

Website Essentials: Too Often Forgotten!

By Julie Ellenberger

Because all of us spend so much time on the Internet today when looking for a particular good or service, comprehensive, well-put together websites have become integral to a company's ability to garner new clients and satisfy current customers with the information and tools that they need and expect. In fact, an effective website may be the largest source of credibility that businesses today tend to forget to develop and maintain at their fullest potential.

Meredith Courtney, Director of Marketing at Bates Communications, Inc., a strategic consulting firm specializing in leadership development in communication skills (www.bates-communications.com), explains the important role that their website has played in the growth of Bates' business: "Aside from our president's book and referrals, our website is the #1 way potential clients find us. We frequently get calls from potential clients saying they found us on the web and now want to work with us."

What then could you be doing to get the most out of *your* website? Here are five essentials, helpful reminders that many of us know but often forget when it comes to building and sustaining a valuable website:

1. The initial impression makes all the difference

If you haven't changed the look of your website in a few years, it's probably time! The first thing that current or potential clients see when they visit your site is extremely important. Those sites that seem to work best are those that exhibit a high level of professionalism immediately and are easy to navigate (usually with a vertical and/or horizontal bar of links with more quick links at the very bottom of the page). Further, nothing is easier and more pleasing to the visitor than if all of the links and information that they need is right there on the home page without having to search.

2. Post your published materials

One of the most significant ways to increase your credibility, one that not



Julie Ellenberger is an editor/scribe with emerson consulting group inc., which transforms companies and business experts into "thought leaders." Contact her at 978-371-0442 or inq@thoughtleading.com or by visiting www.thoughtleading.com.

enough businesses and individuals take advantage of, is posting copies of published articles or excerpts from books that they have written. Far too often, these articles are nowhere to be found on websites; and even if the individuals associated with that site are published authors, those visiting the site will most likely never know.

"Companies and business people often post 'white papers' on websites, meaning that they haven't been published anywhere except that website," explains Ken Lizotte, Chief Imaginative Officer of emerson consulting group, specialists in transforming its client companies and individuals into "thought leaders." (www.thoughtleading.com).

“Therefore, when an article does get published, it offers a lot more credibility because of the implicit ‘endorsement’ from a third party, such as a journal or major e-letter. So make sure your website visitors know this.”

3. Keep it simple: make the key resources visible

But be careful: with all of this potential information to post, it would be easy for your site to become overwhelming to the viewer especially if poorly organized. Once these articles and other materials and links are posted, make sure that they are easily accessible, not hidden away in a confusing web from which the visitor will never be able to escape. Jack Maguire, Chairman and Founder of Maguire Associates, a research-based consulting firm serving educational institutions, believes that his firm’s website is effective for this very reason. “It’s functional,” he says, “not overly flashy.”

4. Leverage your connections

A fourth great way to build business credibility is by including customer testimonials throughout your site. These add a lot by showing the work that you’ve already done through the words of your satisfied customers. Also, under client listings or any other business partners listed on your site, make sure that you link to these others’ sites and that they are linked to yours as well, if possible. This one simple step could help increase traffic, enable you to obtain new clients who wouldn’t have found you otherwise, and even raise credibility by linking to a well-known client or partner (such as Amazon). When you do post links, however, make sure to regularly check them in case any have gone inactive.

5. Update, update, update!

Once you have your good-looking site in place with all of your important (and published!) content, this does not mean that your work is done. If your site is not up-to-date with the most recent news and information in your area of expertise, this can deeply affect your credibility in the eyes of your clients, prospects and colleagues.

Most importantly, always give people reasons to come back to your site again and again. Think about how you can more effectively keep your clients updated on your work, your published articles, your special events, and any awards you may have received. With such liveliness and attention to detail, your site too can be one day listed among the greats.