

# The insider's look to a successful web site

Written by Claudio Geanta

### **WHY SHOULD A BUSINESS HAVE A WEBSITE?**

Should you really consider having a web presence? Short and direct answer - YES - of course you do. Let me explain: As long as you live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and use a cell phone or just get online for fun, you should definitely have a website especially if you own a business. I am not saying that just because I am a designer and I am always looking for clients, I truly believe that if you don't have a website you are really behind times and are missing a huge opportunity.

The truth of the matter is that it doesn't matter how big or how small your company is. It doesn't matter if you sell services and products that you don't think they cannot be

sold online, the answer is always: YES YOU SHOULD HAVE A WEB PRESENCE. Basically if you are in business for yourself or employ several hundred people your company needs a website. Why? CREDIBILITY.

Now-a-days hand someone a business card and invariably you will be asked: what's your website? Say "no" and you just lost credibility, you lost a client and thus profit. By having a website you show the world that you are a viable business. Not having one makes you suspicious in the eyes of many prospects. It is silly but true: a website will enhance perceived professionalism.

Also, don't think for a minute that just because you repair electrical outlets or coach

organizational skills, somehow that doesn't call for a web presence. The reality is that very few people will drive around to find your place of business or even open the Yellow pages to find what they are looking for. Why miss the opportunity of new clients just because you were MIA on the web.

More and more people find clients and resources by surfing the web. Nowadays, there's very little that can't be sold over the internet. More than 25 million shoppers are now online, and that number has increased at least another 1000 since you've been reading this material. They are purchasing everything from books to computers to cheese cakes to real estate to pants and perfume to gold and oil, to name just a few.

Let me clarify one point: I'm not saying you should put all your efforts into selling your stuff over the internet, although you got eBay just for that, but if your product can be sold online, you should definitely build a web site with an ecommerce feature built in.

The point to be made here is that you should at the very least have a presence on the web so that customers, potential employees, business partners and perhaps even investors can quickly and easily find out more about your business and the products or services you have to offer. In the internet world - size doesn't matter. I don't care if you're a one-man show or a 1000-employee company; if you don't have a website, you're losing business to your competitors that do. Period. End of story.

CONCLUSION - GET YOURSELF A WEBSITE. NOW!

Now that you are convinced that you should have a website no matter the size of your company, the next logical question is: What kind of site should you have?

### **HOW GOOD LOOKING IS YOUR WEBSITE?**

Now - let's kick it up a notch and plainly say this: YOUR SITE HAS TO LOOK PROFESSIONAL no matter how small your business is. In other words it's not enough that you just have a website, you must have a professional-looking site if you want to be taken seriously. Imagine you show up in front of a client without a shirt and wearing flip-flaps. You just lost a client because remember - 70% is how you look.

Prior to making a purchasing decision, any potential customer will search for information online before he or she will drive to a brick-and-mortar store. I know my wife was sick and tired seeing me glued to my laptop finding the best deal for a professional camera.

Your site may be the first chance you have at making a good impression on a potential buyer.

If your site looks like it was designed by a guy who "likes to be on line" and has no idea of HTML, CSS or even keywords and alt tags, your chance at making a good first impression will be lost. While reading this you are wondering what does all this mambo jumbo lingo means, that's your first clue that you don't have the right person for the job, because obviously he or she has never explained any of this to you.

Remember this so far - your chance to make a good impression to a potential customer is already made without you even knowing. With a well-designed site, your little operation can project the image and professionalism of a much larger company. The reverse is also true.

I've seen many big company websites that were so badly designed and hard to navigate that they completely lacked professionalism and credibility.

Now let's just conclude with this: If your website is not good looking or professional enough for your audience you are better off not having one.

### **FORGET HAVING A WEBSITE**

What? You just said I need a site no matter what. Here's the exception to the rule: It's actually better to have no website at all than to have one that makes your business look bad. Your site is your sales person that doesn't sleep or take vacations, your website is the very first impression a potential client will quickly make of you and your business.

Your website speaks volumes about your business. There are only 2 things your site can say about you. It either says, "Hey, look, we are so serious about our business and respect our clients so much that we created a very strong image of ourselves!" or "Hey, see how talented my teenage nephew is? He designed my site. Good luck finding anything!"

Your website is an important part of your business. Make sure you treat it as such. Make sure you hire that marketing professional that knows the perfect combination between design, accessibility and on-line marketing and promotion. Hiring someone who knows someone who dabbles in web design is a recipe for disaster.

Here is why - Unless you possess online marketing skills you will be making a lot of poor decisions. You might want certain graphic elements on your website just because you like the way they look, are convinced you have to have an "about us" page because every other site does and demand a certain color because you think it "looks professional". None of these

ideas are necessarily mistakes but they are symptoms of a very common problem - way too much focus on design and decision making lacking any real practical justification. Don't rely only on your like and dislikes but do not rely 100% on your designer either. There are very few designers out there that encompass the talents needed for a successful web or brand promotion. That's why they are called graphic designers, web designers, SEO specialists, etc.

The truth is that your web designer cannot provide all the answers. You may argue that your web designer should help you establish a successful online presence. That's what you hired him or her. Unfortunately most web designers are not online marketers. They could

be very good technically and creatively. If you find a great one he or she will be able (or try) to create anything you ask - unfortunately that's like giving a bucket a paint to a baby expecting the next Picasso to emerge. Usually, the result is a beautiful website that doesn't do a thing for growing your profits or your online exposure. Yes you are very proud of it, you eagerly parade it around to all your friends and family but no one else knows about it. No one as in no clients. An awesome looking web site doesn't bring you any new business - the reason you built the site in the first place!

**Conclusion:** If you decide to have a web presence and you are serious about it - hire the right man (or woman) for the job. Hire a company who combines creativity and

marketing talents, one that is versed with brand and product promotion as well as search engine optimization, one who thinks like your customers and understands profitability.

So you are on the web now. Here are some helpful rules:

### **RULE #1 BE FRESH. BE ORIGINAL.**

In other words do not make the mistake of copying other web sites, if even you think they know what they are doing. Copying other websites rarely works effectively. Most other small business website owners don't know how to market online so you will repeat what doesn't work. That's not to say that you cannot mimic another website's choice of colors or structure. I said mimic not copy and there's a big difference.

Of course bluntly copying word by word is a big no-no. First you can get in trouble with the copyright laws and if you don't know that by now, that infringement can very well shut your business for good. Secondly, the search engines out there will ban your site and will force you

to spend additional dollars in setting up another domain name, redesign the site, etc, etc. More money down the drain when all you had to do was be original.

### **RULE #2 DON'T THINK OF YOUR WEBSITE LIKE IT'S A BROCHURE. IT'S NOT.**

Your website is a living breathing organism, just like your business. Water it and take care of it and it will do exactly what your business is doing for you. The basic problem is most people think of a website as an online pamphlet, while it should be a dynamic customer relationship building tool. A website can convert prospects for you without you personally selling at all. When your potential customer finally contacts you they are pre-sold, you don't have to do anything but take their

money and provide your services or product. In order to succeed on line you have to cater to your number one sales tool you have - your web site. What do I mean by that? As you groom your sales staff and keep them up to date with new services and products your business is offering so should your website reflect just that.

You have to constantly visit the site, update it, and adjust it with new keywords your customers are using to find similar services and products. If you are not doing any of these, or don't set aside a budget for that you are neglecting one of your most important profit and credibility elements of your business.

### **RULE#3 DON'T CHEAT YOURSELF**

Avoid cheap designers. Cheap designers are not very good at what they do anyway and if you have money for a Yugo don't expect to get a Cadillac cause you won't.

In the everyday quest for getting something for nothing, we continue to observe a very distinct and disturbing trend:

Companies or individuals expecting to pay a ridiculously small amount for web development work, and so-called web developers who operate on the low end of the scale, undercutting everyone else.

There is no voodoo magic or mystery to what we do: those of us who have been in the industry for a decade or more treat every day

and every project as a learning experience! We make our living off of the knowledge we've acquired over the years. Will these fly-by-night lowball developers be there tomorrow when your site needs updating, or develops a problem? Most of the time the answer is no - they won't.

I have a bag full of client stories about these so-called designers who once they put together a cheesy web site, got the little money they bargained for and bolted in the internet sunset.

A while ago one business owner, who eventually became one of our clients, asked us to make some changes to his site because their old designer was nowhere to be found. He decided to move to a new location and lots of

his potential clients were still going to his old office location according to the information they found on the company's website.

Of course we ended up helping him but not before he had to go through several painful hours of searching for any piece of information about his hosting company because again - the designer was in charge with that. Finally, after faxing several pieces of ID, the hosting company released their information and we were frantically changing his contact information.

Looking back - the business owner saved a bunch of dough by hiring a "designer" with the only talent of disappearing once the job was done. In the end he spent and lost more than if

he would have done this the right way from the beginning.

Think of the thousands of dollars he lost just because he took the cheap route when he launched his website. That's what happens when you deal with amateurs. These amateurs are flooding the online listings in recent years. Just because someone has set up a rudimentary site using FrontPage and hosts it on GoDaddy does not make them a web professional. Yes, you may get a "pretty" site. But will it do anything for you or your business?

Ask that person how they handle search engine optimization and advertising. Ask them what they can do when your site grows-will you need custom programming to handle increasing

volumes of data, or custom applications installed to make the site truly useful to your business? Or will you need to move to a bigger server or a better host? Ask them what programming languages they know, and get prepared for that blank stare.

Another trend we see is the "off shoring" of our talent to third world countries, where so-called "developers" (and we use the term loosely) will work for a fraction of the price. The language barrier is but one of many problems you will have by going overseas-how can you communicate with anyone who has a poor grasp on basic language skills? But again, can you trust this person or company, thousands of miles away, to be there when you need them?

Wouldn't you feel better by keeping your money in the U.S.?

### **DESIGN BY SATORI. YES WE CAN**

Now that you know what it means to have a web presence and the responsibility that comes with it - allow us for the final plug: visit our web site <http://www.designbysatori.com> and check out our portfolio page.

We stand behind our word and our portfolio of works proves how serious we take this design business. Go ahead - call any of our clients and they will tell you how satisfied they are with our service.

**» DARE TO STAND OUT!**

### **WHAT WE DO BEST - DESIGN & SEO, BRAND PROMOTION AND MARKETING**

We are a creative group of people with strong passion for web and graphic design. Either you need a logo, a new web design to launch your business in the cyberspace or simply are looking for a professional team of designers to take over your marketing efforts - we are here to help and fanatically support you in all your marketing and design endeavors.