

To Website or Not to Website?

By Cathy Taylor

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Ask yourself, "What is the one critical thing we've done over the years to bring in the most new business?" Most of you will answer the exact same thing – build relationships. There is no better business than referral business.

How can a Website help you achieve better relationships? Let's take a look at some ways.

If someone were to offer to build your company a Website for free, probably the first thing you'd say in response is, "I'm a service business, what good is that going to do me?" Even though you provide a tangible product, when it comes down to whether a builder, architect or owner choose you or the competition, it's all about service. If you are providing cast stone and so are eight other companies, who will those prospects choose? The one they like, that's who.

So it's really all about sales and marketing, isn't it? If you are in business, you constantly have to sell yourself – what you offer and how you provide it. How can you use a Website to build relationships that enhance your credibility and increase the trust level of both prospects and customers?

First of all, a Website gives you the chance to provide several types of information and services to your clientele.

Education is a critical step in the decision-making process and providing information on a Website can save your sales force a lot of time upfront. The more a prospect is able to become familiar with your company; the sooner trust begins to build. To do this, you want to include:

- Background and historical company information
- Contact information (make it easy to find)
- Industry-related articles
- Links to government regulatory sites

Marketing Information is another value you can provide by using your site as a marketing communications vehicle. Give them everything they need to know to make a good buying decision.

- Highlight and explain your services and display your products including your unique selling

proposition and strategic market positioning

- Provide samples of print promotional tools such as brochures or flyers
- Testimonial and Case Studies are the most powerful selling tools you have. Besides, your products can be beautifully showcased with photography within the case study
- In-depth product information
- Offer a free consultation to provide a call a to action and generate leads

Public Relations on your Website is a primary way you can dazzle them with your knowledge of the industry and provide a forum for industry news. Your company's name in print is extremely influential in building credibility in the consumer's mind.

These are just a few guidelines to follow when building a Website that will help you best meet your sales and marketing goals as well as promote relationship building.

Give Lots of Information

People visiting your Website want information about who you are – company background and history, the industry, and your products and services. Because you provide a high-ticket item, chances are a lot of research goes into making a decision of what type of construction to choose and what company is the best one to hire. You want them to rely on you for that information as much as possible.

Present yourself in a professional manner and give them an offer such as a free consultation to get them to call you and give you a chance to begin building a relationship. Never forget to ask for the sale, especially on your Website. Keep the message in a warm, friendly tone so the consumer feels like they already know you.

Know What They Want to Hear

You must speak to your Website prospect in such a way that it tells your target audience you understand who they are, what their needs are, and what their biggest problem is. Then you let them know how and why you have the perfect solution.

Hire a good copywriter who has marketing experience and understands how to write from the end-user's point of view. It's all about what's in it for me as far as the prospect is concerned. If you have more than one target audience, make sure each viewpoint is addressed individually.

Make it Easy to Use

Easy site navigation is critical to a site's success. It needs to be professional looking, and it's well worth the investment to hire an expert to map the site so it flows properly. People won't spend a lot of time on a Website that confuses them or that makes it hard to zero in on the information they are seeking. They want to get the information they are looking for quickly, and move on.

Don't overcomplicate the design – "flash" is not necessarily a good thing. You want the Website to load fast and that means keeping large graphics to a minimum. If you have established branding, your Website should reflect it.

From a PR Viewpoint

Articles written about your company by a third-party are powerful and should be used on your Website to entice visitors. Make sure each article has a signature file on the bottom including an email address of where they can contact you for more information. Anything written by the company should also be displayed here – the more publications, the higher level of credibility you'll be

perceived as having in your industry. Everyone wants the expert – especially when they are spending big bucks. Press releases are a mainstay of a company's communications. Keep your most recent ones highly visible and the past releases archived with a search engine feature.

Your website can also be used to market your company online; but that's another article.

Some of you are wondering, what should we expect to pay to build a Website? The answer lies in how feature rich you need it to be, but a good estimate is somewhere between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to get a small business like yours online. Isn't that a small price to pay for a tool that can help you build relationships without you even being present? It's your decision.

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