

18 Common Web Design Mistakes

(Where people often go wrong with their web site) Foggy or undefined business goals - your web site needs a purpose. For example, the purpose of this web site is: "to support word-of-mouth and classified advertising of my web design services to small businesses and sole traders in the CBD and southern suburbs of Brisbane. I will know if it is successful if it generates an average of at least five enquiries or three sales per month."

A Bad Business Model - a great web site will not save a bad business model. If you cannot state in one sentence what you have to offer, or why you are different to your competitors, then you have major marketing problems. Remember, your web pages are competing with 21 billion other web pages on the Internet. Without a good business model and marketing and PR support, your business will have difficulty in succeeding.

Focusing on style rather than substance - it's easy to waste a lot of money on fancy Flash pages, Java script, music, graphics and other techniques that add little to your sites value and make it slower to download and harder to navigate. When in doubt - don't do it. Your web site should be designed so that even people with older versions of browsers and slow old modems can still get the information they need quickly. Trying to be all things to all people - getting found on the Internet means a focused approach to marketing. Pick one product or service offering and build a web site around that one offering. By appealing to different markets with unconnected products means that your search engine rankings will suffer. Pick a profitable niche and focus on that niche.

Using a generic domain name - the more unique and memorable your domain name, the better. Domains like pets.com or computer.com describe the product category, not the brand. google.com, dell.com, yahoo.com are easy to say, easy to remember and excellent brand names for the web. Do what they do, choose your online name carefully.

Not having a domain name at all - the use of a web address like ispname/~fashionshop looks unprofessional and "small-time". Invest the \$40 or so it costs to have your own domain name. Speaking of domain names, whatever you do, don't register your domain with Melbourne IT. I can highly recommend cheapdomains.com.au or webcity.com.au

Not thinking like a customer - your web site should anticipate your prospects' questions and be designed with them in mind. What do they want to know? What's the best way to tell them? What proof can I offer? Consumers don't necessarily want to make the best buying decision, they are usually happy just avoiding a bad one.

Not listing prices - the second question all prospects ask after "have they got what I'm looking for" is "how much is it?". If you can give straight pricing, do so. Prospects are looking for value, not necessarily the lowest price. Value = offer/price. If you have a strong offer and your prices are reasonable you will represent value to your prospects. If you don't state your prices then the value can't be calculated. If you charge by the hour, state your rates for the type of work you do and a typical project cost.

Bad spelling, punctuation or grammar - there's no excuse for typos, bad spelling or bad grammar. Always get your web site proof read by an independent party. If you do find an error, fix it promptly.

Not allowing for growth or updates - your web site design should allow for growth in content and easy changing of content. New product lines, additional locations, extra consumer information should all be catered for without the need for a major site redesign. This website uses what's called a content management system. You can have a site like this for as little as \$995 all inclusive.

Not considering search engines - The primary way people will find you online is via search engines like google, altavista and sensis. By adding key words to the header of your web pages, using paragraph headings, linking to related sites and other techniques, you can improve your ranking in search results. Here is a short article I wrote for Business Trader Magazine on how to get better search engine rankings. Investing too much in electronic order taking systems - if you expect to receive less than 10 orders per day from your web site, it's probably far easier to use a simple order form and manual credit card processing using your EFTPOS machine than building real-time electronic payment processing systems. For low to medium volumes, another option is the range of merchant tools from PayPal. It takes about 5 minutes to insert a Buy Now button on your web page that allows customers to pay immediately by credit card.

Investing too little in online marketing - in most cases it pays to invest in online marketing. Unlike traditional media, with online marketing you can choose your daily budget and the cost-per-click of your marketing campaign. With good reason, Goggle Adwords is the leader in pay-per-click advertising. Learn about Adwords or hire a consultant who does. For about \$5 -\$10 per day you can get yourself a source of steady, qualified leads. Not responding quickly to inquiries that come via the Internet - the Internet works very quickly. It takes less than a second to send an e-mail from Australia to Europe. Internet users are impatient. They want immediate results. If you take a few days to answer and e-mail there's a good chance you've already lost the sale to someone who understands this and acts quickly. Check your e-mail twice a day and once a day on weekends if possible.

Unreadable pages - your pages should be clean, simple and readable. Red writing on a black background may look rather funky, but it is hard to read and will lose visitors quickly. Similarly with fonts. Only use fonts that you would usually see in a mainstream newspaper or magazine.

Unprintable pages - if you use lots of graphics and coloured text on coloured backgrounds it may be difficult for

prospective customers to print out your pages. Black on white/cream works well. It's easy to read as well as cheap and fast to print.

Using stock photos and graphics - photos can really add impact to a web page, but don't be tempted to use the same stock photos that everyone else does. You know what I mean, "man with briefcase running" or "business meeting" or "close-up of pen on table" or even "business handshake closing a deal". These are the sort of cheesy images a 12 year old would put in a school project. If possible, use original photos of you and your business.

Bad site navigation - it should take a maximum of three clicks for your reader to find the information they are looking for. 40 seconds is the average time a person will spend scanning your web site to see if you have what they want. Deliver.