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Creating a Website That Sells

Creating a Website That Sells: The Why, What & Who

When a business owner decides to take their business online or create a new, Internet-based business, the first nod is always given to the website. A website acts as your calling card online and allows people to interact, engage and become familiar with you, your products and your services. Since this is your first impression for potential customers, you need to ensure that your website is set up right from the start.

We are going to explore a few of the areas that you need to focus on for your website, including the platform you should use, what to include content-wise, how important search engine optimization really is and we'll also dissect each of the website areas so that you can get a full understanding of what you need to consider.

Let me first say that in order to understand how to build your website, you need to spend some time first deciding the "why", "what" and "who" behind your site. Why are you creating a website? What are you hoping to accomplish with the site? Who will be coming to this site on a regular basis? Once you answer these questions, you'll begin to gain clarity around the type of site you need to build.

For example, most service-based business owners create a website so that they have a virtual brochure of sorts. They want to be able to have people read more about their services, read client testimonials and possibly even have those

people check out right on the site and begin the working together process. The people visiting the websites of service-based professionals tend to be people who are struggling with a particular problem that the service can solve.

When you listen to that example, you can probably envision the type of website that this particular entrepreneur would need. Perhaps it is a simple, four or five page website, that contains information on the service provider, the services they offer and a very clear way for a potential customer to engage with the service provider. A website like this doesn't need a hundred bells and whistles – it simply needs to be able to provide information and convert potential customers into paid customers.

So, how does that happen? Well, we are going to cover that next but before we do that, let me just talk to you for a moment about creating a website that serves the who, what and why.

Websites are a perfect place for your target audience or potential customer to get to know, like and trust you all while learning about things that are relevant to the topic they are most interested in. People want to visit sites that feel like home to them and that offer enough relevant information to keep them coming back for more. However, websites can also grow into these huge, unruly beasts that try to be everything for all people.

When you are thinking through your who, what and why, you are naturally going to thinking about (or forced to think about) the technologies that are needed to support your web visitors. Through this process, you might determine that you need e-commerce, list building, social media integration, a forum, a blog, a rating system, etc. Or, you might determine that a brochure format with a contact form

is all you need. Regardless, the technological needs that your website will have determines the platform that your website is built on. If you need something more custom, there is a good chance that a WordPress build wouldn't work for you. If you needed something simpler in creation, WordPress might be the perfect answer.

We're going to explore platforms in a moment but I want you to be thinking about the technological needs of your site early on to ensure that those are considered when choosing a platform.

Creating a Website That Sells: The How

Once you spend some time deciding the details and particulars about your who, what and why, you know want to move onto the how.

If your website vision included e-commerce, list building, videos, photo galleries, etc., your particular vision may be a bit more complex and may have a specific set of custom requirements to achieve the look you're after.

However, if you were in the same boat as the service provider I talked about in the example, you might find that your list of requirements is shorter so you can therefore go with a less complicated option.

Neither option is a poor one. It simply means that whether your website is simple or complex, it has needs and in order to achieve the goals that you have for the site, those needs need to be met. I will give you the advice though that less is more and simple is better than complex when it comes to a website.

An amazing book to read, whether you design websites for a living or simple have a website or will have one shortly, is Steve Krug's "Don't Make Me Think." This book, a guide on web usability, is an amazing one that really will stop you in your tracks and realize some very interesting things about your web visitors. You see, too many people build websites to be self-gratifying. The website serves the owner but not the customer. Krug's book will allow you to see it from the other side of the screen, which is where you want to be looking at it from.

Let's imagine for a moment that you have the idea for your website and you have an idea of what you want to include. I now want you to think about the process and the flow for your target audience. To help you with this, I've created a super simple system that you can follow:

1. What do I want my customer to see first and foremost before anything else?
2. Once they see that, what do I want them to do next?
3. Once they do that, what do I want them to do next?
4. And then?

A good process flow, for a service provider, might be:

1. I want my customer to see that we offer free consultations where they can get to know us and vice versa.
2. I want them to sign up for a free consultation.
3. I want them to then be offered our free download so that they also get on our list.
4. I want them to be pointed in the direction of our top blog posts so that they can be fed relevant information in the moment.

Once you begin to think through the steps, you will naturally see what your website needs to highlight and showcase and how your funnel or path needs to be set up to convert people from visitor to prospect to potential client to customer.

Creating a Website That Sells: The Platform

When beginning your research into websites, you will inevitably find that there are hundreds of platforms from which to build and launch your site. We have an opinion about how people should choose their platform and it goes like this.

If the website is complex and requires custom coding or scripting and you don't like to be tied to a specific layout, format or have any other technological drawbacks, you are probably looking at a custom build that will need to be designed and programmed for your site specifically. This option is going to be costly and will be more limited in terms of who can update it in the future. However, it will give you the most custom look and will be able to do everything that you need your site to do.

If the website is more simplistic in nature and you don't mind being tied to a general layout and some formatting rules, you'll want to look at WordPress. WordPress was long used as a blogging-only platform but about four-five years ago, people started building websites using WordPress, myself included, and since then, thousands of websites have been built using WordPress as the platform.

With WordPress, you get ease of updating, built-in search engine optimization, the ability to change themes / layouts with the click of one button and there are hundreds of service providers who support WordPress sites and will support you

with your site. WordPress is also free with most hosting companies and it is open source, which means plug-ins and updates for WordPress are also (mostly) free.

If you don't want to explore a custom built site or a WordPress site, you can also opt to go with one of the website builder platforms that exist on the web. Or, you can check out platforms like Kajabi or Nanacast, which offer other functionality but will also help you create a website or a sales page.

Regardless of the platform, your role is going to be to ensure that the website conforms to your site process flow and that, in choosing a platform, you will not be limited to the point of your business suffering.

If people ask my opinion directly about the type of platform that they should be using, I always recommend WordPress as it is highly flexible and very easy to work with. We also recommend Bluehost.com as a hosting company if you need affordable, yet super reliable, hosting.

Creating a Website That Sells: The Content

Content is as crucial, if not even more crucial, than the design of your site. It will serve your customers in that it will give them great and valuable information but it also helps search engines to be able to find your site and send new people there regularly.

One of the most frustrating parts of a site build is determining what content to add to your site and what content to omit. My rule of thumb is that all content should

be serving your what, who and why. If it is not serving those three things, you more than likely don't need it.

Your content needs to be concise, clear and contain strong calls to action. People will not land on your site and do exactly what you want them to. You need to direct them and guide them to doing what it is you want them to so be sure to spend some time with your content to make that happen.

The primary pages that you need to consider include: an about page, a contact us page, a media/news page, a products/services page and an events/training page. You can get fancy with the titles and the organization and you can of course add pages to this list but know that people will be looking for and expecting those types of pages.

Mostly though, you want to ensure that the content you are presenting is clear, strategic and placed in an effective manner. With your content, ask yourself:

- Are title tags present?
- Is the written content presented clearly?
- Are the content details separated by importance?
- Is the navigation clear and labeled?
- Is it easy for your web visitor to contact you?

Let's dissect each of the areas of the website to ensure that you are including what you need to include.

The General Layout – the layout of your site includes all of the visual elements and how they are laid out in proportion to each other. It's everything you see

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when you land on the home page of your site. Some questions to ask yourself about the layout:

- Is there a clear distinction between areas?
- Is there an appropriate use of columns to separate key content?
- Is the spacing and padding adequate to leave ample white space?
- Is the web visitor quickly guided visually around the site or does the visitor panic and not know where to look first?

The Sidebar – sidebars are used to highlight key content on the site. Whether this is a sale / sale item, an upcoming event, a free download, etc., it's generally timely and considered the most important content. To ensure that your sidebar is passing the clutter-free test, you'll want to ask yourself:

- Is there a call to action in my sidebar?
- Is it free from irrelevant advertising?
- Is it clutter-free?
- Did I use social media icons appropriately?
- Are there appropriate archive links?
- Is there a feature of the top recommended posts?
- Is RSS set up and working properly?

The sidebar can fill up quickly with all sorts of inappropriate and unneeded information so be diligent in keeping this space clutter-free.

Color – color helps you to create a visual, emotional connection to your website visitor. Color helps to also guide web visitors to the key points on your website

so it is used often to enhance the website visitor process flow we talked about earlier. For color, ask yourself:

- Is the contrast appropriate?
- Is the color palette restrained / used carefully?
- Is the color work appropriate for the brand?
- Are links distinguishable as links?

If you want more in-depth information on color, I will point you in the direction of Steve Krug's book, "Don't Make Me Think."

Fonts – fonts are more important than most people think because they allow your visitors to understand the hierarchy between various sections on your website. For example, your page titles and blog post titles may be in one font – usually larger – to draw the eye to it whereas the font underneath the blog post that contains the post information may be smaller to show visitors that it is less important. For your fonts, ask yourself:

- Do I have a hierarchy present on my site as it relates to type size and weight?
- Is there enough contrast in the font size?
- Is there enough spacing in the main content – again, to avoid clutter?
- Is there consistency throughout the site with fonts and spacing?

One of the other things you want to consider, as it relates to fonts, is to make sure that there is ample white space around the copy. There is nothing worse than copy that is smashed together causing it to become difficult to tell the difference between certain sections of the site.

Navigation – navigation is how your website visitors will move through the options that are available on your site. It is also how search engines index your site's pages. You want to make sure that your navigation is clear, uncluttered and laid out appropriately so that your visitors can access what they want to access, quickly and effectively. For your navigation, consider:

- Is the navigation area clear, obvious and easy to use?
- Is it short and concise?
- Are you using appropriate titles for home, about, contact, etc.?
- Is the navigation consistent across your entire site?

If you find that your navigation doesn't meet these standards, this would be the first area that I would recommend putting your attention to. This will ensure that your visitors get to where they want to go efficiently.

Creating a Website That Sells: Important Integrations

Now that we've discussed the considerations for your website, we now need to discuss the important integrations that you'll want to ensure your website has. These integrations will help you to turn your website into a living, moving, breathing entity that is helping you to reach your goals.

The areas that we are going to cover include: the opt-in box, e-commerce, social media integration and forms.

The Opt-In Box – an opt-in box is a piece of code that is generated from an e-mail marketing tool, such as MailChimp, 1ShoppingCart, InfusionSoft, Aweber,

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Constant Contact, Get Response, etc., and is placed on the website to collect information from your website visitors.

More often than not, the information you are collecting here is a name and e-mail address and you are doing so in exchange for a free giveaway of some sort. Sometimes people will also use the opt-in box simply to collect information for a newsletter but we've found this to be less effective than trading information for something more tangible.

All of the collected information, from the website's opt-in box, is added to an autoresponder inside of the e-mail marketing program. Once someone is "on your list", you can then send them marketing messages as often or as little as you wish. The marketing message can be a single broadcast e-mail or it can be a series of autoresponders or it can be an on-going newsletter.

The opt-in box is extremely important to have on your website from day one because this is how you will capture your website visitor's information. If you do not have one, you are hoping that people will come to your site and buy instantly or remember your site forever. Most people will do neither. So, by offering something to that website visitor, in exchange for their information, you can ensure that you can follow-up with them on an on-going basis in an attempt to turn them into a paying customer.

Our recommendation, in creating a website that sells, is to create a website freebie / download / giveaway that will help your target audience solve one of their major problems so that they feel supported, heard and understood. This will have them coming back to you for more information and more in-depth support.

E-Commerce – e-commerce will allow you to capture payment information from your website visitors when they are wishing to buy your product or service. Generally speaking, most e-commerce is done using a merchant account or a service such as PayPal. The merchant account, or PayPal, is then integrated into a shopping cart to create a virtual storefront or, and this is perfect for people on a budget, shopping cart buttons are generated straight from PayPal.

E-commerce is a perfect solution for both service providers and product suppliers as both target audiences will have reasons for checking out online. The only difference between the service provider and the product supplier will be how each sets up the storefront through which their clients will purchase the goods or services. A service provider will need a less robust system and can usually get away with doing a simple PayPal buy now button or a buy now button generated from their shopping cart of choice. A product supplier will more than likely have different needs and may require a more robust storefront to display their wares to potential customers.

Regardless of which camp you fall under, the key is to ensure that your website can handle the needed technology. This is a perfect discussion to have with your webmaster before or during the e-commerce integration process.

Our recommendation for e-commerce, in creating a website that sells, is to choose a platform that services your needs but is not more complex than it needs to be. If you don't need a platform with a lot of bells and whistles, start with the least complex one and move up from there.

Social Media Integration – another key piece in creating a website that sells is integrating social media into the website. There are two pieces to social media

integration – allowing people to share your content direct to their social media networks and allowing people to connect with you on social media. Both are equally as important.

To allow people to share your content direct to their social media networks, you'll want to use plug-ins like Share This or Sociable or Sexy Bookmarks, which will allow people to click the social media icon of their choice and post a link directly to your content on their Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc. feeds. This will help your content reach much larger audiences, thus increasing your personal network size and will help you get more visibility to new audiences.

The other side of social media integration is adding links to your own profiles on social media. This will help you to connect with people across multiple platforms, which helps you to build relationships and share your messages more frequently. You aren't needing to bombard people with messages but ensuring that they have ample opportunity to see you and hear from you will increase the know, like and trust factor, which will result in more sales.

Forms – where your opt-in box and e-commerce fail you, forms will help you to capture valuable information. Forms can be used in a variety of ways throughout your site. Some of these ways include:

- Lead generation
- Understanding our potential client's needs better
- Getting ideas for our blog posts

Where the other integrations may not make sense, a form might just be the answer. We use Icebrrg.com to create forms that we then place on our website(s) but we have also heard great things about Wufoo.com as well.

Creating a Website That Sells: Search Engine Optimization

The last piece we are going to focus on today is search engine optimization, also known as SEO. SEO is extremely important to a website because it helps to create an ideal set up / configuration for the search engines who are visiting your site to index your content into the search results.

WordPress, as a platform option, is an instant search engine optimized platform and the content added to the WordPress platform will show up in search engines very quickly. A standard HTML website is not an instant search engine optimized platform, which means that you'll need to manually do search engine optimization in order for it to see the same results as a WordPress site would.

SEO has many, many different tactics available for use but I like to keep things really simple so all of the sites that we build are put on WordPress or, for existing site builds, are migrated to WordPress so that the site owner doesn't have to work so hard for traffic. On WordPress, we generally install the All-in-One SEO plug-in and configure that for the client's site and we also ensure that the client is adding keyword rich content to the blog portion of the WordPress site on an on-going basis.

If you don't have a WordPress-based website, you'll want to spend some time researching the best search engine optimization tactics for your particular site and you'll want to implement those on a regular basis. SEO will help your

website, regardless of the platform, so it is something that should be looked at regularly.

Creating a Website That Sells: In Closing

To wrap up the content, we just want to say that while everything we talked about is important, the most important piece of website creation and management is to simply get out of your own way. Often times, website owners will attempt to build a site based on what they feel is needed from their perspective but they fail to look at it from the perspective of their audience and therefore, they lose out on many opportunities.

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