

OH WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE: WEBSITE FAIR & FAIRYTALES

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Once upon a time, businesses built their websites with one question answered: What do I want on my website? And while it stands to reason that you need to have an idea in mind, business owners often forget to address the much more important question which is: Why do I need a website? The answers vary but boil down to one simple thing – marketing. But along with the array of answers are some very unrealistic expectations. The bottom line is that your website is a marketing tool and to some businesses it is the only one. All too often, businesses also have unrealistic ideals in mind when developing a website. So here is a list of points that separate the fair from the fairytales:

The Fair

- ✓ **Marketing & Sales goals** – having realizable goals for your marketing and sales are at the precipice. Whether you want to generate new business, harvest new opportunities from existing clients, or improve your brand identity, goals like these are measurable and can be realized.
- ✓ **Hire the right Expert** – do your homework and find a designer who:
 - Uses open source technology – these designers both have the ability to develop interesting workflows (plug-ins) and obtain trial-tested ones from others in their developer community. Experts that use open source platforms like Wordpress and Magento have the ability to source features from a vast community of developers, whereas those who concentrate on other platforms are limited by few 3rd party options that always carry hefty price tags and lengthy integration periods.
 - Has a varied portfolio – check their website. Developers that have built websites for different businesses such as restaurants, retailers, professional services, healthcare, etc... are the best to consider because they will usually have the most customization options to choose from.
- ✓ **Work with – not against – your designer** – If you’ve done your homework and have brought in an expert to build your site, trust their EXPERT opinion.
- ✓ **SEO is your friend** – with a well designed SEO (search engine optimization) campaign, your business’ marketing plan can work for itself – visitors will find your site themselves and you will have time to focus on other aspects of business development. Again, trust an expert but make sure to learn how it works. There are many easy-to-do aspects of SEO that can be extenuated when you give it some of your own time.
- ✓ **Content connects** – if you’re well written, you’re well read. Your designer may not be the best source of content – and they’ll tell you that ahead of time. They may have a writer on staff or outsource available but a good copy writer will not be part of the package. So if your grammar and syntax leave much to be desired, have a backup plan or some additional money budgeted for professional writing – and as with your design expert, do your homework – look at their site, their portfolio, etc.

- ✓ **Mobility is virility** – how many people do you know that do not have a smart phone? Recent studies have concluded that mobile devices and smart phones rule the airwaves. Moreover, mobile computing and web browsing is taking over. So make sure your website design plan includes mobile browsing capability.
- ✓ **Keep your enemies closer** – before you build your website, take a look at your competition and see what they’re doing on their site. You will find things you must have but more importantly, faults with their websites that you want to be advantages on yours! Again, do your homework!
- ✓ **Reason stands to reason** – without giving your visitors “the why” you might as well pack it in. Why should they register? Why should they subscribe? Why should they follow you? Why, Why, WHY??? Its basic sales: give them a reason to buy; give them a reason to buy now; and give them a reason to buy, to buy now, and buy now from you! And buying doesn’t have to equate to a monetary transaction – “the buy” is the registration on your site, the subscription to your e-newsletter: the conversion of a visitor to a potential customer.

Fairytales

- ⊗ **DIY, don’t even try** – ya think this first point is self-serving? Of course it is! But have you seen some of the so-called “make your own professional...” crap out there? Just look at the template designer on... wait; I don’t want to make any enemies. Put yourself in your visitors’ shoes. If you walk into a dingy restaurant, are you going to stay and eat? How many times have you checked into a rundown, moldy motel for the evening? For many businesses, this is the first chance for a potential client to see your brand and tour your digs. Don’t let it be their last. Save your DIY desires for that birdhouse you’ve been meaning to build in the yard and leave the website to the experts.
- ⊗ **Now where are all the visitors?** – This isn’t *Field of Dreams* my friends. You’re going to need SEO, feet on the street, and a big NEON sign (metaphorically of course) telling your audience that “WE’RE OPEN FOR BUSINESS!” Without a solid marketing campaign you might as well have opened a delicatessen and left the lights out and the door locked.
- ⊗ **Intriguing isn’t it** – save the mystery for singles night at your local watering hole. Your audience wants answers - not more questions. If they can’t figure it out , they’re gone in a click. If you lead the way, you make’em stay.
- ⊗ **The more I spend, the** – less you have to spend later. And the less you have to spend on support. It is important to note that many web-based businesses out there have a full-time dedicated staff working on day-to-day management. It is more important to spend money on research and development than it is to throw money at your website without having the facts. Know your budget and make sure your designer is aware of it to. A true expert will have a solution that fits your budget: a true expert will offer open architecture that allows for future upgrades – so you can always start with essentials and work your way into more advanced features. Slow and steady wins the race.
- ⊗ **Rome wasn’t built in one day** – and the same is true of your website. Some designers take several months; others fewer. But every expert should be in a position to give you an accurate forecast of their launch date.
- ⊗ **Don’t be that blog** – who has time to sell, market, manage, reconcile, network, clean... AND write a blog? REALLY think about this one. Most of my clients have never changed content

ONCE, let alone posted a single blog discussion. If you are really considering a blog or interactive forum, ask yourself the following questions:

Do I update facebook daily?	YES	NO
Do I update LinkedIn daily?	YES	NO
Do I tweet daily?	YES	NO
Do I write a newsletter monthly?	YES	NO
Do I have time to post discussions daily?	YES	NO

If you answered NO even once – then the answer is NO. An outdated blog is a sign to your visitors that you are small-time or worse yet, out of business. And don't feel bad – even I answered NO to more than half of them. If I spend my days supporting your businesses, you can't really expect me to manage mine! There are only twenty-four hours in a day.

- ⊗ **Follow us** – as above, remember, if you're not updating your outdated. Do not link facebook, twitter, etc. unless you plan on keeping it all up to date.
- ⊗ **Gone in a FLASH!!** – Much like the popular comic book from the 30's or the 80's dance craze, Flash is being phased out. So trust me when I tell you, you don't need it. And with iPhone killing the mobile market, and – more importantly – ADOBE's recent announcement that it will not be supporting flash one way or the other guess what? You'll be a *flash* in the pan too.
- ⊗ **They're grrreat!** – Ever watch a compelling infomercial at 2am? You've got your phone in hand, fingers ready to dial, credit card at the ready - and all of a sudden, a string of the phoniest, doctored up, "see what our customers are saying" testimonials kills the mood. My advice – ask a stranger; a pessimist, a complete jerk – but not a friend - if it sounds fabricated and assume that all your visitors will be just as skeptical.

To sum it all up, it's time we start paying attention to our dollars. Gone are the days of throwing money at problems with needless advertising, stale marketing, and consulting consultants. Take your business seriously and your website even more so. If you follow some of these basic pointers, your story will continue, even after story time is over.

The End.