Why Isn't My Website Working?

Don McCauley ICM, MTC, CH
Free Publicity Focus Group
http://www.freepublicitygroup.com

Over and over again, I hear that same old refrain – 'My website isn't producing the sales I expected!' This is not surprising. Practically anyone, from the 12 year old child to the 92 year old grandmother can put up a website these days. However, only a very small percentage of people can be successful in marketing a product or service from that website.

Many people have been listening to the get-rich-quick speeches of the 'marketing gurus' that are so prevalent within the 'vulture culture' out there. Another very high percentage of people are disappointed with their dismal and disappointing sales results from their sites, but don't quite seem to be able to put their finger on the problem as to why. Being in the business for all these years, the answers seem obvious to me. In the interest of helping you see what people such as myself see, this short article is designed to help you clarify why your site may not be producing the results you hope to achieve.

Understand this one point and understand it clearly – to the buying public, your website IS you. Therefore, the creation of a website that reflects you in the way you wish is of utmost importance. The impression you make when that site flickers onto the screen is the only chance you will get to make that all important first impression. If they visit and then immediately click away, the chances are quite good that you will lose them – forever. There is no single thing more important in the world of electronic marketing than the initial impression your site makes on your potential client. No single article could ever cover this subject completely. The goal of this extremely short and condensed article is to offer some general ideas for further thought and study – brainstorming ideas you can build upon.

'Homemade' Websites

I would venture to guess that this is the number one reason why websites don't produce the sales numbers people hope to achieve. Ask yourself this question – Are you building a website, or are you building a business?

Hosting companies are famous for giving away website creation tools for free. This is like a medical supply company giving away free scalpels. Yes, in either case you can use the tools to operate. However, the question must be, what will either tool create?

Your website is your business. It should communicate to your potential client a snapshot of the overall theme, goal and philosophy of you as a business person. If your site looks 'cartoonish', that is precisely the impression people will get about you, your business and your product or service. It will stop them dead in their tracks. The opposite is also true – if your site appears to be super professional, that is also the opinion others will hold about you and can cause them to buy even if all the other factors do not work well.

You have approximately 5 seconds to make that impression. Complain about the unfairness of this all you like – it is nonetheless a fact. That impression is developed immediately from the overall feel and timbre of that site.

Your site is your storefront. Have you ever walked through a mall, walked into a store and said to yourself , 'I love this place!'? If so, ask yourself why. How about the opposite? Have you passed by

certain stores because you just somehow knew the place was not for you?

Websites function very much the same way. Storefront designers are trained to create a feel – an air that will attract the right people in the right way. They work with lighting, color schemes, general layout, carpetings, wall coverings – a hundred little things that on the surface may appear insignificant but are, in reality, vitally important. Your site functions as your storefront. You should give this aspect of your site as much attention as storefront designers give to the development of a storefront, for this is where that first impression is made (or broken).

Often, (not always) the person who attempts to build their own site ends up with a site that looks awkward, unprofessional and very much like it was drawn with a crayon rather than a sharp pencil. Is that the impression you wish to give to those potential new clients? It is for this reason (and many others) that I recommend you never attempt to build your own site unless you are capable – really capable- of producing a professional site.

IMPORTANT: Do not make the mistake a finding a site you like and then attempt to copy it. You might like a site that does not produce sales. Not everybody likes the same colors, look and feel. What you really like may simply not work. Put your own preferences aside.

Now, website designers are not marketers, nor do they understand your business like you understand your business. Though you should certain use the services of a designer, you should never allow them to create the site as they wish.

A movie producer controls the overall output of a movie – they do not build the sets, direct the action or run the camera. That work is left to others who have the skills to do these things. You should treat your relationship with a website developer in the same way. You control the production, they put together the nuts and bolts necessary to achieve your particular vision.

Once your site is built, survey, survey and survey others for their opinion. Use a web based survey company to do this (many free). Listen to each and every opinion offered.

Trust
The big one. Without the trust of your potential clients, you are dead in the water. Trust is the key factor that will determine whether a client stays and buys, or simply clicks away. It would take an entire book to even begin to teach how to create that trust in you, your business, your product or service. I will not attempt that here. I will however direct you to a much longer article I have written on the subject entitled 'Creating Trust – Using Words That Sell', located on the Free Publicity Focus Group site at http://www.freepublicitygroup.com . This article will give a fair treatment to this subject.

However, I will give just a brief 'for instance' example here for our purposes and urge you to read the article in addition to what is presented here.

When presenting a sales message to a potential client, I use a theory that now goes by many names. It was originally drawn from Myers-Briggs theory Here, in a proverbial nutshell, extremely condensed for this example, is that theory.

Your potential market is comprised of people with four distinct personality styles. Those styles are:

The Amiable
The Expressive
The Analytical
The Driver

The Amiable has as their primary focus the development of relationships.
The Expressive has as their primary focus the drive to be the center of attention.
The Analytical has as their primary focus the drive to make the correct decision.
The Driver simply wants to get to the bottom line facts of the matter as quickly as possible.

Have you ever met someone you instantly liked, but did not know why? Have you ever met someone you instantly disliked, but did not know why? Personality styles tell us why.

Let us suppose I am a Driver. When I talk, I am sharp, curt and get directly to the point. Now, let's suppose I am attempting to sell my product to four people, each of a different personality style.

I deliver a sharp, curt sales message to an Amiable. The Amiable, however, wants a lot of personal small talk first. The Amiable may instantly dislike me due to the delivery system of my message, not necessarily the message itself.

I deliver a sharp, curt sales message to an Expressive. The Expressive, however, wants me to instead pay attention to what he or she might have to say. The Expressive may instantly dislike me for not paying attention to him or her.

I deliver a sharp, curt message to an Analytical. The Analytical will appreciate the facts I have given and will use them in his or her decision making process.

I deliver a sharp, curt message to another Driver. That Drive will feel an instant affinity for me and will listen closely and then decide.

What is the point in all this? If we suppose for just a second that the world is divided equally into these four groups, my sharp curt message will instantly alienate 50% of the population, and I will not know why. Personality styles are why. I will lose 50% of my sales and not know why. Personality styles is why.

The message your site delivers must take this into consideration and meet the needs of all four styles, in that all four styles will be visiting your site. If you do not do this, you will unnecessarily lose those clients.

Often it is not what you say, it is how you say it. How you say it must meet the needs of each of these styles. That is no small order. It is an art form. Failure to pay attention to this subject will result in potentially instantly alienating 50% of the population, in this example. Again, I urge you to read the above named article for a larger treatment of the subject of building trust.

Too Much Information
In the world of marketing, brevity is crucial. You cannot ramble on and on and on and expect anyone to listen.

The meat of your message must be delivered in the first few paragraphs of the text on your site. This is

because most people will click away within the first minute or two. After reading the heading and the first few paragraphs, they will begin to skip around your site, if they stay. They are not here to listen to you ramble, however much you might like to ramble. They are here to make a determination as to whether or not your product or service might meet their current needs in some way. A well developed 'elevator speech', delivered immediately, is the only way to accomplish the goal.

Assuming you have developed the necessary trust, and assuming you are communicating your message properly, the goal now becomes to get that message impressed quickly and effectively. We have all seen those long, rambling, extremely boring pages Internet marketers are so fond of using. These will work perhaps to make that one quick sale. That is the goal. They will not work in regards to creating a relationship with your client.

In most cases, when faced with one of these, most of us simply page down to the bottom to see how much the thing costs. If the cost is acceptable, we will normally page back up and read the message to see if this product or service really gives us what we need.

The key to making your site work is to put your entire message in the first two or three paragraphs. Then, expand upon that message somewhat without rambling on and on. Though you might now wish to do so, it is imperative that you use as few words a possible and condense your message as much as possible. The Internet purchaser is impatient. Take this into consideration and give them what they came for NOW.

Traffic Mania
Everybody wants traffic, traffic and more traffic. However, this is not the goal of an effective website. The goal of a site that produces results is to get INTERESTED traffic. As yourself – if you owned a store that sold skateboards, who would you rather have walk through your store:

(a) 1000 people age 65 or older
(b) 100 people age 18 and under?

The answer is, of course, (b). These people are very likely to buy your skateboard. Very few people over 65 are skateboard users.

Don't get caught up in traffic mania. Uninterested traffic is, in a word, useless.

A page rank 0 site can far outperform a page rank 5 site if the traffic there is interested traffic. It is interesting to note that most *inexperienced* marketers want to tell their story to everyone. Most *experienced* marketers, on the other hand, do not want to do this at all. Instead, they only wish to tell the story to a very small percentage of people who are interested in the product or service. They do not wish to waste their time with 'tire-kickers'.

Ease of Use
The Internet buyer of goods and services is extremely impatient. The least little tiny bit of difficulty can cause them to click away, never to return. 'Been there, done that' will be the attitude once they are gone. Make certain your site is easy to navigate and easy to use. If in doubt, get others to test your site and get their honest opinion. Do not ask your spouse or your kids, your mother or your cousin. Ask a stranger for they will tell you the truth.

Pictures/Headshots

Sad to say, but pictures can make you or break you. People learn visually. Pictures paint the entire impression in the perceiver's mind the moment they are perceived. The wrong picture can destroy anything you might say. 'Wrong', in this case, does not necessarily mean 'bad' or 'poor quality'.

People will say no because they simply do not like the way you or your product looks. You might be too old, to happy, to stern, too young, too whatever. I would never use a picture as you cannot control the reactions of others to that picture. The most beautiful and well done studio glamor shot will mean nothing if you happen to resemble Uncle Bob, whom your client hates with all his heart. This alone can kill a contract. Simply do not use them unless you have a very good reason to do so.

Niche Markets

This is the key to Internet (or any) marketing success. Think of it in this way:

Your storefront is your website. The 'store' is located in a supersize mega-mall. There are several hundred millions stores in this mall. How will you get people to visit your store?

Yelling will not work. Screaming will not work. Blinking signage will not work. Everyone else will be doing this also. You will be one among hundreds of millions.

What will work? Contacting your potential, very interested, motivated clients and asking them to stop by for a visit will work. Putting an invitation in front of that very interested niche market will get them there. Creating the right first impression will keep them there. Giving them what they want, in they way they wish to receive it and doing it quickly and professionally will cause them to consider you.

Showing yourself to be an honest and educated real business person with a quality product or service at a fair price will cause them to pause. Demonstrating that you have their best interests at heart will cause them to buy.

A good marketing campaign can take months to plan, but just an hour or two to implement. Likewise, your site should be thoughtfully planned, every word, phrase, paragraph and picture tweaked and re-tweaked before ever loading up the software to build the thing.

Again I will note that the topic of this article is deserving of an entire series of books, not just a tiny article such as this. The Free Publicity Focus Group offers a totally free, completely without obligation consultation. Contact us and we will offer an honest opinion regarding your site.