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**Building Credibility of Your Brand Online...and Stay There**

**By Johann Sebastian S.**

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In online commerce, credibility is as important to a brand as it is offline. But unlike its offline big brother, the Internet is an entirely different environment made up of bits and bytes, as opposed to physical substances. It imposes a set of constraints and imperatives for effective brand-building initiatives that evolves around leveraging and tweaking the building blocks of a website — design and content.

For starters, the nonattendance of physical element on the Internet disturbs the very nature of commerce. Consumers are deprived of their ability to feel and touch the products, interact with salespeople, and of course, get an instant idea whether the store is credible.

Let's start with a real-life example. Say, Dave walked into a jewelry store along one of Manhattan's chic district to purchase a diamond ring. As he entered the store, he surveyed its physical attributes — decoration, salesperson, products, certifications granted — to see if the store had the credibility and capability to fulfill his desire.

While it is relatively straightforward for the jeweler (and any other brick-and-mortar business, for that matter) to instantly conjure up the sense of credibility, trustworthiness, and professionalism by tweaking its physical attributes, online retailers are left to figure out how pixels beamed from an 800x600-pixel screen can be merged harmonically to reach that objective.

**Design matters**

What then, should be on a marketer's priority list to position his site along its branding objectives? Design. Yes, design. The first thing a visitor encounters upon logging on to a site is the façade, not what's in it (read: content). Out of a number of stores, how did Dave pick which one to enter in the first place? He zeroed in on one looks convincing and professional. For a moment, the long-term principle that content is king has to give way for design.

As a site's design varies to a great extent as its nature of business does, there are no sets of standards for a proper design. While a conservative nuance fits the image of a management consulting company,

it might look dull and boring for a teen–apparel site. Colors, fonts, and graphics can be mixed together in variety of ways to come up with variety of combinations.

Yet web development has spawned a set of patterns shared by sites across diverse orientations, that address the nitty–gritty of a site anatomy: design, consisting of colors, background, and images; content, which covers writing style, fonts, and company information; and usability, related to screen size and pop–up ads.

### Design

#### Colors

Just because there are hundreds of possible color blends in your image–editing software, doesn't mean you have to use them all. In general, a site's color composition is a blend between one or two base colors and their shade variations. The golden rule here is stick to colors already dominant in the industry, adding variations to convey your brand personality. Deflecting too far from the convention alters your image and spawns uncertainty about your business.

#### Background

During the early years of the Web, websites were adorned with background images. Overtime, realizing it was a distraction for users, websites ditched background image and opted for solid color instead. Nowadays, background image appears rudimentary, unprofessional, and is confined to personal websites or those of unsavory businesses.

Obviously, your background color should stem from your site's central color. To maintain readability however, go with shades that are bright yet easy on the eye, supposedly cream or white.

#### Images

Basically, images serve as an illustration and aesthetics to add more 'life' to an otherwise monotonous page. That said, unless you run an online art gallery you should use graphics sparingly, as too much of them could hamper users' browsing process and alter the personality of your brand.

For product illustration, stick with clear image taken point blank. For artistic purpose, aim for professionally developed ones that represent both aesthetics and the character of your brand.

#### Writing style

There is nothing new here. Your copy, especially of product info, should be tight, to the point, and grammatically correct, for you to deliver your message effectively. A bit of puffery and flowery lines might do well as a welcome mat, but that's about it. For a content site, break your paragraphs in two to 3 lines of text – rather than according to sub–themes – as reading on a monitor causes eyestrain. And no typos; even an occasional spelling mistake is intolerable and can taint your professionalism.

### Fonts

The size, type, and color of your fonts must be readable and fit the overall design elements. Fonts that are too big overwhelm users, while too small ones are hard to read especially by people over 40.

Fonts in too many color variations look crude and rudimentary; stay with your site's base color(s) for headlines and black for text. Verdana, Times, and Arial are the types most commonly used today, in size 2 for text and 4 for headlines.

### Company information

Providing detailed information about your company – the people, location, and contact – is compulsory to reinforce your credibility and assure users there are real business and real people behind your site. In your 'About Us' page, post concise information about your management board and financial backers,

who in charge of what, etc.

Give users the physical location of your business — real address, not P.O. Box — along with your telephone and fax number, email address, and representative who takes inquiries (this person rather not be the webmaster, but staffers of marketing department).

### Usability

#### Page length

Friends don't let friends hit 'Page Down' more than 3 times, and Web designers should remember this. For content sites lengthy pages mean long reading, which is particularly tiresome online. While the actual length doesn't change, breaking your content down to several pages unloads that burden. Better yet, provide a printer-friendly version for offline reading.

#### Horizontal scrolling

As noted by usability guru Jakob Nielsen, horizontal scrolling is one of the top ten Web usability failures in 2002. It drags down reading and makes scanning cumbersome, while implying rudimentary design and scant commitment to users' online experience.

#### Pop-up ads

Denounced as the bastard son of Internet marketing of 2002, pop-ups are going deeper down the toilet as major sites like iVillage, AOL, AskJeeves, and likely more to come, subsequently scraped pop-ups altogether last year. A real put off to online experience, pop-ups taint your brand credibility (remember X10?). A recent survey by GartnerG2 found that pop-up ads are the "most irritating," with 78.3 percent of respondents calling the ads "very annoying." Unless yours are a recognized and reputable brand name like The New York Times, stay away from pop-ups.

Of course, achieving a brand credibility that sustains overtime requires more than a good first impression. However, capturing a prospect's interest with an image you are trying to portray is a crucial step in communicating your brand and the personality it represents. And isn't that what we are aiming at?

### **Why Branding Is Vital For Your Home Business Success**

**By Mal Keenan**

Why Branding Is Vital For Your Home Business Success

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On a hot Sunday afternoon when your body fluids have been drained dry by the scorching sun, which would you rather order? Coca Cola, or Jeebejus Sweet Soda? The answer is as clear as it is universal. The more established brand would be chosen almost every time.

This is why branding is very important in building a home business. Cyberspace is fueled by information, and information travels fast. Everything on the Internet is delivered with digital speed. Competitions would sprout from out of nowhere on a daily basis. The only way to contend is by beating them to the punch when it comes to consumer recall, and this can be done through effective branding.

In building a home Internet business, much care and attention must be given to your enterprise's name. It is the means by which people would refer to it, after all. Once a name has been decided on, the next logical step would be to build on that brand and expose it to as many people as possible.

Building a brand, and consequently, building an online presence, can be as fast or as meticulously slow as you want it to be. As we've mentioned earlier, everything on cyberspace is faster, and this includes branding your home business. But you also proceed at your own pace, and in the process, giving your market the impression that you're emphasizing quality over popularity.

Here are some branding techniques you could use to help you in building a home Internet business:

- \* Always use your name. A lot of people are hesitant about online transactions. Giving them your real name would be taken as an invitation for their trust. Additionally, your name would give them something to remember you by.
- \* Article marketing can help in branding you as an expert on the subject you wrote about. And you being a representation of your enterprise, will in turn help in branding and building a home Internet business.
- \* Consider crafting a logo during the planning stages in building your business. Visual representations are sometimes easier to remember than written words.

## Building Credibility of Your Brand Online...and Stay There

\* **Build relationships.** Relationships would help you achieve a level of credibility and reliability. Additionally, those whom you have befriended would be more than willing to give a good word about you, either in private correspondences with their own network, or publicly by giving you a testimonial for your products or services.

\* **Provide bonuses and excellent after-sales services.** These value added attractions would make your clients feel special, and they would remember you well because of it. Consider this detail in building an online business.

\* **Publish your own eZine.** Having a constant medium through which your thought and your business messages can be conveyed would be a fantastic vehicle in building your brand.

These are but some of the more popular ways of branding, as utilized by veteran Internet marketers. It would serve you well if you'd follow their footsteps and give a good start in building an Internet business that would be remembered for a long, long time.

Mal Keenan can show you step-by-step how to set up and run a successful online home business. Learn the 7 essential strategies to internet marketing success. To receive your free 10 part mini-course visit:



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