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The Smart Web Site: Navigating the 7 Red Flags

By Scott Smith

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"The Smart Web Site - Navigating The Field Of 7 Red Flags"

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Figuring out what makes a smart, profitable Web site is a process of elimination. Look around at what's out there on the Web. Take a very close look at your competitors by inputting your key words into a search engine. You will be amazed by what you find.

There are certainly sites that are great, and full of good ideas that you can take and make your own. But the majority could use a good housecleaning.

Let's define a smart Web site by first identifying the various red flags. Get rid of these problem areas, and the smart Web site is revealed.

There are 7 main reasons why Web sites fail in their basic structure, even before they begin to market their presence to customers. People will visit Web sites for 3 primary reasons: to find information, to be entertained, or to make a purchase. Listed here are the roadblocks that get in their way.

1. Red Flag #1– Contact Information Is Difficult To Find

(Somewhere, deep beneath some hidden link lurks the contact information. You know it is there, because nobody would be so stupid as to leave this crucial part out. Would they..?)

Knock this red flag down by putting your contact information on the home page, and adding links between pages within your site. Include name, phone, fax, email, and surface mail address prominently. Show visitors clearly on your home page how to place an order with you. Make it easy for them.

2. Red Flag #2– Not User–Oriented

("How about giving visitors really useless information about something I find "cute," or that really tickles my personal funny bone? What if I bury the content I've advertised — the material my potential visitors are hungry to find — beneath layers of my exceptional personality? After all, this is my Web site. Isn't it all about ME?")

The truth of the matter is that visitors to your site are totally self-centered. They are looking for what they can gain for themselves, and they want it NOW. Give it to them first, beginning with the home page, or they will be gone in a click and they won't be back, ever.

Right away you must give them an up-front reason to stick around, and

to get lost in your site. Tell them to BOOKMARK your site. Demonstrate in your writing and graphics that they have arrived at their dream site, filled with benefits for them, about them, answering their specific and important needs. PS: Tell them about "YOU" later.

3. Red Flag #3– Too Difficult To Navigate

("This site best viewed through Netscape Navigator version 18.c– download a copy now — only 18,000k, so smoke 'em if you got 'em because it'll be awhile — bye for now, but then come on back so you can proceed. By the way, we've modeled this site after a rat maze, because our feeling is the more intellectually challenged you are, the greater appreciation you will have for our fabulous content– IF you can find it, because there are a ton of links taking you away from here to other sites all the heck over cyberspace...")

This red flag flaps very loudly indeed. Here are 4 simple rules to observe:

- Everything you offer visitors should be no more than 2 clicks away.
- Your sales information is never more than 1 click away.
- Prominent links at the top of pages get higher click-through rates than those buried deep within.
- Organize your site like your favorite magazine cover. The cover equals the home page; the articles headlined are all your other pages. Just like you when you read a magazine, not every article/Web page will have the same appeal for a visitor. Provoke their response with a headline, 'forcing' them to click and take a look inside.

4. Red Flag #4– Too Many Bells And Whistles

("Less is more? Says who? We're on the leading edge, so we go for titanic graphics; really dark screen colors to separate us from all those other sites; 3D, textured backgrounds for the sake of interest (just don't try to read our pages); frames, just because we can; lots of jiggling java and other "cool stuff," at least a dozen a screen... And sound — just download the extension! So you connect at 14.4 kbps — so

what? We're worth the wait!")

Definitely not. Until the online world has across-the-board access to high speed modems, and everyone uses the very same browser you do, it's best to follow these 7 basics:

- Keep it simple.
- Try to keep each page size under 30k, and never over 40k.
- Use a solid background on text-heavy pages (white is best).
- Test. Connect through a 14.4 kbps modem to learn how long it really takes to load.
- Don't put graphics at the top of your page, because they take longer to load. Place them beneath a benefit-laden headline and the opening salvo of your text.
- Don't put banners at the top of your page. If you do use them, place them 2/3 of the way down, and

then only on the RIGHT HAND side of your page. Studies show this right justification increases their click-through rate significantly.

– Choose to use frames, java, Shockwave, Active X and all the other bells and whistles with the knowledge that a significant percentage of your customers can't use them (yet). In fact, these technical fireworks can cause their systems to crash. Not a good advertisement for your offerings, wouldn't you agree?

5. Red Flag #5– The "Un" Site: Never Finished, Never Updated

("Under construction -- see my wee little logo saying so? But I'm telling you, one of these days it's going to be great. Really! You won't believe what you'll be able to get here, but you'll have to come back when we're done, so bookmark now.")

Forget it. The online world functions through instant gratification. Nobody will bookmark your unfinished site. By the same token, if you don't revitalize your site often through updating and enhancing information, you will be out of the race.

Your Web site is "organic", an asset that grows, and even a simple change can make a difference. Cyberwave, an excellent marketing site, prominently places the current month and year at the top of their home page. Very smart, because it states that they are totally up-to-the-minute, offering you the latest marketing information available.

Never announce your site to the search engines before it is finished, because you will let down a lot of potential customers who will likely never return -- a total waste of your time and money.

6. Red Flag #6– Lack Of Interactivity; No Way To Communicate With Customers

("We're the phone company. We don't care — we don't have to." – Lily Tomlin)

But everyone else does. Customer response can make your success on the Internet, and you will find as you deal with people online that the personal touch and going the extra mile for someone can make a huge difference.

Encourage interactivity. Give people every reason to visit your site, and capture their information when they arrive. At a minimum, you must get their email address. Best of all, get their complete contact information — those who supply their address and phone number are your very best prospects for a business relationship.

Here are a few suggestions for building an interactive web site:

- Develop an email newsletter or ezine
- Offer to discount an Internet purchase
- Offer frequent purchase bonuses
- Give away FREE information or products

- Make product announcements
- Offer prize giveaways and contests
- Supply cool things and links to cool places
- Offer games
- Generate a discussion group

- Develop and offer a searchable database

In exchange for each of these processes, you receive contact information. But you should do even more. Find out what you can about your growing customer base, and the effectiveness of your web site.

Create a Guest Sign-In Book, and give something for signing it in return.

Provide an Information Request form, in which you ask respondents: "What are the top 3 things our business can do to meet your needs?"

Provide a Feedback Form, asking customers these basic questions: "How am I doing?" or "If I could

offer you one more service/item, it would be."

The list goes on. Electronic Order Forms, Customer Satisfaction Forms and more, all of which give visitors to your site the tools they need to interact with you. The more back and forth access you provide between potential customers and you, the more successful your Web site will be.

7. Red Flag #7– No Sales Message

("Well, folks, that's what we offer here. Not much, but thanks for stopping in. Bye–bye.")

Wait! The average person is confronted by 1000's of advertisements daily. Surely people have already grown "comfortably numb." So shake them out of their stupor.

If you don't ask for the order, you will not get it. Ask politely for their order now ell them to place their order right away/DEMAND they send you their money immediately VERY LOUDLY, and MORE THAN ONCE. Make sure they hear you, and you can count on this: a certain percentage will respond.

Take away these seven red flags, and you are on your way to standing head and shoulders above the majority of the online crowd. You will have revealed the 3 basic ingredients of all outstanding Web sites:

1. Your Web Site Is Now Customer–Based
2. Your Web Site Now Lives Up To the Promise Of Its PR
3. Your Web Site Is Now Easy To Access For Visitors, And For You

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Visitors navigating directly = Higher conversions

By Wildfire Marketing Group Content Development Team

A study was recently released showing that visitors navigating directly to a web site resulted in almost twice the conversion ratio of those using search engines to arrive there (4.23% compared to 2.3%). Internet traffic generated from other sources such as text links or online advertising converted at less

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than 1% (.96%).

To make the best use of this information as business owners let's start with how visitors can navigate directly to a web site — there are really only two ways: By typing your web site address into the address bar of their browser By using a bookmark that they have previously saved In order for someone to arrive at your web site in one of these two ways, they will have to be reached through some other means first, such as face-to-face sales calls, networking, direct mail postcards or some other form of marketing. Therefore, be sure to include your URL on all of your marketing materials, stationary and company literature. There is something more tangible about being able to hold a brochure, business card or postcard in your hand and type the address into your browser. It creates a higher degree of trust by showing that you really are more than just a web site.

Now we'll look at the lower converting traffic from search engines, links and online advertising. Although it will offer a lower conversion ratio when compared to visitors navigating directly to your web site, it's still a valuable resource and can also serve as the first contact that someone has with your company so that their next return can be through direct navigation. You should include a mix of SEO and online advertising to improve the effectiveness of your overall marketing campaign.

Wildfire Marketing Group is an

specializing in helping businesses like

yours to compete against larger companies and win! If you're ready for your business to grow like wildfire, give us a call.



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