

Site unseen?

Frequently asked questions about websites and SEO **Interviewed by Matt McClellan**

When people are curious about a company or product, the first thing they often will do is visit the website. So more often than not, your website is going to be the first impression your company will make to a prospective customer or business contact.

“Your website is a strategic marketing tool, just like an advertisement, press release or brochure,” says Jonathan Ebenstein, the managing director of Skoda Minotti’s Marketing Services Group. “It must fit into the overall marketing strategy you have established for your company. It should be charged with accomplishing specific pre-determined marketing goals and objectives and communicate a consistent message that is tied to your brand.”

Smart Business spoke with Ebenstein about how to optimize your company’s home on the Internet.



Jonathan Ebenstein
Managing director
Skoda Minotti Marketing Services

What kind of website do I need?

There are three main types of websites: basic information sites, lead generation sites and e-commerce sites.

The information site today is what the company brochure was 20 years ago. It functions as an online brochure that supports your off-line marketing efforts. That is the bare minimum today; you need a well-designed site that gives site visitors the information they need in an intuitive fashion. If that’s all you’re looking for, that’s OK, as long as it fits in with your overall strategic marketing goals and objectives.

The next step up is a lead generating site. Lead generation sites are unlike information sites because you want them to generate leads and business opportunities on their own. You want people to not only find the site while they are browsing on the Internet; you want them to feel compelled to contact you so you are set up to make a sale.

An e-commerce website can be a combination of a lead generation and information site, but added to the equation is the ability to purchase products and services online. After finding the site and viewing the content, the visitor is compelled to click to make a purchase. Those can be very profitable sites and an integral part of a marketing plan.

How do I know if my website needs to be re-designed?

When people are curious about a company or looking for a supplier, the first thing

they will often do is visit its website. You need to ask yourself: ‘Does my site properly introduce my company?’ Does the site give visitors the perception that you are a leader in your service or your industry? If the answer is ‘no’ or ‘I’m not sure,’ you should probably consider a redesign.

Think about how prepared you are for a first meeting with a prospective customer. You have your brochure with you, you have your best suit on, your shirt is pressed — you look good because you want to make a great impression, and you want to be prepared to discuss the needs of that individual and how your company can meet those needs.

Your website is no different. It too has to be able to do that for you, because more often than not, it’s the first impression people are getting from your company.

How do I evaluate a website developer?

There are a lot of people out there with different price points for the same type of website. It’s not just about looks and cost. Your website is a strategic marketing tool, and it needs to fit into your overall marketing strategy. It needs to be charged with accomplishing specific predetermined marketing goals and objectives, and communicate a consistent message that is tied

to your overall brand and marketing. The Web developer needs to understand that.

If you agree to that philosophy, it’s important that you partner with a Web design firm who is accomplished not only in designing and programming websites, but is also a strategic thinker. The ‘jack of all trades’ developer can sometimes get you into trouble. Your Web developer needs to be accomplished in all aspects of website design and development (i.e., project management, design, content development, programming, search engine optimization, etc.). And, they need to be a strategic marketer so they can tie what needs to be done from a website standpoint into your company’s overall strategic marketing plans, goals and objectives.

Is there an easy way to make frequent updates to a site?

Five plus years ago, you had to go back to the developer if you wanted to make any changes to your website. Now, sites are built with content management systems (CMS), an administrative software system that allows users with little to no knowledge of web programming languages to create and manage the site’s content. So, if you want to add a picture, new copy or a new link, you, as the owner of the site, can make those administrative changes without taking on additional charges by going to an outside vendor or consultant. So make sure your website is built with CMS.

What is search engine optimization (SEO) and why is it so important?

SEO is the process of improving the visibility of a website or a Web page through its structuring so that search engines, such as Google or Bing, can find, read and index them in the most effective manner. When done properly, SEO makes your website and its content attractive, relevant and visible to search engines and Web searchers. In short, it will help folks find you or your company. A good way to think about it would be if you decided to build a beautiful new house out in some rural part of the country, but you didn’t build any roads to get there. How would your friends and family come to visit you? SEO creates the road to your website. <<

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