



Website development 101: How to put your site to work for you - by Anthony Quaranta

June 06, 2017 - Long Island

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?When it comes to websites, my clients either want me to create and launch a new one, or have a current site tweaked or overhauled. But no matter what their website's condition or status, my experience has taught that a site's overriding objective should be that it's addressing three critical criteria: qualify your company, provide a service to clients, and generate leads for your sales efforts.

1. Qualify. First and foremost, your site must resonate credibility for your company and its credentials. Think about what happens when you give a sales presentation. Typically, prospects are checking you out prior to your pitch—and they're doing so by visiting your website. Be sure it's easy to read and navigate and has a professional look and feel that's consistent with your brand and corporate image.

?2. Provide service to clients. I often tell clients that if I was going to invest in a website, I expect it to provide a tangible efficiency or savings for my company. That can mean lowering an operating expense or making some impact on the bottom line. As an example, many years ago when designing an all-new site, I took a tour of the client's facility prior to web development. I came across a three-person phone team who was responsible for verifying proof of deliveries, relaying to customers when items were delivered, who signed for them, etc. We added this function to their website, putting the site to work with a dynamic database where all delivery documents would reside and clients could easily input a tracking number to receive the latest delivery detail, 24/7. The department's employees were re-assigned to other customer service functions which demanded a human interface.

3. Generate leads. Too often, clients don't make a commitment to using their site to generate leads—the golden ticket for your sales team. We can build the finest website in the world, but if it's not marketed properly and consistently, no one will go there. When you build your site, you need to be cognizant that there are literally millions of websites. It's not like a brick-and-mortar business where, at the very least, you'll get noticed by the traffic that drives by daily.

So how do you "drive" people to your website? Typically, through "search engine optimization," or

SEO. A fundamental goal should always be to improve your search results when prospects are at their most critical point in the discovery or buying process. Search engines need to recognize your site's focus, objectives and credibility via its content (i.e., text, titles and descriptions), Content Management System (CMS) and navigation so they'll recommend your website when it's of relevance.

Today, there are hundreds of search engines, with Google and Bing being the most popular. These engines also let you increase your qualified leads through paid optimization which can include a listing and/or advertisement. But there are considerable category-specific search engines (e.g., food, education, legal, medical, real estate, hospitality, etc.) which receive millions of inquiries a day as well and provide free exposure.

A good example is Yelp whose reviews are visible in many local queries. What's more, Google does consider a businesses' presence on Yelp, such as how many reviews its received and their favorability. So rather than a restaurant or other business actually paying for search engine optimization, Yelp does it automatically by getting users to offer their experiences and/or reviews in a host of categories.

In addition, there's great lead generation value in improving the user's experience once they arrive at your site. One way is to educate prospects about the benefits of your product and/or service. Tell them something they don't know by communicating industry knowledge, facts or statistics. And, naturally, make sure your website is part of an integrated marketing plan. Utilize email blasts and print ads to drive traffic to your site. Run contests, post videos, or offer free advice (e.g., five top things to evaluate when choosing a mobile carrier). Build value.

?There is a myriad of "bells and whistles" clients think they want in their website. They want theirs to be interesting. They want it to be interactive. They want it to look "fancy" or "hip." But your guiding vision when creating your site should be its ability to qualify your company, provide a service, and generate leads. So be sure to work with a professional web development company who also has the experience and know-how to not only build it, but drive traffic there. That includes a responsive design that ensures your site is viewable and functional independent of the screen it's viewed on (e.g., desktop, phone, tablet) or the web browser that's utilized. And, be sure to save a little of your marketing budget for online advertising. That's Q from the street.

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