

[Having A Website Is Not A Web Strategy](#)

"I have a website, now what? I really don't understand what my website should be doing for me." This statement, from a successful manufacturing company owner, was made during a recent "Introduction to Web Marketing" seminar held by The Net Impact. "I know it's up there and I'm proud of it I guess, but what is your website supposed to do for you?" This comment caused a lot of conversation in the room and opened the floodgates to similar comments.

"I have a website." another business owner said, "I just don't know if its bringing me leads or not." Another person joined in with, "I seem to be slipping in the rankings as well and I'm not doing anything different. I think this is affecting my lead flow. What can I do about it?"

How many firms have the same questions? From this encounter and similar concerns raised in other seminars, I would have to say quite a few. Most firms we see at our seminars have a website that is three to five years old. Many times this is a second or even third generation site that replaced an older or original site. Interestingly enough, the most often cited reasons for these "next generation" website efforts usually have nothing to do with marketing! Business owners in many cases dramatically change their website or build it all over again mainly because of a change in their core business or because they simply don't like their old site. With the notable exception of e-commerce sites, sales and lead flow had little to do with their reasons for the creation of a new site or their selection of the web development firm that produced it.

Website cost vs. website return on investment

Many businesses are mistakenly more concerned about the "cost" in building their new site than they are in how they will maximize their ROI from the site after it's online. The reason behind this is pretty basic. It is almost always easier to control a checking account than it is to develop an effective revenue strategy. Thankfully this, "I got a deal." approach to evaluating the value of a website has been changing to, "I made a good investment." Increasingly firms are understanding that their website should perform, it should generate revenue and thus be considered a business expense rather than simply a one-time outlay of capital.

Over the past two years we have increasingly heard concerns about a site's marketing impact, lead flow and search engine placement. Why? The old standby methods of generating business and their primary approach to advertising for many of these firms; direct mail, print media and yellow pages ads, are rising in cost while at the same time they decline in effectiveness. Business owners now more than ever realize that their website holds great potential and performance is a necessity. Yet most firms simply put, have a website and are now realizing they need a web strategy! We see this changing environment regularly in our seminars. The main questions business owners ask us as they start to re-evaluate their web approach are:

- 1) What is my website supposed to be doing for me?
- 2) How can I tell if it is doing this (in example: providing leads)?
- 3) What needs to be in place to measure results?
- 4) What efforts are required to improve performance?
- 5) How do I determine my return on the investment I have made in my site?

These are all great and common questions that reflect symptoms of not having identified a strong web strategy. In these next few posts we will address these questions starting with, "What is my website supposed to be doing for me?" This leads us into a discussion of differing web strategies.

Determining your "Web Strategy"

Deciding the desired functionality for your website and thus the major part of your web strategy can be challenging. There can be an irresistible urge to "keep up with the Joneses". Some firms create sites that are way over the top and overly developed way beyond what are really their genuine online business requirements. Like office space, an elaborate and expensive website is not always a guarantee of success. We urge clients not to let corporate ego or peer pressure determine their approach to the web. At the same time, without advance planning and market awareness, an underdeveloped site will cost you business and stature. As in most strategic planning, it is best to start with the end in mind.

What do you want your website to do? Not really that tough a question, the tougher question is how to accomplish that.

Today we will start with a most basic use for your site:

Is your web strategy fairly simple? Do you just need your website to reinforce your business card?

You are of course aware that after an introduction at a conference or frequently even prior to a sales call, many prospects will call up your website to learn more about you and your organization. If your business is face-to-face, your approach is personal and your market local, then your website may need to do no more than provide a source of information supportive to the "elevator pitch" you just delivered to that new acquaintance or prospect from the conference or other chance meeting. A site built for this purpose should be simple and informative but also should be authoritative for the decision maker you are about to approach with an idea or service.

If this describes your business, then following these guidelines may be enough.

- * Keep the information simple - viewers want information about you and your services. They will go elsewhere for the weather, time, entertainment, inspirational messages or stock quotes. Give them exactly what they want.

- * Keep the design basic - no one wants to see marching monkeys, flashing pictures or burning logos. Just because your developer can do something clever, is not a good reason to do that something clever.

- * Keep the site current - information must be accurate and up-to-date. As importantly, feature your contact information, phone number included, prominently on the site. Don't make prospects dig deep to find out how to talk to you. Also, it is very inexpensive, even free, to have an email service provider on board to provide that important stan@stantheexpert vs. stantheexpert@hotmail or other less impressive email address. And for all of our sakes, watch it with cutesy email addresses. You really don't want to be remembered as ladiesman@yahoo or something similarly distracting do you?

- * Make sure your site works - How does your site look in Firefox, IE7, Safari or on an iPhone? Do your links work? Is your "contact us" form in good working order? Simple, up-to-date and functional are the basics.

- * Don't be afraid to be authoritative - are you an expert? Tell us! Publish this on your site. "What do you know and how will it help me?" is a question that needs to be answered for a viewer.

- * Use web analytics tools - even a simple site should be measured for effectiveness. What pages do viewers visit? How long are they on the site? Where do they come from? All good things to know.

This simple, user-friendly, authority site need not be overly expensive. If you stay local and do not need the search engines to bring traffic to your site, you can make periodic changes to the site as needed for very little expense.

So, let's put this strategy to the five question test above.

1) What is my website supposed to be doing for me?

In this basic case, represent my business in a professional and authoritative manner for prospects and partners who check us out online! Provide easy to find contact information.

2) How can I tell if it is doing this (in example: show credibility)?

Be proud of your site! Ask clients and prospects if they have seen your site. Did they find the information useful? Make your site the springboard for a face-to-face description of products and services.

3) What needs to be in place to measure results?

A simple web analytics tool like Google Analytics can be quickly installed for free. Though far from perfect, it will give you general information about your traffic and visitors. It also has great help screens.

4) What efforts are required to improve performance?

In this case, very little. Make sure your information is accurate and up-to-date. Keep articles and information on services topical and current.

5) How do I determine the return on my website investment?

It is hard to totally evaluate the return in this case on a minimal web investment since you are not trying to generate leads just as it is complicated to determine the cost of not having a website. Prospects and partners want to find out about your business online. The site then should give you peace of mind that your firm, regardless of size, is well represented online for referrals, prospects and recruiting. Use your online information as a springboard for launching into a sales meeting.

In this most basic web strategy, follow the steps we discussed above and your website will represent you in the simple, professional and authoritative manner you really need in order to support your face to face client meetings and close those sales!

About the Author

Steve Thomas is President of The Net Impact, a [Web Design Firm](#) and writes regularly on SEO, Web Development and Internet marketing related topics. He can be contacted at stthomas@thenetimpact.com.

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