

11 Basic Steps to Get Your Website to Work for You

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As a business person you know you need a website. Done. Check it off your list of must-dos. But wait, did you know you should update your website, regularly, check for broken links, use correct meta tags, and do several other “housekeeping” items to keep your website working well? Here are 11 basic steps to check off your list of website must-dos:

1) Make sure your site looks good on all browsers. Use different browsers to access your website. Browsers are like interpreters. Let’s say you have a document you need translated into another language. If you give the same document to three people, each person’s translation might be ever so slightly different. Browsers work the same way. If they interpret the website code differently, your site may look great on Firefox and look very different on Internet Explorer. So make sure your site looks great across different platforms and systems.

2) Keep your content current and pertinent. An updated site makes your site look fresh, more attractive to prospective customers and gives them reasons to return. Plus, your search engine rankings are higher when the site is current. So here are some things to do to keep your site updated:

a) Make sure all links go to where they’re supposed to. Links to websites don’t last forever, so at least once a month you should click on every link and ensure it’s still working. If it’s not, fix or delete it. If a potential client tries a link and it fails, it could give that person a negative opinion of your site, and bye-bye business!

b) Insert new content frequently. You don’t have to rewrite a page/website each time. If you simply change the wording, or even a graphic element or two, your site will continue to look fresh and stay at the top of search engines’ lists. Adding a new page also is a great idea. But make sure what you add is relevant to your site and your subject matter.

3) Make sure your site has been submitted to search engines and directories. Do you really want to be a well-kept secret? Sometimes the search engines and directories find you, but it is better to tell them your website is there. Think of it as a first date. By submitting your website, you are letting search engines and directories get to know who you are and what you’re about. First dates don’t have to be expensive, either. There are free submission sites that will introduce your site to several engines at once. There also are sites that will do it for a minimal fee. Be sure to also submit to sites that are local or within your industry.

a) When submitting, use meta tags and make sure they’re correct. A meta tag is the information about the website page that search engines and directories use to help index your site. The most basic meta tags are your site’s title, description and

keywords. Make sure you have meta tags for each website page, and make sure they're spelled the way you intend and are customized for that specific page. Improper spelling could mean a would-be customer misses your page because he spelled the keyword right and you didn't.

b) Make your site is spider-friendly. We don't mean those (sometimes) cute little arachnids. We mean software that "crawls" down your website to collect information on your pages. If not all of your pages are showing up on searches, then you're probably not spider-friendly, and your friendly neighborhood web designer can resolve this.

4) Identify your target market and design your website to fit it. Someone advertising football-related items or services should not have a website whose primary color scheme is pink and flowery. Similarly, the words you use should reflect your target market, so a football site would have words such as "linebacker," "touchdown" and "quarterback." It would not have words such as "roses," "frilly" and "dainty." Remember to write your content to your target market. Use words your target market would use and understand, and you might find customers and potential clients staying on your website longer, which means they are finding out more about you which in turn could help your bottom line.

5) Identify your keywords and repeat them. What you choose as keywords (descriptive words/phrases) depends on what descriptive words you think/know your customers will put into search engines to find you. There are tools online to help you with this process and pick which words/phrases you should use. Another useful method is to see what your successful competition is going after. Remember, include these keywords in your meta tags as well as your content. If you target a geographical area, make sure those cities within the area are also keywords.

6) Get referrals. If your business has a retail supplier, ask if you could be placed on their site as a trusted partner or preferred vendor. That way you get additional exposure. Put a link to their site on your website. This will give them one more avenue to sell their products or services. It's a win/win situation. Also, ask clients if they would put you on their site as a trusted person.

7) Get reviews of your site from friends that will tell you the "truth." Everybody has trusted friends or business associates. Why not use them? Have these people look over your site and provide feedback. Be sure to cross gender, age and generational lines because everybody will see your site a little differently, and their comments and suggestions could provide insights you weren't aware of, which can lead to new business if you take that information and run with it.

8) Check your competitors' sites. They invariably have different ideas, and one or more of them might give you an idea of how to improve your site. But be careful not to just copy their idea verbatim. You don't want to be seen as unoriginal or be sued for plagiarism.

9) Let Google do the work. Google offers a free service called Google Analytics. It generates detailed statistics about visits to your website, such as tracking visitors from search engines. It also can tell you which pages are most popular and what's not working, which will help you target your market. Without Google Analytics, you can't tell what kind of activity your site is getting.

10) Use alt text. This one has been mentioned so many times by others, yet web designers and developers still fail to heed it. "Alt text" is words (usually one sentence) that describe something on your website, such as a photo or graphic element. Putting alt text on your images allows search engines and disabled users to make better use of your site.

11) Include a call to action. So visitors are on your site, but they're not calling you. It could be because you aren't telling them to. It might seem silly, but many would-be customers need their hands held through the entire process, so make sure that, at least at the bottom of each page, you tell them to contact you. And make it creative. Everybody has "Click here" or "Contact me" but most don't have "Call us to find out what the IRS isn't telling you", or "This can be yours if the price is right."

These are only a few of the steps that will help you maintain a website that is relevant, search engine-friendly and will get your clients to ultimately contact you. To discover what else can be done to improve your online presence, contact Warren Schultz at warren@tapsolutions.net or call him at 818-281-7628.