhausted? You might be, but do not despair. Your new sitemap is significantly better than anything you have had in the past because you created it with a methodical approach geared towards SEO and converting visitors. This is excellent!

Chapter Fourteen

Should You Ditch Your Website & Developer?



When I first started my business, I thought projects would be clearly defined as web design or SEO. Oh, was I wrong. Projects, like clients, come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. What may start out as a simple SEO project may lead into a full-blown website development. And this migration is not because I am pushing web design on clients, it is because the client has significant limitations with their existing website.

Since I run into this often, I am sure the average website owner does too. If you are trying to decide between updating your existing website or moving towards a full website design, I would encourage you to ask yourself five quick questions.

1. Do You Have a CMS Package?

If you are wondering what the heck a CMS package is, it means “Content Management System.” Which really refers to a user friendly way to update your website. And when I say user friendly, I mean easy enough that the average person could update page text, write a blog post, and modify an image.

Popular flavors of CMS consist of open source WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal. I am a WordPress girl and have dedicated by firm to creating WordPress websites and supporting WordPress users. That being said, Joomla and Drupal are also good packages and both have their place in the market. Each CMS package has different niches they fill and each can be an excellent solution for creating a new website.

Do people really use CMS for website design? Yep, and many more than you think. WordPress powers fourteen point seven percent of the top million websites in the world. And twenty-two out of every one hundred new active domains in the US are running WordPress.

I digressed a bit. The point I wanted to make is that CMS packages give you control over your website and your online marketing. If you are stuck living with an HTML website that is impossible to update, then you have a problem.

2. Is Your Website SEO Friendly?

This is a huge factor if you rely on your website to generate traffic through organic search. One of the core reasons I love WordPress is because it is very user friendly. If configured properly, it will create search engine friendly URLs, 'alt' tags, unique page descriptions and titles, XML sitemaps, and the beloved H1 tags and bold text. All are needed for courting Google and Bing properly. WordPress makes it very easy to stay compliant with search engine rules and helps guide you along the way.

If you are unable answer that question yourself, go to WebsiteGrader.com and see how they grade your website. My website is a 99/100. Most I query are a 50/100. If you are less than a ninety, you have problems.

3. Is Your Website Functionally Robust?

Complete a list of functional desires and compare it to what you currently have in place. Can your website manage your wish list without consuming your entire marketing budget in code changes? Can you add to this functionality or do you have to turn to a high priced coder each week?

Now take your requirements list and compare that list to WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal. One of these CMS solutions will meet your needs and all are excellent choices. Especially if you are currently stuck with an HTML website.

Remember the usage numbers I provided for WordPress? You are probably wondering why it is so popular. There are over 15,000 plug-ins available for WordPress, and that means 15,000 opportunities to add to the core functionality WordPress offers. Many of these are free and they usually have an easy one click install right from the admin panel. Good stuff for me and the million other WordPress users.

4. Are You in Charge of Changes?

Do you control your website? That may seem like a silly question, but you would be surprised at how many people have no idea exactly who created their original website, where they are, or how to reach them. Another frequent complaint I hear is the developer has a thirty day backlog and a simple text changes cannot be made for forty-five days.

That, my friends, is a major problem. Internet marketing is fast paced. Last year Google made 500 changes to their algorithm, which means we webmasters needed to also adjust. If you cannot get a hold of your webmaster or if you have no access to the website, you will fall behind on search engine compliance and you will also be a lagger to your competition. The goal of CMS based websites is to keep you in control.

5. Is it Easy to Use?

Assuming you are in control of your pages and you can access the back end to make modifications, is it easy to do? Can you figure out how to update text, add a page, or create a blog post? Can you add images, products, or change your navigation structure? You should be able to if your website is built within a CMS solution. A good developer can help you work this out.

However, I caution you on picking your developer and making sure they fully understand the CMS package. I have written about my sister's experience with selecting a WordPress designer. The next chapter, "Fifteen Questions to Ask Your Future Website Designer" goes into how she had a pretty blog that did not quite come to the level she was expecting. Needless to say, my development team rebuilt the entire thing for her because the original designer did not code to WordPress best practices. He hardcoded a ton of functionality that should have used WordPress' user-friendly menus and widgets. It has been eight months since she received the original design and after months and months of frustration, she is just now capable of making changes.

My sister's project was a worst-case scenario and this is typically not the case. Generally when you hire a reputable designer for WordPress, Joomla, or Drupal – you actually receive a very user-friendly website.

Conclusion

If you answered no to any of the above questions, consider moving to a CMS. And do not forget to locate a reputable website designer. Review WordPress, Joomla, and Drupal to see which CMS package you like best; ask around and review some website portfolios. You will find someone you like and the money will be well spent. You will end up with a SEO friendly website, that looks modern, and that you can actually update yourself. All very good things.

Chapter Fifteen

Fifteen Questions to Ask Your Future Website Designer

A year or so ago my sister decided to launch a website and blog. With my encouragement, she selected WordPress as her platform of choice and then set out to locate a WordPress consultant. Why did she not come to me, you ask? Well, honestly, I had no desire to work with family and I could not begin to meet her list of needs. Sisterhood aside, we both knew we were not an ideal fit for each other at the time.

She wanted a cute blog with minimal website functionality and that was not my strength. I was a B2B or B2C girl who likes to work with small businesses and not so much individual bloggers. I was not a good fit for her and we both knew it.

While I did coach her along the website design process, she did pretty well all on her own. For example, she found a great graphic artist who created an awesome WordPress design for her. I did not agree with everything he did, but I do think he answered her unique needs and she has a WordPress design that is perfectly matched to her needs.



This experience with my sister reminded me that different websites and blogs need different talent sets and while we web designers may want to be everything to everyone, we simply cannot do it. We have limits, areas of expertise, and a niche within which we fit. We have to acknowledge these limitations and strengths both for our future clients and ourselves. I did not fully understand this when I launched my internet marketing firm, but I do now.

So, what should you look for when hiring a website designer? While this will vary based on your individual needs, there are fifteen criteria and/or questions that I consider fairly universal to the process of selecting a website designer. This may not be all-inclusive, but it is a great starting point for locating and interviewing a consultant or design firms.

Fifteen Must Ask Questions for Your Future Website Designer

1. **What CMS package do you use?** Is it open source or proprietary? If you do not know the definitions of those two terms, research them and you will thank me later. Open source means the website design software it is widely available, while proprietary means

it is solely used by the website designer. Proprietary would also mean the website designer probably wrote it himself and the website itself is HTML based. Open source means you are free to update and select website designers at your leisure. Proprietary means you are tied to your website designer for life. The only CMS I use is WordPress, because I feel clients should be able to come and go as they please and not based on my needs or wants.

2. **Can your design portfolio meet my aesthetic needs?** Remember my sister, who wanted a cute farm blog? She needed a graphic designer, not an internet marketing expert. Take a look at my WordPress portfolio. Do you see anything cute? Nope, you see business and branding. Now you understand why we did not bond over her WordPress design project. If you are looking for a new website designer, review the potential designer's portfolio well before you reach out to them for conversation. You will save both of you a lot of time and frustration.
3. **Do you adhere to web design best practices?** This may seem silly, but not every web designer understands best practices. Usability is still a huge issue even with the best graphic designers. My sister asked me if she should add a "key to help explain her social icons" and my response was "any website that requires a key or tutorial is not based on solid design or best practices." Then I told her to change the icons. Cute is great, but functionality and usability trump cute any day of the week.
4. **As a web designer, how knowledgeable are you with organic search engine optimization?** If you think you can worry about SEO after design, think again. Strong search engine optimization begins with website design and the architecture of your website or blog. Rush ahead with design without thinking about SEO and you will definitely regret it long-term. I will not even start designing a new WordPress website without first having a full understanding of a client's marketing needs and SEO objectives.
5. **Do you use social media and do you feel it is important?** It would be a bad idea to skip this question, because social media is not going away anytime soon. In fact, it is growing at amazing rates of user adoption. Facebook, Twitter, and locally focused websites like Foursquare are taking over the internet and they are powerhouses of traffic and engagement. A new website should embrace social media and encourage engagement. Your new website designer should be active on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. If they are not, then you should ask yourself why and decide whether or not they can really serve your needs.
6. **What exactly are your project deliverables?** Can they meet my individual needs? Let me return to my sister. She hired a graphic designer and he delivered. She did not, however, hire a website developer. She got exactly what she paid for, which was a beautiful WordPress website design. She did not get hosting set up, organic SEO, page build out, WordPress plug in set up, Google Analytics integration, an XML sitemap, a robot.txt file, or even submission to the search engines. She did not pay for it. She also did not ask for it. She's a newbie so she did not really know she needed all of that other "stuff" and she has me to help coach her along. But not everyone has a free website designer on call, so decide what you need and make sure your potential website designer

can deliver it. Your new website will not produce results if you are unable to figure out how to get your content uploaded or submit your finished site to search engines.

7. **What is the full scope of your services offering?** This is a big one, because, similar to project deliverables, designer capabilities are as diverse as clients' needs. If you need copywriting assistance, organic SEO, or even assistance with public relations, you typically will not get this from a graphic designer. My sister was not in need any of these, so a graphic designer was perfect for her. Most small businesses need a full service design house or an experienced internet marketer. They lack in house marketing resources and need someone to provide a complete website development project with the option for post-launch support. Know your own needs and make sure you pick a firm that meets those needs in both the short-term and long-term.
8. **How would you categorize your project management skills and what tools do you use to manage website design project?** What? Isn't it the client's job to manage the website project? Honestly, most clients do not comprehend all of the steps necessary to launch, so expecting them to manage unknown deliverables is unrealistic. I provide prospects with a written project plan and then once they sign on as clients I transfer this plan to Basecamp so we can jointly manage the project electronically. I learned this the hard way, unfortunately. One of my first clients was classic for expecting me to write content, locate images, and do way more than our contract called for when signed. He lied about project volume and frequently told me he did not know "it" was his responsibility. I learned my lesson and now I list off tasks and assignments in Basecamp and assign owners so there is no room for misunderstandings. This helps me stay organized and it helps my clients see the immense list of to do items that need to be accomplished to launch successfully. It keeps us both on task and on target.
9. **Are you comfortable with my brand and do you understand my marketing message?** This is important to small businesses because they frequently lack an in-house marketing team. If there is not a full-time marketer to monitor the brand and message, someone needs to do it, and it falls on the web designer. Your website fails if it does not grab your audience and convert them into your desired outcome. No messaging and no conversion equals failure. While industry experience is not always necessary, if you have a sophisticated product or service, then it is needed. I have had multiple clients within the ERP industry because I was in the ERP industry for eight years. Not only was I a marketer for an ERP software developer, but at other times I demonstrated the product, sold the software, and trained users on it. I got the concept of ERP and I understood CIO-speak and selling to the C-level decision maker. While this is not important to every industry, it is to the ERP industry and you need to get C-level selling to help craft out an effective website that can sell a product the size of an ERP system. If you fall within this type of niche, then you need to thoroughly interview your future web designer to make sure they "get it." If they do not, it is not their fault. Just keep looking until you do find someone who gets your industry and your product or service offering.
10. **Do you think we have a good rapport with each other?** Yes, I am asking if you like the designer. I receive calls from people needing websites and they are so opposite of my personality I do not even quote the opportunity. I am passionate about internet

marketing, I really do know my stuff, and I will tell you when I think you are off base and headed down the wrong path. If you do not like this approach and simply want your designer to unconditionally agree with you, then I am not the right website designer for you. Run, run away from me quickly. On the other hand, you may find me refreshing and you may like my passion and conviction. If that is the case, we are destined for a long-term and successful relationship.

11. What is your availability? Are you accepting new website design projects?

Some of us are really good at what we do and we fill up for months. Many times throughout the year I am at capacity and I feel as though my head may spin off. Other times I am not and am open to new projects and/or consultations. If you have found someone of quality, do not assume their schedule is wide open and they can start immediately and devote 40 hours a week to you. It will most likely not happen. Ask your potential designer for a possible start date and how long the project will take to go-live. If they cannot meet your timing constraints, thank them for their honesty and keep looking.

12. Are your terms and requirements flexible? I do not mean yoga flexible, I mean “go with the flow” and gets the idea that life and business happens flexible. I have a new client who had a family emergency come up and he dropped off the face off the earth in mid-December. I told Steve I understood and we will pick back up once he gets his mother-in-law back on the road to recovery. He has a business to run and his mother-in-law just took the free time that was slated for website launch. I get this and I also get that I am not his top priority. I may nag at you, but I understand you need to keep your business running even if I am waiting on content. I get that you may need to reschedule our appointment three times due to your client's needs. I do not like it, but I get it and I will work around it. All I ask is for you to allow the same should my son come down with the bubonic plague.

13. Can you work within my budget? This is a big one. My sister’s graphic designer was contracted at a fourth of my standard rate. I did not understand how he could do this until I realized our deliverables were completely different. In life you get what you pay for and website designers fit within this theory. Reduced budget means reduced deliverables or reduced abilities. You cannot expect the best of the best on a shoestring budget, so be realistic and find someone who meets your financial constraints. WordPress consultants range from \$50 to \$300 per hour and WordPress websites can range from \$500 to \$50,000. If you only need a \$500 website, then great, but know that you are getting a \$500 website. With most things you purchase, it is relative. My pricing falls into that middle of the road category of \$100 per hour and websites ranging from \$3,000 to \$15,000. I believe my rates match my skill set and my target market. While I have given free websites to nonprofits, I do not discount and I do not believe in cost creep. If you cannot afford me, I understand and I believe you should continue to look until you find a consultant that can work within your budget.

14. Can you provide references? While many of my clients come from referrals and I am happy to provide clients to speak with prior to signing contracts, not every website designer can or will do this for prospects. This is especially true if they are just starting out in website design. If the potential website designer was referred to you by a trusted

adviser, you are really not in need of additional references. If you randomly found the designer via the internet, you should validate their abilities with a reference prior to signing contracts. In doing so, please be respectful to your potential designer and their clients. Avoid asking for a reference unless the designer is your chosen partner. In my case, most of my clients would be C-level executives who are busy, so I only provide their name to prospects if needed. Their time is valuable and the reference is a gift so I try my best not to abuse it.

15. **Do you want to or can you support long-term relationships and website support?** I firmly believe long-term relationships are a privilege and not a right. I need to earn your business and in many cases I want to earn your business for the long-term. That being the case, not everyone wants or needs me long-term and this is okay too. Hire me on retainer, by project, or even hourly. I do not care because I am fairly flexible as long as my calendar has availability, but I am not every web designer. Not every graphic designer or website consultant wants or can support long-term clients. If you need support after launch, make sure you have asked your future website designer if they can or want to manage you as a client moving forward.

Conclusion

Web designers come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and flavors and we are definitely not a one size fits all type of offering. Avoid assuming a potential web designer is good or bad until you can compare his or her skill set to your unique needs. What may be a poor designer for you, may be an exceptional designer for someone else.

Like I said, this list of qualification questions is my list and my view of the world. Your list may differ some and you may even add another fifteen questions or criteria onto mine. But that is definitely okay, because you are thinking about what is important to you and you are providing yourself with selection criteria that will help you narrow your search field. You now have a list of questions that will help you pick a website designer that is a good fit for you and your website project. In the end, that is what matters most.

Chapter Sixteen

Each Page of Your Website is Like a Handshake

Each page of your website is like a handshake. Really. To illustrate this statement, let me set the stage for you. You are manning your company's booth at a trade show and a prospect wanders by and is within reach. This person looks at your booth, pauses, and then takes a brief moment to ask about your product or service offering. What do you say? Remember – you only have about one minute to make an impression and keep their interest. You have about the time it takes to shake someone's hand.

In a call with a certain client, which inspired this chapter, we were discussing page content for his new website. Without realizing it, I found myself saying, “Your website content is like a trade show. You have one minute to make an impression and keep a prospect's attention. What do you say as you shake someone's hand and make introductions?” His response was that his trade show pitch was not at all close to what he wrote for the website page that discusses the same topic.



The reason I came to this illustration is that this client is from a B2B technology company; the writer of the content speaks at an educated level and tends to go into significant depth on the “how” when writing content. In actuality, he simply needs to discuss the “what” and, more importantly, the “what's in it for me.” He is absolutely great at demonstrating his product and is very good at explaining the technology behind his offering, but the web page is not a demonstration. You simply are not afforded that much time. It is a handshake or an introduction.

My ten-year-old daughter is, in some ways, like my client. I call her the “clock builder”. If I ask her the time, she does not just give me the time, she wants to build me the entire clock to help illustrate how she reached the point of knowing the time. I love her to death, but she is way too much like me. We are clock builders by nature, which is good if you are a clock builder but not so great if you are writing content for a basic web page. My daughter and I can go into much to many details and in many cases this is overkill for a web page. Many times the KISS (keep it simple stupid) principle works best.

Back in my early twenties, a sales manager at my first job said, “Rebecca why can't you just tell me the time? Why do you always have to build me the clock?” He was right. Many years later I still want to build everyone the clock. I have to make a conscious effort to simply just tell them the time. I have learned to adjust my clock building tendencies when I am writing content for a

website, so that the average person can read my content without getting lost in the unnecessary details. Unfortunately, I still struggle with building the clock for my husband or friends.

The pages of your website only give you enough time with your visitor that is equivalent to a handshake. They are brief moments that allow you to connect with the visitor's needs or wants. You must provide enough in depth verbiage to offer value, but not so deep of content that you make the visitor feel like they just fell into a graduate level course at Harvard.

My client is a smart man and not a clock builder. I suspect he will have a much easier time adjusting than I did years ago.

Chapter Seventeen

Web Design Ain't Over Until the SEO Sings

So, you have gone through weeks of website design, content creation, and setting up your social media accounts. You are ready to go live with your beautiful new website. Ah, not so fast. You are forgetting the SEO consultant has the last word and no website should go live until your SEO guru dots all the I's and crosses all the T's.

At Web Savvy Marketing we work on a good mix of web design projects and straight SEO consulting. Our website design clients typically select us because our process is integrated with full search engine optimization. The funny part is that they are almost always surprised when we do not launch the new website the minute they email their last bit of content. We do not launch immediately because there is still a lot of SEO work to perform. And, while we start the web design project with SEO, much of it cannot be performed until the last minute.

Why Does Website Launch Wait for SEO?

When we kick off the project and I, the resident SEO geek, perform my research and competitive analysis, I have a plan in mind for SEO. I know what keywords I want to target and what pages I want us to write. That is when development really starts and you, the naive and unprepared client, realizes writing strong web content is not as easy as you think.

It is painfully plain and simple. Content is harder to write than many expect, so we, the team, end up making compromises on keywords and content. We shift focus and modify our sitemap to accommodate less pages and thus less keywords. It happens every time.

As your SEO consultant, I stretch you as far as I can take you and attempt to reach as many keywords as possible. You, the client, put me back in my box and reset my expectations with what your team can support.

You may think I should scale back, but I will definitely disagree. My job is to stretch your imagination and reach you beyond what you think is possible. When you fight and cannot support it, then we can adjust, but I will not accept limitations until they are true limitations. And I would rather stretch and reach more than what was expected than not reach at all.



Once we modify the sitemap, pages, and keywords, my SEO strategy needs to be adjusted. I am used to this and have no problem with it at all; I have learned this is the natural progression because I am firm on pushing you to your limits. I just need to wait until this occurs before I put a large block of my time or my staff's time into your on-page SEO.

When the Design Dust Settles, SEO Cleans Up

Once the last website content is loaded and we know our final page count and site structure, me and my team move in to pretty everything up. When I say “pretty”, I mean we fancy up your content and make it page one worthy.

1. Optimize Page Text and Headers for Keywords and Phrases

This really starts at the launch of the project, but as I stated above, these keyword focus can change some over the course of development. Taking a step back and revisiting your targeted keywords at launch makes sure you have pages to support your keywords and more importantly, your copy supports the keyword.

I go through page by page and make sure your content uses the keyword or phrase we selected and that it is used in a natural way that is easy to read. I also go through and double-check headers (H1 tags) and subheaders (H2, H3, H4 tags) to make sure they support the keyword and phrase for SEO and readability.

Subheaders are very important because they help break up content for the readers and for the search engines. They provide natural breaks within the page and help point out areas of interest for those of us that scan web pages and blog posts. I am one of those scanners, so I make sure every client website has a good mix of subheaders.

2. Review and Update Alt Tags Images, Anchor Text for Links and Files, and Bold Text References

Alt tag refers to an alternative tag for an image. Search engines, and users with some disabilities, cannot read text in images. The alt tag is simply used to describe the image in the event it cannot be read. You want the alt tag to be relevant to the image and include keywords if applicable. But you must do so only if the keyword is relevant to the image itself.

Anchor text is the clickable text that users will see as a result of a link. Good on-page SEO includes the use of keyword rich hyperlinks, however, this should only be used if it represents value to the reader.

On-page SEO best practices also includes formatting file names. Using short and descriptive filenames with matching alt text is preferred. These should not be full, keyword stuffed sentences. They are best when they are short, but descriptive.

Bold or strong text is also believed to influence search engines. I will use this if it can support both the focusing of readers on important points and is keyword rich. Due to usability concerns, I will not bold words just for the sake of on-page SEO.

3. Create Page Specific Meta Titles and Descriptions

When you are launching a new website or relaunching an existing website, it is critical that every page has a unique and hand crafted meta title and description. Your meta title should be less than sixty characters and your description less than one hundred and sixty characters. Both should include the page's keyword and should provide text that sells. The search engines will use your description (if they like it) for the search engine results page. It is the first thing your future visitor sees about your website, so you need to make it good. It needs to closely relate to the page and it needs to be worthy of someone clicking through to the website.

I typically create our meta titles and descriptions in Excel and do so for the entire sitemap. Once this process is done I have my assistant, Jen, input them into WordPress. We use two people, because Jen will always find mistakes. When you sit and write 200 meta titles and 200 meta descriptions, you will make mistakes. The second set of eyes helps greatly in making sure your meta is correct and without spelling or grammatical errors.

4. Optimize Blog Entries

Blog entry optimization is important and yet it is the one item I many times almost forget. Clients throw blog posts at me right before go-live and due to this, I frequently catch myself backtracking to make sure these are optimized for the search engines.

Optimizing a blog post works the same as with the other pages, however you need to remember the value of the internal link. Blog posts typically support the cornerstone content pages and their keywords. What the heck is a cornerstone content page? It is a page that is used to target higher volume and more competitive keywords. The blog posts then support these pages by providing keyword rich inbound links.

Meta descriptions and post excerpts should be reviewed as well. Many times these are displayed when the post is shared on social networks like Facebook or LinkedIn. You want to make sure the intro text is descriptive and entices someone to click through to the actual post.

5. Create Deep Links

Deep links. For me this is where I call uncle and grab my assistant Jen. I have worked on the web design and SEO of the website for weeks and I am usually starting to get fatigued. Jen, being the perky and WordPress savvy person she is, takes a fresh look at the content and goes page by page to input hyperlinks to other pages. This process helps both the user and the search engines understand what pages are most important.

It's a Wrap

Well, kind of. You are done with on-page SEO for now, but we have not yet discussed the really geeky side of SEO. This comes in another chapter; we will end this one with the reminder that your website and content is optimized for on-page SEO, which is the land of search engine optimization, is a huge part of the battle.

Chapter Eighteen

Stand Back! The Geeks Are Coming

One of my business partners, Scott, is an engineer and his engineering brain loves SEO. I have been teaching SEO 101 to him while we build Scott's website. Recently, as we moved from SEO 101 to SEO 201, Scott could not understand why I did not do this with every client. The truth be told, 99% of my clients just do not care. They pay me to make sure their website and SEO are taken care of and they have no desire to worry about it beyond that point.

We All Make Mistakes

Very few clients have Scott's thirst for knowledge. They do not understand it, or care about it, or have the time to listen to me ramble about SEO and website design. They are confident my team will manage go-live and do so properly. And we do, because we have a project plan that we walk through and I check off as the project progresses. But not every web design firm or SEO consultant uses a checklist or project plan. They miss things and these "things" become opportunities for their client's competition because it is the little things that win in SEO and website design.

Recently I was researching competitors of a prospect and I discovered one of their local competitors had every page on their website blocked to search engines. Only the home page was in Google's index and the company was paying heavily for pay per click campaigns. The company was unaware that their web designer or in-house webmaster left the no index tag on all their pages. It was everything I could do to stop myself from calling the firm to let them know.



The point I am trying to make here is that many consultants and marketing firms miss things. We are human and we make mistakes. Not like a doctor leaving a medical device in a patient type of mistake, but pretty big mistakes nonetheless. If you are the client or the DIY web designer, you need to protect yourself. You need to have some education and you should do a quick run through of your website before and after go-live. And of course, well before you pay that final invoice.

Go-Live Checklist for Web Design Projects

1. **Test Your Website Against All Browsers** – Just when you think everything is perfect, in walks someone using IE (Internet Explorer). Older versions of IE have produced many

gray hairs for me over the last few years. Things tend to break in IE, so double checking the new website in it right before go-live is critical. While not as buggy as IE, other browsers such as Firefox, Chrome, and Safari should also be reviewed. They are more robust, but older versions can also be problematic. My beloved iPhone and iPad are newer arrivals and they too should be checked.

2. **Add a Favicon** – A favicon is about branding. It adds a little image to the tab or window of the user's browser and it is saved with the bookmark in a favorites list. While this is not a critical element, it does provide a nice polished look to your website and I have many clients who get big smiles when they see their logo pop up as a favicon.
3. **Create an HTML Sitemap for Visitors** – Much to my disappointment, sitemaps are ignored by many developers. I still create one and while I do not put it proudly in the main navigation, I do try to make it available in the footer. Most people do not use sitemaps, but for those of us who are impatient (that would be me) they are important because they help quickly guide visitors through your website.
4. **Create an XML Sitemap for Search Engines** – A sitemap.xml file should be created and placed in your root directory. This simple little file allows major search engines to easily index your website. In WordPress, generating this sitemap is as easy as adding a plug in and clicking the generate button. WordPress will automatically update this file with every new page or post addition or content change. It is a simple way of reaching out to search engines and letting them know you have fresh content available for their review. While this is simple, it is many times forgotten.
5. **Prepare a Redirect File** – The redirect file is the bane of my existence. It simply tells search engines and users that an old page or post is no longer available and it redirects them to the current page or post. It is important for usability and SEO. So why do I hate it so much? It is time consuming and it is one of the last things we do before go-live. Not only do we create the redirect file for the client, we generally have to audit their existing pages and provide a cross reference between old and new. My clients do not know what pages they have, so I end up becoming an internet detective in my efforts to locate a complete list. Once you have the list of old and new matched up, you simply add the directory to the .htaccess file. Or, as in my case, you use a WordPress plug in like Redirection. I love the Redirection plug in because I can upload all the links right from a CSV file.
6. **Create and Review a Robot.txt File** – The robot.txt file blocks spiders or instructs the search engines to ignore certain file folders on your server. For most clients this generally means keeping spiders out of the WordPress core and theme files. For others it may identify a protected directory of white papers or files that are restricted. Simple, yet important for protecting your website and your high value web assets.
7. **Double Check Your Submission Forms Are Working** – The simple checking of submission forms may seem like a no brainer, but you would be surprised at the amount of problems that can result from a simple contact form. Email and forms can work differently from server to server, so you absolutely need to recheck forms after a website is moved from a development server to a live server. One woman told me her company

had broken forms for an entire year after they launched their website because no one remembered to check them. When inquiry forms are your lead source, this is disastrous.

8. **Double Check Your Meta Titles and Descriptions** – Yes I know I just wrote about this in my last chapter (Web Design Ain't Over Until the SEO Sings) and we really have already done this twice, but I still double-check high value pages after go-live. I use the toolbar from SEOmoz to view the meta title and description outside of WordPress just to make sure I did not miss anything. And sometimes, the meta title or description that sounded great a week ago sounds incredibly stupid at launch. So I go back and edit it just to make sure my pages are well represented in the SERPs. This is where my OCD personality is highly visible and beneficial.
9. **Double Check Your Index Settings** – Didn't I do that with my Robot.txt file above? Well, yes and no. The robot.txt file looks at folders and is server based; CMS packages like WordPress allow you to block search engines at a site or page and post level. While we are in development, we have a site wide block of search engines so our clients do not run into issues with duplicate content. Our go-live plan includes removing this setting. That being said, not everyone has such a policy and I've noticed new websites blocking search engines more times than I have time to discuss right now.
10. **Check Your RSS Feed and Sign Up for FeedBurner** – An RSS feed is a techie term for a page that lists your most recent blog posts. You can use this feed to automatically populate other websites or profiles on the internet. It is a must have for link building efforts. Feedburner is a service that allows visitors to subscribe to your RSS feed via email. It is offered by Google, and it is 100% free, and it makes a great tool for building engagement. Some people even show off the number of RSS subscribers they have as if it is a badge of honor. It is rumored that Google will discontinue this service, but other services exist and are available should this occur.
11. **Add Google Analytics** – I virtually force Google Analytics on every client. I set it up even if they don't care, because I think some day they will care and I want them to have data available. Google Analytics is a free application that tracks visits to your website and the corresponding activity. It can tell you where people came from, what keyword they used, how long they stay, and when they left. Good website design and SEO requires analytics. Since GA is free and powerful, it makes a great tool.
12. **Submit Your New Sitemap.xml File to Google and Bing** – Use Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Tools. Doing so will not only allow for very rapid indexing of the new website, it will provide very valuable tools down the road. I use Google Webmaster Tools every week and find it a critical tool for evaluating website and SEO success.
13. **Review Speed and Performance** – After your website is live on your server, you need to review performance. You'll be able to verify speed immediately from viewing the website live on the internet and you'll receive performance reports from Google via Webmaster Tools. Remember that speed alters search results and conversion rates, so make sure your website performance is up to par. If you're live and you're living with poor performance, don't be fooled into thinking it is temporary. Some hosting companies are just horrible, so get out as quick as you can.

DIY Designers Take Note

Winning (not the Charlie Sheen kind) isn't easy. Most people are not like my pal Scott and their minds do not just magically sponge up SEO knowledge.

Each week I receive calls from a lot of DIY website owners. Virtually every time my heart goes out to them, because they're really trying, but trying and succeeding are two different things. Website design and SEO is hard work. Competing on the internet is difficult and there are reasons why most websites get virtually no traffic.

If you are considered the average Joe and you've undertaken a DIY website project, take a moment and reread the above list. If you've reviewed my thirteen items and you only "get" about five of them, you're setting yourself up for failure. Take the time to research them further and postpone your website launch until you've made sure you've thoroughly covered your to do list. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the list, then seek out a professional. The few hundred dollars you spend for the last minute help will be well worth it in the end.

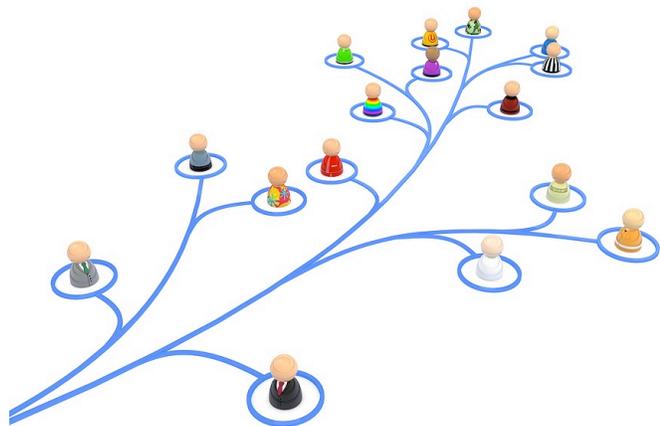
Whether you're the DIY website designer, a marketing manager, or a small business owner – double check your website and efforts at go-live and make sure you and/or your website design firm have everything in working order.

Chapter Nineteen

Ten Steps to Quality Link Building And Strong Organic SEO

Whenever I create a new website for a client, I always tell them the website is only the core foundation of strong SEO. Strong SEO requires a solid, well planned, and long-term link building campaign. Interestingly enough, as I prepare for live Q&A sessions for my friends over at JuJuQ on the subject, I found myself sending an email to a client nagging him about building inbound links for a brand new website we launched last Wednesday. Inbound links are a huge part of SEO and since I'm an organic SEO girl, I cannot help but talk about creating inbound links.

As your web designer, I will do everything in my power to design an SEO friendly website that is built around your target keywords. I identify the keywords, prioritize the keywords, and try my best to guide your content to help support those keywords. But that process, as long as it may sometimes feel, is only the beginning of a solid SEO campaign. The real work comes after the website is launched and if you do not hire me or another SEO consultant to help in these efforts, the due diligence of this effort falls back on you.



So now what? You've got your cool new website (if it was done by me this would be based on the WordPress website design platform) and you wonder what's next. I'll tell you the same thing I tell the students over at JuJuQ and the same thing I tell my website clients: you get building. Not house building like my friend Rick does, but link building, like all the WordPress geeks I know do.

Ten Steps to Quality Link Building and Strong Organic SEO

1. Plan Out and Separate Your Content into Keyword-Rich Pages

Any good project needs a plan. SEO and linking building do too, so this means you start your plan with the right keywords. You want to target keywords that will result in a positive experience for website visitors and this means you want keywords that are relevant to what your

website will offer in content, the products you sell, or your service offering. Remember, I'm an organic girl, so we need to focus on quality. Organic SEO begets quality content; or really, the other way around.

Offer misleading keywords or irrelevant keywords (aka black hat SEO) and your visitors will simply bounce on arrival. This will not only defeat the effort to gain quality traffic and it will ultimately produce negative results with Google because it will inflate your bounce rate per keyword.

To avoid this I suggest starting with a sitemap that matches up individual keywords to individual pages. Once you've defined it, stay on task and stay focused in both writing quality content and building inbound links.

2. Limit Your Targeted Keywords to One or Two Per Page

One page cannot gain you oodles of traffic for ten different high volume keywords. It can do so for one or two, so stay focused. If you are not targeting a long-tail (longer keyword terms that are offer lower volume) keyword, then pick only one, or, at most, two terms to target per page. This will make your sitemap to keyword relationship manageable and it will be the most effective in generating traffic.

3. Check Out Your Competition

Before you stop planning, visit your top competitors. Look at their website structure, page URLs, on page content, etc. You can also utilize resources like Google's Keyword Tool, SpyFu, Keyword Spy, Complete.com, or Alexa to gain insight on their target words and their traffic. You will find new keywords and new inspiration for your website.

4. Make Each and Every Link Count

Having a link isn't enough. It needs to be keyword rich. In step one I said to make a plan, now that you have this plan and page to keyword reference sheet, just use it for link building. For example, if you have a LinkedIn account and you are adding a link to your website on your profile, don't just use the standard "My Company". Use your keywords and link to a specific page. That takes an average inbound link and makes it a great inbound link.

5. Never Engage in Link Farming and Avoid Paid Links

You may have received emails or read ads promising the world with inbound link farming or paid link promotions. They sound too good to be true and they are, so ignore them at all costs. When I say ignore, I mean run and run fast. Google will not reward you for paying for inbound links, so don't waste your time or money working to obtain them.

6. Promote Your Inbound Links Through a Press Release, Blog Entry, White Paper, Article, Event or Social Media Site

Not all people read press releases and white papers, but search engines certainly can and will. If you have something meaningful to announce, then consider a press release. Remember to embed your press releases with quality links that are keyword rich and point to specific pages within your website. I, particularly, pay for few press release services. I tend to rely on free services, although I do admit that I regularly pay twelve dollars per press release for one service that allows three keyword rich links. Some of my favorite press release websites are PR Inside, PRLog, OnlinePRNews, OpenPR, 1888PressRelease, PitchEngine, and MyPRGenie.

Blogs are another great way to increase your inbound links. As a matter of fact, blogs are the best way to get links. If you are a good blogger, you will quickly gain regular readers and people who "follow" your postings through RSS feeds and other publishing methods. These readers will also encourage other people to read your entries. Google looks positively on blog entries and their associated links. If you're lucky, you'll realize you love blogging and it will be both a benefit to your website and an enjoyable task and outlet for you at the same time.

Once your blog post is released, you can promote it or post it on other websites such as industry forums, blog directories, or social media websites like Facebook and Twitter.

7. Always Include the "http://" in Your Link

If your link isn't embedded in keyword rich text, always include the 'http://' in the inbound link's URL. If you forget, the link you provide might get picked up as an inbound link or it may not. Therefore, it's always a good practice to include the full address of your URL, and this also means the 'http://.' This is a simple point, but an important one. As a rule, I believe in both keyword rich links and URL based links. A little variety is good for the Google soul.

8. List your Website in a Directory

Another way to increase your inbound link efforts is to merely to promote it as much as you can and a great way to do that is to utilize a directory. While you typically can't submit individual pages, you can list your main site. Think of a directory as online yellow pages. First and foremost, focus on DMOZ. This is a free service, however each submission is reviewed by a human, so proceed with caution. Take the time to make sure you are applying your link to the correct directory location. If you do not, you will be rejected. Do not give up if you are not quickly listed; it takes time and it may take a few requests before you are officially in DMOZ.

9. Establish an RSS Feed, Sitemap.XML File and a Strong Ping List

Make sure you have an active RSS feed for your blog posts. The RSS feed will be updated automatically each time you release a new blog post. This feed can be connected to Facebook

and other social media sites to automatically update your page or profile with each new post. That equates to new inbound links each time and you do not have to touch anything beside your blog post.

You also need to make sure you have a sitemap.xml file that includes content for your entire website. Once set up, this sitemap will automatically update each time a post is added or a page updated. This will literally “reach out and touch” the search engines and nudge them in a way to inform them that you have new content available. This is critical for keeping the search engines up to date on your fresh content. It will also help get your blog posts into Google’s blog listing, which provides current content for other bloggers to read, review, and comment upon. Just make sure you use your keywords within your blog titles so the effort is not wasted.

Finally, consider a ping list. By utilizing a ping service, it allows you to automatically notify blog directories that your blog has been updated. Once you establish your ping list, whenever you write a new blog post, the blog directories on your ping list will automatically be notified of the change. The bigger your ping list, the higher the chances of receiving traffic from those sources. If you use WordPress, for example, you can modify your ping list in your Dashboard settings. This is a great timesaver as it will help spread the word about your new posts effortlessly. All you have to do is maintain a healthy ping list.

10. Stay White Hat, Organic, and Don’t Give Up on Your Effort for Quality Inbound Links and SEO Driven Traffic

To maintain your credibility with the search engines and to obtain page one ranking, stay on top of the SERP (search engine results page) and continue building your inbound links. It is an ongoing process, so remember that you’ll need to continue your link-building efforts or you’ll fall off page one. Just because you land on page one doesn’t mean you’ll stay there. Good organic SEO takes work and it does not happen overnight.

One reason I like organic SEO is because I believe in the concept of a strong work ethic that is driven by good intentions. That, in itself, is the basis for organic SEO. It takes commitment and steady work, but as many website owners already know, the reasons for engaging in SEO are compelling. Cultivating inbound links is a proven methodology for attracting free, long-term traffic.

Chapter Twenty

Twenty Tips for Creating the Perfect Blog Post

When I said I blogged years ago, people looked at me as if I was crazy. Well I was, but blogging didn't drive me to insanity. Because of my technology background, as a marketer, I was one of the early adopters of blogging. Today blogging is considered a bit more mainstream and bloggers are everywhere.



I actually like blogging; I enjoy it and it has been a huge help to me professionally. Recently I attended WordCamp Detroit and I was surrounded by bloggers. I wasn't prepared for that one; there were bloggers everywhere. Many who had day jobs and blogged at night about their hobbies or in an effort to make a few bucks. WordCamp Detroit reminded me that blogging is a profession that if done properly and with dedication, can provide a healthy income. I use WordPress for website design and I guess I assumed everyone in the room would too. Boy, was I wrong. –The WordCamp was filled with regular people who had day jobs and blogged at night.

Is there a right way or a wrong way to blog? Absolutely. Over the last year I've trained a number of clients and presented webinars on blogging best practices. I enjoy blogging and I try to teach others that they too can not only learn to blog, but learn how to create the "perfect" blog entry and love it along the way. Over this last year I've realized not everyone is a blogger and you cannot force them to become one. That being said, you can teach wannabe bloggers to blog better.

So, What is a Blog?

A blog is short for a "web log" and is maintained by either an individual or a group of authors. A blog will typically focus on one topic or niche and is published on a regular basis. There is no limit to the variety of content a blog can contain; it can include commentaries, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics, charts or videos. It can be, and often is, a full on multi-media experience.

Individual bloggers, when they are good, are often times branded as authority figures or celebrities and gain momentum in and of themselves. Personally, I'm in love with Matt Cutts, but I would not have even known about him if it were not for his blog.

The public has gotten so conditioned to blogs, that many now expect to find a blog on both business and personal websites. If you are selling something on your website, most visitors will expect some educational commentary in the form of a blog on the website. They'll want to read about why product A is better than product B and they'll want to do this before they even consider purchasing. This is best done via a blog, because you can communicate to your reader in a more informal and natural manner.

Why Does the World Love Blogs?

- **People Like Blogs** – Blogs provide a sense of intimacy. And it's this intimacy over the Internet that allows the marketer to capture an audience. If you can do this, you will capture Google.
- **Search Engines Like Blog** – Search engines like blogs, because they create fresh content that is relevant to the website and the reader. I believe this is most demonstrated with the speed in which Google picks up and publishes blog content. Google can spider and index a blog entry in as little as 30 minutes.
- **Marketers Like Blogs** – Blogs help a marketer promote their website, business, product or service. They feed and nurture the core website, help to cultivate branding, convey the marketing message and recruit people to follow their website, business, product or service. Blogs can also be picked up by other bloggers, the media, and blog entries can quickly create a momentum all on their own.

What Are Some Best Practices for Blogs?

1. **Focus on One Key Topic or Niche** – If you don't know what to write about, think about what is of interest to you. Look at other blogs and what makes them interesting or think about something that can relate to the product you are selling.
2. **Build Your Blog Around the Kitchen Table** – If you are using your blog as a marketing tool, think about what the reader would want to hear if you were sitting at the kitchen table with them casually discussing your product or service. My boat dealership has a gentleman who is a natural salesperson. If someone walks through the door of their store, Ron is going to be able to close the deal because he is a people person and he has a natural way about him that makes you like him. If you can translate Ron's natural ability with people into a blog post, you'd have people from around the world wanting to buy his boats.
3. **Write About What You Know** - If you try to blog about something you hate, you will in turn hate blogging. Blog about something you love and your blogging will become a passion and not a chore. If you are a marketing person and you hate your product, it is going to be difficult for you to blog about it. You're better off asking someone else to write the blog posts and you edit it, as you can only be a good blogger if you have a passion for what you blog about. It is kind of like cats and people who hate cats—cats have a sixth sense for people who don't like them and I swear my cats will stalk you if

this is the case. They just know. The reader will “just know” too, so don’t bother talking about something you hate.

4. **Make it Interesting to Read** – Your blog post should be easy-to-read, fun, and interesting, so make sure it doesn’t read like a dissertation or thesis. If it’s not immediately interesting to read, it doesn’t sell across the Internet. The easiest way to make a blog interesting is to tell a story of interest and make it personal. I’ve related Girl Scout cookies to ERP software and ERP software to buying Christmas gifts online because it was relevant and it was my personal experience. It was real, which made it interesting.
5. **Aim for Dialog and a Two-way Communication** - Talk to the reader like they are human and allow people to respond to your blog. Today’s Internet is about interaction. Yes, I said interaction. That means you need to allow comments and you need to reply to them – the good, the bad, and the really ugly.
6. **Include a Great Title** – Pick a great title that is unique and reaches out and grabs your audience’s attention and makes them want to read more. I believe so much in this point, I wrote an entire chapter on it. Visit the next chapter “A Good Blog Title is like Wrapping Paper on a Present” to hear my full views on the subject.
7. **Have a Great Introduction Ready** – You have a few seconds to engage the reader, so your introduction or initial paragraph better be good and it better align with the rest of the blog entry. It needs to set the scene and provide something that entices the reader to stay with you and actually read the full blog post.
8. **Don’t Forget About Subheadings** – Use H2 and H3 headings to help balance the blog post and give readers sections where they can focus their attention. It will be beneficial to both the reader and the search engines.
9. **Don’t Forget About Bullets** – Not everybody likes to read paragraphs, so mix it up. I rarely sit and read an entire paragraph. I scan the paragraph and actually pay more attention to bullets than anything else. This is just my personality; I’m a constant multi-tasker. You have to be prepared for me and the millions like me. You also should remember that human nature dictates how we read bullets. Most people read the first one or two then skip to the last one in the list. This item is number nine, so most likely you aren’t even reading it. If you are, then kudos, you’re a better person than I am.
10. **Don’t Forget About SEO** – Remember that your blog is many times targeted at both the reader and the search engine spiders. When a SEO client tells me he has the perfect idea for a blog post, the first question I ask him is, “What keyword are you targeting?” Eric absolutely gets this, but Jeff and Andy, well, not so much. So I nag them about keywords and I make sure the blog posts uses our targeted keywords to link to an internal web page to help build deep links within the website or blog. And yes, we always use use keyword-rich anchor text. If you don’t know what that means, you need an hour discussion with a good SEO consultant, because it is important.
11. **Bring it Back to Your Product or Service** – If your website sells a product or service offering, remember not to lose site of your marketing goals. If you’re an affiliate marketer or business whose sales rely heavily on internet traffic, you need to write content that can be associated with your offering. You can discuss virtually anything, as

long as you bring it back to your product or service and the key focus of your blog itself. It's okay even if the topic is off the wall, as long as you bring it back to your product or service. My most off the wall blog topics are the ones people remember most. And for me, they were the most fun to write.

12. **Stay Focused** – Stay on point and your audience will then stay in touch with you. Don't be my daughter; I call my daughter the clock builder, because she can't just give you the time. She has to go into painfully slow detail about how she built the clock or how she figured out how to tell time. As much as I love her – and I do – she loses my attention because I really don't care what type of jelly Tommy had on his sandwich at lunch. We were talking about her homework. See, I almost lost you there, didn't I?
13. **Update Your Blog Regularly** – Okay this one is funny, because this is like the pot calling the kettle black. I know and believe this, but I struggle with it big time. I spend so much time on my clients' projects, I forget about my own blog. But I digress. If you post blog entries irregularly, your benefits from blogging will be limited. To gain a base of followers or subscribers, you need to have something tangible for them to follow or read. This means regular and meaningful updates and posts. I prefer at least one blog post a week and you can go up to five posts a week if you have something relevant to say. I have one client in a very competitive keyword environment and we blog three times per week with fresh content. He is going up against the big boys, so we have no choice, but we will win on strong content and on keywords.
14. **Make Your Post a Multi-Media Experience** – Consider it eye candy for your blog. A blog can include a variety of content that can consist of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics, charts, or videos. Didn't I say this already? Yes, but it is important so I'm going to say it again. One word of caution is to not include a graphic or video that isn't relevant; that is just annoying. I love blog eye candy as long as it provides a real purpose.
15. **Soften the Sales Pitch** – Your blog post isn't a constant sales pitch. If it feels like a sales pitch to the reader, you will lose your audience and you will fail in your blogging effort. You can insert a call-to action, as this will be your pitch opportunity, just don't be too aggressive. And for heaven sakes, make the pitch relevant to your post itself. Talking about chicken soup and offering your reader a new car doesn't provide any continuity so don't do it.
16. **Watch Your Spelling and Grammar** – Make sure you proof your post before publishing. Check for any spelling, punctuation and grammar errors that may appear—a poorly written post can damage your credibility. Once you post, check it out online just to make sure it is correct. I often see an error online that I didn't see in the back end publisher. And yes, I'm a horrible speller and have been so since about age six. While I try to find errors, you still might find one within my blog posts. I apologize for this now as I know it will happen.
17. **Spread the Word About Your Blog** – Extend your blog entries with RSS feeds to websites like Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social media sites. An RSS feed will automatically be updated each time you release a new blog post. You establish your RSS feed connection once and then allow the RSS feed to automatically update your page or

profile with each new blog post. That means new inbound links and you do not have to touch anything besides your blog post.

18. **Chirp Like a Bird** – Tweet your blog post and encourage others to re-tweet it. Thank those who help spread your message and be appreciative. And yes, I'd love if you tweeted one of my posts. There is a little button at the top of them that makes it super easy for you to do so. If you want a a cool button like mine and you use WordPress, there are a bunch of plug ins that will whip it in for you.
19. **Remember to Ping the Post** - Utilize a ping service that allows you to automatically notify blog directories that your blog has been updated. I use WordPress for all my blogging and website design projects, so the ping ability is built right into the software. Get a good ping list established, so whenever you write a new blog post, the blog directories on your “ping list” will automatically be notified of the change. The bigger your ping list, the higher the chances of receiving traffic from those sources. The bigger your ping list, the higher the chances of receiving traffic from those sources.
20. **Have a Sitemap.xml File** – For some unknown reason, this is the one topic area where clients look at me as if I'm from Mars. Make sure you have a sitemap.xml file that includes content for your entire website that is submitted to all the major search engines and updated each time you add or edit a page or post. When you have a robust sitemap.xml file this will literally “reach out a touch” the search engines and nudge them in a way to inform them that you have new content available. This is critical for keeping the search engines up to date on your fresh content and for encouraging them to quickly provide your content in search results. WordPress has a number of great plug ins to manage this process, although I can tell you from experience with my client base, not every web software does so be careful.

So now I'm getting ready to close, so this is where an excellent wrap up discussion would come in. Then I'd sneak in a subtle call to action, but I like blogging and I could talk about SEO and internet marketing all day long, so I'll skip the pitch.

Okay I've changed my mind. I will tell you one quick story to close. A few years ago I was at a technology trade show in California. I'm a Michigan girl so this was a little bit of a journey for me. At the show a man continued to tell me we had met and he knew me. I had never seen this guy in my life, so I had no idea what he was talking about. Finally, after a few hours, he remembered that he subscribed to my blog on IT Toolbox and he started to tell me his favorite posts. Not only did he recognize my face from my blog, he remembered individual posts and could tell me what I had said. He actually had personal favorites. Now tell me any other method of marketing that can touch people and imprint on them in that manner? At that time I was marketing ERP software, which is generally considered a necessary evil and not something you want to digest and remember. But Jay did and I thought that experience was very cool and an excellent example of how internet marketing just works.

That, my friends, is the power of blogging and one reason I love internet marketing as much as I do.

Chapter Twenty-One

A Good Blog Title is Like Wrapping Paper on a Present



I always loved Christmas as a child and love it today as an adult. It is filled with family, great food, and presents. As a child I liked the family and presents; as an adult I love all three. The difference is that as a child I liked to receive presents and as an adult I like to give them. While I probably didn't care much about the wrapping paper as a child, I do as an adult. I think the wrapping paper and presentation should be as good as the present itself. Gifts for adults need perfect corners, while gifts for children need lots of ribbon and a piece of candy on top to peak interest and make the receiver want to rip it open.

Recently I was preparing my slide deck for a webinar for my friends over at Lurn. The webinar is titled "Ten Best Practices for Writing Headlines, Descriptions and Meta Data That Get Traffic." The preparation for this webinar reminded me of wrapping paper and my ultimate love for Christmas. Yes, you read that correctly, in my mind I think of titles and meta as wrapping paper.

Here is why: line up two presents of equal size and cost. One is wrapped in a brown paper bag and the other is wrapped in beautiful shiny paper with perfect corners and an exquisite ribbon to match. Which one do you want to open? Unless you have mental issues, you're going for the one I wrapped—that would be the pretty one. Blog entries and website pages are the same. Visitors and search engines lunge at the page or post that is wrapped perfectly. This means well-written content that is accompanied by a fabulous title, concise meta description, and relevant keywords (if you are targeting search engines other than Google). These three elements are the teasers that make you want more, just like the perfectly wrapped present.

Unfortunately, blogger and “wanna be” webmasters are a dime a dozen these days and everyone thinks they are the next great publisher of content on the Internet. They are not. I am thankful the folks over at Lurn feel the same as I do and they are trying desperately to educate these up and coming Internet moguls with some good old fashioned SEO expertise. Once you get past Lurn’s glitzy landing pages, you’ll see they have great content on SEO and Internet marketing. So much so that I wish they’d been around seven years ago when I entered into the world of SEO and website design. This isn’t a push for Lurn, it is an education. I 100% believe they provide great content for the SEO newbie. Below is a list of best practices I discussed at the webinar. Lurn believes in these things just as much as I do, which is why I believe in Lurn.

Writing Headlines, Descriptions and Meta Data That Get Traffic

1. Write an eye-catching, well-written headline
2. Use your headline, descriptions, and tags to gain traction
3. Use your keywords in the title
4. Build keywords into your alt tags
5. Include headlines and descriptions that will resonate with those readers
6. Include information you want your visitors to see when they see your link in search engines
7. Watch your character limit
8. Don’t overdo it
9. Utilize the H1 tag so it helps both the reader and the search engine
10. Pick the right header for the job

So my SEO friends, I will leave you with this thought. When crafting your next blog entry or web page, ask yourself this – is your wrapping job good enough to give to your mother (aka Google)? If you aren’t pleased to attach your name to it, rewrap it and make sure the presentation is as good as the page content itself.

Chapter Twenty-Two

304 Link Building Opportunities

Let the Link Building Begin!

Your new website just went live so you are now enjoying the fruits of your labor and admiring the exceptional job you and your team did on design and development. The project is finally over and it is time to settle back and wait for your website traffic to climb to new heights.

Reality check! I repeat – it is time for a reality check! You’re about half done with your quest for internet dominance. The research, website design, build out, and on-page SEO are all only part of your ongoing battle for visitors and conversions. Link building is not only necessary – it’s critical! It is the only way to maximize your website traffic and get the most ROI out of your web design project.



Why Do We Need to Worry About Link Building?

Pretend that the internet is like the homecoming queen contest; to win the crown (or page one ranking), you need to be pretty, have some depth, and have a lot of votes from your peers. A website is no different. It needs to be functional, have unique content, and it needs to have links pointing to it from other websites so Google and Bing know it is of value. The links represent votes and these votes help provide a method by which the search engines and their algorithms can score authority. Without incoming links, it will be impossible to win over the search engines. We SEOs call this off-page SEO.

Why Do We Wait for Link Building Until After Go-Live?

In an earlier chapter, “Ten Steps to Quality Link Building and Strong Organic SEO”, I discuss the need for a structured link building plan and map of your keyword to page strategy. This is critical because you need to build links into your home page, but also pages and posts. If you’ve followed my website design plan (my previous chapters), each page of your website will have a specific keyword focus. You’ll need this list and the final page URLs before you can start link building and this list isn’t finalized until after go-live.

How on Earth Can We Find Link Building Opportunities?

There are a lot of ways, although not all links are as beneficial as others. We SEOs talk a lot about “do follow” links and page authority and PR rank. Most regular people don’t get our SEO babble and they don’t need to. What they need is basic link building and a decent list of link building opportunities.

Link building opportunities include, but are not limited to the following:

- Search engines
- Social media websites for company or personnel profiles
- Blogs and microblogs
- Blog directories
- Guest blog posts
- RSS feeds
- Blog comments
- Press release distribution
- Local listings and directories
- News websites
- Bookmarking, and tagging websites
- Review websites
- Groups and forum interaction
- Industry publications
- Associations
- Event listings
- Presentations and document sharing
- Image sharing websites
- Wikis
- Videos and podcasts

You’re probably feeling a little overwhelmed right now, but you don’t need to. Link building is not so much difficult as it is time consuming. When I first started link building, I spent hours every Friday working on this task. It was painful. Back then there were not a ton of helpful bloggers or SEO consultants giving out free advice. I had to research opportunities and find potential links by turning myself into Nancy Drew. Nancy Drew surfed the internet for websites related to our keywords, watched our competition, and did a whole lot of random queries. These days link building is much easier. There are lots and lots of sources of information and lists of link building opportunities for generic and/or industry specific links. Liking you as much as I do, I’m going to give you a jump-start and provide a slew of websites to get you started.

Link Building 101

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
://URLFAN	Blogging & RSS		www.urlfanx.com
5 Minutes for Mom	Blogging & RSS	Women Only	www.5minutesformom.com
5z5	Blogging & RSS		www.5z5.com
Alltop	Blogging & RSS		www.alltop.com
Bizsugar	Blogging & RSS		www.bizsugar.com
Blloggs	Blogging & RSS		www.blloggs.com
Blog	Blogging & RSS		www.Blog.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Blog Bunch	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogbunch.com
Blog Catalog	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogcatalog.com
Blog Clicker	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogclicker.com
Blog Collector	Bloggging & RSS		www.blog-collector.com
Blog Digger	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogdigger.com
Blog Flux	Bloggging & RSS		www.Blogflux.com
Blog Folders	Bloggging & RSS		www.BlogFolders.com
Blog Gapedia	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloggapedia.com
Blog Hub	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloghub.com
Blog Listing	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloglisting.net
Blog Pulse	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogpulse.com
Blog Search	Bloggging & RSS		www.blog-search.com
Blog Tree	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogtree.com
Blogarama	Bloggging & RSS		www.Blogarama.com
BLOGbal	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogbal.com
Blogged	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogged.com
Bloggeries	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloggeries.com
Bloggers	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloggers.com
Bloggers Base	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloggersbase.com
BlogHer	Bloggging & RSS	Women Only	www.BlogHer.com
Bloglines	Bloggging & RSS		www.bloglines.com
BlogRollCenter	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogrollcenter.com
Blogs	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogs.com
Blogs by Women	Bloggging & RSS	Women Only	www.blogsbywomen.org
BlogSpot	Bloggging & RSS		www.googleblog.blogspot.com
Blogville	Bloggging & RSS		www.blogville.us
Feed Age	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedage.com
Feed Fury	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedfury.com
Feed Listing	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedlisting.com
Feed Nuts	Bloggging & RSS		www.feednuts.com
Feed See	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedsee.com
Feedagg	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedagg.com
FeedBurner	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedburner.com
Feedcat	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedcat.net
Feedgy	Bloggging & RSS		www.feedgy.com
Free Webs	Bloggging & RSS		www.freewebs.com/blogotion/
Globe of Blogs	Bloggging & RSS		www.globeofblogs.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Golden Feed	Blogging & RSS		www.goldenfeed.com
Ice Rocket	Blogging & RSS		www.icerocket.com
instablogs	Blogging & RSS		www.instablogs.com
Jordo Media	Blogging & RSS		www.jordomedia.com
LeighRSS	Blogging & RSS		www.leighrss.com
Liquida	Blogging & RSS		www.liquida.com
Live Journal	Blogging & RSS		www.LiveJournal.com
Loaded Web	Blogging & RSS		www.loadedweb.com
MetaFeeder	Blogging & RSS		www.MetaFeeder.com
Million RSS	Blogging & RSS		www.millionrss.com
Mom Bloggers Club	Blogging & RSS	Women Only	www.mombloggersclub.com
My Blog 2U	Blogging & RSS		www.myblog2u.com
Networked Blogs	Blogging & RSS		www.networkedblogs.com
News To Watch†	Blogging & RSS		www.NewsToWatch.com†
On Top List	Blogging & RSS		www.ontoplist.com
Oobdoo	Blogging & RSS		www.oobdoo.com
Place Blogger	Blogging & RSS		www.placeblogger.com
Plazoo	Blogging & RSS		www.plazoo.com
Quick Blog Directory	Blogging & RSS		www.quickblogdirectory.com
Read a Blog	Blogging & RSS		www.readablog.com
Regator	Blogging & RSS		www.Regator.com
RSS Buffet	Blogging & RSS		www.rssbuffet.com
RSS Micro	Blogging & RSS		www.rssmicro.com
RSS Mountain	Blogging & RSS		www.rssmountain.com
RSS Network	Blogging & RSS		www.rss-network.com
Search Sight	Blogging & RSS		www.searchsight.com
Small Business	Blogging & RSS		www.smallbusiness.com
Solar Warp	Blogging & RSS		www.solarwarp.net
Spicy Page	Blogging & RSS		www.Spicypage.com
Super Blog Directory	Blogging & RSS		www.superblogdirectory.com
Syscon	Blogging & RSS	Technology	www.sys-con.com
Technorati	Blogging & RSS		www.technorati.com
The Blog Frog	Blogging & RSS		www.theblogfrog.com
TheVital.net	Blogging & RSS		www.thevital.net
Top Blog Area	Blogging & RSS		www.topblogarea.com
Top Blogging	Blogging & RSS		www.topblogging.com
Total Blog Directory	Blogging & RSS		www.totalblogdirectory.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Tumblr	Bloggging & RSS		www.tumblr.com
Twingly	Bloggging & RSS		www.Twingly.com
Webloogle	Bloggging & RSS		www.webloogle.com
Wil's Domain	Bloggging & RSS		www.wilsdomain.com
WordPress.com	Bloggging & RSS		www.wordpress.com
Work It Mom	Bloggging & RSS	Women Only	www.workitmom.com
Xanga	Bloggging & RSS		www.xanga.com
XMeta.net	Bloggging & RSS		www.XMeta.net
Yahoo Blog Directory	Bloggging & RSS		dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Blogs/
Your Weblog Here	Bloggging & RSS		www.yourwebloghere.com
Zimbio	Bloggging & RSS		www.zimbio.com
Amplify	Bookmarketing		www.amplify.com
Delicious	Bookmarketing		www.delicious.com
Digg	Bookmarketing		www.digg.com
Folkd.com	Bookmarketing		www.folkd.com
Give a Link	Bookmarketing		www.givealink.org
Jump Tags	Bookmarketing		www.jumptags.com
My Link Vault	Bookmarketing		www.mylinkvault.com
Newsvine	Bookmarketing		www.newsvine.com
Ping.fm	Bookmarketing		www.Ping.fm
Reddit	Bookmarketing		www.reddit.com
StumbleUpon	Bookmarketing		www.stumbleupon.com
WIKIO	Bookmarketing		www.wikio.com
Docstoc	Content Sharing		www.docstoc.com
Issuu	Content Sharing		www.issuu.com
Scribd	Content Sharing		www.scribd.com
Slideserve	Content Sharing		www.slideserve.com
SlideShare	Content Sharing		www.slideshare.com
SlideSix	Content Sharing		www.slidesix.com
Flickr	Image Sharing		www.Flickr.com
GigaPan	Image Sharing		www.GigaPan.com
ImageShack	Image Sharing		www.ImageShack.com
Imgur	Image Sharing		www.Imgur.com
Minus	Image Sharing		www.Minus.com
Pegshot	Image Sharing		www.Pegshot.com
PhotoBucket	Image Sharing		www.PhotoBucket.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Pinterest.com	Image Sharing		www.Pinterest.com
TinyPic	Image Sharing		www.TinyPic.com
TwitPic	Image Sharing	Twitter	www.TwitPic.com
Contracted Work	Job Sites		www.contractedwork.com
eLance.com	Job Sites		www.elance.com
Find a Freelancer	Job Sites		indafreelancer.com
Freelance Switch	Job Sites		www.freelanceswitch.com
Freelanced.com	Job Sites		www.freelanced.com
Freelancer.com	Job Sites		www.freelancer.com
Guru.com	Job Sites		www.guru.com
iFreelance	Job Sites		www.ifreelance.com
oDesk	Job Sites		www.odesk.com
PeoplePerHour	Job Sites		www.peopleperhour.com
Project4Hire	Job Sites		www.project4hire.com
Absolute Michigan	Local Listing	Michigan Only	www.absolutemichigan.com
Angies List	Local Listing		www.angieslist.com
Bing Local	Local Listing		www.bing.com/local/
Brownbook.net	Local Listing		www.Brownbook.net
City Search	Local Listing		www.Citysearch.com
City Squares	Local Listing		www.CitySquares.com
Discover Our Town	Local Listing		www.DiscoverOurTown.com
Foursquare	Local Listing		www.Foursquare.com
Google Places	Local Listing		www.google.com/places/
Hotfrog	Local Listing		www.hotfrog.com
Infogroup	Local Listing		www.Infogroup.com
Insider Pages	Local Listing		www.InsiderPages.com
Judy's Book	Local Listing		www.JudysBook.com
Kudzu	Local Listing		www.Kudzu.com
Local	Local Listing		www.Local.com
Localeze	Local Listing		www.Localeze.com
M Live	Local Listing	Michigan Only	www.Mlive.com
Made in Michigan Movement	Local Listing	Michigan Only	www.madeinmichiganmovement.com
Magic Yellow	Local Listing		www.MagicYellow.com
Manta	Local Listing		www.Manta.com
Map Quest	Local Listing		www.MapQuest.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Merchant Circle	Local Listing		www.MerchantCircle.com
Michigan Malls	Local Listing	Michigan Only	www.michiganmalls.com
MichiganBusiness.us	Local Listing	Michigan Only	www.michiganbusiness.us
Mojo Pages	Local Listing		www.MojoPages.com
Super Pages	Local Listing		www.SuperPages.com
Switchboard	Local Listing		www.Switchboard.com
Yahoo Local	Local Listing		local.yahoo.com
Yellowbot	Local Listing		www.Yellowbot.com
YellowPages	Local Listing		www.YellowPages.com
Yelp	Local Listing		www.Yelp.com
1888 Press Release	Press Releases		www.1888pressrelease.com
24-7 Press Release	Press Releases		www.24-7pressrelease.com
Before Its News	Press Releases		www.BeforeItsnews.Com
BigNews.Biz	Press Releases		www.BigNews.Biz
Biz journals	Press Releases		www.bizjournals.com
Drop Jack	Press Releases		www.DropJack.Com
Express Press Release	Press Releases		www.express-press-release.net
Free PR 101	Press Releases		www.freepr101.com
Free Press Index	Press Releases		www.FreePressindex.Com
Free Press Release	Press Releases		www.FreePressrelease.Com
Live PR	Press Releases		www.Live-pr.Com
My PR Genie	Press Releases		www.myprgenie.com
Online PR News	Press Releases		www.onlineprnews.com
Open PR	Press Releases		www.openpr.com
Pitch Engine	Press Releases		www.pitchengine.com
PR Inside	Press Releases		www.pr-inside.com
PR Log	Press Releases		www.prlog.org
PR USA	Press Releases		www.pr-usa.net
Press Media Wire	Press Releases		www.pressmediawire.com
Small Biz Trends	Press Releases		www.smallbiztrends.com
Wide PR	Press Releases		www.widepr.com
All Experts	Q&A		www.allexperts.com
Answers.com	Q&A		www.answers.com
AOL Answers	Q&A		aolanswers.com
Ask.com	Q&A		www.ask.com
ChaCha	Q&A		www.ChaCha.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Focus	Q&A		www.focus.com
Form Spring	Q&A		www.formspring.me
Friend.ly	Q&A		www.Friend.ly
Google Knol	Q&A		knol.google.com
LinkedIn Answers	Q&A		www.linkedin.com/answers/
Mahalo Answers	Q&A		www.mahalo.com/answers/
Mamapedia	Q&A		www.mamapedia.com
Quora	Q&A		www.quora.com
Stack Overflow	Q&A		www.stackoverflow.com
Wiki Answers	Q&A		www.wiki.answers.com
AskSearch.me	Search Engine		www.asksearch.me
Bing	Search Engine		www.Bing.com
Blekkio	Search Engine		www.blekko.com
Clusty	Search Engine		www.Clusty.com
Deeper Web	Search Engine		www.DeeperWeb.com
DMOZ	Search Engine		www.DMOZ.com
Dogpile	Search Engine		www.Dogpile.com
Duck Duck Go	Search Engine		www.DuckDuckGo.com
Excite	Search Engine		www.Excite.com
Google	Search Engine		www.Google.com
HotBot	Search Engine		www.HotBot.com
Info	Search Engine		Info.com
ix quick	Search Engine		www.Ixquick.com
Mamma	Search Engine		www.Mamma.com
Metacrawler	Search Engine		www.Metacrawler.com
Stumpedia	Search Engine		www.stumpedia.com
WebCrawler	Search Engine		www.WebCrawler.com
Yahoo	Search Engine		www.Yahoo.com
123 People	Social Media		www.123people.com
About.me	Social Media		www.About.me
AboutUs.org	Social Media		www.aboutus.org
All About Site	Social Media		www.allaboutsitem.com
All Business	Social Media		www.allbusiness.com
B2B Yellow Pages	Social Media		www.b2byellowpages.com
Biznik	Social Media		www.biznik.com
Business Card 2	Social Media		www.businesscard2.com
Business Exchange	Social Media		bx.businessweek.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Business Insider	Social Media		www.businessinsider.com
Card.ly	Social Media		www.card.ly
Congoo	Social Media		www.congoo.com
Connect.me	Social Media		www.connect.me
CrunchBase	Social Media		www.crunchbase.com
DirectoryM	Social Media		www.directorym.net
DISQUS	Social Media		www.disqus.com
Domain Tools	Social Media		www.domaintools.com
Ecademy	Social Media		www.ecademy.com
Empire Avenue	Social Media		www.empireavenue.com
Entrepreneur	Social Media		econnect.entrepreneur.com
Follow Friday	Social Media	Twitter	www.followfriday.com
Friendster	Social Media		Friendster.com
Global Spec	Social Media	Industrial	www.globalspec.com
Google Plus	Social Media		plus.google.com
haystack	Social Media		www.haystack.com
hi.im	Social Media		hi.im
Hubpages	Social Media		www.hubpages.com
Identica	Social Media		www.Identica.com
Internet Evolution	Social Media	Technology	www.internetevolution.com
internettagger	Social Media		www.internettagger.com
jayde	Social Media		www.jayde.com
LinkedIn	Social Media		www.Linkedin.com
List Company	Social Media		www.list-company.com
Listorious	Social Media	Twitter	www.listorious.com
Local Search	Social Media		www.localsearch.com
Local Tweeps	Social Media	Twitter	www.localtweeps.com
MeeMi	Social Media		www.meemi.com
Mom Logic	Social Media	Women Only	community.momlogic.com
My One Page	Social Media		www.myonepage.com
MySpace	Social Media		www.MySpace.com
Naymz	Social Media		www.Naymz.com
Orkut	Social Media		www.orkut.com
Peek You	Social Media		www.peakyou.com
Plaxo	Social Media		www.plaxo.com
Plurk	Social Media		www.plurk.com
Posterous	Social Media		www.posterous.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
ProSkore	Social Media		www.proskore.com
reverseinternet	Social Media		www.reverseinternet.com
Ryze	Social Media		www.ryze.com
Scribnia	Social Media		www.scribnia.com
ScrnShots	Social Media	Designers	www.scrnshots.com
Social Moms	Social Media	Women Only	www.socialmoms.com
Social URL	Social Media		www.socialurl.com
soup.io	Social Media		www.soup.io
Spoke	Social Media		www.spoke.com
Sprouter	Social Media	Start Ups	www.sprouter.com
stuffgate	Social Media		www.stuffgate.com
Tagged	Social Media		www.tagged.com
Toolbox	Social Media	IT, HR, & Accounting	www.toolbox.com
TweetMeMe	Social Media	Twitter	www.tweetmeme.com
Tweetwawa	Social Media	Twitter	www.tweetwawa.com
Twellow	Social Media	Twitter	www.twellow.com
Twibs	Social Media	Twitter	www.twibs.com
Twitaholic	Social Media	Twitter	www.twitaholic.com
Twitiq	Social Media	Twitter	www.twitiq.com
Twitter Moms	Social Media	Twitter	www.twittermoms.com
TwitterPacks	Social Media	Twitter	Twitterpacks.pbworks.com
Twtrland	Social Media	Twitter	www.twtrland.com
Viadeo.com	Social Media		www.viadeo.com
Vois	Social Media		www.vois.com
XING	Social Media		www.xing.com
YouTube	Social Media		www.youtube.com
ziki	Social Media		www.ziki.com
Zoom Info	Social Media		www.zoominfo.com
Alexa	Website Directory		www.alexa.com
BizWeb	Website Directory		www.bizweb.com
Feed Plex	Website Directory		www.feedplex.com
Fyber Search	Website Directory		www.fybersearch.com
Gozoof	Website		www.gozoof.com

Website Name	Category	Focus	URL
Grokodile	Directory Website Directory		www.grokodile.com
Michigan Business Directory	Website Directory	Michigan	www.michiganbusiness.us
Michigan Web	Website Directory	Michigan	www.michiganweb.com
Web to Thumb	Website Directory		www.webtothumb.com
Webotopia	Website Directory		www.webotopia.org
Bizwiki	Wiki		www.bizwiki.com
MyWikiBiz	Wiki		www.mywikibiz.com
wiki	Wiki		www.wiki.com
Wikipedia	Wiki		www.wikipedia.com

Don't forget about the anchor text when link building. Anchor text is the text used to identify the link. You don't want to use "click here" because it isn't descriptive for the user or the search engines. Use words that relate to the destination page and make sure you have a good mix of phrases or terms.

website should use something social media related. It doesn't matter if you are B2B or B2C based, marketers should be driving traffic from social media referrals, likes, pins, and retweets.

Why should you care about social media? It connects you with people! These same people are your current customers or possibly your potential prospects. Social media interactions are part of the search engines algorithms and thus play a role in determining if your website will score well for a particular keyword or phrase. Social media is also an easy way to get quick feedback about your product, service, or company. And, most importantly, social media drives website traffic.

Five Social Media Websites Every Marketer Should Consider

If you're new to it, social media can be overwhelming. Each social network has its own set of best practices, rules of engagement, and social norms. They all operate differently and they all have their own quirks and bugs to work through. My advice is to start with one social network, get your feet wet, and then begin to explore more—walk before you run, stumble, and fall flat on your face.

My recommended social media websites include:

- **Facebook** – Facebook is great for driving traffic to websites. If you sell to consumers, Facebook pages can help drive a considerable amount of traffic to your website. If you sell to businesses, the traffic generation will be much smaller, but the SEO benefits will remain.
- **Twitter** – The use of Twitter by consumers is mixed. Certain industries and demographic segments are using Twitter in high demand, while others are virtually non-existent. On the business side of things, Twitter is great for interacting with journalists, bloggers, and industry experts. It may or not be beneficial for actual users, but it is always great for link building and overall branding efforts.
- **Google+** – A lot of people feel Google+ usage is high, although I am highly suspect at this point. My industry has a lot of users active on Google+, but virtually every client I have received little interaction from real users. In its current state, Google+ will drive substantial website traffic, but it is a great tool for developing inbound links. Building your Google+ profile offers many ways to create direct inbound links, share images, and highlight videos.
- **LinkedIn** – LinkedIn may not be suitable for the local doctor or dentist, but for those professionals who live in traditional offices and cubicles, it offers great rewards. Not only can you build out a keyword rich profile and company page that includes great inbound link opportunities, you can also be “found” by other professionals. And if you connect your LinkedIn profile to Twitter, you can have an active LinkedIn presence without any additional ongoing effort.
- **Pinterest** – I'll admit my initial impression of Pinterest was not great. It soon grew on me and I am now a huge fan. I personally use Pinterest to file away info graphics I love or website designs that I find inspirational. My mom friends are using it and loving it, so I

know this new social media darling is not going away anytime soon. The men have yet to truly embrace it, but I'm sure they will in time. It won't serve a means for every industry or business, but it is a great tool for retailers and anyone who sells anything to women.

Like I said, not every social media website is going to be a perfect solution for every marketer, blogger, or business. But there will be at least one or two that are natural fits. Find your social media sweet spot and use it wisely. Build out your profile or page, then stay active on your account so you can fully obtain the benefits social media can offer.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Become a Master of the Drip Campaign

Drip marketing typically refers to email related interactions that provide information in bits over time. I think that is old school and I believe drip marketing should be a multifaceted approach. With the advent of social media, drip marketing can refer to virtually any digital marketing and includes blogging, emails, newsletters, tweets, and posts.

Drip marketing campaigns are very effective for sales cycles that occur infrequently or those that take a considerable amount of time to close. In these situations, you frequently come into contact with a prospective customer well before they are ready to make an actual purchase. You need to stay in front of them until they are ready and the drip campaign allows you to do just that.

My marketing background started in enterprise software sales where a given prospect could be in the sales funnel for six to twelve months. We would have a new visitor reach our website while they were researching available software solutions, but not anywhere close to buying software. Because of the extremely long sales cycle, we had to find a way to stay in front of people while they continued to investigate solutions and weigh their purchase options.

Even though I was selling into a B2B tech environment, the same process would hold true for a real estate agent, mortgage broker, or financial advisor as these are all B2C businesses that sell to consumers. The element they all share in common is that the sales cycle is long and the purchase happens infrequently.

Eight Steps to Mastering Drip Marketing

1. **Pick an Email Campaign Provider** – There are a ton of email software providers available today. Popular ones include AWeber, Boomerang, Bronto, Constant Contact, GetResponse, iContact, MailChimp, Silverpop, and VerticalResponse. Some are free to start and some cost money immediately upon sign up. The important thing is to consider your requirements, document them, and then compare solution providers. Then match the providers' features and functionality to your needs and don't settle for just the easiest solution or the cheapest. Do you need the software to automatically send multiple emails to the same contact over time? Do you need the software to easily integrate with WordPress or another CMS solution? Do you need prebuilt templates or the ability to whip up your own in HTML? Decide what you need and you'll easily find a solution to fit.
2. **Consider Your Personas** – Who are your personas (aka target market) and what do they need? Different target markets need different types of content, presentation, and frequency. Know your personas and document their needs well before establishing your drip campaign plan.

3. **Decide What You're Going to Publish** – Once you've defined your target market and individual personas, you need to create a plan. Not all products and services will align well with drip campaign, so don't force it. If it doesn't feel like a natural fit, then most likely it isn't right and it is best to avoid it. Think about what is of value to your target market, what you already have to offer, or what you can offer in the future. It could be an event, eBook, blog post, white paper, or product give away. You have to have something of value for drip marketing to work.
4. **Decide On How Often Should You Publish** – This is highly dependent on your target market and the method used to connect with your audience. If you think an email each day for a week is going to resonate with a busy c-level executive, think again. If you think ten Facebook updates a day are going to woo your consumer-based audience, you're also wrong. While I can't give you a magical number, I can tell you that you can increase the acceptable amount of touch points if you vary the delivery. And, most importantly, you have to have something to say that is of value. The more value you offer, the more times you can share, email, or post. When at all possible, reuse content to maximize the reach. Create a great blog post that can be included in your email newsletter, tweeted, and/or shared on Facebook and Google+.
5. **Create Your Newsletter Template** – We're going to assume that email marketing is part of your drip campaign plan and setting up an actual newsletter template is needed for that. Before you even think about doing this task, you need to have an idea of what is going to go into your newsletter. Remember that plan I mentioned? Well I'm back to it. And yes, I know I sound like a broken record. I'll be honest here – I hate anything related to email newsletters. I read them, but I hate preparing them. I've hated it ever since my first one some ten or so years ago. It isn't so much the newsletter I hate, but the need for content. If you have content available, newsletter creation is a snap. When your boss declares you must produce a quarterly (or monthly or even weekly) newsletter but offers no content suggestions, the marketer in you wants to wither away and die. You have to have something of value to use in the newsletter and you need to know what that is before you try to design or map out your template. Newsletters can consist of recent blog posts, industry articles, videos, podcasts, upcoming events, or virtually anything. What you need to include in all newsletters are: social links, links to your website, contact information, your logo, and your website's color scheme for extended branding. I highly recommend taking the time to create the first template right, so you have it to reuse again and again. There are lots of professionals that can help create a beautiful template for a reasonable fee and they are truly worth every penny.
6. **Upload Your Contacts and Grow Your List** – Most campaign providers require you to have a given user's permission to upload their contact information and email the recipient in mass. This is a reasonable request, as you do not want to be marked as spam and have future issues with blacklisted URLs. In reality your email list can get jump started from existing clients and/or contacts, as well as your website itself. Adding a subscribe box to your website is not overly difficult if you have a CMS based website or a website that allows the addition of HTML code. Most providers have simple tutorials or apps that allow you to create your sign up box and produce HTML code for your website. The

larger providers will also provide Facebook apps and WordPress plug ins to help build your list. Take advantage of these offerings so you can maximize the reach of your content.

7. **Jump in and Send Your First Newsletter** – Earlier I used the word hate when describing the process of creating a newsletter. My six-year old considers this a four letter word, which it is, but not nearly as bad as the four letter word “spam.” Creating a newsletter isn’t hard or painful if you create your plan and follow through on it. You just need to DO IT! Yep, it is just that simple. Sign up for campaign provider, create your opt in box, plan out your content, and create the actual newsletter. You’re going to make some mistakes the first time around and that is okay; we all do it. The key is to do something actionable and to move forward with reaching out to your prospects or customer base. Remind them that you still exist and that there is a very good reason(s) to do business with you. If you give them a compelling reason to visit your website or call you on the phone, many times they will do it.
8. **Review Your Stats and Adjust** – Typically nobody hits a home run the first time up to bat. Marketing, and newsletters in particular, is not perfect on day one, but knowing what works is actually fairly easy in the land of newsletters. The top newsletter providers offer great stats on open rates, click through rates, and funnels. I’ve tended to play with formatting to see what scores better with open and click through rates. Consider subject lines, content placement, image usage, link verbiage, fonts, and colors as your tools, then play with different scenarios until you get the highest number of opens, click throughs, and ultimate phone calls or purchases. Once you’ve reviewed your newsletter providers’ statistics, head over to Google Analytics to see what happens when the readers click through to your website. If you’ve set up goals and dashboards properly, you’ll have a world of data at your fingertips.

Okay, It’s Time to Get Started!

About a year ago I decided I was going to write a blog series on the steps for designing and launching an SEO friendly website. I started at keyword research and went through site mapping, wireframes, design, build, and post launch review. This chapter is within that series. The blog posts are, themselves, like a drip campaign. Having an outline of the blog posts and their sequence helped make blogging effortless and logical all at the same time. It gave me content to share, post, or email that was of value to my specific target market. All I had to do was craft a plan that was geared towards serving my target market and then just do it. Easy peasy.

Feeling confident yet? It isn’t nearly as hard as it sounds. It just needs to be planned, a bit strategic, and adaptable. My first newsletter campaigns left a lot to be desired. But with a little effort, you learn and continue to improve just like I did.

Chapter Twenty-Five

It's All Fun and Games Until the Website Flops

It's the moment of truth. The moment when you finally know whether your new website is a lead machine or a money pit. It happens; virtually every business owner with an internet presence has been there. That moment when your new website is live and you can finally determine if your web design project was a huge success or a dismal failure. The thirty-day mark is what I call the moment of truth.

Thirty is the Magic Number

Once a new website or redesign is thirty days old, you can start to tell what the world thinks about your SEO, usability, and general aesthetics. Are you getting visitors, are they staying, and are they converting to leads or sales? All basic questions, but questions that still offer a significant amount of value.

As a web design firm we spend anywhere from four weeks to six months on web development projects with our clients. While the process typically offers great rewards, it does come at a price—it is hard work. Make no mistake, designing and launching a new website takes much more effort than anyone ever imagines. My clients are generally so excited about the aesthetics and coding in WordPress that they forget about the content—or they ignore it, I'm not really sure. Eventually they finish content and we launch their new pride and joy. We tweet about it, we promote it, and we welcome friends, family, and business associates to come and view our beautiful new baby. And then we wait. We wait for the analytics to arrive to see how Google, Bing, and the visitors feel about our baby. Is she a beauty queen or an ugly Betty? Analytics will tell us. It always does.



Knowing whether you've succeeded or failed is much easier than one might think. While there are many ways to judge a project's success, I encourage our clients to review some basic factors in valuing success or failure. You get more advanced over time, but focusing on some core items will help get you started and knowing if your new website is a hero or a zero.

The Moment of Truth: Five Metrics You Can Use to Decide if Your Website Project Was a Huge Success or a Dismal Failure

1. **Position in Search** – Where do you stand for your top keywords and phrases? Has your position for these core keywords increased or decreased with the new website design in place? Design does matter to SEO. Some websites have architecture that is so old and corrupt that it negates any on-page or off-page SEO factors. On the flip side, some designers and coders are so unaware of SEO, they create a design and coding structure that kills SEO best practices. Redesigning your website with basic SEO fundamentals in mind will absolutely improve your search position and traffic from organic searches.
2. **Website Traffic** – Did overall website traffic increase, decrease, or stay stagnant? “I don’t know” is not an acceptable answer because this is very easy to see when plugged in to Google Analytics. Just create an annotation in Google Analytics for the date your website went live and you’ll quickly see the before and after traffic differences. You can even compare one month this year versus the same month last year so you can see a true apples to apples comparison that isn’t altered by seasonable adjustments. When you’ve done things right, you’ll have a success story to brag about and have metrics of growth at exponential rates.
3. **Social Interaction** – Have you increased Facebook likes and Twitter followers? Has your sharing of content gone through the roof? Again, Google Analytics makes this easy to see. Launching a website that presents strong content that is easy to share will produce results. There is a direct correlation to the quality of content and the ease of sharing it with social mentions and inbound traffic from social media websites.
4. **Leads** – Having website traffic isn’t enough. While I do believe the basic number of leads is important, I think the quality of those leads is more important. I would much rather have ten high quality leads than thirty low quality leads. You need to make sure you are receiving the right traffic and that this traffic is converting to leads or sales. Making this happen is dependent on writing content that is not only easy to read and digest, but also making sure it is written for your target demographic. Combine this with a strong visual presence and you’re going to have success.
5. **Revenue** – The bottom line is that one through four doesn’t really matter unless money begins to flow as a result of the website redesign. When I speak with past clients I always ask about traffic. Once we discuss that, I quickly jump to leads and revenue. I want to know if their traffic has increased, but I really want to know that their revenue has increased. Increasing your revenue is the easiest way to quickly know your redesign was a success. It is quantifiable and it is a language that any CEO or CFO can digest.

What About Intangible Benefits?

At one point in time my team and I were working extremely hard on completing a website design project for a big ten university. The nature of this website and their target audience wasn’t going

to scream success by increases of revenue and leads. The website wasn't designed to do that, so we couldn't use that in our analysis of success.

The university's measurement of success will be much less quantifiable. It will be based on more intangible factors like usability, ease of data access, and information transfer. It will be based more on the happiness factor than the income factor because all of these are soft measurements of success. To this university's executive committee, it is of paramount importance and yet it still completely contradicts my point number five above.

Success comes in many ways, as does the measurement of a successful project. Knowing what constitutes as a success for your website project is important. Just as important is to know these metrics in the beginning of the project so you can keep them in mind and stayed focused on them throughout the project.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Three Steps to Keep the Cobwebs Out of WordPress

A lot of our web design clients ask about ongoing WordPress maintenance in the proposal stage of our project. They've heard WordPress is easy to use and they want to make sure it will be just as easy to maintain. They also want to make sure their website will be safe, secure, and free of malware or hacking attacks.

I'm very open with people in these discussions. And I can be, because I've personally had few issues with WordPress maintenance and security. In the years I've worked with WordPress, I have only had two clients encounter malware and both were due to poorly maintained plug ins and had nothing to do with the WordPress core. The general rule is that if you keep your WordPress website updated and optimized, there should be no problems. Leave cobwebs lurking about and there absolutely will be problems.

For the average website, WordPress is easy to maintain. It really boils down to updating the WordPress core and plug ins when needed, optimizing your database on a regular basis, and monitoring spam. None of this takes a lot of technical know how or time. It just takes spring-cleaning a few times a year.

#1 – Upgrade the WordPress Core and Plugins

Many of my clients ask me to sign a non-disclosure agreement prior to beginning our website design project because they are concerned about protecting their informational assets. Many times it is these same people who fail to upgrade their own websites once launched. The irony of this is funnier than people realize and I make sure I express the humor to the clients themselves. It's kind of like the doctor who doesn't seek treatment for his own ailments. They are concerned about the security of their business direction and target market, yet not worried about the security of their website.

Older versions of WordPress are simply dated software packages. The outdated code opens website owners up to vulnerabilities that allow those nasty hackers to quietly insert malicious files (aka malware) into an unsuspecting website. With over 47 million installations of WordPress worldwide, this is a problem. So much so that in June of 2011, Google started warning website owners that their WordPress installations were outdated and that an upgrade was needed. Why should Google care? Google wants to deliver high quality websites in its search results, not websites hijacked by some hacker living in his mom's basement. Malware and hacked websites degrade the user experience and this goes against everything Google and Bing protect.

Upgrading WordPress and the associated plug ins is simply not that hard. Website owners just need to do it. And if they don't want to do it or are afraid to do it, they need to hire a professional to do it for them.

WordPress Upgrades for the Beginner

Upgrading WordPress includes backing up your data, upgrading the software, and testing your website or blog. When we do this for clients, we estimate it to be an hour's worth of work; depending on the size of the website and the availability of back up files, this could take ten minutes or two hours.

Your WordPress website or blog consists of the following:

- MySQL Database
- The WordPress Core
- Your WordPress Theme (or theme framework and child theme)
- WordPress Plugins
- Images
- Additional Files (PDFs)

One of the most important things you can do before beginning any upgrade is to back up the website. This backup should include both files (theme, images, etc.) and your MySQL database. Even though lots of hosting companies offer free backups, we still recommend saving a backup to your local hard drive or a third party backup service like Dropbox or BackupBuddy.

WordPress is run on a MySQL database. This is what holds all of your posts, pages, links, menu structure, and settings. Backing up this database is the first step in the upgrade process. I like WP-DBManager, which is a WordPress plug in. It allows me to create database backups directly from my WordPress admin panel and I can skip the whole phpMyAdmin or cPanel experience. I leave that to my coders.

Once you have that done, you can download a copy of the website files to your hard drive. I typically do this via Filezilla, which is a robust and free FTP software package for Mac and Windows.

Now that you've backed up everything, you can start the upgrade process. I recommend using the upgrade process available via WordPress' admin panel. It is just one click and super easy. On really outdated WordPress sites this may not work, so you might have to refer to your hosting provider's upgrade process. Either way, the novice can quickly do this with ease. Just remember to watch the upgrade occur so you can read any notices that pop up. Once WordPress finishes the upgrade (it will take all of a minute), you just need to poke around the admin panel and live website to make sure everything is working properly. And it should. I've never had an issue with upgrades to the WordPress core.

Finally, we move on to upgrading plug ins, and my personal recommendation is to upgrade one plug in at a time. Before upgrading I like to read about the plug in's new version to see what has changed and so I know what might break. The vast majority of the time, nothing breaks. But when it does, it is nice to have a heads up on what is about to happen. After you upgrade one plug in, test the functionality. If all is well, continue on and upgrade one plug in at a time. Notice I'm saying this twice? It is because it is important. I never recommend the mass upgrade, because it will be difficult to troubleshoot should things occur.

The worst thing you can do is not test your website after upgrading. When I first launched the firm I had a client hit update all, go to bed, and never check anything. And by the way, he never backed up anything either. He had plug in conflicts and broken functionality, but wasn't sure why or how because he did everything in mass. He ended up going back to his host to restore the website and then followed the process correctly. Guess what? This time around he could see what went wrong and quickly fix it. Don't be that guy!

#2 – Optimize the MySQL Database Optimization

If you run a high traffic or large WordPress installation, you'll want to optimize WordPress and your server to run as efficiently as possible. Scratch that. That is what others say. I say every WordPress website or blog should have the MySQL database optimized often.

WordPress is powered by PHP which depends on the MySQL database. When your WordPress site is visited, the web server will query the database to retrieve information. This is a typical operation for most dynamic websites. Over time, the time required for querying the database will increase and slow down the process on the front end for visitors and the back end for administrators. While this is one of the most frustrating experiences possible, all of this is due to overhead in the database, which is easy to correct. Overhead is caused by many inserts, updates and deletions. When this occurs, you need to optimize the database via phpMyAdmin or by using WordPress Plugin.

Did I scare you with the phpMyAdmin statement? Yep it scares me too. That is why I use a plug in called WP-DBManager. I set it to automatically optimize the database every day and repair it once a week. It is a must have plug in in my mind, as it keeps WordPress performance at optimal levels.

#3 – Moderate Comments and Block Spam

When I talk about spam, I refer to those pesky and irrelevant comments left on blog posts. Designed to increase inbound links and alter Google's search results, spam commenting is a favorite task of black hat SEO consultants and website owners. While spam can be annoying, it is completely controllable and it can be almost irrelevant to website owners. It's really all about the set up options and spam protection.

But why does it matter? Some of my clients have asked why they should care if their blog or website includes spam comments. It matters because it degrades the user experience; it makes your website look unprofessional and unloved. And, more importantly, it will negatively affect you with the search engines and how they rank your content. Google and Bing want to present high quality websites and blogs in search results. High quality means the content is not overshadowed by spam comments.

Virtually every time I train a new design client on WordPress, they tell me to just remove the option to comment; that is their spam defense. I do my best to counsel them and remind them that blogs are conversational and conversational means you need to allow comments. Allow comments, but moderate them. I also encourage them to install spam protection via a plug in.

There are a ton of options available and popular plug ins include Akismet, Spam Free, JSSpamBlock, etc. In three years our website has blocked 128,000+ spam comments. The good news is I don't have to worry about any of it. My spam blocker does it all for me. And in that time frame, I've only had about five real comments mis-marked as spam.

How Many Cobwebs are in Your Website?

As I write this chapter, I'm reminded WordPress just came out with another update in the last few weeks. This means that I, myself, have some cobwebs. Thanks to BackupBuddy I could quickly create a back up of my website and then update the WordPress core, Genesis core, and a number of plug ins. Easy peasy and well worth the effort to protect my website and my online identity.

About the Author

Rebecca Gill has a well-rounded business background and over fifteen years of experience in sales and online marketing. Her love for website design and her strong belief in the user experience is equally matched by a fascination with search engine optimization, blogging, and social media marketing.

As an early adopter of blogging, her online marketing efforts have been highlighted by media outlets such as Wired Magazine, Ziff Davis, and IT Toolbox. Her writing has been featured in variety of publications that range from technology outlets such as Backbone Magazine, Social Media Today, Sphinn.com, and Search Engine Roundtable to industry specific magazines such as Contract Manufacturing & Packaging, Food Manufacturing, and Progressive Distributor.

As President of Web Savvy Marketing, Rebecca is able to utilize her love for marketing, technology, and sales to assist small and mid-marketing B2C and B2B organizations achieve long-term business success through website design and search engine optimization.

Rebecca manages Web Savvy Marketing's day-to-day activities, is an active blogger, and teaches three workshops including Social Media Boot Camp, SEO Boot Camp, and Blogging Boot Camp.

Learn more about the firm at <http://www.web-savvy-marketing.com>.



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Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, 2012

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