10 Secrets of Successful Web Sites

Successful Web Sites have a Good Name

A domain name is your home on the web. It is the part of your web address that comes after the *www.*Your domain name will also be used after the "@" symbol in your email addresses. Therefore it is important to register a name the closely reflects your business name and is easy for people to remember and type. Registering a domain name is the first step in any online enterprise.

Your domain name should…

1. Reflect your actual business name. An ABN is required to register a .com.au domain name. Today, however, you can register variations of your business name.
2. Be short so it can be remembered easily if seen on a TV ad, the side of a bus or a web site that wasn't bookmarked. Also, the shorter your domain name, the less likely it is to be miskeyed in the browser address field.
3. Your domain name shouldn't have any weird characters like the ~ (tilde) or / (forward slash) as newer Internet users cannot find these easily on their keyboard.

Some people believe that registering a domain name with their main keywords in it will shoot them to the top of the search engine results pages (SERPs). While having keywords in your domain name *will* advantage you, this advantage should not be overstated.

It may give your site a *little* lift in the SERPs, but this will be just one lift out of many you could give your site in addition to thinking carefully about your content, your keywords and page/site structures (SEO stuff in other words).

Successful Web Sites have Compelling Content

If your web site has good information on it, and this information is revised, updated and added to regularly, your site will be rewarded by search engines.

Think about for a second… if you were a search engine company, who would *you* give prominence to; the site that has 12 pages that haven't changed for 24 months or the site that has 20 pages that change from time to time and link to new pages that are continually being added.

So, what do your customers really want or need to know? Write it down now, send it to your web developer or add it to your blog.

Successful Web Sites Choose their Products Wisely

Products that work well on the web…

- *have a reasonable margin.* Selling on the web requires a payment gateway (that will nibble at the margin). Also on the web, items are freighted one by one to the buyer. This is expensive compared to a shop where freight costs are amortised over all the goods.
- *are hard to find.* If you make or import or distribute a unique product, you can expect to do well.
- *don't have complicated sizing*. Say you sell shoes, what sizing scale will you use? UK or US. Does this confuse your customer and create inertia at the moment of sale?
- *are generic.* If you are selling books or CDs the buyer

knows what they are getting – e*xactly* what they are getting. There is no variation in the product. A book may have a different cover if it is bought on Amazon, but generally, the rule holds.

- *have excellent lines of supply*. This is a biggy. If you set up a web site, can you always guarantee you will have supply? If you make the item then yes, if you import it then no. Solid lines of supply are difficult to find.
- *are not too heavy or fragile*. e.g. wine, impossible to freight overseas
- *can be packaged quickly and stored easily*.

Products that work poorly…

Well, obviously the reverse of the above. Products with small margins, that can be bought anywhere, are heavy or bulky or that have uncertain lines of supply or are subject to exchange rate moves should probably be avoided.

Successful Web Sites have Quality Inbound Links

Links are critical. But have to be handled in a very specific way to benefit your site. Some general rules are listed below.

1. Try to get a minimum of *60 inbound links* from sites with relevant content to your user group.
2. Try to *develop a theme* with your inbound links so a search engine is in no doubt what industry group you belong to.
3. The more *relevant inbound links* the better. Try to get the search engines to see your site as a hub: a website at the centre of some important topic, what Google thinks of as “expert pages”.
4. Use your *keywords in your inbound link labels* i.e. the text that the link is under on the referring site.

5. Link out to important and busy resources, try to think of what outbound links will *add value to your visitor's experience* of the web.
6. Avoid FFA ("free for all") link directories as you may be penalised (i.e. sent backwards in the SERPs) for listing on some of them.
7. Don't spam guestbooks or comments boxes on blogs (a technique that dynamically inserts links on web pages with a comments section or guestbook).
8. Use keywords in your link labels, not "click here".
9. Only buy links if the selling web site can demonstrate traffic from their site to yours.

Successful Web Sites Exclude…

1. *Frames* – frames sites do not work – avoid frames, or bury them in the 2nd level of your site
2. *Flash* – flash sites do not work. Macromedia has a tool from converting a flash animation/presentation to an HTML document… not sure exactly what you would do with it after that…
3. *Tricks* – tricks like bogus links pages, text the same colour as the background, doorway pages… if you get caught, you get kicked off
4. *Cloaking* – cloaking is serving one page to the Search Engine and another to the user. Not so prevalent these days
5. *Java navigation* – e.g. rollover buttons are difficult for search engines to index and links may not be followed.
6. *Pictures* that replace text – sometimes web sites put text content in jpegs or gifs because it looks better e.g. the font is aliased. Search engine index-able content (text) cannot be forsaken for design (pictures).

Successful Web Sites are Made By Web Developers

Friends, family members and students make poor web sites. They are well intentioned and cheap and may even look ok in a browser *but they do not perform on search engines* and you should kindly decline these offers. Also, students move on, as do younger family members leaving you without an upgrade path, access to your domain name or even a copy of your web site.

Successful Web Site are Marketed Offline

Successful web sites are marketed offline as well as online. In fact, from the time of writing a brief for your web site, provision should be made to integrate your web site with your other marketing activities.

Here are some common mistakes web site owners make:

- The web site owner runs a costly TV advert and… excludes the web address
- The web site owner runs a costly radio advert… and excludes the web address
- The web site owner takes out a number of classified newspaper ads… and excludes the web address
- The web site owner has an office or main street location… and doesn’t sign write the front window.
- The web site owner has a huge 4wd …and neglects to put their URL on it somewhere.

What about caps, pens, business cards and letterhead. Do they carry your web address?

Success Web Sites have the Involvement of the Web Site Owner

Having a web site is a commitment. It is not like other forms of marketing where people pay their money, their material runs

for a defined period of time and that is that – they either got customers from it or they didn't.

Web sites have to grow and evolve. If search engines can see someone is tending and watering the garden, they will reward that web site with greater prominence. In other words, if the web site content is current, expanding and changes frequently, it will perform better on search engines.

Successful Web Sites ask for What they Want

Too often web sites lack a call to action. The author of the web site knows all about the product and service, but how well is this communicated to the reader and what response is required?

"*Call this number*", "*Complete this brief survey*", "*Click here and we will call you back*" are all calls to action. If there is no call to action or no means of response, what does this make the site? In the industry, we call this "brochureware".

Successful Web Sites Have Quality Photography

It is a cliche, but it is true for the web… a picture tells a 1000 words. Good photography will be essential in selling products and services on the web. Without photography, people will be unsure exactly what they are getting and this will create doubt and inertia at checkout.

The web is a visual media, more akin to a magazine than a manual. People tend to read less on screens and respond more to images. Next time you are browsing a web site, think about what is attracting and keeping your attention, is it the text or the photography?

Summary

Successful web sites are rare. A number of technical, practical and design ingredients are drawn together to create a killer web site. However, web sites can start small and build the above success strategies as they go.