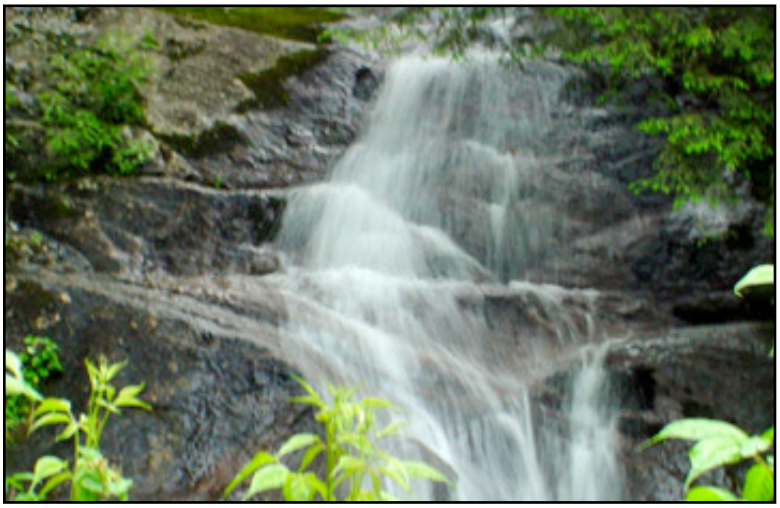
NEWSLETTER

Human Works 423 Days Straight!

"But It Didn't Seem That Long" Revived Business Owner States.



You have clients waiting - deadlines to meet! Now is not the time to goof off. I mean if you don't do the work, no one will.

Ahem, anything sound familiar? Workers in the U.S. log more work time than anywhere else in the world. We work longer hours, multi-task more, and continually take on additional work.

We're in the office early, skip lunch or eat at our desks, stay late and come in on weekends.

As if that wasn't bad enough, we have cell phones, email, fax machines, pagers, Blackberries, regular PDA's, IM's, laptops, and are networked within an inch of our lives.

Do you remember a time when we could not be contacted 24 hours a day? A two week turnaround was normal for a quotation or report, and receiving a fax was a 'big deal'.

Amazingly businesses survived those horrid delays. The world did not come to an end because an instant response wasn't occurring. No one panicked. IT support wasn't called because of fear the network was down. Life continued.

We - the small business owners and workers - had lives outside of the office. We saw our families and friends, relaxed, vacationed, stopped to smell those proverbial roses along the road.

When all is said and done, you're not going to be remembered because you worked another Saturday. Enjoy your life, it's the only one you have.

What Is This Anyway?

This is our version of a information dump.

There is so much knowledge that we need to pass along about the always changing issues concerning Web sites, that this seemed like a much better venue then simply posting it on the x-SITE-d Web site.

Not everything you find here will immediately apply to your business or Web site.

You might be familiar with a few of the topics and others will cause you step-back and think for a moment.

The bottom line is we want to continue to make our Web sites user friendly, safe, interesting, non-annoying, and effective. Keeping you up-to-date, helps all of us.

We can't ask for a much better partnership than that.

-Ann

How Often is Too Often When Sending Out HTML Emails and Newsletters

The Email Frequency Index, and how it can damage you. I think maybe I just made that phrase up...the Email Frequency Index, or EFI.

If you send out emails or newsletters, it's a figure to keep in mind. Here's how to get a grasp on the idea.

Grab a pencil and paper and write down the newsletters and emails you receive...in your business life...which you find to be of the most value.

Then write a list of the newsletters and emails you no longer open, and will one day get around to unsubscribing from, or at least filtering to your junk folder.

Now, next to each newsletter, on both lists, write down how frequently those companies or individuals email you.

Here's my guess. The newsletters and emails of greatest value arrive in your inbox no more frequently than once a week, and often only once every two weeks or more. Those you no longer read probably arrive with greater frequency.

This won't be true in every case, but overall it's probably not too far from the mark.

Now have a look at the value of the content. See if there is a correlation between the best, infrequently emailed communications, and the length and value of the content.

My guess is that you'll find a connection there too. Lower frequency will often go hand in hand with more substantial and useful content.

Here's what goes wrong. People and companies grow a list and then decide to "monetize" it. They do this by emailing you more frequently. The short-term math works for them.

However, with increased frequency you'll often see a reduction in the quality of content being sent you. I have seen numerous companies and individuals try to "make more" from me by increasing the frequency or their newsletters and emails. At the same time, the quality of content goes down.

Now for the formula I don't think I have ever written a formula in my entire adult life. I blame it on hanging out with my colleagues at MarketingExperiments.com (where I work).

So here goes. A = V - F

A = Attention

V = Value of content

F = Frequency

I know, it's not a very impressive formula... Attention equals Value, minus Frequency.

In other words, if you want to keep the attention of your subscribers, you need to keep the quality of content very high, particularly if you want to increase frequency.

Increased frequency without any perceived increase in value will inevitably result in a reduction of attention.

Do I have the data to prove this? No, not yet. However, there are times when a little common sense can help you almost as much a solid test results.

This excellent article is from Nick Usborne, EXCESS VOICE, author of Net Words. You can subscribe to his free Newsletter by going to: www.excessvoice.com.

I've been reading his articles for years, and have to say he usually "nails" the issue cleanly and on the first go-round. And yes, I have the book too...

-Ann

Link Farms Are On the Rise - My Personal Pet Peeve

I found myself in a rather strong discussion the other day about the damage a Link Farm Web site can inflict on your site.

On the surface, you might not believe another link to you is anything but helpful, but if that link isn't relevant - people aren't going to find it.

For example, I'm looking for a new cat-condo for the fur kids. I go to Google and up pops a bunch of sites that sell cat products. In the mix might be a site that states it sells Life Insurance. Life Insurance? I want a cat-condo! I'm obviously not going to click on that link.

Why did that link show up? Because they have a section on their site that has simply collected random links. The worse part is, they probably paid a service to provide them with all these quality links.

Those are annoying, the other form of Link Farm that is taking over has me tearing my hair out.

This company (yes one company) is based in the UK - I've tracked down all the pertinent information and contacted them directly with a cease-and-desist for all my, and any affected clients, sites.

These email contacts are all identically worded with the usual flowery praise, letting you know they've added you and to please link to them.

If you go to these sites what you'll find is literally 100's of links on every variation of the base subject - like balloon. You'll find random links from blow up party balloons to hot air balloons.

So your business site is put on this mess and the page is spidered by the search engines. Someone initiates a search, and because of the sheer volume of links this company has generated, they show up at the top of the list.

You think that's okay because they linked to your site. Go and try to find your link.

They're funneling your potential clients away from a real site and to their link farm.

If you ever receive a request to link back to a site that use an extension of either HQ.com or FORUM.com - insist your link be removed immediately. (such as http://www.lingerie-hq.com or http://www.lingerie-forum.com

"The News About Newsletters"

The Nuts & Bolts of Making them Work

We will be presenting a 3-hour workshop for HOA's and other associations, for the City of Garland this April. Joining us will be Mike Stanfill of Privatehand Illustrations (www.privatehand.com).

Most groups know exactly what content needs to be included in their newsletters, but unless they've been exposed to page layout in the careers, that can be a problem.

What we'll be covering is basic layout, fonts, styles, sizes, color, consistency, columns, indents (deep breath), spacing, images, legibility, paper color, and using a software program that most people have so others can keep working on it.

Previously we have led HOA Web site forums for the Citys' Neighborhood Community Conference. It's a blast! Geek talk for over three hours - heavenly.

How to Build a Successful eCommerce Web Site (Tongue Firmly in Cheek)

1. Use the eCommerce Software's Default Layout

Whatever shopping cart you use, the "stock" or default look is fine. After all, if it wasn't the best layout of all time, why would they distribute it as "stock" in the first place? Never mind that your site will look like every other lazy shop owner who decided that product presentation was overrated. Never mind that it has no flow, coherence, or style. And you might as well just ignore the fact that it makes you look like some high school kid in a basement trying to take their money and run.

You lack design talent? We understand. After all, if you could make nice Websites, you wouldn't be trying to sell whatever it is you make online: you'd sell nice Websites instead. Sure, you could get a ready made, beautiful drop-in template from one of hundreds of sites that specialize in that sort of thing -- some of them even custom-made for your cart platform -- for less than $200.00. But hey, you picked a FREE cart, and darn it, this site is going to be free if it kills you (or your chances of success). Those people that say you have to spend money to make money are all full of garbage, right?

2. Don't use Thumbnails

Why would you want to speed up load times for slow connections, or make your product shots look better? Good looking images are the sign of professionalism and class, and you surely don't want your site to have either of those. Sure, successful shop owners say better images sell more products, but you don't have to listen to those people. After all, what does a successful shop owner know that you don't?

Forget the fact that every cart on the planet either has the ability to use thumbnail images built in, or a free and easy-to-install contribution that handles them beautifully. Keep posting 800k images to your site, and laugh at those people who talk about "site optimization" and "load times".

3. Don't optimize your Images in Photoshop

Optimizing your images in Photoshop or some other image editing program takes time -- your valuable time. Leaving pictures at their original, huge dimensions and making the customer download 3MB of images for each page in your site takes time too -- the pesky customers' time. Everybody knows customers love to wait to buy your products. Play a game! See how big you can make your images, watch how your load time suffers, and then see how your conversion rates fare!

Challenge yourself to approach dial-up speeds over your cable modem using your stellar layered, uncompressed image design. I'm sure your customers will love it!

4. Don't smooth the Checkout Process

People love filling out 8 pages of forms before they can buy stuff. Better yet, add in a couple more pages to surprise the customer just when they think they're finally through! You really do need the customer's age, gender, and the name of his first-born son before you can sell him your hand-painted dishrags.

Whatever you do, make it as hard as you can for the customer to complete a sale and pay you money -- that's how you can tell if a customer is truly dedicated (or if they love pain).

5. Ignore the Market you're "Targeting"

Sure, there are 50,000 computer stores online, but yours is going to be the best! Market research is for people who don't know what they want to sell, right? You never researched for a term paper in high school and you passed. Why should an online business be any different? Don't invest time or money in unique products or services, and don't even think of developing some sort of unique selling proposition. Just bang out a site with the exact same products as your competition, only make yours more expensive, lesser known, and harder to deal with!

6. Don't add an SSL Certificate

All that junk about customers "Caring about their privacy" and being "Worried about identity theft" is unfounded. Just ask my friend "John" from Indonesia. Hey, by the way, he has $30,000,000.00 he wants to send you. He just needs your credit card number along with your name and billing address.

Never mind that SSL certificates enable the 128bit encrypted tunnel between customers' computers and your payment processor. All that stuff can just be sent plain text across the Internet. SSL

certificates cost money, and you're on a budget. Sure, the customer can sue you after your Website is found responsible for their identity theft, but that's not very likely to happen. You treat your customers like they're dumb and their personally identifiable information is worthless, so they probably don't have the smarts to hire a lawyer to sue you all the way to the poor house. After all, $50 is a lot of money for security and peace of mind!

7. Don't add Terms of Use, Privacy, or Conditions of Sale Statements

Some might say that customers like to know who they are dealing with, but those people are full of it. Customers don't care about your return policies, what to do if they receive a broken product, or what to do if the size they ordered is wrong.

Likewise, they don't care what you're going to do with the personally identifiable information you collect. I know for a fact there are people who love SPAM mail: I received an email about it just the other day. Oddly enough, it had a link for cheap "V I AG RR A" in it too, whatever that is. Forget that mumbo jumbo about how providing privacy and terms of sale information is a legal requirement in most jurisdictions -- like I said, your customers are hardly going to get a lawyer! Everybody knows that people don't like to sue lazy, complacent companies for easy money, right?

8. Completely leave out Product Descriptions

All your customers need is a browser-resized, jagged picture of your product. They don't need to know its features, limitations, or comparisons to other products. Hey, if they knew all that, they'd probably go buy your competitor's widget right?

Don't describe your product at all. Be sure to use your own arbitrary part number scheme too, so customers can't search by the manufacturer's part number to find the products they already know they want to buy. Oh, and use some random picture for the product with a note at the bottom that says, "Picture is a demo, actual product may vary" so the customer never really knows what they're going to get.

9. Add Flash. Lots of it. Throw in some Java, too.

Flash intros rock. Add two of them, and make sure you don't put one of those annoying "skip intro" links at the bottom. Heck, if you did that, nobody would get the chance to experience your Uncle Joe's mediocre Flash skills. When you finally do let the three customers who are willing to sit through your tedious intros into your store, make sure you have a Flash product menu, a Flash header, and random Flash buttons all over the page. Page animations and moving text equate directly to quality and usability, and don't you ever forget it!

Now, if all that Flash doesn't slow your site down to a crawl, don't worry: you can always add Java. Sure, most professional developers and customers refer to Java as "That Damn Dirty Java", but your customers are different. Put random Java image switchers and scrollers on every page. Put that neat-o Java water ripple effect thingy on your homepage, because that wasn't old and tired enough in 1993. And make sure you require users to have Java installed, along with Flash, Windows Media Player, QuickTime, Comet Cursor, and goodness knows what else, in order to use your site properly. Maybe throw in an ActiveX dialer installer for good measure -- customers love to wait endlessly for compulsory ad-ware-laden downloads while trying to spend their money on your products!

10. Never post your Address or Phone Number

Customers never want to get a hold of you: that's why they buy online! Plus, if they have a complaint, they have no way of getting in touch with you other than email, and we all know how easy to ignore that is. Just think -- without them knowing who you are, where you are, or how to contact you, your customers can never send product returns, make complaints, or cause waves. It's brilliant! You can claim customer satisfaction is 100%, because nobody will ever be able to contact you to tell you otherwise.

Sure, this might put off about 90% of your potential customers, but don't let that stop you. That still leaves you 10% of the Internet, and trust me, the Internet sure is big. Make sure you ship your items from the shipping store or the post office so there is never a return address on the box. When the credit card company calls you about a chargeback, make sure you tell them the customer never called and complained, and you never received a return.

How Horrible is your eCommerce Site?

While these "tips" were written in good humor, the above pointers cover serious advice that is not so much related to the technical nature of an eCommerce site as it is to product and company presentation.

Sometimes, the negative aspects of not taking certain actions have more impact than extolling the virtues of doing it right. This article is not designed to be a punch in the face to those diligent, passionate store owners who really care about the service they provide, but as more of a wake up call to future and existing shop owners and developers.

This article is from Jason Chance posted on Sitepoint. He's an online product manager for a company that manufactures and distributes firefighting chemicals. He does extensive consulting with small business owners. www.jccommerce.com

He says: As a frequent visitor to forums in which people ask for critiques of their new eCommerce sites, I have seen the best and the worst of small business Web development. For the first 1000 posts or so, I was helpful, kind, and supportive when gently pointing out each developer's site issues and how he or she could make the site "the best it could be".

Funny thing though: I found out that this approach doesn't really work. Maybe the developers think their sites are somehow different, or that the basic rules of good online commerce don't apply to them for some reason. Site after posted site, I see the same errors in judgment and design. The following 10 tips now represent my standard advice to every budding Website entrepreneur.

Page Rank Controversy

We still find ourselves explaining the "I have to have a 1 or 2 page rank" demands as being worthless.

It's very common to find a daily request in the inbox from someone that needs a high page rank. Not only are they adamant about it, they demand guarantees that they'll stay at that ranking forever, and only have $500 to spend to make this miracle happen.

So... page rank doesn't mean anything. Period. It can and does change daily. As more sites come online - everything readjusts itself. This will never change; the Web always changes.

If you want to be on the first page of Google, you're going to have to work at it. That mean optimization, headers, sub-headers, intelligent writing (have a pro write for you), keywords and phrases, good navigation - all the same features you'd want on any quality Web site.

You don't achieve high rankings overnight, and you don't keep them unless you work at it. If a company promises all that and more, just hold out your wallet and wave goodbye to your money. Or better yet, send it to me; I promise to put the money to a good cause.

What We Do

We are a small, woman owned and run company specializing in small business, creative business, and homeowner association Web sites.

In addition to Web sites, HTML and plain text emails, SEO optimization and promotion, we also help in the design of a look-and-feel for print, including business cards, letterhead, and brochures. If desired we can even build your stationery as a Word document so you can print as needed.

We produce Keynote and PowerPoint presentations in various formats and develop PDF catalogues that you customers can downloaded from your Web site.

Our support staff includes a professional illustrator, Flash designer, proofreader, copywriter, and most importantly, someone is always around to help you navigate the often confusing world of the web.

By helping you become successful, we become successful!

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