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Flashy Web Site Designs are Bad for Business

By Cheryl Carnright & Joann Marsili

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FLASHY WEB SITE DESIGNS ARE BAD FOR BUSINESS

Have you heard yourself saying, "I don't understand? I have a gorgeous site, a really cutting-edge splash page with a flash introduction, up-to-date technology, I paid a small fortune for this site, and I'm getting plenty of hits but no one is buying or staying in the site."

Well, you may be one of a growing number of businesses, both large and small, who believed all the hype about the latest in new technology. Many business owners want their website to have that cutting-edge look, and so will ask for things such as animation, music, flash, and other "bells and whistles" that would be detrimental to their site. These extras are probably driving potential customers away because they increase download time and are not search engine optimized.

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In the rush to join everyone else on the Internet, businesses have ignored vital steps in the process of getting their business on-line. They assumed that because everyone else had gimmicks such as a splash/intro page, this was the right way to go. The result: businesses chose design companies who readily took their money and who designed exactly what the client wanted without clearly focusing on marketing goals. To be fair, oftentimes the graphic design company has no idea that a site designed with all the latest technology doesn't necessary translate into a site that has the functionality that an on-line business needs. This is because the graphic design firms specialize in graphic design, not in marketing. Many

graphic design sites are full of splash pages, scrolling text, animation, etc. They use these tools because it allows the graphic designers to display their creativity and their knowledge of these "bells and whistle." Creativity is good but all the latest cutting-edge technology translates into a lack of functionality to effectively market any on-line business including their on-line presence.

When having your site designed, remember that first and foremost, you are building your site to increase prospects and sales. Don't look for a graphic design firm that believes all you need to do is get in the search engines and place banners to be successful. Don't hire a designer that is new to the Internet—meaning they have years of print design experience but have just decided to expand their horizons to the Internet. Don't hire a graphic designer that doesn't have a professional copywriter or marketing person on staff and don't hire a graphic designer just because they are the cheapest. Remember, cheap can cost you money—you get what you pay for. Hire a marketing/design firm that understands the difference between form and function and can apply it in a marketing perspective. Remember, many of these latest bells and whistles are very expensive and your site may not need them to be effective.

There are several elements, that when pieced together give your on-line business proper form and function and provide you with a fighting chance of succeeding. Hand this to your designer before you begin:

INDIVIDUAL PAGE SIZE:

While every day more Internet users are signing on with DSL, satellite, or cable modems, the majority is still using dial-up access. Dial-up is the number one way people access the Internet because of one of two reasons: DSL, satellite, and cable is not available in rural areas or they cannot afford the extra costs associated with these cutting-edge technologies. What this means is that the majority of your potential customers will download pages at 3–4 KB per second versus the 0–1 KB per second with DSL, satellite, or cable modems.

What does this mean? Studies have shown that if a web page doesn't load in 8–10 seconds, you will lose 1/3 or more of your potential customers. The total size of a page should not exceed 30 KB including text, graphics, JavaScript, animations, HTML, etc. The absolute maximum recommended

download time is 30 sec over a 28.8 modem, which is 15 sec over a 56k modem. Anything longer and you've lost your potential customer.

Even though your logo, fonts, colors, images, etc. are necessary for your brand, it is important to use them in such a way as to not cause your pages to load too slowly. If the page does load too slowly, then your brand is in jeopardy because customers remember the bad far longer than they remember the good. To keep top-of-mind awareness, it is necessary to pay attention to these details as they, too, are part of your brand. Another aspect of pages loading too slowly is loss of revenue. Customers come to your site to see what you offer and they need an overall experience that will stay with them and make them want to recommend your site to others.

SPLASH PAGES/FLASH INTRODUCTIONS

Research is necessary to any business as this allows a business to track what is happening. Therefore, research has generated reports about splash pages and flash introductions. These reports have indicated that these particular pages are not popular with the buying public. They are, however, extremely popular with designers and people who want to keep up with the latest technologies. This raises the questions, "Who is buying and who will give a return on investment?" Is it the

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buying public or the designers and the people who want to keep up? Obviously, the answer is the buying public. Therefore, it is a no brainer that a web site needs functionality for the buying public's needs and not for a business owner's or designer's ego. Unfortunately, many business owners are talked into a splash page by the designer simply because it allows the designer to be creative and, of course, the extra revenue for the design company. If you have or are thinking about having a splash page for your on-line presence—DON'T. They take too long to download, they don't provide your potential customer with enough information, and there's nothing there for the search engines to spider. Remember, potential customers are in your site for one reason only and that is to see what you have to offer them, get the information they're looking for, and to potentially buy.

A flash introduction is just as bad for an on-line business. Although I love flash personally, I do find times when it's a pain and often leave the site before seeing anything else. The rule of thumb to remember is to keep the number of clicks a potential customer must make to get to

the information they are seeking is three or less. For every added click with a splash page/flash introduction, you are running the risk of losing that potential sale which decreases your return on investment.

In conclusion, it is in your best interest to avoid the use of splash pages/flash introductions. Have actual text that your customer can read and the search engines can index. If you really want to have innovative technology on your site and are willing to pay the added costs, offer it as an option. Have a hyperlink to a flash introduction on your home page that people can choose if they have the time or like flash. Another option is to create a parallel site that potential customers who covet the latest technology can access. By doing this you will see an increase in your sales and search engine traffic.

HYPERLINKS

Hyperlinks are extremely important for search engines to index your site. These are what the search engines follow to find all the pages in your site and index them. However, if it isn't a true hyperlink then some of

your site may become invisible to the search engine.

Remember use a true hyperlink. While 90% of most browsers will recognize JavaScript hyperlinks, they don't give search engines anything to follow.

A true hyperlink is:

elements, it breaks the flow of the text on a page. Although we see the page as flowing nicely, search engines do not. They see the code as unrelated fragments instead of part of a continuous sentence or paragraph. Thus, every table or frame breaks the flow of text.

Consequently, the simpler the page design, the better for your search engine ranking.

Keep in mind the following research when designing your web site and how it will function (according to Forrester Research, Inc. as posted on <http://www.quickinfo247.com/304895/FREE>).

High-quality content: 75%
Ease of Use: 66%
Quick to download: 58%
Updated frequently: 54%
Coupons and incentives: 14%
Favorite brands: 13%
Cutting-edge technology: 12%
Games: 12%
Purchasing capabilities: 11%
Customizable content: 10%
Chat & BBS: 10%
Other: 6%

This tells me that when building a web site, potential customers and repeat customers are looking for three basic elements on a site:

1. Good content.
2. Good navigation/site design.
3. Fast download time

SUMMARY

Every single design element affects your web sites

functionality and marketability—from the decision about how the navigation will work to choosing the right colors, fonts, graphics, content, HTML code, and more. These will not only influence potential customers but search engine indexing as well.

Therefore, a business plan and marketing strategy that includes the above elements for your site will increase your chances of succeeding on–line.

Are you ready to be successful?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

Cheryl Carnright and Joann Marsili have years of graphic design and marketing experience. They are the authors of a free monthly newsletter: "B2B Marketing News." Visit their site <http://www.b2bstrategicmarketing.com>.

RECOMMENDED READING

"Ice to the Eskimos. How to Market a Product Nobody Wants"
by Jon Spoelstra

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0887308511/b2bstrategicm-20>

If you need to jump–start your marketing effort, this is a great book to read and apply. Everyone will get at least one very useful idea from this book.

DOES YOUR WEBSITE WORK?

Is your website doing what you want it to do? B2B Strategic Marketing

<http://www.b2bstrategicmarketing.com/>

will give you a 5 – point free analysis of your website.

We will look at:

- design
- navigation
- copy
- coding
- marketing focus

We will give you some ideas on how we would do things Differently and also give you some free advice on what you need to do to make your site more successful.

Cheryl Carnright and Joann Marsili have years of graphic design and marketing experience. They are

the authors of a free monthly newsletter: "B2B Marketing News."

Web Designs Critique

By Nash Ville

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Criticisms, whether constructive or destructive, motivate someone to work hard on anything that he does. Before, I really get mad every time someone criticizes my assignments (especially in school) or even, my fashion statement. But now, I am more matured. I take good or bad criticisms as a challenge for me to do best in whatever endeavor I'm engaged at. I am aware that other people's comments are necessary for us to be aware of our mistakes which we usually overlook or just tend to ignore sometimes because we find our works compelling and attractive.

I agree with what the article's author has said, you learn to create good designs through the works of others only when you make an effort to actually evaluate the work and state why you think it works or doesn't work. We're all born with the same set of tools. Those tools you develop and 'grow' are the ones that you use for life - the effective ones.

Regarding the belief of one designer that "You learn a good design by looking at a bad design", this is true because we get the chance to assess that certain design and create a better design which is totally different from that design. But remember, we all have different tastes and styles. Something that appeals terrible to our eyes might be excellent to other's perspective.

I also agree with the statement of the other designer that "You learn good design through the works of others" because sometimes, especially when we're just starting in our chosen profession, we tend to copy other people's ideas and concepts in creating our own works of art. This is acceptable but we should limit ourselves to use other designers' designs as references only, not as plagiarized designs-to-be.

There's nothing wrong in giving criticisms to others or following what other people says about us. But always remember that it will still depend on us if how are we going to take these criticisms, either we follow or just ignore them. After all, we all have our own prerogatives to do what we want in our lives. We have our own principles and it's up to us if we are going to live with it. I believe that our individuality makes us unique. When it comes to web designing, it's a matter of self expression, simply showing what others don't see in you. Let's just respect others the way we respect ourselves.

For comments and questions about the article you may contact the Author at 888 888 4211 or visit <http://www.uptime.com>



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