

Plan Your Web Site for Profits - Revised

Most businesses fail to plan for online success. Knowing your purpose, audience, and uniqueness are the first steps to developing a successful web site. Follow these three steps to position your web site for Internet profits.

Step 1: Determine Your Purpose

The first step in planning a web site is to determine what you want to accomplish. Do you want to sell products and services, find new customers, establish credibility, or improve customer service?

The purpose of your web site will influence its content and design. Depending on your goal, you may want to write articles to establish trust, provide a compelling sales letter, a catalog, product information, a secure online order form, and a shopping cart.

Step 2: Define Your Ideal Customers, Their Needs and Concerns

Many web sites are trying to attract everybody. Don't make this mistake. Your web site will be more profitable if you focus on the ideal prospects who are most likely to buy your products or services. Ask the following questions to find out who your ideal customers are:

- ? Who wants or needs your products or services?
- ? What is the age range, gender, profession, industry, income level, and education of your ideal customers?
- ? What are your customers' needs, wants, and concerns?
- ? What problems can you solve for your customers? What problems do your products or services solve for them?
- ? Who will be visiting your web site?
- ? What is the common denominator of your visitors?
- ? Why will they come to your site?
- ? What information do they want?
- ? Are most of your customers computer literate? What computer monitor and screen resolution do they have? What browsers do they use? Do your visitors connect to the Internet with a slow modem or a fast connection such as cable or DSL?

Target your web site's content and design directly to your ideal customers. Attract your target audience with a benefit-oriented headline. Tell right away what your web site is about and what's in it for them. If they don't read further, they were not prospects.

Make your text large for seniors. Use a conservative design for accountants. Make your design colorful for children. Avoid movies, sounds, and Flash animations if your clients have slow computers and Internet connections.

You can dramatically increase your web profits by focusing on your customers, providing information they want, and solving some of their problems.

Step 3: Demonstrate Your Uniqueness

To be successful with your web site, you must stand out from your competition.

The competition is tremendous on the Internet. How many web sites are you competing with? How do you make your site stand out from those other web sites? And more importantly, how can you get your prospects to buy from you instead of one of your competitors?

Simple, you do that by emphasizing how you're different and better. Marketers call it "USP" or "Unique Selling Proposition."

Instead of copying everyone else, separate yourself from your competition and develop a web site that distinguishes you from all the others. Focus on what makes you unique; attract your audience with a benefit that is different from everyone else's; and provide a distinct advantage or offer.

But first, determine what makes your business unique. Here are some questions to help you establish what sets you apart:

- ? Why should prospects buy from you instead of your competitors?
- ? What are the most important benefits or results your customers will get from your products or services?

- ? What do you do better than anyone else? Do you possess hard-to-find or specialized expertise?
- ? Do you offer a free consultation, initial visit, analysis, or better advice?
- ? What makes your services better, more unique, or more desirable than your competitors?
- ? Do you have the lowest prices or the highest quality products in your industry?
- ? Do you provide the fastest service, the strongest guarantee, longest hours, or better follow up?
- ? Do you keep customers informed with newsletters?
- ? Do you target a specific audience?

After determining what's unique about your products and services, you can emphasize this uniqueness on your web site and set yourself apart from your competition. Here are some ways to accomplish that:

- ? Provide your USP, benefits, and site description at the top of the page.
- ? Use words and images to make your site unique.
- ? Target your audience in your headline and first paragraph.
- ? Use benefits that appeal to your audience. Talk their language.
- ? Create a unique design. Design a custom web header and product images, such as an ebook cover or CD cover.

Give your prospects a reason to buy from you instead of a competitor's web site. Study your competition and then be different, look different, and give them benefits the others don't.

Plan your web site for profits. Determine what you want to accomplish with your web site, who your ideal audience is, and what makes your online business unique. Only after implementing these steps are you ready to start developing your web content.

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