Small Business Websites: A Checklist for Success

Listed in order from basic to the more advanced, these tips will help you create your perfect small business website. Print this out, open your site and go through the list.

Don't try to do implement these improvements all in one day. Just take it one tip at a time.

- ☐ **Professional design.** Your design should look professional rather than "homemade." While it need not be expensive, it shouldn't look cheap either. First impressions count, and your site needs to represent your business well.

- ☐ **Intuitive navigation.** It should be clear where to click in order to move around the site and what to click on first. Too many sites get fancy with names; just say "Home" and something like "About Us" and "Contact." You don't need a large menu of pages; you know why your visitors are there, so address those needs.

- ☐ **Simplicity.** Have you seen high-fashion sites with an animated Flash introduction? Bo-ring! Absurd as it sounds, no one has patience to wait a few seconds for these to load and play. And, they almost NEVER add value. Keep things on your site simple and relevant to why the visitor came there. If your site has frames (those boxes in which you have to scroll to see all the text - yes, they still exist), it's past time for an update. We are big fans of Wordpress sites (http://wordpress.org) using the Thesis theme (http://bit.ly/QyOkS).

- ☐ **Phone number.** I know, I know. It's in the footer. It's in the header. It's on the Contact Us page. I hear this all the time, immediately followed by, "So why do people always tell me they can't find my number?" Do yourself a favor: if yours is a business in which people call you often by phone, *prominently* feature your phone number in the top part of your website, preferably on the left hand side. Or, weave it into the design of the header.

- ☐ **Brand congruence.** The design of your small business website should match the look and feel of all your other marketing materials. And yes, your car, briefcase and personal appearance are part of the brand. Everything should work together harmoniously to create a strong impression on your prospects. To develop your own authentic, compelling, profitable brand, take a look at the *Enlightened Marketing Brand Roadmap* (http://bit.ly/brandroadmap).

☐ **Photos.** The photographs on your website convey a lot about your brand. The quality of photos as well as what's in them send a message more powerful than all your text. Be sure there's something about all of them that radiates the essence of your brand, especially yours. (And would it kill you to SMILE?!)

☐ **Keywords.** Be sure you use the same words and phrases your prospects are using when they search the Internet. It's no use creating a perfect website if the search engines don't think you have what the "Googlers" are looking for.

In some cases it took a few months to kick in. But, I started to get prospects, purchasers and real, paying clients who found me through Google searches.

☐ **Headlines and sub heads.** Internet users don't read the information on websites; they skim it. And they don't spend much time doing that either. Your best bet is to have headlines at the top of the page that draw your readers in and keep them reading. Sub-heads are large and/or bold text that breaks up and makes the page easier to read. Take a look at magazines for ideas on making text more skimmable.

☐ **Who We Work With.** I expect a small business website to spend a lot of time talking about the company, its owners and the services they offer. Why not talk also about the clients? Your visitor is thinking, "Will she be interested in working with us?" Or maybe, "I bet they don't work with someone like us." A page outlining "Who We Work With" can assure prospects you want to attract that they are a good fit for you.

☐ **Engaging bio.** People do business with people, not companies. A successful bio or "About Us" page will include a great photo which radiates your personality. Your biography should build credibility by emphasizing how you have helped your clients. Just enough personal details near the end will create a bond with readers who want to know you're a part of the community, too.

☐ **Articles.** Having articles on your site gives visitors a reason to stay longer and consider you an expert in your field. You can even syndicate your articles around the Internet to drive traffic back to your site. If you have writer's block, you may find a tool like *Instant Articles Wizard* (http://bit.ly/bZbqE) helpful.

☐ **Blog.** If you like to write articles, why not make a blog? It's easy to set up, manage and update, and the fresh content brings visitors back to your website on a frequent basis. We prefer Wordpress (http://wordpress.org) and the Thesis theme (http://bit.ly/QyOkS).

☐ **Link discipline.** Some websites unwittingly drive visitors away by sharing too many "Useful Links." Your intention is to draw visitors to, and keep them on,

your website. Instead of a page full of links to helpful resources, create a free report on your topic and include all the links in there.

☐ **Tell-a-friend.** Help visitors share your site with others who may be searching with a "Tell-a-Friend" form or button on the page. Your web designer can provide one or you can download one for free online. There are a few pitfalls to avoid, so do your homework. But, the referrals to friends can be worth it.

☐ **Special report.** Special reports and other information products are incredible lead generators. You can prequalify clients, educate them about the process and position yourself as an expert all at the same time. Keep yours concise, targeted and engaging. Whatever you find yourself explaining to clients over and over is a perfect topic for your next special report.

☐ **Email follow-up.** Once a visitor leaves your website, it's statistically unlikely they will ever return. They forget about your site, where they found you and continue with their busy lives. Put yourself in charge of the follow-up with interested visitors by capturing their email addresses. No, they won't just hand them over. You can request them in exchange for something of value, like the report I mentioned earlier, a free audio, or a checklist like this one. Just be sure to let them know you'll be following up with them and that you won't share their email with anyone else. Check out Aweber for this service (http://bit.ly/4lclWI).

☐ **Email newsletter.** One of the most incredible, low cost marketing strategies is to publish an email newsletter. With a little effort and some good writing skills, you can stay in touch with thousands of prospects, past clients, alliances, referral partners and colleagues. The best ones share a combination of news, success stories, tips and recommended resources. Think no one wants more email? No one wants more dull, boring junk email. Write a valuable, informative fun to read newsletter and you'll build a priceless lead generator. Again, our recommended provider (the one we use ourselves), is Aweber.

☐ **Statistics.** I'm shocked at how many website owners don't track their stats or assume this is something their web person should be managing. Your web stats will show you how many visitors your website gets, which sites they came from, how they move through your site, what they click on, how many minutes they spend on each page and more. Learn and incorporate this data to improve your site's performance. (Very few web designers are going to help with that.) Be sure to view the keywords too, since this tells what visitors were looking for when they came to your site. Get them for free using Google Analytics (http://www.google.com/analytics) and StatCounter (http://www.statcounter.com).

☐ **Frequent updates.** If you can't quickly and easily update your site, you may as well not have one. The more frequent your updates, the more active and

dynamic your site will look, and the more visitors and search engine traffic you'll attract. This doesn't mean changing your page texts, it means adding new pages of content, such as articles, new listings and photos, or blogging, which you can do every day.

☐ **Video introduction.** What a powerful impression your site can make with a warm personal introductory video. Include in yours a statement about who you work with, how you help them and an invitation to download your special report (in exchange for their email address, of course).

The funny thing about the Internet is: low-tech video is actually preferred over something flashy like you might see on TV. So, while you might not want to use the web cam built into your laptop, you also don't need to spend $1000 to get a video made and edited. Keep it simple and focused on you. If you're on a tight budget, start with an audio intro. You can make one easily with Audio Acrobat (http://bit.ly/sh2J3).

I hope you enjoyed these tips. For more information about building your own client attracting website, just contact (http://bit.ly/Enlighten) Enlightened Marketing!