

Credibility: Make your Web presence believable!

By Phil Hanson

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Summary: If you're serious about improving and maintaining your credibility, potential customers will become customers because they take you seriously.

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The decision to establish a Web presence for your business can be a daunting one. First, you wonder if you can afford it (you probably can), then, you wonder if you can afford not to (you probably can't). You, and your company, can benefit from having an on-line presence providing you take the right approach.

Before you dedicate your time, energy and money to build a Web site to represent your company in the world of on-line commerce, you should ask yourself a few simple questions, and give yourself the same amount of honest answers.

For starters, what is your primary reason for building a Web site? If your answer to this question is that you intend to use it strictly as a business tool, both for promotions and advertising, and as a de facto sales outlet, then you're building it for the right reasons. You can be assured that, by going ahead, you've made the right choice.

If, however, you've decided to build a company Web site as a monument to your ego or as your next move in an ongoing game of corporate one-upmanship, you can be equally assured that you're building it for the wrong reason. It's just a matter of time before your on-line business joins the ranks of those that have already met with failure on the Internet.

Will your Web site be user friendly? Will your Web pages load quickly, and be easy to navigate? Visitors to your site don't come for entertainment or, as is often the case, annoyance and aggravation; they haven't got the time or the patience for it – they have an agenda of their own. What they do want is usability, speed and convenience. If you give them less than that, they won't perceive you as being serious about your business. You'll not only lose credibility, but you'll lose potential customers and sales.

Another thing that will put a major dent in your credibility is to promise more than you can deliver. When you accept money for your product or service then fail to deliver the goods, you not only put a huge ding in your credibility, you make a serious train wreck of your reputation, too.

Does your on-line business consist primarily of disseminating information or advice? If so, the appearance of factual errors, old news and obsolete information on your Web pages will, at the very least, raise nagging questions about your qualifications and competency. Once again, your credibility takes a hard hit.

Finally, let's discuss the text that appears on your Web pages. Is the writing literate, cohesive, coherent and compelling? Or, does it read like something that was thrown together by the "D" students in a seventh-grade ESL class?

A vast majority of Web sites share a common trait – poorly written text. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar litter the Web pages, rendering them almost unreadable. However, professional oversight can remove this particular threat to your credibility simply by removing the mistakes. In fact, professional editing services like proofreading and copy editing can take your credibility to the next-highest level.

From the standpoint of visitors (potential customers) who come to your site, believability is not a bad thing. From a business standpoint, when your Web pages look good, you look good. And that is a very good thing.

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