

## INTRODUCTION

Your Website isn't getting any leads. How do I know? I receive calls on an almost daily basis from business owners that typically go like this:

**Business Owner (BO):** "I've been in business about 15 years now. I built my business from scratch. We were doing well, but now – not so good. Sales are down. I'm really worried."

**Me:** "What types of marketing have you tried in the past?"

**BO:** "Actually, nothing. We haven't marketed the business. Everything has been through word-of-mouth."

**Me** (furiously clicking through the Website): "Do you get inquiries – calls or emails – from your Website?"

**BO:** "Sometimes, but not often. It's just a brochure site."

**Me:** "Uh huh. I see the last time you updated it was in 2007. Is that correct?"

**BO:** "Yeah, that's when we had it designed. We had this kid do it for us. Actually, he was my brother's son – he was getting his computer science degree and did Websites on the side. But he has a fulltime job now and can't help us. And no, we haven't really done much with it since he designed it for us. My daughter – she took a college level English class – so she wrote it for us. But I keep reading all this stuff about SEO and social media and everything, so I started searching Google and ran across your articles. I like your philosophy. Can you help us?"

If this conversation describes your experience regarding your Website, then you're reading the right book. Since 1998, I've been helping owners of small and

mid-sized companies get more from their Websites. I know your challenges – from getting vendors to pay you on time so that you can meet payroll to dealing with ever increasing regulations and day-to-day glitches and fires. I know you don't have time for marketing – and that your Website is the last thing you want to deal with. I know your challenges because I've dealt with them first-hand. Not only do I have my own small business that includes a virtual team, but I also worked in a small, woman-owned manufacturing firm for seven years doing everything from payroll and bookkeeping to answering four phone lines and quoting custom jobs. In my fifteen years as a business-to-business Web marketing consultant, I've worked with companies across the U.S. in industries ranging from software-as-service and life sciences to manufacturing and construction (to name just a few).

My goal with this book is to show you how to think differently with regard to your Website. Instead of seeing it as an “online brochure” and a marketing expense, I want to show you how to see it as the *most important marketing asset you have* – and how to invest in it and care for it accordingly so that it returns real ROI. You'll learn everything from how to develop a Website that supports your business objectives to creating content that helps your Website get found by your prospective customers who are searching Google for companies like yours. In short, you get my two decades worth of practical experience neatly packaged in 99 pages.

I hope you find this book helpful. If you have any questions, you can email me directly, at [dianna@diannahuff.com](mailto:dianna@diannahuff.com) or catch me on Twitter (@diannahuff).

Dianna Huff

November 2013

## **Chapter One: Start With a Plan**

For eleven years I lived with the original bathroom that came with my 1960 ranch home. When I finally had the resources to completely gut it, I called my plumber – who then called his contractor colleague. They both came to my house shortly after I called to talk about the project. Brian, the plumber, and Bob, the contractor, stood inside my bathroom furiously measuring everything and firing rapid questions at me. What did I not like about the current bathroom and why? Did I want to change the placement of the sink, tub, light fixtures, etc.? Did I want to keep the original footprint or expand? Was the ceiling fan of sufficient power to process steam from the shower? Was I ready to replace the ceiling in addition to the walls due to the mold problem?

We talked about the mold issue, that I wanted to remove a full-length window facing the street, and that I needed to create space for towel bars (the existing bathroom had only one!). I also had this funky and totally useless linen closet that I wanted to close up on the bathroom side and turn into a coat closet on the hall side. Was that possible?

While we talked, they both took copious notes. Brian recommended the type of tub /shower I should purchase and told me to go look at various models at the plumbing supply store; Bob asked lots of detailed questions about vanity height, type of mirror I wanted, floor tiles versus linoleum, etc. I stood there while they both fired away at me and felt my brain begin to fizzle. I hadn't considered any of this. I just wanted a new bathroom!

What struck me later, however, is how much this process mirrors a Website

overhaul – and why business owners become completely overwhelmed by it.

Because Websites are graphically rich, many companies begin the Web redesign process by calling a Web or graphic designer. Starting this way isn't bad, but the problem with the Website usually isn't poor design. It's that the Website doesn't support a company's business objectives (whatever they may be) – and thus, the approach needs to begin from a marketing, sales and communication perspective. Focusing on design is the equivalent of calling in an interior designer when considering a room renovation. The end result is usually a new Website that still doesn't deliver ROI. The real problem is that companies usually don't start with a plan that takes into account the challenges they're facing.

When Brian and Bob came to my house, they didn't ask what color I wanted to paint the bathroom walls or what kind of fancy faucet I'd be installing. Instead, they asked lots of questions — questions that would help them understand how to create a bathroom that would solve my challenges (mold, privacy, hard water, and space, to name a few). The last thing on the list was paint color. In short, they helped me develop a *bathroom renovation strategy*. The same holds true for your Website.

### **Your Website should support your business plan**

Prospects for your products and services are searching Google (and to a lesser extent, Bing and Yahoo!) every day [INSERT STATS]. It's imperative that your Website engage prospects from the get-go as you have literally 10 seconds before they click back out, never to return. Unfortunately, while many business owners understand the Internet has changed how we all do business, their Websites fail to meet this change. Instead of seeing their Websites as a *strategic asset* – one that

provides the detailed technical information that buyers need to make purchasing decisions – companies instead create “brochure sites.” The result is low to zero ROI.

### **Why your Website isn't a brochure**

I hear this phrase frequently: “Our Website is our brochure.” As a B2B marketer who helps companies get new business through an effective Web presence, this idea drives me insane. Why? A Website and a brochure are two completely different animals.

First off, a brochure is “static,” meaning it generally doesn't change or it changes infrequently. Traditionally, brochures were printed, but as we move more content to the Web, many companies create PDF brochures, which prospects can download. A brochure presents information in a linear fashion; you read it left to right, top to bottom and page-to-page. Typically brochures contain information about products, services and the company itself, and often, a brochure is out of date soon after it's been created as specs or other information change.

A Website, on the other hand is “dynamic,” meaning the information is continually updated, sometimes in real time. A Website is also something people experience in real time: they click links, download content, buy products, fill out forms, watch demos or videos, comment on blog posts, etc. A Website allows you to incorporate all kinds of elements that enhance the user experience, such as text, images, video and sound, and that help you better communicate your message. Most important, a Website allows you to include calls-to-action to help you generate leads in the form of subscriptions to e-newsletters, requests for demos and attendance at webinars and in-person events..

And, unlike a brochure, a Website isn't "linear" a key difference that many small business owners fail to understand. Due to search engines and inbound links (that is, links *to* your Website *from* other Websites), buyers and prospects often land on an internal page of your Website – not the home page. A visitor could land on a blog post, a white paper landing page, a press release, or your home page. They then either click right back out if the page they're on doesn't have the information they need or they continue to click through using menu navigation, text links or buttons on a page to get where they want to go. In other words, they don't follow a specific linear path the way they do with a brochure.

People can interact with your Website by signing up for newsletters, demos, webinars and in-person events. They can also comment on blog posts, participate in discussion forums and send questions via online contact forms. Information can be updated weekly, daily, hourly or even minute-to-minute. You can include video and audio. You can provide detailed information about your products and services and about your company and industry. No, your Website is definitely NOT a brochure.

A brochure just sits there, doing nothing. A brochure is what your sales force or distributor "leave behind" after they've already gotten a lead. A well-thought out Website is what gets them those leads. Your goal, therefore, is to create a Website that supports your business strategy and the first step in this process is to answer three important questions.

1. What challenges are you trying to solve?
2. What are your business objectives?
3. What do you want buyers, potential employees, prospects and visitors to

do when they arrive at your site?

Challenges can include anything and everything from “we’re not getting any leads” or “we’re not showing up in Google,” to “Our site needs a complete overhaul because we’ve added new products and markets.” As a business owner or marketer, you probably have multiple goals and objectives. Of course you want to increase revenues and add to your customer base. You may have marketing campaigns planned for next 6-9-12 months. Or, maybe you’re hiring or you’re considering using e-commerce for the first time.

Your Website should support ALL of these activities — and more. If you’re planning on allowing customers to pay for and download software, for example, you’ll need to consider a shopping cart that includes licensing keys and other functions. If you’re hiring, you’ll want to make sure you’re communicating why someone would want to work for you and/or how to submit a resume.

And of course, your Website needs to support your sales and marketing activities. Most business owners know how prospects learn about them (usually word-of-mouth or referrals). However, few people map out the sales process itself, and thus don’t take this process into account when it comes time to overhaul the Website. To map out your sales process, ask yourself these questions:

- How long does a typical sale take from beginning to end?
- What are the steps in the sales cycle? For example, a months-long sales process may include: Referral → Website visit → download a white paper → sign up for a newsletter → attend a Webinar → contact sales → send out an RFQ → negotiation → issue PO.

- What are some of the objections that must be overcome to get to the next step in the sales process? Where do prospects get stuck and why? Where are the bottlenecks in your process?
- How many sales get lost to the competition and why?
- Once a sale is made, do customers order again? Why or why not? Do you have other opportunities to increase business with them?

When developing your Web Overhaul strategy, it really pays to answer these questions and determine how your new site — and its content — will facilitate your sales process, remove bottlenecks and improve sales and marketing efficiencies. Doing all this work upfront – before you even consider your Website's design – is important for three reasons. One, you'll save time and money down the road. Because you've created a strategy, with goals and objectives, you'll be able to develop a Website from the ground up that supports your business objectives. One of the major pitfalls many companies encounter after a site redesign is that the Website "doesn't work." Two, you'll see an increase in conversions. Because your Website is built with prospects and searchers in mind, you'll notice they're doing what you want them to do (download reports, sign up for a newsletter, leave a comment on your blog, sign up for your demo) because you designed the site for these actions to take place. And three, you'll be able to measure ROI. Because you have objectives or goals, you'll know exactly what you need to track and measure. You'll no longer base data on vague metrics, such as, "We had 2,000 hits last month" (which is meaningless, by the way). Instead, you'll have clearly defined metrics, such as, "We had 2,000 new visitors last month and 5% signed up for our newsletter and

2% emailed us to inquire about our service.”

Given all of this, it should be apparent that your Website is one of the best business assets you have. Developed around a strategic plan, your Website helps generate leads that turn into sales. In other words, your Website is definitely not a brochure.

## **Chapter Two: Determine Your Message**

I love working with manufacturing companies. Is love too strong a word? I don't think so. I do love them. I love walking into a manufacturing plant and feeling the immediate visceral experience. Machinery hisses and whooshes and moves and makes noise. Workers, serious and intent, young and old, stand at these machines welding, guiding, inserting, building, and moving parts along the line. Raw material sits near the large docking bays, labeled and ready to be turned into parts, components, machinery or other goods. At the other end of the plant, finished pieces sit waiting to be shipped. Sunlight filtering through windows catches the dust motes, rock music plays, and summer or winter, fans blast cool air. Manufacturing – despite what the experts tell you – is the lifeblood of America. I love it. All of it. And I especially love hearing the stories behind these firms.

“My grandfather started the company, then my father took it over, and now my siblings and I run it.” “My brothers and I started the company after moving to the U.S. 25 years ago.” “I took over for my father after I was wounded in Viet Nam.” “My husband and I realized a gap in the marketplace, so we started our company to solve it.”

The owners and their employees of these firms work hard – you have to these days if you're going to compete with overseas companies where costs are lower. They're competitive, savvy and don't miss a trick for saving money, improving processes and quality, and knowing their customers. They treat their employees like family and will go without pay for weeks if it means they don't have to lay off people. The owners of these firms create new markets, new products, and

new ways of doing things. They solve complex challenges under tight deadlines and constraints.

It's these stories that lay the foundation for a successful Website, yet, too often, they're not told. Instead, the Website, from overused stock images to jargon-filled copy, suffers from what I call the "Three B's": boring, bland and blah. Your key message – or what I call your "story" – is what sets your company apart from its competitors. Your message tells prospects and customers *why* they should do business with you. In this chapter, you'll learn the importance of determining your message and weaving it into a compelling story.

### **Try this exercise**

Pretend you're a B2B prospect looking for company that can help you solve a challenge. Choose any B2B vertical or industry, a professional service or a product and then do a Google search. If possible, visit seven to ten company Websites, quickly scanning the home page and maybe a few internal pages. As you go through the Websites, take brief notes: which words / phrases do they use? Can you tell what they offer and how it will benefit you? Why should you do business with the company? Which company stood out for you? Are you confused by industry terms? Did your eyes glaze over? Congratulations, you just encountered what your prospects go through when they're searching for providers / solutions.

While working with a consultant on overhauling his site, he did this very exercise. After, he sent me the following email (repeated verbatim):

When I visit the websites of firms in my industry, I continue to be struck by the commodity quality we all seem to have in common. This is NOT good.

This similarity could be exaggerated in my eyes because I've been looking so long at these sites that my brain is beginning to fuzz over, but I think you'll agree **we're pretty much all using the same words, making the same claims, giving the same promises over and over.** I'm afraid that my prospective clients are all likely performing the same exercise and seeing what I saw: **site after site saying the same thing, all becoming extensions of the other,** all blurring together with no single firm or message sticking out or distinctly resonating above the others.

### **The problem? "Me too" messaging**

"Me too" messaging is Website copy that's pretty much the same as everyone else's. If you put Company A's site and Company B's site side-by-side, you could plug Company A's message into Company B's site (or vice versa) and no one would know the difference. "Me too" messaging doesn't differentiate your company from your competitors. As my client pointed out when he did his exercise, when you look at boring Website after boring Website after boring Website, your brain fuzzes over. Nothing stands out. Everything sounds the same.

**The result is that prospects come to *your* website . . . and click right back out.**

Here's the deal: People will buy a product or service to solve a problem. But, they decide from WHOM to buy **based on intangibles** – intangibles that often never make it into Website copy (especially business-to-business sites) – such as trust, attention to detail, expertise, creative problem solving, and dare I say it, authenticity.

### **The story of my flowered dress**

Many of the small business owners I work with are pretty technical and very smart. For a very long time, my Website and messaging reflected this fact. I used the corporate sounding “we” to refer to my company (even though “we” was really just “me”). I wanted to look and sound “professional” – and let’s face it, “bigger” than I was. In my photos, I wore a jacket and scarf and later, a black sweater. Safe. Professional. Boring. In 2012, I decided it was time for a makeover and set about developing a Website that followed all the advice I give to my clients. I changed everything – from the design and logo to the copy and services I offer. More important, I did something really scary: I had photos of myself taken in – gasp – a dress! A dress covered in bright fuchsia flowers. Why? I wanted to show who I really am: bright, creative, and passionate about what I do. I pay attention to detail. I get results for clients. And I’m friendly and funny too.

The photos came out great but boy, what a lot of anxiety they induced. Suddenly, I heard the very same excuses in my head that my clients give me about why they can’t put original photos or talk about themselves on their own Websites: “We don’t want to appear ‘small.’” “We don’t want to get too personal,” etc. etc. I looked at the Websites of other women consultants – they were wearing blue or white blouses and pearls or a colorful jacket. “Maybe I should stick with the tried and true,” I fretted. After a few anxious days, I went ahead with the photos – and once my Website went live, I waited for people to call and tell me they could no longer do business with me because it was clearly apparent I didn’t know what I was doing being that I was in a dress. (Seriously.)

Here's what really happened: People began calling me because they could tell, from my Website, that I was "approachable," "trustworthy," and "easy to work with." Prospects would say, "I LOVE your Website. Obviously you know what you're doing. We want a site like yours." Wow! Due to changing my Website and my messaging, my business doubled in 12 months. Double Wow!

I'm not saying you should put on a dress to increase business, but what I am saying is that creating a Website that plays up why your company is different – and why that difference will help your prospects and customers get results – is a very, very good thing. In other words, you want to break out of boring, blah and bland "me too" messaging. The best way to make this jump is to focus on what makes *your* company different. You want to show what distinguishes you from your competitors. You want to highlight your strengths, who you've done business with, and the challenges you've solved. In short, you want to show why your company is amazing and awesome. Yes, I know. You make widgets. What you do is B-o-r-i-n-g with a capital B.

But, trust me. I've worked with hundreds of small businesses. I have yet to find a boring company. What I usually find is simply a boring Website.

### **Focus on what makes you different**

Dell, HP, Toshiba and Acer all make a commodity product: laptop computers. (Heck, even their Websites look and sound the same.) Apple, however, is different. They don't make computers, they make tools that enable people to "make amazing stuff" such as podcasts, videos and Websites. When you buy a Mac, you're not upgrading your computer, you're upgrading your entire "computer experience." The

entire Apple brand is an experience – from the Website to the packaging. When I work with clients on overhauling their Websites and ask for them a list of the Websites they like, 99% list “Apple” at the top of the list. Apple is different – and instead of playing the same game as HP or Microsoft, they play up their differences. And, they make no apologies for the prices they charge.

It works the same way for your company.

To learn more about your company and its position in the marketplace, begin by studying your industry, your competitors and the companies that you do business with. To learn more about your industry, gather collateral from trade shows and scan trade publications (you can learn quite a bit reading the ads). What issues are hot right now and how are they being resolved? How is your company addressing these issues? Have you lowered your carbon footprint, decreased production times or have sourced local materials while still maintaining prices and profitability?

Pick three of your competitors and carefully analyze their Websites. What products and services do they offer? How do they “position” themselves? Be objective: Why would you want to do business with them? What makes them different from your company?

Make a list of five of your best vendors and then list why you continue to do business with them. What makes them different? What do you like about them and why? What is their specialty? What about their weaknesses?

The point of this exercise is to help you learn more about your company and how best to position it and communicate your unique message.

### **The benefit of being a small business owner**

When I recommend that a small business use its “About” page to tell prospects who stands behind the company, I get a lot of push back. “We don’t want to appear small,” is usually the excuse I hear. But here’s the deal: you are small and you can use this attribute to your advantage in a really big way. Because you’re small, you know your customers really well – in fact, I bet you’ve had lunch or dinner with them or have played golf together. I bet you know spouses’ and/or children’s names and where they last went on vacation. You may read the same books and attend the same industry functions. These are people you trust – and they trust you (otherwise, you wouldn’t be doing business).

When your customers have a problem with a product or service your company has delivered, they know they can get you on the phone and that you’ll take care of it – pronto. I know because one, I ran the front office of a small business for seven years, and two, I watch my existing customers do this today. In fact, I was in a meeting with a client one day when an urgent call came through. A “worm” was eating through the caller’s computer databases and their IT person couldn’t stop it. Right there, my client called in his best guy from vacation and within 15 minutes had the situation under control. That’s how it works: you take care of your customers because if you don’t, you’re out of business. And, for your customers, that’s the benefit of knowing the owner of the business – which would be you.

Contrast this to doing business with a multinational or global company. Unless the company empowers its customer service people to help solve your problems, you just do not get the same level of care and attention. And your urgent

problem usually doesn't become someone else's urgent problem – you're just one of many.

So, celebrate your smallness by letting prospects know who you are. Put your photo – and your team's photo – on your Website. Give more than just the standard "bio" facts. Give the history of your company. Explain how or why you started the business. Give details that help prospects get to know you – and trust you -- before they pick up the phone. List the boards you sit on, your hobbies or your passions – whether it's sitting on your church or temple board, working with youth or riding your Harley (I'm serious).

One of my clients who followed my recommendation is Mark Voner, President and CEO of Veterans Development Corporation. A disabled veteran, Mr. Voner began working at his father's construction company after returning from active duty in the mid-1980s. As he became more involved with the business, he helped increase revenues and profitability – and eventually took over the company from his father. In Figure 1, you can see his bio page, which explains his history and his passion for giving back to veterans – exemplified by his active participation in Moore's Marauders, an organization that finds and returns the remains of MIAs and/or POWs. Here's his bio in full:

Mr. Voner brings to Veterans Development Corporation strong leadership, decades of construction experience, a strong industry network, and a commitment to delivering creative approaches to construction project challenges. He is also passionate about giving back to the Veterans community.

In addition to managing Veterans Development Corporation, Mr. Voner is the Director of Public Relations for Asian Affairs for Moore's Marauders, the volunteer group founded by Ken Moore. Moore's Marauders searches for the remains of the estimated 92,000 MIA and/or POW service people.

In October 2009, Mr. Voner and Moore's Marauder team leader Ryan Bach were sent to China to sign a Historic Agreement between the United States and China to search for the remains of Ssgt. William Lynch, a WWII Marine from Dorchester, Massachusetts and the last Marine unaccounted for in China. The group believes they have found the remains of Lynch and will bring an archeological team to China in the fall of 2010.

Mr. Voner, who comes from a family of career service personnel, began serving his country in 1981, when he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He served in Beirut, Lebanon from 1982 - 1983 and was honorably discharged in 1984. Once he returned home to the Boston area, he began working for his father's construction company, where he worked his way up to managing in the field and estimating projects – a skill at which he excelled.

Mr. Voner is a recipient of the U.S. Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal, one of the oldest decorations still issued to active duty personnel.

By placing his bio (and the bios of his team, as well) on his Website, Mr. Voner gives you a really good idea of his values, his passion and his mission – without actually having to use a bland sounding “mission statement” or vanilla “About” page that

says nothing.