

Building a Web Site that Works!

By Lee Traupel

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1) Assemble a web site development plan that is integrated with your overall marketing processes; the content should be consistent with offline materials, the graphics/images don't have to be identical with traditional media, but should be consistent with your overall branding, style guide, usage of colors etc.

2) Hire a web site design firm that understands your market position and one that won't get "geek crazy" – meaning they are so in love with their own design capabilities, your site gets bogged down with graphics, plug ins, GIF garbage, etc. But, conversely, check your ego at the door when you work with your design firm – I've see so many good web site designs get ruined by clients who can't or won't listen to what we tell them!

3) Pay attention to "load times," how long it takes a web site to load on a 56 KBPS modem (this is an industry average), if its more than 12-18 seconds you may experience the "click of death" – the site doesn't load quickly and the surfer is gone. Of course if your targeting broadband customers who are reaching your site via ISDN or DSL then you can build a site that incorporates multimedia-ready content that may include streaming audio or vide, or Shockwave or Flash capabilities – go ahead and let those digital geeks get carried away with cutting edge content!

4) Dare I say it, "keep it simple" - make your site easy to move around in, build a menu structure that is consistent with industry standards, local menus (for a page or section) on the left and global menus (overall site navigation) at the top and/or bottom of each page, keep as much information "above the fold" (above the cutoff point at the bottom of a monitor), don't make people use horizontal scroll bars unless absolutely necessary.

5) Inculcate "digital speed" into your overall site design, your client/customers should be able to get to their desired area of your site within one or two mouse clicks; they will quickly get frustrated if they have to clickthrough multiple menus to find information they are seeking.

6) Develop content that is web-enabled, people don't read web site content like they do offline media, keep your paragraphs short no more than two to three sentences, build in white space with your content, include links in your pages – don't try to tell your whole marketing story on your site – get people to call you (hello the telephone still works!), e-mail or fill out a profile form (see below).

7) Make your site permission-based marketing ready – I love Seth Godin's "Permission Marketing"

book <http://www.permission.com/> and we recommend it to all of our clients – he champions building a long term relationship with a customer by asking their permission to continue to market to them and incorporating value/information in all marcom processes.

8) Ensure your site is optimized for Search Engines by identifying 8-12 keywords that people will use to find your site, then incorporate these keywords in your site content (to drive relevancy with s/engine spiders/bots) and then manually submit your site to the top ten search engines. We don't recommend most of the free or \$19.99 specials available; yes, all will get your registered with the s/engines, but getting listed on page 75 of 350 pages (for example) won't really drive qualified traffic to your site, you need page 1-3 listings on the top ten engines to really drive qualified traffic.

9) Delve into your log server files to uncover “digital tracks” made through your web site – your log files are raw files that show how and from where (in most cases) people accessed your web site, where they went on your web site, how long they stayed, etc. Web Trends is the defacto industry standard, <http://www.webtrends.com/default.htm> but we use and recommend a market-experienced firm in Europe, Fantomaster, Ltd. to our clients <http://www.fantomaster.com> - they have a suite of Search Engine products that can be downloaded for free or purchased.

10) Think global in your overall site design - the greatest Internet growth is occurring outside North America, so it is essential to build a site that can be accessed easily by people around the world. What issues do you need to look at? Load times are very important (again), develop content that avoids colloquialisms that may not be understood by others who may not speak the same language, you may want to make your site content available in diverse languages, there are a number of emerging applications that will facilitate this process, ensure your ecommerce capabilities can be utilized by all.

Lee Traupel has 20 plus years of business development and marketing experience. He is the founder/CEO of a Northern California based, privately held, profitable Interactive Marketing Agency and Software Company, Intellective Communications, Inc. <http://www.intelective.com> and can be reached via e-mail at Lee@intelective.com

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