Websites that sell

August 22, 2014

The first step towards a better website is measurement, according to **Brenda DiVincenzo** (*below right*), IPI's director, Operations and Membership.

'You cannot make any improvements until you start tracking data. So make sure you have some sort of tool so you can measure,' she told the 2014 IPI Conference, Las Vegas, in a session she led called 'Websites That Sell, Not Suck.'

Key website traffic measures include: visits; unique visitors; new visits; page views; unique page views; bounce rate; average time on site; top searched keywords; inbound linking domains.

(Google Analytics is the most common website traffic tracking tool.)

She advised retailers to check this data regularly to identify trends over time and note adjustments – for instance an increased use of a particular keyword search could indicate an unmet consumer demand.
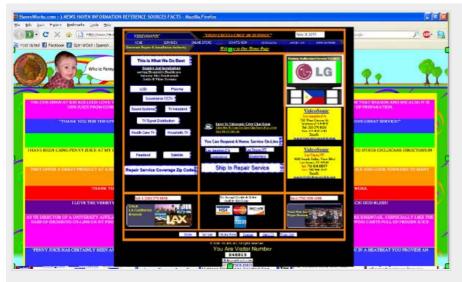
Another important factor was knowing which browsers people use to get to your site and making sure the website renders well in these browsers, she added. And with more people using smartphones and devices to access websites, it's becoming more important to ensure your website works as well on these platforms as on a desktop PC screen.

Website traffic data then needs to be combined with other business data such as online sales to get a real picture of your website's performance.

'This many visitors, this many sales. Without knowing that you can't start making improvements. You'll never know if what you are doing works.'
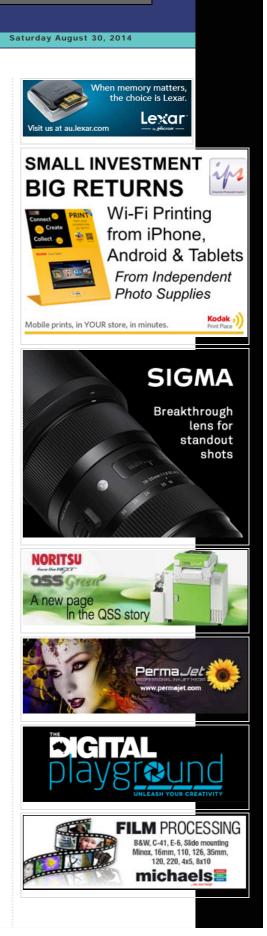
First impressions

Brenda then presented a series of 'websites that sucked'; – poorly designed, sometimes garish, hard to read, jumping all over the screen. (There is actually a website featuring bad website design called webpagesthatsuck.com!)

A website that sucks. Bad layout, too many components, visually offensive and just plain confusing.

'Just like anything else, first impressions are important. If I look at your website and it's moving all around and I can't click on anything then I'm not coming back,' she said.

'Make sure you know what makes you unique and stand out. Then, who are you trying to tell – who is your audience? Sell your personality. Position yourself as an authority, an expert. Someone who can be trusted.

Having privacy policies and contact information prominently accessible instills a sense of trustworthiness.

She advised a 'modern -polished and clean' look which isn't cluttered and doesn't carry too much information.

Use a lot of greys and whites and one burst of colour, she advised, and consider 'vertical rhythm – does it flow well from top to bottom, having places where you want people's eyes to land?'

Other tips on the look of a website included:

Professional images and graphics. 'This is what always gets me in this industry. We put a whole lot of images on our websites, but if I have a beautiful image that's very important to me and I go to your website and all the images and graphics are awful then I'm not going to have a lot of confidence that you are going to handle my project with care.

No one is going to spend any time on your website if it isn't welcoming. Remove visual clutter – it shouldn't look like a cut-and-paste school art project!

Product shots are important – 'but lifestyle photography is huge… If you don't show me what it's going to look like in my home I don't understand. Make sure you are showing things as people would use them, not just on a white screen.'

Using customers examples can be a good idea.

Fonts: Make sure they are readable. Take note they are large enough, because if someone goes to use your website on their iPhone, that's important. Make sure links aren't too close together and buttons work well with mobile phones. Use an unusual font for the purposes of highlighting, but combine too many fonts.

Spelling and grammar: 'If grammar is not your thing, don't make it your thing.' Have someone else look at it. Likewise, she said, unless you are a gifted writer, paying a copyrighter is money well spent.

- And try to get at least two sets of eyes on to anything to minimise errors slipping through.

'Looks aren't everything'

'- So looks aren't everything. After I've looked at your website you want me to interact with it. To come back again and again. It has to be easy to do what I want to on your website.'

She warned about being *too* unique because, 'we know where to look because we are familiar with the internet.'

So for instance you should know where to look for store hours. It's usually somewhere up the top right or maybe down the bottom. 'Is your's in a place which is using that same logic? Don't try to be so unique that people can't find your information. Make sure the phone number is prominent and check what it looks like on smartphones and devices.'

There should be a subscribe-to-email link on every page. 'Make sure they always have the ability to interact with you.' Likewise, there should be social media links on every page. 'Make sure people can share your stuff across social media. People like to share and you want them to share.

'If you have a lot of products or a lot of content – make sure you have a Search bar. And make sure the search is accurate.'

This demands that things are named very specifically what they are. Tags on images helps searchability and improves visibility.

'The more ways something can be searchable the better.'

How to buy

'Finally, it comes down to, "I saw your website and it is beautiful, and the hours are there, and I can find everything I need, and I can follow you on social media – but can I shop?"'

Browsing plus the shopping experience turns visitors into buyers and that leads to repeat business and long term relationships and customer loyalty and referrals, she said.

'The sad part is people spend a lot of money getting people to look at their websites and then fall down on spending money to get people to purchase.'

She said that the average success rate for retail was about three percent when total completed transactions are divided by total site visits. But for every $92 spent on acquiring visitors, only $1 is spent on converting to purchasers.

Organisation:
- All categories accessible from every page
- All images should have labels
- Labels should be ultra specific (SEO)
- Important items 'above the fold' (on the top part of the screen)
- Maximum of 7 menu items (top menu)
- Avoid drop downs

Shopping experience:
- Categories link to more info + way to purchase
- All pages are landing pages + include menu
- Provide news + education
- Use product shots, lifestyle photography + customer examples
- In-depth product videos
- Social sharing
- Help available

Conversion:
- Pop-up email request with special offer
- User-generated content
- Ratings, reviews, testimonials + true social profiles
- Behavioral marketing – re-engage
- Targeted promotions
- Trigger email marketing
- Personalized email marketing
- Viewing + purchasing suggestions
- Interactive engagement – click to chat or call

Maintenance:
- Frequent refreshing – banners + graphics – biweekly, overall – annually
- Drive traffic via: Emails + social media posts + paid ads; specific calls to action; link directly to products; clear + meaningful keywords
- Constant tracking + consistent evaluation – adjust accordingly

Some useful websites:
http://www.browsershots.org – tests your websites speed and compatibility with a huge range of browsers
http://www.brokebnlinkcheck.com – checks for broken links on your website pages.
http://www.webpagetest.org – tests homepage build speed on a range of browsers

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