

Website redesign

By Jared Davis CPF, GCF

Why do you need a website?

- **A level playing field** – The Internet has become “the great equalizer” when it comes to websites, because even the smallest business can “look as good” as the biggest business.
- **Your online brochure** – A website is an important tool for any business. It is effectively your online “brochure.” At the very least, a website should offer an overview of the products and services offered by your business and how your customers can do business with you.
- **Your biggest advertisement** – Your website should be considered as potentially the biggest ad you will ever create – your online “billboard”! So don’t underestimate the power of your website as a marketing tool. No other tool can potentially offer you more exposure for more time, and when you compare the costs of developing and maintaining a website, it is not that much compared to other sources of ongoing marketing and advertising. A newspaper or TV ad lasts only a moment, but a website can be there indefinitely.
- **More important than the Yellow Pages?** – Fifteen years ago, a Yellow Pages ad was a “must” for any business. However, in this day and age, having a website is becoming even more important than having a Yellow Pages ad. If you have a Yellow Pages ad, make sure your website address is prominent.



What is the goal of your website?

For our industry, a website has either of two goals:

1. To get the customer to visit your store.
2. To sell them a product online (e-commerce).

Targeting your market

Before we start, we need to understand what type of market (customers) we are trying to attract. Each of us has a different type of business with a different type of customer. This is largely determined by our product, our service and our location.

Define your market – remember 80 percent of your business comes from 20 percent of your customers. Who are they, where are they from, what are their similarities and what do they want? What is your demographic?

- What sex are they?
- What age are they?
- What is their income?
- What is their lifestyle?
- Where do they live?
- How computer literate are they?

Studies show that upper income shoppers use an Internet search more than anything else. They also have more money to spend.

Designing your website

- **Get a professional** – When it comes to constructing a website for your business, don’t “do it yourself.” Get a professional to do it.

- **“But I can’t afford that!”** – And most business owners like you will also be thinking, “There’s no way I can afford to spend money on an expensive website.” Firstly, it doesn’t need to be expensive. Secondly, how can you afford not to? Yes, it’s true. Websites cost money. But it can also be far more expensive not to have one.

Website essentials

Following is a list of what I consider “website essentials.” It is amazing how many websites fail to provide this type of critical information about their businesses.

- **Layout** – The layout of a good website should be:
 - professional
 - organized
 - logical
 Scattered links are just messy and hard to navigate. It must be user-friendly. A good website makes it easy to navigate and locate information.
- **About Us** – In my opinion, this page is critical. In our industries, “people buy off people.” Everyone loves “a story” so tell a small story about how your business started, and really sell the “personal” side of your business with photos of yourself and your staff. Remember – this is something “the big guys” can’t offer.
- **Contact Us** – Your customer needs to know how to contact you and how to find you. You need to have your hours of operation, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and street address listed. You need to have this information listed on every page or, at the least, a “contact us” link with this information on every page. The best sites also provide a simple map with directions, and don’t forget to include helpful instructions regarding parking. This will go a long way.
- **Frequently Asked Questions** – We all answer “frequent” questions on a daily basis when running our businesses, so why not write them down and list them on your website for reference?



10 tips for designing your website

1. **First impressions count** – “You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.” Because websites are often a customer’s “first impression” of a company, make sure you “make an impression.” Consider your business carefully and think about the most impressive aspects of it for your clients. This may take some time. Is it your store, is it the work you do, or is it you? Whatever is the most impressive part of your business – this is what you want your potential customers to see first! By focusing on this, you will make your website memorable!
2. **Keep it simple** – A website doesn’t have to be elaborate to be effective. Many people tend to overdo it when it comes to creating a website, especially if their cousin with an IT degree is creating it, and he wants to show off by using fancy elements and gimmicks. Effective websites are always simple and not confusing for the first-time visitor. Avoid pop-ups and giant rollover text boxes. Keep it clean, keep it uncluttered and just keep it straightforward.
3. **Branding your image** – Reinforce your identity. If you don’t have one, you really need a professional business logo, and then display it clearly on every page. A matching color theme is also advisable.
4. **Pictures are more important than words** – When it comes to a website, pictures and images are vital. Scrapbooking is a very visual medium – more pictures, less words.
5. **Show ideas!** – Your customers will appreciate “finished product” ideas, so show applications on how your products can be used, not just the products themselves. People like to think they are creative, but most are not – they are just “copiers” – so give them some stimulating ideas that they can copy and then call their own! Inspire your customers and create a “desire” for your product.
6. **Emphasize your specialties** – What does your business specialize in? What do you do better than others? Make sure you find a way to highlight this in your overall Web design.
7. **Comfort** – Make the customer feel comfortable coming into your shop by showing pictures of inside your

shop, including your displays, your counter and your staff. If they have already seen images of how your shop looks and are partially familiar with your store, they will feel “less foreign” and more at ease when they do finally come in to do business.

8. **Avoid “Impressive Flashy Splash” pages** – These are just a frustrating waste of time for the consumer and merely an egotistical “show-off” tool for a website developer. Of course, a good website should be visually stimulating, but it should also convey your marketing message as quickly and concisely as possible. If you really want to waste money and frustrate your customers, throw up a “flashy” splash page.
9. **Fonts** – Don’t choose fonts that are too fancy or hard to read. Keep it simple. Also, don’t choose distractive backgrounds; if there is text involved, make sure there is high contrast between the text and background to make it easy to read.
10. **E-commerce** – Is an online shopping cart really important to your business? It is a lot more work to create and develop than a website and is for potentially a very small market – so think about this before you jump in and commit to creating it. Is it really going to be worth your while? Who will be your competition online? If online shopping is such a big market, then why do customers still walk through your door and buy products in person? Exactly – online shopping is NOT a big market.

When you commit to an online shopping cart, you also commit to keeping your website extremely up-to-date, which will devour a lot more of your time. So make sure your shopping cart will pull in the extra business to justify this.

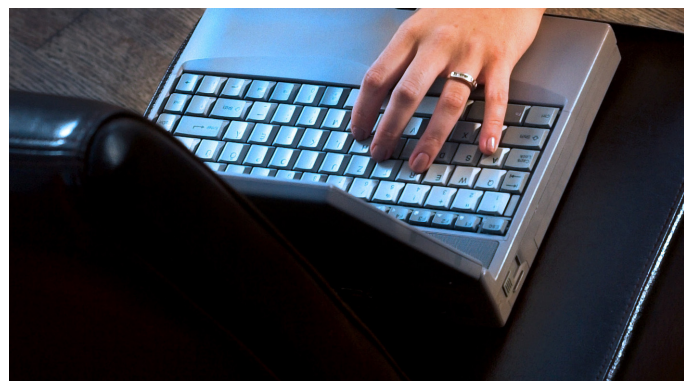
Unlike books and DVDs, we are selling an emotional product that requires a personal touch and experience; thus, I believe our products are not suited to online shopping. Furthermore, online shopping mainly attracts unemotional “price shoppers,” who, unless you are the cheapest, are probably the customers you don’t really want anyway. Unless you are selling something really unique and “hard to get,” e-commerce may be just a long-shot for your business. If you are not going to do something properly, then maybe it’s best not to do it at all.

Getting customers to visit your website again

- **Regular updates** – Regular updates are really key to getting people to keep coming back. Keeping it fresh with new images and features every month is essential. Providing new and different ideas for your clients will keep them coming back. For example, a “Featured Product” section could be updated monthly.
- **Seasonal promotions** – We can theme our promotions by focusing on upcoming holiday themes such as Christmas, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, National Scrapbooking Day, etc.
- **Printable “gift vouchers”** – Gift vouchers with very short expiration dates are another idea for encouraging and rewarding customers to visit your website regularly.
- **Provide useful resources** – By offering your customers useful resources available on your website, they are more inclined to add your website to their favorites for future reference and return visits.

Useful references can be things such as:

- **“How to” guides**
 - How to design a page
 - How to journal
 - How to take great photos
- **Useful links**
 - Product links
 - Upcoming classes calendar
 - Forum links



Hosting your website

- **Don't do it yourself** – Instead of investing in your own server and broadband access, just host your website at one of the hundreds of major online hosting sites like www.web.com. Most Internet Service Providers (ISPs) offer a website hosting service as well. If you "Google" for "website hosting," you will find thousands of affordable choices.

Promoting your website

- **Now you have a website – use it!** "Build it and they will come" does not apply to websites (or, in fact, anything) anymore. You need to promote it. Once you have a website, it is only effective if people know about it! So tell them. Make sure you promote it on everything you can – signage, stationery (invoices, business cards, brochures, etc.), advertising and your Yellow Pages listing.
- **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** – Getting your website to be found easily by Web surfers requires quite a bit of detailed knowledge and a bit of effort for fairly minimal results.

The most effective ways to optimize your website's chances of "being found" are:

1. **Page title tags** – These are critical, so think carefully about using the best words to describe both your business and what you do or offer in the page title.
2. **Headings** – Your page headings are also important.
3. **Submitting your site with major search engines** – The fastest way to get your website "on the books" with the index of a search engine.
4. **Building up hyperlinks** – The more links you have to your Web page from other websites, the more popular a search engine "thinks" it is, and the more likely it will be at the top of a search list.

Summary

A website is an essential resource all businesses can benefit from. The Internet has now proven that it is not just "a fad," and it is not going away. Make sure you get your fair share of exposure on the Internet, and make sure it truly represents what you want your customers to perceive about your business because as we all know – "perception is reality!"



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Davis travels the world regularly giving seminars at conventions. His previous sales and marketing experience gives him an understanding of the opportunities for retailers and offers an up-to-date approach on new methods and techniques now required by business owners to be able to successfully market, merchandise and sell their services to consumers. Davis, a product manager for Megawood Mouldings in Australia and an international sales consultant for Gunnar International, can be contacted at j.davis@gunnar-international.com.



Prepared by the Professional Scrapbook Retailers Organization™

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