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online ideas



The sins of website design

Avoid these design missteps and reap the rewards

Is your website driving away customers? If you're committing these site development sins, it could be costing you more than you know.

Being cluttered. Your site can't be all things to all people, says Drew Ungvarsky, founder of Grow Interactive, an interactive studio in Norfolk, Va. Be selective about the content you decide to put on the site and organize it in a clean and logical manner. "A lot of people try to put too much, especially on their home pages, and cram more down their customers' throats," he says.

Making things difficult. The route from first click to sale has to be easy. Ungvarsky says it's important to think like customers and prospects when evaluating the design of a site. One of his pet peeves: Having to set up an account before checking out. Let customers buy from you on their terms, he says.

Staying static. Your website is never done, he says. Keep finding ways to engage your customers, add content and make your site fresh. This will help keep customers interested and may also help in your web rankings, he says. If you're promoting a specific product or service or have a special promotion going on, it's a good idea to use landing pages that support e-mail and social networking outreach efforts.

Copying your competition. Always check out what your competition is doing, but don't be a copycat, advises Steve Graceffa, president of ExNihilo, a web services firm in Providence, R.I. If you look too much like other businesses, customers could have trouble telling you apart. Review

what others are doing, but speak to your own customers and use your own institutional knowledge to determine what is important to them.

Ignoring your audience's needs. Try getting baby boomers to read eight-point type and they may get frustrated. Be sure you understand your audience and its preferences before you build your site. Tiny or hard-to-read typefaces or harsh colors may look great from a design standpoint, but if you're not designing for the people who buy from you, you could be losing their business, Graceffa says.

Eschewing analytics. Review the analytics of any sites you have before you begin designing a new one, Graceffa says. Know your bounce rate—the number of people who leave the site after viewing only one or two pages—your top entrance page and your top exit page. Google Analytics will help you understand where your traffic is coming from, what keywords people are using to find you and what they're reading on your site. That way, Graceffa says, you can build more of what's working.

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