

Here are a few Q & A's to help you figure out what you're looking for in a site.

1. What is the purpose of your website?

In business, there are three main types of websites:

- * the brochure site
- * the lead generator site
- * the online shop

The brochure site is an online support to your offline marketing. You will refer to it in your ads, because you pay for ads by the square inch, and acres are cheap on the internet. You will refer to it in your Yellow Pages ads, your business cards and your brochures. An online presence will give you a credibility that your competitors without a website (getting fewer every day) don't have. But in the end it is just an online version of a tri-fold a printer might do for you. There is nothing wrong with a brochure site, if this is all you want in your marketing plan.

The next step up is a lead generator site. Unlike a brochure site, you want it to generate business on its own. You want people to find your site while browsing on the internet, and having seen your site, feel compelled to call or email you. After that contact is made, hopefully a sale will follow.

The last option is that your website is a storefront where visitors to your site can actually purchase products and services. In other words, after finding your site, and viewing your content, they are compelled to "click here" to make a purchase.

There is a fourth type of website- the vanity site. But financial rewards are rarely connected to this type of site.

Of course a website may be a mixture of these three (or four) types, but unless you have defined your business model, the purpose of your site, it will be a waste of electrons.

2. How will people find your site?

You already know there are 4 billion sites, so the likelihood that a buyer will find it by chance are somewhat remote. And if you calculated the cost per lead on that basis, you would never build such a site. Your business website exists only for one purpose, to make you money- irrespective of the business model. It must pay its way. So if no-one visited your site, why would you pay for it to exist?

Therefore, you must have a strategy to ensure people know your site exists and that there is a reason they should visit it. How can you do that? There are two basic strategies, offline and online.

An offline strategy is based on all your offline marketing- ie advertising, public relations, networking and cold calling. In every case you would refer leads to your website where they can find out more about what you can do for them, and why they should choose you. Your website would build on your offline promotions giving further details of your service, educating your customer and creating credibility for your business.

An online strategy will be built around visibility. The key elements of this are:

- * Search Engine Optimization
- * A strategy to get links to your website
- * Online advertising

3. What are you going to do to make visitors linger at your site?

The average website visit is 68 seconds. How many widgets do you expect to sell in that time? You must have a strategy to make people linger at your site, get to know you and see the value you can give them.

The three secrets for making people linger are CONTENT, CONTENT, CONTENT.

To get visitors to stay, you need to give them information that they want. This will not be information about you (at least not on the home page). Your goal should be to educate your visitor. Give them information they will not get elsewhere on how to solve the problem that caused them to search for you in the first place. If your website is just sales hype, your visitors will be gone in a lot less than 68 seconds.

4. What do you want visitors to do once they are at your site?

Many would say- "Buy lots of stuff from me." Well, in your dreams! Most people will not buy from you, or call you on the first visit to your site. They don't know you (unless an offline relationship has been established). And unless you are selling a commodity, that is the same on every site- eg CD's, and you are competing on price, you need to be able to establish a relationship. To do this, you need to give visitors a reason to give you a way to stay in contact. This could be by way of a newsletter, or through a free download of information requiring their email details. When you do this, it is essential you provide an unsubscribe option, because otherwise you will be spamming. And there are no rich spammers (although I believe there are rich people selling spam technology).

5. How are you going to get people to come back to your site?

On average, four out of five website visitors will never come to a website. And if they only stay 68 seconds, it's going to take you several lifetimes to become an internet millionaire. To get people to come back you need to do several things:

- * Have sufficient quantity and quality of content, that the visitor will bookmark your site to come back for more
- * Continually add to and change the content to make visitors want to come back
- * Provide special offers to your subscribers that will encourage them to revisit your website

If your website never changes, why would anyone want to come back?

6. How are you monitoring going to monitor the results of your website?

No-one can guarantee what is going to work for you. Therefore you have to measure your statistics. A good web host will provide you with a statistics package that will tell you how many visitors you have had, when they visited, how they found you and what they did at your site. When you make an offer, make a change to your site, or undertake some marketing campaign, whether online or offline, check the response on your statistics, and the conversions that you have achieved on your site. Do controlled experiments. Don't change too many things at one time, because you will never know what caused the change. Find out what works, and what doesn't. And when you find a good thing, stick to it!

7. Are you really going to trust your 10 year old nephew to do all this?

You may not be using your 10 year old nephew; you may be using a graphics design company instead. But don't confuse determining your website business model and marketing strategy with the color and movement of your website graphics. As a general rule of thumb, the flashier the website, the worse it is commercially. (Check out eBay and Amazon- how flashy are their sites? But is there a clear business strategy?) You will need someone to do the html programming, but almost certainly, someone who is good at that will not be good at everything else. A website is just another marketing tool. Like a brochure. Would you get your printer to write your advertising copy?

I don't suggest that you should not use a great website design company (or even your precocious nephew) to build your website, but don't let them be in charge of your marketing!

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