

Ten Ways To Ensure Your Web Page Is a Failure

Gordon Woolf* combines some true conversations into this essential advice on how many businesses are catching up with the dot coms and heading for the harbour floor.

1. Check your e-mails every few days, if at all.

E-mails move around almost instantly, so take your time in answering. If one is placing an order provided you could have shipped the goods yesterday, they should have faxed it. (Don't waste bandwidth with an acknowledgement if you can't answer in detail immediately.)

2. Use an e-mail address that doesn't exist or goes to someone else.

You were going to use lots of department names like "sales@myname.com" and "info@myname.com" but someone said you had to have a catchall arrangement so we forward all those messages to Fred and he left last month. (Maybe we should find out what happens to an e-mail sent to our top salesman who went to work for our main competitor.)

3. Put the wrong address in ads or don't use it at all.

We have a great Web page on our trade association site, but it doesn't seem to bring much response. (I wonder if we updated the e-mail address when we got our own domain name.)

4. Use large graphics. They load quickly on your own computer.

We need the pictures to show detail and when the bloke who did our Web page showed us on his cinema-screen G4 Mac they were there instantly. I've never thought to clear the cache on my home machine and see how they load when it isn't on a cable connection. (Isn't it wonderful how the whole page pops into view instantly after you've waited five minutes?)

5. Be helpful with lots of links to other info - they may still exist.

All the info our customers need is out there on the Web and we tell you where it is... (or maybe where it was, last year.)

6. Keep details on the site of events that have gone - they'll be ready for next year.

It's so hard to update pages - so we leave it up to our designer, who comes in three or four times a year. (I wonder if he could show us just how to replace some text with some different text.)

7. People don't like forms.

We invite customers to click on e-mail links. They open a new message window in Outlook for us so I suppose they do the same for everyone. Perhaps we could think of having forms with buttons for indicating interest but it seems a lot of work, and my son the design expert says we should have lots more animation. (Someone did say that a form we do have brings up an error message so it has gone on the list of things to look at one day.)

8. Have a great Flash graphic on the home page and just the words "click here".

Look at all that action, with pics of everything we do. It only takes a minute or two to load and then they can click to get to our contents page. (Oh yes, of course it needs Javascript to get anywhere at all. What do you mean, 'some people disable Javascripts in their browser'?)

9. Don't include a phone or fax number or real address - this is the Web!

They'll get to us by e-mail... and we've got filters to make sure all the spam gets filtered out. (Occasionally we get a phone call from someone who said they wondered what State we were in and only had to look in three phone books.)

10. Don't include things like prices - they'll give too much info to the opposition.

If we put in prices we forget to update them - or to cut out that special offer that ended two days after the Web page went on line. (If people really want something they'll know what they cost.)

11. Lose money.

We can't really understand what all this fuss is about. Everyone loses money on Web sites so we don't apply normal accounting (or maths). The main reason we have one is because our competitors have one. Ours is bigger and brighter. (I don't believe that cheap looking Web site you run, Gordon, with all that free info, actually makes money; you can't run it on a shoestring like that; you'd better get a bank loan and do it properly, like us).

--

*Gordon Woolf is author of several books on publication production including "How to Start and Produce a Magazine or Newsletter" and "Publication Production using PageMaker". He also manages several web sites including www.worsleypress.com