



Is Your Website Asleep?

By Sean D'Souza

Need To Create A Website That's Dynamite?

Websites are a waste of money and time. Well most of them are. Most people go online for just one reason-- *Get Information*. Yet, what do you see at most websites?

Portfolio!

See the problem? If you stop and think, this is not a website problem. It's a communication problem, which is why most advertising fails. The customer wants information and help and most communication fails to do that.

They load you with portfolio and with information about the company. It's all about me, me, me. This primary reason causes more than 90% of all websites to be inefficient, useless and a waste of time.

It is also the prime reason why not many people make money off their website. If you start talking about YOU, no one is interested. To give out credible, useful information is the prime function of every communication piece. If almost everything on your website doesn't answer the question *What's in it for me?*, it's definitely not worth the time of the customer.

What A Good Websites Does

- 1)It gives information, and builds credibility.
- 2)It builds the brand and allows you to earn off the brand.
- 3)It builds customer loyalty.
- 4)It allows customers to use it as a suggestion box. It's not a perfect world and customers should be encouraged to let you know what can be fixed.
- 5)It should achieve basic marketing principles. It should be solving a problem and aimed at a specific target audience.
- 6)It should generate its own income like any profit centre. It should justify its reason for existing.

How To Create A Near Perfect Website

Consider these factors as important benchmarks for creating a website. If your website doesn't do these things, you have to question, *why not?*

- 1)Revenue Generation
- 2)Data Collection
- 3)Information Source
- 4)Feedback and Complaints
- 5)Distribution
- 6)Reconstruction
- 7)Fan Club
- 8)Associated Tools
- 9)Meet the Basics of Communication

Show Me The Buckeroos!

While it's all very fine to be a *charitable institution*, a website costs money. Which person or organization in their right sense would spend US\$50 for no return? There would be questions to answer and heads would roll.

Yet, most organizations do just that. They spend anywhere from US\$2,000 to US\$50,000 on a website that will not generate any return.

We are not talking about straightforward e-commerce here. We are talking about a bigger brand issue and how you can use the brand to achieve the financial goals of the organization. The watchword should always be--*Show me the money!*

Yes, even schools, hospitals and other organizations can use their websites to make money, and then use the money for a good cause. Charity and good causes are all very fine, but everything costs money. If you can generate revenue, there is no reason on earth why you shouldn't be doing so.

When You're A Guru, Everyone Listens

It's not what you say, it's how you say it. Website design is not about design, it's about thought process. Websites are but a tool to get information that builds the brand further. Articles and material that help the person browsing the site can achieve this.

Information isn't about getting across what you want them to hear. It's about asking them what they would like to have. This is endless. The customers' needs keep changing and you must be able to have information that can excite and educate them. This also keeps the other audiences active.

Who Are Your Audiences?

A website imparting information appeals to two simultaneous audiences. It speaks to your current audience like a newsletter or brochure would and it also speaks to a potential audience.

While you are specifically targeting current clients, there is no reason why the information doesn't impart knowledge to future clients, even potential employees.

There are a zillion bozos out there who are simply selling goods and services and not helping the customer in any way. If you help them and keep in touch with them, when the need arises, you will be first in line.

Clawing Your Way To The Top

This is also a good system to use when you want to capture business from competition. You don't always have to be #1 with your client. If you don't have the business, keep plugging at your #2 position and someday #1 will stumble. When that happens, you get an opportunity to move in. Don't always look at everything as a sale situation. People have innate fears about change. Imparting good information marks you out as a credible, trustworthy source and their desire to work with you will go up as you keep giving them nuggets of useful information.

If You Don't Do This, Drown Yourself

This is one of the most important and inexpensive tools to corner your target audience. If a person feels the connection and you lead them through the right steps, they will invariably feel the need to get more information.

If you aren't collecting e-mail addresses off your website, then you're missing out on the few people (or many as the case may be) that are really interested in your product or service.

How To Get The Data Off Your Customers

The only way to get them to part with their e-mail address is to first establish your credibility and then offer something in return. However, once you have their e-mail address and their permission, you can turn your website into a wonderful marketing machine as long as you don't overdo it. People get tons of e-mail everyday and the junk goes out very quickly. The more useful your information is, the more chances you have of getting visitors to sign up. You can then use that information to market to that audience selectively. So make sure you're collecting data or your website's true potential becomes pretty dodgy.

Is Your Website Built For Complaints?

You build a car with all the features. You paint it black. The customer wants it red. You try to sell the black car and face resistance. You call the customer stupid and go on trying to promote your black car.

We all do this. We decide that's what we need to promote. The customer on the other hand would like something else that fulfills their needs. We never stop to ask. Ever!

Every section of your website should have the ability to handle feedback that can then be incorporated within your website and other communication to give the customers what they need.

Feedback also allows you to stay ahead of your competition big time! Once the customers trust you and see changes in the website, they will be encouraged to give more important feedback that could change not just the website but even the working of the organization. Perception is everything, and you need to know at all times what the outside world perceives your organization to be. Once you have that data, it allows you to go ahead and make the changes you need.

Is Your Website Sitting In A Box?

How are you going to promote your website? While most websites rely on getting to the top of the search engines, you may not have that need. You may have a very specific targeted audience you want to reach. That audience would never search for your website online. They would have to know it, or never find it at all.

Companies print brochures and then make sure they go out. They build websites and it sits in the *box* undistributed. They hope, and this is a big hope, that someone will visit. It doesn't happen. You have to figure out the distribution process as well, so that your website goes out to your target audience.

If It's Worth Building, It's Worth Renovating

Most organizations make changes to their business to keep competitive. Yet, they think nothing of keeping the website stagnant for 50+ years. (Ok, I'm exaggerating, but on the web 1 year= 10 normal years)

Expect change to be inevitable. The website should be constructed so that it's easily changeable and updateable. It should also not require a degree in rocket science. You should be able to update it while you're sitting at a cyber cafe in the Bahamas while sipping your Caribbean Punch!

Understand that it's inevitable and, like all marketing tools, this tool should be reviewed at least every 6-12 months and changed or reconstructed to meet current customer demands.

Are You Signing Autographs Yet?

Most organizations survive on their *fan club*. People who love you so much, that they're willing to talk about you to everyone in sight. Many organizations have clients that are well spread out.

The website can be used to keep that Fan Club together. It should be used as a networking tool as well. Most organizations ignore this fact.

If I love eating Indian curries, everyone else in that *Indian curry* section can be linked up to do business with each other. If they love your company or organization, they will reinforce each other about how great it is, plus they will do business with each other.

The more successful they get, the more it rubs off the organization and eventually, the more business you get to do with them because of their success.

Looking Beyond A Website

Too many people are taken up with the glamour of websites. Websites are just a façade. You must understand the technology that drives business.

Do you have autoresponders? How do you use email? How do you track customers? How can you communicate with customers? How can you make sure your best customers keep coming back? All of these tools have nothing to do with the website itself. However, they need to be thought through every step of the way.

It's The Psychology, Stupid!

If you want to build a website, or do a brochure or have any form of communication, understand the basics of psychology. We are all driven by similar needs and wants.

A Website Shouldn't Be Deadline Driven. It Should Be Need Driven

What's the point of having an absolutely stunning website before deadline if it doesn't do anything for the person

viewing it. Too many people in organizations are caught up in their own ego of having a website up. It's often not worth it.

Websites Aren't For The Organization. They Are For The Customer

Websites are a marketing tool. Use the principles of marketing to build and promote them. That of course, means having a target audience. Having a problem you can solve. Flag off that problem and then provide a solution.

Yahoo might be the wonder of yesterday but Google.com is the one that gets the most converts. Yahoo is trying to be everything to everyone, Google isn't. Don't get lost in the hype of technology because everything on this planet is based on psychology and emotion.

Most websites have no objectives at all. They have no target audience. They are created because it's fashionable to do so.

Dump the fashion. Understand the basics of internet marketing and communication. And if you don't understand the basics, get someone who can! Otherwise you're doing what a zillion websites across the world do-

Nothing!

If you haven't done so already:  **(That's a clue!)**

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