

TIPS TO DEVELOP A GREAT **WEB SITE** FOR YOUR CHAPTER OR BUSINESS

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HEY BUDDY, GOT A WEB SITE?

You've probably never had someone sidle up to you on the street and ask this question, but it might be kind of interesting if it were to happen. What would you say to the guy? Do you have a web site?

Does your business have a site? How about your chapter? If yes, can it be improved?

Is it everything that you need for it to be? And if no, why not? What's stopping you from representing your business or your chapter on the web in a decent manner?

There are many ways for everyone to have a decent web presence these days.

Tools like Wordpress, Drupal and Joomla allow for easy content creation and management.

Image editing programs like GIMP, Picnik and Photoshop Express allow for image creation and manipulation without a large investment.

Web site hosting can be had for as little as \$4-5 a month through GoDaddy or OneandOne, and most larger companies now have at least decent customer service that will help you through nearly any issue. They won't build your site for you, but if you break something or just can't figure out why something isn't working, they'll generally help you.

Below, we'll explore some tips about how you can use some of the options already mentioned to make your site the best that it can be.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND DESIGN FOR THEM

Who is your audience? If you're designing a site for your Fraternity chapter, then it's probably going to be much different than one you would design for your business selling hardware. The audience is much different and you have to present the content in a way that they're going to find pleasurable and meaningful.

Java script is great and Flash can be very cool. Not to knock either, because both applications are useful and can help provide rich content to your site, however Flash and Java script also require the latest browsers, memory, upgraded operating system, or really some combination of all of the above to work properly.

Remember that not everyone has the latest browser updates, the screaming laptop that you have, nor do they want to have to purchase the same to view your site. Just make your site work, and work well, with multiple browsers and even different versions of the popular browsers. Remember that what works well in Internet Explorer 8 may not work at all in Internet Explorer 6. Test it. Then test it again.

Once you're sure your site works, think about the set up. If you have a brick and mortar store, do you hide your sale items in another room that requires people to go through several other rooms to get through? If you're designing a site for your Fraternity chapter, do you want people to have to work to find a history of your chapter? Would you hide your history behind a wall that people have to crawl over to get it? Probably not.

In your store you'll make sure that your sale items are clearly marked so that there are absolutely no questions as to what's on sale. If you're creating a site for your chapter, you'll want people to be able to easily and readily find the history of your chapter.

Don't make your audience work too hard. They'll thank you for it.

MAKE YOUR HOME PAGE IDIOT PROOF

Spinning globes are cool in the library, and hard to decipher navigation is wonderful if you're creating a puzzle for the local chapter of your explorer's club. Unless you really are creating a page for your explorer's club, then make your home pages and the interior pages easy to read and easy to navigate through.

Your home page should show as much content as you can place on it, while still keeping it clean and sectioned. Your reader is there for information on you, your business or your Chapter. Give it to them.

Make your navigation clearly marked and easy to understand. Don't label the sections of your site in lingo that only you and your friends might understand. If you're creating a site for your business, don't create a navigation system that is industry only. If someone finds your site, make them welcome and help them get around.

Create a clearly marked section on your home page that either provides contact information for you and/or your organization, or a direct link to an interior page where contact information is clearly marked. If someone is at your site, they're probably there for a specific reason and may very well want to talk to you or visit your company.

TEST YOUR SITE AT YOUR GRANDMA'S

When you get done with your site, test it. Test it again and then test it one more time. Go to your grandma's house, your mom's house, or anyone who isn't the site designer that you are. Make sure that they can get around easily, find information easily, and can get back to the home page without crying. If they can navigate easily and without asking for a map from the guy at the gas station, then you're doing well.

MAKE YOUR NAVIGATION EASY TO GET THROUGH AND GUESS PROOF

Creative and successful site design doesn't mean that your site has to have navigation that is hidden, driven by weird images, or just plain silly. Mark your navigation clearly, create drop down menus for interior pages if needed, and make it easy for your reader to get around. You might also provide a secondary navigation area on either side of your site for easier navigation. Also, remember to put navigation to at least the major portions of your site at the bottom of each page.

Follow these basic tips, provide compelling constantly updated information, keep your site easy to get around, and your customers or readers will come back time and again.

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