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DIGITAL MARKETING

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Top Design and Usability Considerations for Your New Website

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Introduction

It's hard enough to direct traffic to your website, but you get visitors in the virtual door, they need to **stay** there. It depends on the industry, but most websites have a 30-60% bounce rate on average. This means a large majority of web traffic entering your website leaves *without* navigating to any other pages. And many times they may never come back. Yikes! Here are some tips you need to consider to improve user experience and decrease your bounce rate.

The First Impression

Your website represents who you are and what you offer.

When people see it for the first time they're thinking:

*   Is this site credible?

*   Is it trustworthy?

*   Is this a professional company?

*   Is this company stable?

*   Does this site make me feel welcome?

*   Am I in the right place?

You need to ask yourself all of these questions when designing your website. Now, design may not be the most important factor in a website overall and often-times folks put too much emphasis on how a site *looks* instead of it *works*, but it does play an important role in making a good first impression.

For example, an in-depth study from the Stanford University and Consumer Web Watch, "**How Do People Evaluate A Website's Credibility? Results from a Large Study**," found that a website's design was more important than credibility indicators such having a privacy policy, awards or certifications.

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Tips for Great Web Design

- **Proper use of colors:** Use the right colors for your audience and to draw attention to select elements. Don't try to make everything jump out. The result will be just the opposite – nothing will stand out. Avoid a chaotic mix of colors on your website and instead pick two to four colors for your template and marketing materials.

- **Animations, gadgets and media:** *Avoid anything unnecessary.* Using Flash animations because they look cool is the wrong strategy. In most cases it's best **not** to use animated background or background music. Only use media and animations to help support content and information.

- **Layout:** Create a clear navigation structure (refer to Navigation on page 7) and organize page elements in a grid fashion (as opposed to randomly scattered). Also, don't be afraid of white space and avoid clutter!

- **Typography:** Make sure your website is legible. Use fonts, font sizes and font colors that are easy to read. For easier page scanning, use bullet lists, section headers, and short paragraphs. If your site is English language-based, make sure information flows from left to right and top to bottom.

While design is important, don't forget that offering great content is what your visitors are ultimately after. A well-designed website might convince visitors to take a closer look but they won't look twice if the content isn't useful and well organized. After all, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

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Maintain Consistency

It's best to keep elements on your site fairly consistent from page-to-page. Elements include colors, sizes, layout and placement of those elements. Your site needs to have a good flow from page to page. This means colors are primarily the same as well as fonts and layout structure. Navigation should remain in the same location of your layout throughout your website.

For layout structure, typically three page layouts exist for most websites: one for the homepage, one for content pages and one for form pages. For example, your homepage will have a different layout than a landing page for a PPC campaign. Keep the elements in these layouts constant. This will help keep your visitors from feeling lost.

Using the Right Images

Images can be a powerful element to any website but you need to use them wisely. For example, consider stock photography. Stock images are seen everywhere because they are easily accessible and inexpensive. But are they good to use? Marketing Experiments performed a test comparing the use of stock photography verses real imagery on a website and each of their effects on lead generation. What they found was that photos of real people outperformed the stock photos by 95%. Why? Because stock images tend to be irrelevant. Resist the temptation to use photos of fake smiling business people!

As a result, take care to place meaningful images on your site. Every image is transmitting a subconscious message to your audience and sometimes the result is different from what might expect. We recommend looking into another study by Marketing Experiments "Images vs. Copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29%."

Navigation

Perhaps one of the biggest factors to keep visitors on your website is having a good, solid navigation system that supports all search preferences. In fact, more than three-quarters of survey respondents from a recent HubSpot study say that the most important element in website design is ease in finding information.
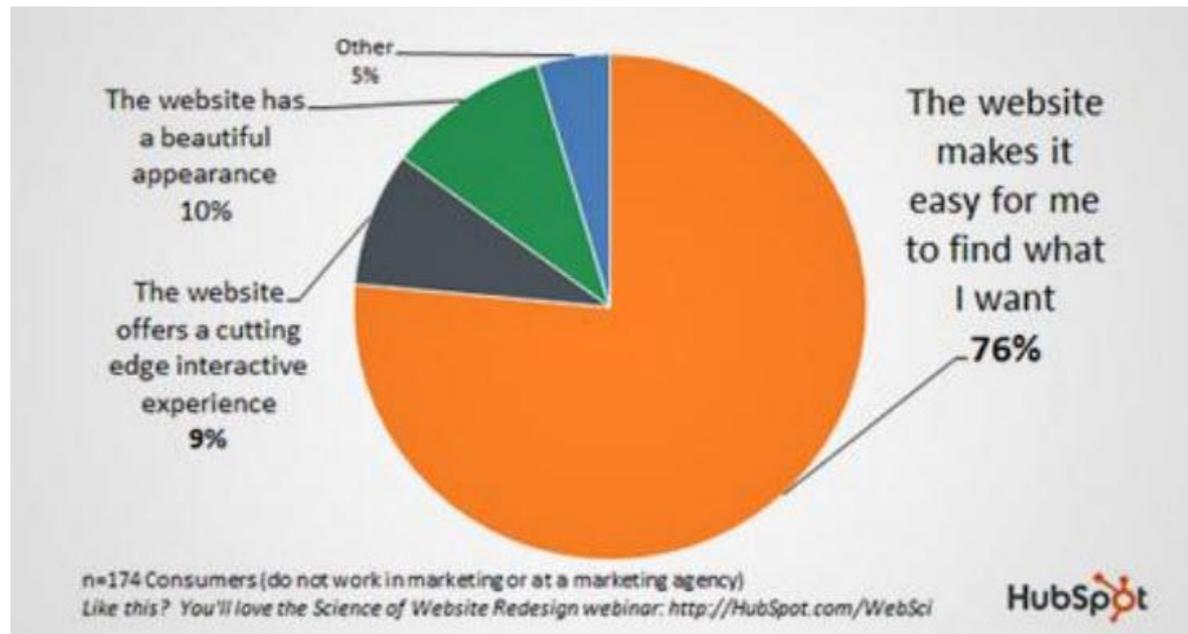
Source: Science of Website Redesign

Navigation

If people can't find what they are looking for, they will give up and leave. Important factors in a site's navigation include:

- **Keep the structure of your primary navigation simple** (and near the top of your page). • Include navigation in the footer of your site.

- **Use breadcrumbs on every page** (except for the homepage) so people are aware of their navigation trail.

- **Include a Search box** near the top of your site so visitors can search by keywords.

- **Don't offer too many navigation options** on a page.

- **Don't dig too deep** – in most cases it's best to keep your navigation to no more than three levels deep.

- **Include links within your page copy** and make it clear where those links go to. This is also great for SEO!

- **Avoid use of complicated JavaScript and especially Flash for your navigation.** Many mobile phones can't see Flash (yet), thus they won't be able to navigate your website. Same applies to web browsers that don't have an updated version of Flash installed.

The overall rule with a proper navigation structure is simple: don't require visitors to have to think about where they need to go and how to get there. Make it easy for them.

Flash and Animation

Flash animation can grab someone's attention, yes, but it can also distract people from staying on your site. Not only are mobile applications lacking the capability to view flash animation but many people simply don't want to be bothered with unexpected noises and animations. Keep the animation to a minimum and only use when necessary.

If you're in love with Flash or require animations, consider moving to HTML5 instead, if applicable. It's a great browser-compliant alternative to Flash.

Accessibility

Make sure that anyone visiting your website can view it no matter what browser or application they are using. In order to gain significant traffic, your site needs to be compatible with multiple browsers and devices. With growth in mobile phones and tablet devices, people are surfing the internet more than ever before. Make sure to get some of those views by allowing everyone to view your site, no matter what kind of system they run or which browser they use.

Conclusion

The internet has changed everything. Internet usage is growing rapidly and you need to be there when potential buyers come looking. A business website may be the most important factor in your inbound marketing strategy, but it's more than just having a website, it's the integration of SEO, social media, blogging, content, CTAs and landing pages that will drive traffic, leads and sales.

After all it is these components that generate sales and revenue for your business. Inbound marketing is the key to filling your sales funnel with qualified leads and your website is where education, engagement and conversion take place.

Follow these guidelines and you will soon have a great website that generates traffic, leads and sales. But don't stop there. A website never truly stops growing. Keep learning and stay tuned for more updates.

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More Resources

The Bonanno Group Digital Marketing was founded in 2005 and has helped hundreds of businesses better leverage the internet to help achieve their business goals.

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