

Website Development Strategy Before Marketing

by Dan Shaw

Before you market your products and services through your website in any really substantive way there are a number of preliminary steps that when followed will help assure you of a good return on your investment. This brief article gives the broadest overview of the process of website strategy development so that you can see the steps in a way that allows you to prioritize before you begin, and to continually re-evaluate.

Website development strategy is unique for every client. Some initial guidelines can be given to further initial strategy planning. Key to planning website strategy is integration of the web into the existing business plan. What part of the plan is based on internet? What part on services and/ or products? What part of your target market is local and what part is national? Your web master needs to know a good deal about what direction and how you want to grow your business.

To choose among the infinite universe of website marketing possibilities, one must do a thorough self-evaluation, and also an evaluation of potential profitability of various products or services. I have written several simple, brief articles for my websites clients, including "A Self-Evaluation Questionnaire" and "Comparing Potential Profitability" which you can read at:

<http://ashlandindex.com/websites/>

and fill in the blanks. These articles are designed to help you make better decisions about your website business. I am a New Paradigm business, so I am giving you the tools to do it yourself to any degree you choose.

Having a clear idea of the many possible items for sale *and markets*, then one can prioritize where to begin. A thorough evaluation of the existing website, if any, is called for before marketing. See "Website Analysis". If you do not already have a website, also read "Getting a website built for cheap". Search engines are just one obvious avenue of website marketing which must be seen in the context of a wholistic approach, as elaborated below.

Before marketing a website to the world, we need to be sure our design meets certain basic standards, including; that the html code is current and validates, the structure does not impede the search engines, the order form is secure and professional, the file names and images are handled properly, and that your site hosting bandwidth is sufficient, to name a few. We must also be confident that the content and structure move toward the sale and not away. Traffic reports should be reviewed to see the pattern of traffic, entry page, exit page, number of pages viewed, etc.

As an example, I've just remodeled punkfolkbanjo.com, a music website for Jack Chernos. Is the main purpose of the website to sell CD's or gigs? Only the musician can decide. In this case, the answer is neither. Jack's site is really not-for-profit. Before marketing his site, we restructured the page navigation; renamed pages, images and sound files to rank better in the search engines;

improved his ordering page; added metatags; added more keywords to the content; and added a links page. His traffic reports show that his essays act as entry pages for many search results so we improved those. Since this was an existing site, it's already indexed by Google and it will automatically get re-indexed. If it were built from scratch with the search engines in mind, that might be even better. Jack added his site to a folk music WebRing to increase cross-linking traffic.

Think that now you're ready to begin marketing your website on the world wide web? Not yet. First you would be well advised to "pick the low hanging fruit", and do the obvious, cheap, quick and simple ideas in "How to make more money on the web", like having your domain name on stickers, rubber stamp, window signs, bumper stickers, products, receipts, brochures and everything that goes out your door. Since I'm a New Paradigm business, I don't stop at websites. I'll suggest anything I think will support your business. Jack Chernos took my advice to better market himself at his gigs, and redesigned his business card and put his domain name on his guitar case.

At least one more step is vital to successful website development strategy, and it must also be set in place before you begin marketing. That vital step is the procedure for ongoing and rapid feedback and evaluation of your strategy. The minute you implement a new marketing campaign, you have just begun. You've got to watch the response carefully in as close to real-time as you can, to take full advantage of the web, to test and adjust, until you find the most effective strategy for you.

For the purposes of a small business with a modest internet marketing budget, search engine submission is a matter of basic "due diligence" of about 3 - 5 hours of submitting to the handful of major search engines.

To see how it's done, read "Submitting to Search Engines". Beware of anyone with a piece of software who'll charge you a bundle to submit your name to thousands of search engines; these are of course thousands that nobody has ever heard of, or worse yet, "link farms" blackballed by Google and other search engines.

Submitting to search engines is one part of an internet marketing strategy, but by no means is it the only part, or even the most important part. Other elements that are at least equally important to consider are also touched upon in the "Search Engines" article, including reciprocal links, dmoz.org, blogs, etc.

Again, the most important part of the strategy is your business plan. The tactics must develop from your mission statement and respond impromptu to the environment dynamically.

So, you've got a well-designed website, commerce-ready, and you've done all the preliminary steps outlined above, now what? Now it's time to look at marketing campaigns. Go back to the "Comparing Potential Profitability" chart. Have you listed every possible stream of income, broken out each individual target market, and figured the potential costs and profits of each? Even if you only have one product to sell, this chart will help you choose where to begin

marketing. *Marketing Warfare* by Ries, and Lao Tzu say, choose a narrow enough "campaign" to have "penetration" in your "field". In search engine terms, this means "Organic Pet Vitamins" is a much more powerful choice than "Vitamins" because you'll have a better chance of reaching more buyers who are looking for your product specifically, since there are an overwhelming number of vitamin buyers and suppliers.

The main part of this article deals with website development for marketing, but there are other profits to be reaped from your website in the form of reduced costs. Here a few questions worth considering: Are you printing and mailing costly newsletters or catalogs? Do you require patients or clients to fill out paperwork that could be completed online before they arrive? Could you use your website server as a way to backup and share data securely among staff and between home and office? Would a "Frequently Asked Questions" page (such as with driving map) save you time? These are just a few of the ways beyond sales and marketing that a closer integration of your business plan and your website plan can increase your profits and better support your business mission.

It bears saying that a marketing strategy must not be solely an internet marketing strategy. The internet strategy must be integrated into the overall marketing strategy. Often in-person marketing at workshops, gigs, tradeshow, etc., are the most powerful drivers of traffic to a website and the site must fully support follow-through for these purposes. The website must meet many diverse goals, including not only various target markets, but also humans v. search engines, open area and members only area, etc.

Given that the steps above are followed, then your investment in website marketing will be well spent. The evaluation and prioritization of your many, many tasks, and the ability to manage many details and parallel projects are essential parts of the developing your comprehensive website strategy. I hope this article has been helpful to that end, and that you will contact me if I can be of service to you in the future.

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