

5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Website Design Success

The Five Guiding Principles

If you're thinking about approaching a new website design project for your company, it's hard to know where to focus your energy. Many prospective clients come to us after having looked at our portfolio and admiring the "look and feel" of our website designs. But after a few minutes on the phone, we help them understand that a great looking design, in and of itself, will not make a website successful. Website design, though critically important, is only a single factor you'll need to consider when approaching your project and choosing the firm to help you. True ROI, is the result of many factors which all need to be prioritized based on your business, budget and goals.



We have a short list of five guiding principles to evaluate whether a website will truly be effective and ultimately successful:

CREDIBILITY • VISIBILITY • USABILITY • FUNCTIONALITY • PROFITABILITY

Not only are these five principles a good place to start when doing preliminary research for your web design project, they're important to consider as you evaluate web design firms. Any one of these factors without the others will not be optimal. You'll need to address each one to ensure new opportunities and increased business revenue. Be sure the firm you choose addresses each one and cares about them all.

CREDIBILITY



Why should people trust you?

With millions of websites online today, people are generally skeptical and savvy when they review a company's online presence. So what can you do to convince people to trust your business message? And how can you establish professional credibility through your website?

LOOK AND FEEL. The best place to start is with your website's look and feel. A professionally designed website is the gateway to getting a potential customer to stick around and explore your business offering. If your site is disorganized or confusing, you run the risk that your potential customers will navigate away from your website soon after they arrive, without taking the time to learn about your business.

CONTENT. Beyond the look and feel, a successful website offers strong communication and messaging, along with an engaging "voice" that your audience can relate to. Think about the impression you want to make for your brand and your business. Do you want to be approachable and conversational, or do you want to be "all business"? Do you want to sound innovative and cutting-edge, or should the voice be more traditional and stable? Content is the substance of your website and it is why people have landed on your page.

TRUST. Other credibility factors come from showing visitors proof that you can be trusted. But if you merely tell them they should trust you, they never will. Testimonials, staff bios, certifications/affiliations, community outreach, partnerships, a portfolio of your work, thought leadership articles, a helpful blog – all these are ways to show visitors that you're trustworthy, that you know your industry and that you're an expert.

VISIBILITY



If new customers aren't finding you online, they're finding your competition.

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is to judge websites only by their aesthetic design. No matter how beautiful a website is, if no one can find it, it does you no good. It's like spending \$20,000 on a glossy brochure and then locking it in a cabinet. Without an effective strategy for making your online presence visible to your customers, your site will be doomed to fail. Here are some strategies to consider:

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION. Does the web design firm you're working with have SEO expertise and an SEO strategy for your website? Being (and staying) at the top of search results for your products and services is key to the success of your website.

KEYWORD RESEARCH. Done effectively, keyword research is one of the first tasks your web design firm needs to complete in order to find out what kinds of queries your customers use. A good website designer will determine how effective those keywords are and how those keywords will be worked into both your site structure (navigation) and content strategy, both during and after your website build.

ADDITIONAL METHODS FOR IMPROVING VISIBILITY. Other ways to gain exposure for your website are through social media marketing, e-mail marketing, blogging, inbound marketing and paid search. These approaches help keep your business message current and relevant, and can help build loyalty and generate additional business opportunities.

USABILITY



Don't make them think; make them react.

Making your site aesthetically appealing and on top of search won't cut it if visitors can't find the information they need – quickly and effortlessly. This is why the most successful websites are generally characterized by ease of use. Usability factors include:

INTUITIVE SITE NAVIGATION. Your navigation is the roadmap to your content. A clear, organized and intuitive navigation can help provide an optimal user experience.

STYLE AND LAYOUT. Beyond graphics, color palette and layouts, an effective website should be organized and laid out in a way that users can quickly find what they need. Especially if your site is largely informational, you'll want a website design company that knows how to style content for optimal usability. Examples include header styles, a copy hierarchy and choosing appropriate fonts and line spacing.

RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN. With more than 50% of all website traffic now coming from mobile devices and Google including mobile-friendliness in its algorithm for search rankings on mobile search, you may need a site that seamlessly adjusts to all screen sizes. Make sure your designer is current on responsive web design standards.

QUICK LOAD TIMES. Online customers want information now. That's why site performance is vitally important. Your website designer should be able to help you balance a desire for high-resolution images with the need for quick load times.

CLEAR CALLS TO ACTION. Your website should tell your visitors what to do next without being pushy or condescending. Look at competitive websites' calls to action to determine what works and what doesn't – and then make sure your own website copy and design is at least as good as theirs. Ask your website designer what resources they have for improving copy and making it actionable.

FUNCTIONALITY

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Make it easy.

An effective website has interactive features that make it come alive. On the other hand, bells and whistles without a purpose can make your site confusing and distracting. Good website design balances several factors, including customer behavior, business goals and budget restrictions.

FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS. A good website designer should have extensive experience in designing and integrating functional elements, which are optional and frequently interactive aspects that provide specific information or improve the user experience. Two functional elements almost every business website should provide are a responsive web design (to optimize the viewing experience on any device) and a contact form so customers can get in touch with you. Depending on the nature of your business, other functional elements may include:

- Map and directions
- Filter and search tools
- Photo/image galleries
- Event and registration management
- Slideshow or carousel images
- E-commerce functions
- Catalog management
- Catalog management
- Dynamic site features (basically, anything that moves on your pages)
- Video libraries
- Blogs
- APIs [Application Programming Interfaces] such as MLS listings, Google Map and leased content

PROFITABILITY

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The best salesperson you never hired.

When clients come to us frustrated by their existing website, it's usually because their website simply doesn't advance their business goals. If your website doesn't make you money or save you money, it's not doing its job.

Your website should be an around-the-clock salesperson, working tirelessly to bring in sales, build brand awareness, develop leads and create business opportunities. Check with your website designer to find out their capabilities and suggestions for tracking website use and success.

WHAT COMES NEXT? Choosing a website design firm should be a careful decision based on detailed research and discussion. The firm you choose should understand the goals of your website, be able to show you similar successful websites they designed, and have a plan in place for measuring the success of your website. In selecting a website design company, remember to consider all of the above guidelines. A website designer that can address these five principles will greatly increase the likelihood that your redesigned website will provide a positive return on your website design investment.

SMART DESIGN. SERIOUS RESULTS

Lasso Up is a web design, development and inbound marketing firm focused on digital marketing solutions that are effective, compelling and that drive financial results. If you need help with your internet marketing strategy, we're here to help.

GET IN TOUCH

