

Entireweb Newsletter * November 25, 2008 * ISSUE #495

To ensure that you receive all our newsletters to your inbox, please add newsletter@entireweb.com to your address book.

7 Steps to Building a Successful Web Presence

Doing business in the 21st century will eventually require every company to have a website in one form or another. Whether your site is interactive or simply informational, there are steps you can take to ensure you're on the right track to creating a successful web presence, seven to be exact (at least from our humble perspective).

While following these steps will not guarantee a successful website, it is certainly an intelligent place to start.

1. Perform a Business Analysis.

What is a business analysis? Simply put, review your business requirements and your objectives. What do you want to accomplish? How does your website fit into your overall business plan? What... no business plan? Develop a business plan first before you go any further into the process.

Your business plan will be your roadmap to success, so make sure the objective of your website fits into your overall business plan. I'll say it again, BUSINESS PLAN, don't have one? GET ONE!

2. Perform some research, also known as, the Research phase.

Research your competition and industry sites. See what kind of competition is out there. What kind of marketing does your competition engage in? Don't look to "reinvent the wheel", take a look at how the current market works; develop a list of pros and cons about your competition and then make your web presence work better.

3. Develop a concept and a design.

Finally time for the creative and fun stuff! This involves the selection of specific content, the layout of the site structure and navigation and the overall "look and feel" of your website.

Remember to pay special attention to your navigational structure!!! If visitors can't navigate your website or feel lost when doing so, your "pretty" site will have been a waste of time; don't go there, keep the navigation simple and for SEO purposes, make sure your navigation is text based. Although Flash driven websites look cool, they are not SEO friendly and can create more problems than the "coolness" factor they express (we'll discuss Flash sites in another article).

4. Develop your website.

When considering which technology to develop your website, think cutting edge technology, not bleeding edge. Make sure the technology you use, such as ASP, PHP, HTML, CSS, will be useful for the next three to five years.

Database driven website are ultimately the easiest to maintain through the use of a content management system, but make sure the CMS you use is SEO friendly. An SEO friendly CMS will utilize real URLs, not strange looking query strings with lots of strange characters and question marks. Search engines despise query strings and rank these site accordingly.

5. Choose a host provider and implement your website.

When deciding on a host provider, make sure the host is not only reputable, but has been in business long enough that you can be sure they will be in business next year. Also, ask about site uptime. If your site is down for any reason, this will not only affect your potential and current customers, but the search engines as well. If the search engines decide on a given day to spider your site and it is unavailable, it could cost you your rank.

6. Promote and market your website.

Register your site with the major search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Initiate other marketing activities such as an email blasts to prospective customers. Consider "Pay per Click" advertising with the major search engines and don't forget about a long term SEO campaign to drive targeted traffic to your site.

7. Finally, maintain your website.

Probably the most important long term step is continuing to provide current and relevant information on your website. Keep your site content current to encourage return visitors and give them something to return for! Related to SEO, search engines just LOVE sites which provide new content on a regular basis and rank such websites accordingly.

Overall, remember, your website is not just a marketing tool, it's a business tool, and it should be generating a revenue stream for your business.

Matthew Mckernan - About the author, Website Design, Search Engine Optimization/SEO, Web Development.