

Or, ten ways to keep your sanity during your website development

Your website is one of the most effective and cost-effective marketing tools at your disposal.

Done right it can build your brand, spread the word, educate your prospects and even take them through the sales process. Or, alternatively, it can be a static, poorly produced online brochure that is easily ignored. Which are you going to choose?

When you look for a web development company, your first thought is probably to check their portfolio for sites that are professional looking and creative. Okay, I'll concede that's a good start, but it's even more important to team up with a web developer who understands internet marketing and can play an active role in creating an effective, responsive site.

You can tell a lot by looking at their past projects. For each one, ask yourself the following questions ...

- 1) **Objectives.** Is there a clear objective? Can you tell what end result (response) they were trying to achieve?
- 2) **Site map.** Has the site map been designed to lead visitors through a complete sales message? Are there enough pages to provide each prospect group with the right information, divided into logical, manageable sections?
- 3) **Navigation.** Does it feature user-friendly navigation that provides easy access to all the information, without overwhelming?
- 4) **Page design.** Does the page design make it easy to find, and follow, a compelling sales message? If the graphics overwhelm the message (unless the graphics truly *are* the message, for instance with art), the prospect won't search, and they certainly won't scan down the page for it.

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- 5) **Call to Action.** Is the contact information prominent and near the top of the page? Is there a solid call to action; and plenty of opportunities to respond?
- 6) **Social media integration.** Is there an obvious tie-in with social media?
- 7) **Content.** Does the site contain fresh content and opportunities for interaction, such a blog or a forum?

Then, once you have satisfied yourself that their portfolio sites have been designed and built strategically, talk to them...

- 8) **Branding.** Do they want to see your other promotional materials so that they can maintain consistency with your visual brand?
- 9) **Ease of updating.** Do they talk about the importance of fresh content to your web marketing success? Can they make recommendations on platforms such as wordpress or joomla that allow you to add new content yourself?
- 10) **Search engine optimization.** Perhaps most importantly, make sure your web company understands SEO. Ask questions about keywords, tags and descriptions; about SEO friendly features; about optimizing your site map – and make sure that your web company appreciates the importance of built-in, on-page SEO.

Oh, actually, it's not ten...

- 11) **An ability to listen.** This is a tough one, as it's hard to be sure until you start working together. But it is crucial to your emotional well-being that you find a web builder who understands what you want to achieve; who is willing to follow your instructions; and who will search out solutions when they don't have the answers to hand. If possible, ask for a mock-up before you pay anything - if it bears no relation to your brief, turn around and quietly back away.

Finally, and I may get myself into trouble here with the web building community, but when you find a company with the expertise to create a truly effective site for you, make sure you tie them down to a firm timeline, and then add at least a month. There are so

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many factors in the web development process that there are nearly always delays or technical challenges. It may not your web developer's fault, it's just the way it seems to be.

The take-away here is that, as with any marketing activities, your new website should be designed to generate a response. Creativity is very important, but never more important than strategic planning and response-driven design.

About Wendy Zak

Wendy is a freelance direct response copywriter and internet marketing specialist.

She helps growing companies build a powerful, responsive presence online. Her experience in direct response copywriting and strategic planning give her a unique edge when it comes to planning and executing an effective, integrated web marketing program:

- **Website strategic development, and project management**
- **Direct response copywriting**
- **Search engine marketing consultancy**

In other words, Wendy can take the guesswork out of developing your strategy and planning your website; she writes web copy designed to keep people clicking through your site, reading and responding; and she can manage your web development process, working with the web builder to ensure that the final product is strategically designed to achieve your specified objectives.

Call **403-279-3606** to talk about your strategic web marketing needs, or email wendy@wordsbywendy.ca