

Oh the Tangled Webs We Weave! When We Forget What to Practice.

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By Donna Lehman

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How long has it been since the "Internet Revolution" transformed the world as we know it? Long enough that the Web is part of everyone's lives and everyone, even Grandma, has a website or two. Right? So what's happening now with these hundreds of millions of pages of content? Are we accomplishing our utopian vision? Actually, this might be a time to revisit what we think we know.

If you're under about 25, or a propellerhead of any age (and I mean that in an affectionate way - being a `geek', `nerd', or simply `someone fascinated with new technology' myself), the Internet is like the very air you breathe. For many others it's a research tool, a communication medium, a shopping mall, the news channel and even the new, improved, interactive Rand McNally of our time.

While all of these aspects of the web are cool or even fun, the real `business opportunity' of the Internet was supposed to be the ability to reach new, untapped markets more efficiently and effectively. So think about it in terms of your own business site: When visitors turn up on your homepage, what do you give them?

Haunted by "business as usual"?

This might sound familiar: your website serves up the usual assortment of company information, product and service details, executive profiles, and maybe a "news" section. It's decorated with testimonials or stock photos. Maybe there's a product demo, or some articles. Chances are it's missing real action steps, and some of it is looking a little more like cobwebs in the corner than a tightly woven web to catch customers.

It's time for a re-weave. Or you might need to start your Web from scratch - to avoid ending up on the "Websites That Suck" [<http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/>] list.

In the spirit of the season, here are the Top 5 things to do to avoid spooking your visitors:

#1 Post more than brochure-ware.

The most basic, first-line purpose of a business website is to validate the company's identity. New

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visitors ask "Who are you?" and the site tells them. Very simple. So make sure it really happens, in less than ten seconds.

After that, the average visitor gets very picky about finding what they need. Make sure you keep information succinct, simple, and easy to access. Organize information in layers. If someone wants to read your eight–page brochure, they'll ask for it, or download the PDF you hopefully placed as a link.

#2 Be more useful.

You don't need to do anything "cool" like have a long Flash animation intro to prove you're on the `bleeding edge' (how vampire–like). That was back in `99. Instead, offer something rewarding to your readers so they don't feel like you're wasting their time. Provide industry news that they might not have come across yet. Run an online poll or survey. Offer insight and helpful hints (something along the

lines of Knowbits) A great collection of links to other sites can also be very effective, plus boost your Google ranking.

#3 Make things sticky.

When you look at your web statistics, are there hundred of page views, but you haven't received one email? Who ARE all these people? You'll never meet those potential customers if you don't have action steps and a well–oiled mechanism for capturing information.

- Make it easy. Gather contact info, but don't ask questions like "how many locations do you have?" or "what's your sign?" unless it's essential to both you and the visitor. (kidding on the sign thing, except for Astrology.com)
- Make it irresistible. You're asking for valuable information. Offer something in return: A free evaluation, Starbucks gift cards, 30–day trial, a trip to Florida – get creative.
- Keep it safe. Make your privacy policy visible, not in a footnote. (You DO have one, don't you?)
- Follow up. We all want instant gratification, even if it's only a well–crafted email.

#4 Bring them back.

OK, so it's unlikely anyone will make your site their homepage. But you can get people to come back if you give them an incentive. To develop leads: publish a series of articles online. Or set up a Blog. Send email alerts when you post new content - better yet, create an RSS feed. Post survey results, best practices, Q&A with your experts. Hold webinars for potential customers or paying participants. Deliver ongoing project information online. Set up an extranet. The details depend on your particular business, but you can probably do more.

#5 Keep it fresh.

"Oh, just leave it up. Something is better than nothing. Nobody will notice." Old stuff might fool some of the people some of the time. But for the most important readers - return visitors - out–of–date content can be a red flag. At best it says you're not paying attention; at worst it says there's something seriously wrong with your company. So stay up late once in a while and post new information. Or hire someone who will.

Creating and maintaining a website isn't rocket science any more. But like most useful things, it does take careful thinking, tinkering, and rethinking to get maximum marketing power from the Web.

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By the way, MarketUP falls into the camp of 'those who stay up all night working on their website', and on some of our clients' sites too. Sure beats howling at the moon.

Just for fun – other tangled webs:

'Engineering a Spider' [

http://www.isa.org/NVTemplate.cfm?Section=News_and_Views&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=38472]

When we practice to deceive. [http://sisu.typepad.com/sisu/2004/08/oh_what_tangled_9.html]

This month's headline - "Oh, the tangled webs we weave, When we practice to deceive." is attributable to Sir Walter Scott, Scottish romantic novelist, from "Marmion"

<http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/14174.html>

1997 Presentation by Peter Magnusson - with Internet evolution and forward projections. Interesting.

<http://www.sics.se/~psm/ar97/sld011.htm>

If you have a question or topic you would like to see in Knowbits, write to Donna Lehman:
dlehman@market-up.com

Winter Dog Agility Training

By Brad Carlson

Yes, its cold outside, but don't stop your dog's agility training. Depending on where you live, there might be snow on the ground from November through March, but thats no reason to give up your agility training. Bring your training indoors, right at your own home.

Get creative with your training locations. Do you have a hallway, basement, or garage? Then you have a place to train! Before it snows and your equipment is frozen to the ground, store some in your garage, shed, basement, or put a tarp over it. Bring in one piece of equipment at a time, and begin your indoor training.

We do a lot of indoor training with a Pause Table. In fact, we keep one in our living room for both obedience training and agility training all the time. The Pause Table is a great obstacle for developing your obedience behaviors and teaching agility directional commands

Don't forget to work on your contacts. It's easy by having a Contact Trainer indoors. A 3–Piece Contact Trainer offers you versatility; you have an A–frame side, the Pause Table, and a Dog–walk plank. Practicing your two feet on and two feet off is convenient and quick when you have indoor contacts, only a few minutes a day to steady your dog's behavior.

Indoor jumping must be approached carefully. If you don't have indoor matting, don't jump. You don't want your dog jumping on concrete or wood floors. But you can use the uprights or posts to practice

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your handling. Use your Sit–stay or Down–stay and practice your lines or dogs path with no jump bars.

Weaves can be practice indoors. Are you training with a weave–chute or straight line weaves? Five minutes a day of weave training through out the winter will have your dog weaving smoothly by springtime. You can practice weave entries and weave sends or weave recalls.

There is also a variety of mini agility equipment that can be purchased, and don't require the same space as standard equipment. There are mini–teeters, mini–dog walks, and mini–A–frames. These are great obstacles for puppy training or indoor winter training.

So, during the cold winter months, don't give up on your agility training. Whether you are starting a young pup, working a novice dog, or an experienced titled dog there is always something that you can do indoors with your agility training.

Brad Carlson is a dog trainer at Agility by Carlson. For more training details, visit our website at



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