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HOSPITALS HEALTHY
IN SICKLY ECONOMY

How to Create a Recession-Resistant Website

BY KRISTI STANGELAND

The new reports are bleak. The economic forecast suggests at least another year or two of living in this down market. Homeowners are suffering. Unemployment is rising. Small businesses are holding their breath in anticipation of what will hit the fan next. Forget expansion. The question is how much can we cut and get away with it?

In times like these, it's tempting to make the same mistake countless other business owners make: maintaining the status quo of your website. But according to John Quelch of the Harvard Business School, "In a recession, consumers become value oriented. But a downturn is no time to stop spending on marketing." What do Quelch and other marketing experts recommend? Making adjustments so you spend more wisely and most effectively.

Ignoring your website can be a devastating mistake. Your site works 24/7/365 for you without fail to promote your business and/or make sales while you tend to other tasks. In most cases, the operating costs of a website are far less than an employee's salary. Also, promoting via the Web is much less expensive than broadcast or print advertising. Fact is, in a recession, your website is the one form of marketing you can't afford to do without.

Does that mean you should simply let it ride? Certainly not! You'll actually want to give a little added attention to your site to ensure it's up to par. Here are seven tips for making your website recession resistant. You'll notice that none takes an enormous amount of time or money to accomplish, but all practically guarantee positive results.

1. Review Brand/Product/Service Positioning

Considering the current (and projected) economy, are your products and services (and the branding that backs them) in the best position possible?

John Foligno, president for Cubism Group, advises, "Now more than ever, evolving your

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brand's products or services is crucial to meet your clients' changing needs. In today's difficult economy, it's just as important to update your website to reflect these new offerings. This will increase the likelihood that prospects will not only find you but also sense your relatedness to what they're going through."

Tweak corporate/product-branding strategies to better reflect your desire to support your customers through this challenging time.

2. Adjust Copy

Just because you aren't adding or changing product/service offerings doesn't mean copy should remain static. Take a moment to reflect on your current copy. Does it still sound relevant in the current climate? Are there ways you can adjust the copy to portray a clearer message of value and trust to your clients?

In this day and age, customers want to know you're able to deliver. Does your copy provide proof of performance? I'm not just talking testimonials, but verifiable evidence that your products/services made a positive impact on the customers who used them. Does your copy make it easy for customers to choose you over

every other option available to them?

3. Refresh Graphics/Images

Jerry Froehlich, graphic designer with Froehlich Bonini Design, gives some sage advice, "Make sure you back up your message with appropriate graphics and that the image/images/help to support your words." How cohesive would it be to have slick, flashy images on the same page with copy that speaks to the value and longevity of your products/services?

4. Use E-mail to Increase Sales

Some estimates state that it takes seven points of contact before a new client buys from you. In strained economic times, it may take more exposure than that. This is where the good old standby, e-mail, comes into play. This economical and fast medium lets you stay in touch with new customers as well as refresh existing, but perhaps dormant, relationships with previous customers.

5. Give Away Something for Free

Offer visitors to your site something of value free in exchange for their contact information.

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With the explosion of social media and online PR, it has become critical for businesses of all sizes to effectively manage their online reputations. This begins with a relevant and current website which positively reflects a company's brand.

A detailed white paper, a free report or a series of tips or tactics for improving their businesses/lives can go a long way to developing strong relationships with site visitors. Once they've opted in to your e-mail list, continue to prove your worth by offering great advice along with offers rather than just bombarding list members with sales messages.

6. Get Social

Stacey Cohen, president of Co-Communications, Inc., offers some timely advice about social media. "With the explosion of social media and online PR, it has become critical for busi-

nesses of all sizes to effectively manage their online reputations. This begins with a relevant and current website which positively reflects a company's brand. It is counterproductive to embark on a social media campaign or a PR initiative until the website is fit."

Don't just jump into social media blindly. Take time to firm up your website, so it will support your social media efforts.

7. Optimize for the Search Engines

Is your website already optimized for the search engines? If not, it's not too late to start. Obtaining organic search rankings is something that

will pay off now and in the future. But don't delay. Depending on how competitive your industry is, it may take a while to secure good positioning.

If you've already reached the top of the organic ladder, do some additional keyword research. Have you missed any opportunities to reach customers through new keywords? Adding a few new pages to your site can open the doors for new, highly targeted clients to find your site via the engines.

Whether you take a course, attend a seminar or hire a professional to make these changes to your site, it will certainly pay off in higher conversion rates... that's the name of the game. Because, after all, a site that converts more visitors into buyers is priceless in any economy.



Kristi Stangeland is president of Mustang Web Designs, a White Plains-based web design firm. Start harnessing the full power of the Internet for your business today when you visit www.mustangwebdesigns.com.