

WEBSITE MYTHS – DEBUNKED !!!

A White Paper Explaining Effective Website Operation in Plain English

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So, you want a website for your business. **WHY???** **What Is A Working Site?** What Do You want it to do for you?? **Where** should you put it?? **Who** should do it, yourself, or hire a pro?? **How** do you get traffic on it, and make it work for you continually?? **When** should it be updated and changed?? ...and **How Much Should it Cost???**

Yup, there are a lot of questions that need answers before you embark on this venture and spend dollar one. Many of you may have already made the plunge and are wondering why it isn't working for you.

Let's explore these questions one at a time and see if any answers pop out.

Item 1. WHY? ... do you want a Website?

Be honest with yourself. Your competition has a website. It's the vogue thing to do. You want your business in the 21st hi-tech century. You are somewhat computer literate, and Microsoft and other industry giants promote the "magic" of this new instant business success tool, and their hype that "anyone can do it" seems fitting. Just get on the Internet, instant success. It levels the playing field, as your business is in the same league as mega-buck corporations on the Internet. *Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!!!* If you put your mind to it you could probably come up with another dozen or so reasons. And yet, there is really only one, albeit complex, reason for your Website.

Increased Exposure for your Business = ***Increased Expanded Revenue***, and...provides another vehicle for your Customer Liaison, Improved Customer Service, and Customer Support.

The bottom line is that a properly *designed, marketed, and managed working* website, (it takes ALL three), can in fact substantially augment and increase your business generated revenue! The key word is *Working*, for not all websites are so, in fact, the vast majority of self-enabled sites are just there, existing, but non-working. Sort of like having a billboard, behind a clump of trees on FM 1969! Or an obscure 1/64 page 2-4 line ad on page 42, of the Sunday paper. Or a radio ad running at 3 am, right after a 20 minute uninterrupted music spree, with music segway from one to another. These choices admittedly are not very effective in generating new traffic, but the rates are definitely affordable. The old adage is still true – "you get exactly what you pay for!"

So. Let us focus on ***THE Primary*** reason for your website – **To Increase Potential Customer Exposure**, which will **lead to Increased Revenues !!!**

So, if your website is to be like a Billboard on Every Major Internet Highway, it must be more than just there. For there are thousands of websites, most behind a clump of trees, that few people see and fewer still are motivated into action. It must be a truly ***Working*** website, attracting potential customers, dynamic, interactive, displaying your business in the most professional manner, and designed to keep them coming back for new and more.

Spending \$79.95 - \$249.95 for any of the plethora of consumer oriented Website Publishing software currently available and 4-8 hours of effort DOES NOT create a ***Working*** site. You can write your own will, treat the family cold as Dr. MOM, and use your own garden hose when a brush fire breaks out in the backyard,

and, create your own simple web site. But when things are really serious, we ALL go to the professional lawyer, doctor, and firefighters for assistance. So too, should it be with the seriousness of your business website.

Item 2. What Is A Truly *Working* Site? ... what should it be doing for you?

This is a very complex issue; so... let's look at it one step at a time.

A. Design:

First off, the site creation **MUST** professionally reflect the exact nature of your business, with graphics, pictures, movement, and/or attention getting animation if appropriate, and sound. The first Home or Index page should immediately tell the viewer Who you are and What you do!!! The entire site should be an extension of this single thematic, with threads of this theme running thru every page, by color, format, sound, etc. This HOME page must load in less than a minute! Visiting browsing potential customers have a very short patience when they are in a scan mode. It must tell your story with very few words, instantly discernable from the graphics and layout format selected. Its **ONLY** purpose is to grab the immediate attention of the viewer and entice him/her into seeing more pages.

The site must navigate effortlessly with dynamic mouse-over buttons and/or hyperlinks. The navigating scheme must be simple, instantly recognizable, and lead the viewer to where he/she needs to go. The single thematic **Must** be evident on all sub-pages. Gimmicks and shimazz are only effective if used very sparingly. Colors, format, and texture should be thematically correct, all complimentary to each other and none clashing or distracting from the rest.

Much of this Design phase is creative, artistic, somewhat esoteric, and quite subjective in nature. Each of us will have at least several approaches. However, every decision made as to color, content, font style, format, etc should be a "yes" answer to the question, "will this make the viewer's task easier ? " ... or will it be distracting and a source of discontinuity? This Design phase is what most all consumer web generation software programs focus on. Though important, this phase is but a portion of the total story of creating a traffic generating Working Website, and yes, almost anyone can do it, to a point.

Special E-Commerce sites, Data-Base online cataloging, Credit Card Purchasing, Interactivity with Viewer, and Security Issues usually require professional services as HTML, PHP, Java Script, CGI Script, SQL, etc. programming must be mastered to perform these operations. Enough of the ABCs already.

Now, for the rest of the story.

B. Marketed:

Yes, the effective **Working** sites are **all** marketed, **CONTINUALLY!!!** What !!! How do you market a website? A professional knows the shortcuts, the methods, and the secrets, learned by years of experience. If the name of the game is to generate traffic, one needs to know how the Internet operates. What criteria do Search Engines, Spiders, and Crawlers utilize to find your site? These criteria are much like the secrets behind every magic trick, not often revealed by the prestidigitator, for that is their personal stock in trade. However, let us touch on just a few.

Meta-tags and keywords are the first place to start. They are chosen not only to reflect your business, but also in the type and format that make it easy for search engines to find them. Their use and choice is one of the most important factors between a true Working site and another one that is just there, Design content notwithstanding.

Banner exchanges and multiple Hyper-links are another tool available to the website professional. When, where, content, and why are all considered for use by the professional to give his site an "edge" over the plethora of similar sites out there. Again, these decisions are made only with a full working knowledge day by day of internet operation.

And, finally, the subject of Search Engine submittal. There are over 15,000 Search Engines Operating, with an actual core group of 178. Each of these has peculiar, changeable criteria that they look for. Did you ever wonder why some sites come up repeatably in the first page top ten of most popular Search Engines, and similar sites may be on page 10 or 15. The difference is largely the submittal technique. Many Webmasters submit their client's site to a few Search Engines only, and then promptly forget them. Why? It takes 2-4 hours to submit to One or Several Engines. To be effective, multiple Engines must be utilized, yes, almost all of the core 178 must be covered. And...this is **NOT** a one-time activity!!!

Meta-tags, Banners, keywords, and Search Engine submittals for the true Working site **ARE** continual!!! Simply put, they are dynamic, and NEED changing periodically to maintain their effectiveness!

C. Site Management:

This is the 3rd leg of that three-legged stool, without which the stool doesn't stand up very well. Just what is site management?

Well, 1st, the site has to be changed periodically to give it a fresh appearance to repeat visitors, with current information updated regularly. Failure to do so is similar to a worn out Billboard we have all seen, weather-beaten, with some areas deteriorated and obscured. Who pays attention to their message – no one. A website that has been last updated 2 years ago, leaves serious question marks in the viewer's mind. Are the prices current? Is this business still operating?. Etc. etc. ... planting seeds of doubt, mistrust, and lack of inherent integrity in the viewer's mind.. Life and businesses are dynamic, ever changing, and potential customers are leery of businesses that are stagnant, or so perceived by their website presence.

We have already mentioned the need to update meta-tags, banners, and engine re-submittals regularly. But on what basis is this done? By sheer luck. Absolutely **NOT**!

The professional Webmaster has put in place a statistics-generating counter that is seen by none but himself. These marvelous tools show all kinds of demographic data of the people visiting the site. For example, which engines generated the most "hits", same as to hyper-links and banners? What time and day periods are the "hits" coming from? What are the sources of the "hits"? This type data is reviewed regularly and only upon viewing patterns shown are changes made to fine-tune the site's exposure as discussed. This continual mid-course correction is what keeps the site continually on course and **Working**.

So you see, Site management is a continual process. You wouldn't buy a new car and not ever change the oil or rotate the tires, check the fluid levels, or check the air pressure. If you did, it wouldn't stay new very long, and in time could not be depended upon to provide the service for which it was purchased initially.

So too, is it with your website!

Item 3. Where Should You Put Your Website?

As an inducement to new subscribers, many ISPs are now offering to host free website space on their own servers. This is a cost effective way to get on the internet, but beware of the pitfalls. Usually the available host disk space is limited, and not sufficient for the more complex websites. Secondly, these hosts are not truly set up as host domain servers, and are quite technically limited. For example, their protocol will not accept FP extensions, Java or CGI Script. Publishing on these host servers becomes quite a bit more complicated, as they can only be accessed by FTP, (File Transfer Protocol) The main purpose of these hosts is for the neophyte business or consumer user, with a small relatively simple website.

As your needs grow, you may want to consider using the hosting services of your professional webmaster. Generally, the cost of such a site host is relatively low. \$25 - \$50 one-time set-up and \$5 - \$20 monthly, depending on disk space required. Dedicated host providers usually have a technical working

relationship with your Webmaster, which goes a long way in maintaining your site's online uninterrupted time. They also are accustomed to dealing with web techies, and their sites are capable of technical compatibility with the latest programming techniques. Further, your webmaster will have many client sites on the host provider's server, and will therefore carry a bigger stick to resolve conflicts than any one single site owner.

Item 4. Who Should do it?

If you need a site for your family or personal use, no problem with the Do-It-Yourself program. But, if the purpose of your site is to increase revenue, then by all means hire a professional full time certified webmaster. And how do you find this person, check the internet for sites similar to your thinking, contact the Webmaster, usually via E-Mail, and inquire as to their references and pricing packages. Then, **DO CHECK THEIR REFERENCES!!!** Better yet, check with your fellow businessmen, local chamber, and even competitors, and see if they can recommend anyone – personal references to a job well done is worth a thousand words of fluff!!!

Certainly, it is YOUR business, and Your Money to do with as You please. And, if you feel capable and are so inclined, and...can invest the huge amount of hours away from your business, by all means, go for it. This gets you one leg of the stool. You still need the other two legs to make it truly work and stand alone. In this case, I strongly suggest hiring a webmaster pro, for your needs are more serious than Dr. MOM can handle with a little cough medicine and Vick's.

Item 5. How Do You Get Traffic on Your Site? Change? ... How Often?

One word – constant change and updates. *Market* and *Manage* your site!!! We have touched the surface on a few techniques that pro webmasters use. It takes **ALL** of that skill and highly specialized knowledge to play in the major league – the top ten of search engines like Google, Yahoo, etc. If you want to play in the major leagues, hire a major league player, with verifiable references. As a minimum, they should have at least one client in the top ten of a major search engine. If they don't, keep looking!!! The reasoning here is that they know how to get and maintain traffic, for only a small percentage converts to customers. In Direct mail, a 0.5 - 1.0 per cent conversion is considered satisfactory. Depending on your business, a 1.0 – 4.0 per cent customer conversion return is to be expected, although bear in mind, there are no guarantees.

Just like you remember to change oil every 3,000 miles or so, your website needs its oil changed continually, usually subtle updates on a monthly basis. A Professional full-service webmaster can usually quote an affordable monthly maintenance package.

Item 6. What should all this cost?

Tough Question! Sort of like asking “What should a new car cost?” Do you want or need a KIA, a ACCURA, Ford, Buick, Olds, Caddy, Lincoln, or Lexus. Want a Hardtop Coupe, 4-door Sedan, 2-seater convertible, Pick-up truck, Van, or Suburban Type? Usually, you get what you pay for! Same with websites – the size and complexity of your site to do the job required translates simply into hours required, and then dollars.

For example, mowing a small city lot lawn may cost \$35-\$40 a week. Mowing a 3-5 acre estate may cost \$300-\$500 a week.

A simple no - frills one page sub-site on a webmaster's server can be provided for under \$100, taking about 6-10 hours to do. However, true websites created and managed by professional webmasters can range from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands, totally a function of the complexity and time required. I have included a few package price offerings of a certified professional webmaster meeting all of the criteriion established earlier, operating in the low-cost East Texas market, for comparison purposes. The same package offerings in the DFW Market would be priced 2-3 times higher.

“DOMAIN 1 “ (www.yourname.com) **\$379.95** **Monthly Maintenance \$ 39.95**

This is a true stand-alone website, with your own registered domain name. Meta tags and keywords are created and submitted to a multitude of search engines, providing maximum exposure for your site. Up to four (4) pages are included, one (1) of which may be a Poll, Survey, Forum, Guest Book, or Pricing page. Up to eight (8) pictures, either supplied by you or taken by us and processed, are included. Multiple links to your site will be provided and upgraded periodically, as well as a monthly meta tag and keyword update to maximize your site hits. In addition, text, pictures, and/or other information supplied will be updated, as well as the specialized page chosen. Three (3) Email names, including one alias, are also included One (1) customized animated feature is included.

A site of this magnitude represents about 40-50 hours effort.

“DOMAIN 2 “ (www.yourname.com) **\$579.95** **Monthly Maintenance \$ 59.95**

This website contains *all* of the features of “DOMAIN 1” above, plus the addition of the following::

1. Expanded up to seven (7) pages, with additional server memory space allocated to support them. Up to four (4) specialized pages *are* included, such as a Poll, Survey, Forum, Guest Book, and Pricing page.
2. Inclusion of counter with protected statistical reports available to you.
3. Up to ten (10) pictures are provided, including processing.
4. Five (5) active buttons are provided as website navigational tools.

A site of this magnitude represents about 60-70 hours effort.

“DOMAIN 3 “ (www.yourname.com) **\$699.95** **Monthly Maintenance \$ 74.95**

This package provides a website with most of those attention-getting features of major large company websites. Further, it is enhanced to maximize the generation of traffic via its banner exchange, meta-tag and keyword design, and submission in banner exchange programs.

This website contains *all* of the features of “DOMAIN 1” *and* “DOMAIN 2” above, plus the addition of the following::

1. Expanded up to nine (9) pages, with additional server memory space allocated to support them.
2. Music embedded into loading process for automatic play in background.
3. Buttons upgraded to dynamic color changing type.
4. Additional animation created and added to site.
5. One (1) dynamic changing banner created, added to site, and registered with major banner exchanges. This feature will substantially increase site exposure and traffic.

A site of this magnitude represents about 70-80 hours effort.

“DOMAIN 4 “ (www.yourname.com) **\$899.95** **Monthly Maintenance \$ 89.95**

This is the classical online merchant website for a small merchant with a few product categories, which includes a shopping cart, and product listing, and order page. (Online real-time credit card processing, auto order response, product data base and site search engine, password protected directory, credit card merchant account, and your own security certificate features are available at extra cost.)

This website contains *all* of the features of “DOMAIN 3” above, plus the addition of the following:

1. Additional server memory allotted.
2. Shopping cart feature included.
3. Credit card logo included.
4. Custom order form page created and added.
5. Product picture page, price list, and description included

A site of this magnitude represents about 90-110 hours effort.

If you push your pencil just a little, you will note that the above package prices include the Professional Webmaster Services at a cost of \$8 - \$10 per hour, as contrasted to the \$25 - \$40 per hour normal billing rate for professionals of this caliber of experience and training. WOW!!! What a Bargain.

Summary:

So, there you have it!! The Myths and the Truths about Website Creation, Marketing, and Maintenance. Sure, this is just an overview, without a lot of the ABC and XYZ technical acronyms, but make no mistake... A true Working Site requires the understanding and application of it all!!!

A true Working Website is not merely another expense, but a necessary form of advertising in today's business world. And,, the ROI (Return of Investment) is among the highest, recovering your investment usually within 3-4 months after your Website has been established.

So, now your choice should be very clear. Is your Internet billboard going to be like so many others, behind a clump of trees on a desolate FM Road, or ... An Attention Getting Lighted Constantly Working Updated Major Billboard on the Main Interstates of the Internet!!!

The choice is Yours. So, what are you going to do next???

Author's Note:

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