

HOW SHOULD YOU UPGRADE YOUR WEBSITE? A Marketplace Primer

WEB 1.0

The ways in which the Web is being used are continually changing. A decade ago when most people had dial-up modems, web pages tended to be static, composed of paragraphs of written text and images. Visitors moved from page to page through the site using pull down menus and clicking on page links.

There are simple sites that still work well this way today. A restaurant site comes to mind. Images of food and restaurant ambience, with location directions, menus, and catering services for the most part remain a constant. Small content changes are probably best handled by the web site designer as part of a web hosting package. Many start-up companies may also want to replicate this simple approach.

What You Should Know

Such sites have limited usefulness. There is no compelling reason for visitors to return more than once. But Web 1.0 sites do offer a means to “trust and verify” information about your company, gained through other sources such as advertising, direct mail, or word of mouth.

WEB 2.0

This marks a profound departure in the way in which the Web is being used. While there is no consensus, the move from dial-up modem to broadband can be seen as ushering in a host of new web tools that have become commonplace. Web 2.0 sites may offer video clips, online chats, surveys, and meetings, product and service directories, shopping carts, feedback loops, rating systems, password protected information downloads, or links to other relevant information sources.

These more advanced sites have morphed into transport mechanisms that keep visitors returning to a single source proven to be useful, informative, or entertaining. Examples are online shopping sites or news feeds. Such sites promote information sharing, two-way communication, and collaboration. There are a number of sites that have successfully mastered the transition to Web 2.0: Apple, Amazon, or eBay come to mind. Such sites tend to set the standard for visitor experience across the Web.

For professional firms, a website should showcase your capabilities and enhance your reputation as an industry expert. Market research shows visitors look for a human element in this electronic medium. Social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter are enormously popular. There are ways to incorporate a people presence into your website that did not exist with Web 1.0.

What You Should Know

There are many ways to take advantage of these new features. But it is important to remember that each feature has a cost associated with it, based on its complexity and the time taken to build it. Properly selected, Web 2.0 features can add immeasurably to your site's effectiveness in generating repeat visitors and customers. The percentage of sales originating online is increasing rapidly across all business sectors.

Web 2.0 requires being clear about the objectives. The place to start is to determine what you wish to accomplish through your website, followed by a careful review of options to help determine cost/benefit ratios. You will need to measure both development costs (of the website designer) and internal time costs (time allotted to the development process by you or your staff). If these steps are not followed, the results can consume more time and more resources than are warranted.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

Search engines such as Google will list your site on a search results page by determining relevance. The goal of any site is always to be in the top 10 search results on the page, or "above the fold". To get there requires specific expertise on the part of a web designer to determine site assets like keywords, code, paragraphs and hyperlinks.

Optimizing your site requires an evaluation by someone experienced in SEO techniques, to remove technology obstacles from the search process and find other ways to improve rankings. Fortunately, results are easily measurable. Any company investing in SEO will have access to metrics with which to track changes measured against pre-determined goals.

What You Should Know

Not every web designer is experienced in SEO or in maximizing the potential of your website. Any performance improvement campaign should not be considered a quick fix solution, but an investment with specific long term goals such as new customer acquisition.

By applying specific techniques such as Google Analytics, you can cultivate closer relationships with site visitors. Knowing how they enter your site, the average time spent on a particular page, or how quickly they leave will enable you to better identify what is working on your website and what is not: design, content, usability, accessibility, traffic targeting. By initiating an interactive process for sign-ups, downloads, or information requests, you can begin to convert site visitors into loyal customers.

WEB 3.0

Now under development, this third generation has been described as the Intelligent Web. Current search engines such as Google, searching by key word, cannot distinguish between dissimilar meanings of the same word, or much in the way of the degree of relevance to a specific search.

Like a personal assistant, Web 3.0 will utilize unique internet profiles gathered from browsing histories to deliver content. An example of how this works can be found relevant to a site like Monster.com. Job seekers and job posters now have to winnow through myriad irrelevant entries, even after specifying several search categories such as job title and geographic area. Web 3.0 has the potential to deliver search results that are much more focused.

Web 3.0 uses artificial intelligence, natural language, machine learning, and data mining (to name a few) to conduct targeted searches with the Web as a massive knowledge database organized into a single, integrated results page. The new technologies are expected to challenge the conventional ways in which web visitors find information and will give rise to opportunistic, entirely new web-based businesses, once more challenging the status quo.

As with all technology developments, Web 3.0 will spin off new marketing mediums requiring creative adaptation that may, or may not benefit your business. The growing complexity is all the more reason to invest wisely in assessing the tools that are to prove their worth as part of a website upgrade.

What You Should Know

NetSage Marketing offers a short consulting module to better evaluate options when it comes to upgrading your current website. Proposals from web designers are often distinguished more by what they leave out than what they put in. Equipping a buyer with the knowledge to distinguish between marketplace offerings for website services and determining what is required to meet specific objectives is what we provide. Please contact us:

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