Build an Effective Website to Enhance Your Marketing

In this series of columns devoted to marketing your business, I will devote a few columns to your small business website. When potential customers are looking for a specific product or service, they search the internet to find a business that can meet their needs. Therefore, building and maintaining an effective business website is crucial.

Think of your website as a window to the world that gives potential customers a sneak peek at what your business has to offer. While the quality of your products and customer service will keep customers coming back, it’s a well-designed website that gets customers in the door in the first place.

It’s not enough to simply have a website. The impression it makes can either boost or hinder customers’ likelihood to interact with you. If your website is outdated, hard to navigate or visually unappealing, or if it doesn’t offer the information your visitors want, they will spend their money elsewhere. But, if you can tap into your customers’ needs, and meet those needs, your website will be a business-generating machine.

**My first suggestion is to ask you to focus on who’s your target audience?** It’s tempting to think you want a website for everybody, because in the end you want it to bring in as many customers as possible. But in truth you need to tailor your website for your target audience. That is those most likely to do business with you after visiting your website.

If you run a bar and grill near a college campus, your target audience should be students, faculty and alums. If you operate a canoe rental business in a small town, your target audience should be folks visiting town for the weekend. And if you run an auto garage that specializes in repairing foreign cars, your target audience should be foreign car owners.

Knowing your target audience is valuable because these are the people you need to convince to choose your business over your competition. Use your website to communicate to them what makes your business better than others with similar offerings.

On the other hand, if you don’t tailor your website to your target audience, you risk being too vague or bland and getting lost in the shuffle. So, take some time to
figure out who your target audience is and keep them in mind when building your website.

**Design a website your customers love.** The key to persuading potential customers to visit your site, and more importantly, to take action, is creating an excellent experience for your online visitors.

Make a strong first impression. Attracting visitors to your site is great but keeping them there is the larger challenge. One way to do this is to entice them early and often, whether that means using visuals, written content or a combination of the two. It can be helpful to think about your own experience browsing the web. When you visit another business’s website, what types of things make it more likely for you to stay? You can then incorporate (but not copy) similar elements into your own site.

Be yourself. Your website should feel true to your business. Revisit the brand you sketched out for your business, and imagine how those attributes can translate to your website:

- Is your brand trusted? Your homepage might feature an image of your employee helping a customer find the right product, paired with this headline: “Financial planning can be scary. We make it easy.”
- Is your brand welcoming? Your services page will be more appealing if it highlights services for beginners at the top of the page and reinforces that first-timers are welcome.
- Is your brand delicious? Your online menu should include words that make your visitors’ mouths water: “Explore the spring menu and discover dishes starring sun-drenched tomatoes, luscious berries and vibrant herbs.”

As you plan the content for your website and get into the specifics of your products or services, consider how those brand attributes guide your messaging. Write for your website with your customers’ problems in mind. How do your business attributes solve those problems?

Focus on your strengths. In business, defining your unique selling proposition is an important factor, and your website is an excellent chance to put it to use. Many potential customers research multiple providers online. Make it easy for them to compare your offerings to those of the competitors and reinforce why they should choose you. Are your products made with the best-quality materials? Do you offer
a satisfaction guarantee or price matching? Perhaps you are the most experienced business in your neighborhood. Your website should convey what sets you apart.

Amanda Brinkman, Chief Brand and Communications Officer, Deluxe Corp. puts it this way. “The way you show up online is just as important as the look of your shop. You can communicate trust in a split second through the fonts, colors and images you use online.”

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