

10 Tips For Better Web Sites

By Tony L. Callahan

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What are the secrets of the super sites? Why do some sites succeed while the majority of others fail? More and more Internet business owners are asking themselves these questions. The answers are frequently more obvious than you may think. Below are 10 tips for better, more successful web sites.

1. Build It For Speed

It's a fact of modern life - people are in a hurry. Nowhere is that more true than on the Internet. It seems that no matter how much the technology improves, nothing is ever fast enough. In fact, several studies indicate that the faster technology advances, the faster people expect things to be.

So what does this mean for your website design? It means that you have between 10 and 30 seconds to capture your potential customer's attention. If they can not at least begin to read about your product in that much time, they will be headed elsewhere. To minimize your load time, keep graphics small. Compress them where possible. Use flashy technology (Javascript, Flash, Streaming Audio/Video, animation) sparingly and only if it is important to your presentation.

2. Target Your Market

Know who your market is and make certain that your site caters to their needs. It is critical that your site reflect the values of your potential customers. Is your market mostly business professionals? If so, the site must be clean and professional. Is your product aimed mostly a teenagers and young adults? Then your site could be more informal and relaxed. The key here is to know your market and build the site to their preferences.

3. Focus The Site

Make certain your web site is focused on the goal, selling your product or service. A site offering many unrelated products is not necessarily unfocused, but this is often the case. If your business does offer many products, dedicate a unique page for each instead of trying to sell them all from one page. Upselling or cross selling is vital but don't dedicate so much to it that the customer feels caught in a bait and switch. Make mention of other products but do so subtly.

4. Credibility Is Crucial

The most professionally designed site won't sell if your customers don't believe in you. The

impersonal nature of the Internet breeds a certain level of mistrust. For your web site to be successful you must overcome this tendency.

A clear privacy statement is one way to build your credibility. Every commercial web site should have a privacy statement posted on line. Provide a prominent link to your privacy statement from every page on the site as well as from any location that you are asking your visitors for personal information. Provide legitimate contact information on line. Your contact information should include an email address, mailing address, phone number and a fax number, if applicable. If you are unwilling to provide this information to your customers, why should they trust (or buy from) you?

5. Offer A Guarantee

Offer an ironclad, no exceptions money back guarantee. This item is really a credibility issue but it is important enough to warrant its own mention. What better way to establish your customer's trust than to eliminate any risk for them? If the customer sees that you are willing to assume all of the risk, they will immediately be more inclined to trust you.

6. Make Payment Easy

Offer a variety of payment methods for your customer. If you don't currently take credit cards, start immediately. You can either set up a merchant account or use one of the many credit card clearing houses. Take checks on line. Provide an address for those who prefer to pay by cash, check or money order. Make sure the payment process is clear, easy to access and intuitive to use. Eliminate as many steps as possible. Do not ask for any more information than is necessary to complete the transaction. Nothing frightens a customer off faster than feeling that their privacy is being invaded.

7. Simple Navigation

Make site navigation easy and intuitive. While it may be artistic to make your index page all black and hide the link to continue, will that generate business? If your customer can not navigate your site to find what they want, they will go elsewhere. Limit the choices and direct your customers through a sales process.

8. Consistency

Make sure the site is consistent in look, feel and design. Nothing is more jarring and disturbing to a customer than feeling as if they have just gone to another site. Keep colors and themes constant throughout the site.

9. Design for indexing

85% of all web users find what they are looking for via the top search engines. Make sure that your page is designed to maximize your placement. Focus on your keywords and keyword density but don't sacrifice your message. Utilize the meta tags keywords, description and title. Use your keywords when naming your pages.

10. Content is (still) king

Good content sells product. Ask yourself the following questions: Does your copy convey the message you wish to get across to your visitors? Is it compelling? Does it lead your visitor through the sales process? Have others review, critique and edit your copy to insure it is delivering the intended message. Always double check your spelling and grammar.

Implementing the ten steps above probably will not make your site as successful as Yahoo or Amazon overnight. If they are implemented correctly and integrated into an overall web site design and marketing campaign, you should see a marked improvement in the site's traffic and sales.

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