How to Design the Best Website for Your Business

Think of your company's website as a first impression for potential future clients. Is it easy to navigate, and does it clearly convey your business's products and services? If not, visitors may lose interest and abandon your site, which will not add up to repeat customers.

Scott Prindle, VP/Executive Creative Technology Director, and Winston Binch, Partner/Managing Director of Interactive at Crispin Porter + Bogusky, the famed Miami-based advertising and design agency, offer their advice to small business owners on how to design the best website for their small business, and ensure that visitors keep coming back.

Small Business Website Design: Make It Clear to Visitors What Business You Are In

Since you only have a few seconds to engage your visitors and keep them on your site, it's important that your value proposition and intent be clear the instant customers hit your homepage, says Binch. Great visual design, animation, and pretty pictures can always enhance a website, but you need to take your business's message into consideration, too.

'Don't underestimate the expressive power of simple language,' Binch says. 'For example, take a look at Facebook's homepage; they do a really good job of making their service obvious the moment you arrive. Since the first text you see on the login page proclaims,*Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life*, it's pretty hard to confuse what they're selling.'

Dig Deeper: Marketing Your Mission Statement

Small Business Website Design: Make Your Website Easy to Use

If you're building something from scratch, the first step is to ensure you have the right minds working on the project. Most importantly, it's crucial you have both information architects and technical developers front and center of the creative development process. They will be there not only to contribute conceptual ideas but also to help you present users with an experience that is efficient and pleasant from a user flow, navigation, and technical perspective.

'The Internet is cluttered with bad websites,' Binch says. Make yours one of the most usable, and you'll attract an audience and form lasting relationships with your customers.' He recommends that your website focus on easy-to-use site navigation and on creating pages that achieve quick download times. Readable text throughout, and share functionality (which will allow a user to post something from your site on Twitter or Facebook) is a helpful addition, too, he adds.

Dig Deeper: Has Your Business Outgrown Its Web Developer?

Small Business Website Design: Don't Underestimate SEO

According to Prindle, if you're site is not search-engine optimized, you're basically cutting off almost

all possibility for organic traffic or chance encounters with your brand. If you let your idea ultimately guide the technology solution, that's a start, but you'll want to make sure it works well with leading search engines, including Google, Yahoo, and Bing. At a minimum, be sure that you've generated a site map, and your title tags, heading titles, and site description are filled out appropriately.

'If your budget allows for it, get an SEO company or a consultant to do a quick audit of your site,' Prindle advises. 'There are always optimizations to be made, and you should always be looking at ways to improve your search ranking.' Additionally, if you are a new company, you should consider buying sponsored link placements through popular search engines. 'It's a good way to attract new users right out of the gates,' he says.

Dip Deeper: How to Improve Your Website's Search Ranking

Small Business Website Design: Give Your Brand A Soul

Many corporate websites lack soul. They tend to use stock imagery, business jargon, static content, and generic web design - all of which undermines the user experience. That's a serious problem, Binch says, because your site plays a crucial branding role, serving as the digital interface between your customers and your company, product, and services. The best way to create a positive branding experience is to be yourself: Be transparent, speak to your customers on a real-time basis, and let them connect with each other through your brand.

'A company like Zappos is not just selling a solid e-commerce product," Binch says. "It is also selling a culture of innovation and exceptional customer service, and the team at Zappos use the their digital presence as the primary means to do that. Luckily, with social technology, like Twitter and Facebook, it has become pretty easy to make your Web presence interactive and collaborative.

Dig Deeper: Telling a Good Story Online

Small Business Website Design: Don't Forget the Mobile Web

Not too long ago, we considered mobile sites a nice-to-have add on. That is no longer the case. At present, approximately 5 percent of traffic to CP +B's site comes via mobile phone, Prindle says. And over the next year, as more smart phones hit the market, and carriers continue to enhance the capability of cellular wireless standards, Pindle says he expects that number to dramatically increase.

'What that means is that you and your company need to be there,' Prindle says. 'Our mobile web strategy centers around creating designs for three screen sizes: PC, smart phone, and the basic (or WAP) phone. Once you've covered the basics, monitor your site metrics, and if you have a growing and engaged mobile audience, think about getting into the application game.'

Dig Deeper: Mobile Phone Marketing

Small Business Website Design: Use Analytics to Track Everything

According to Binch, your website redesign should never be over. 'Make sure you identify clear and realistic brand and business goals for your site so that you have numbers to optimize against after you go live,' he says. 'Then, you'll want to think about the different parts of the experience you want to track in order to support your company goals.'

If you're challenged from a budget perspective, Binch suggests using the free Google analytics package: 'In addition to the more expensive solutions, such as Omniture and WebTrends, we use [Google analytics] across all of our client work.' Once you've confirmed that all of your tags are working, make sure you pull weekly reports and start looking critically at how people are using your site. Fortunately, it doesn't take long to observe trends, but it's still important to be relentless in your pursuit of delivering an optimal user experience, he says.