

NET MAN

Business Websites That Work!

“Ask NET MAN” Column
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New Mexico Internet Professionals Association Educational
Foundation’s Internet Informer

WHY THE CUSTOMER (Website Visitor) IS NOT ALWAYS WRONG

Q: I’ve got a new product line to promote, but my web developer told me that what I want to tell my customers isn’t what I should tell them. Why would I pay for that kind of feedback?

A: I hope that you kept your cool! While your web developer could have put this more delicately, there’s an important issue behind what you heard. Realize that a web developer needs to consider alternate perspectives of a website because of the external usability, design and marketing expertise that they bring (or should bring) to the table as part of the service. Web Design is not graphic design for the internet, it’s the ability to create a functional extension of your business. Website owners with the day-to-day experience running a business know how to perform **that** business, but can have a myopic vision of how their own customers see them and what those customer desires may actually be.

One great example in web marketing of this is search engine optimization. I require my clients to provide me with a set of keywords that they "think" people who need their business but don't know they exist will be searching on. I then need to step back, look at their site and what they're selling, take myself out of their shoes to realize what the new customer or website

visitor is interested in and laterally free-associate to realize where the potential demographic or niche's interest lies. As a specific example, a collector's-only gallery of very high end antique American artifacts benefits very little from an expensive Pay-Per-Click advertising campaign focused on what they may think their absolutely most important keyword phrase of "indian art" is.

Unless you are in a marketing related business, few Website owners have a great ability to see what's needed to improve their online business presence and their website customer experience, which determines whether the bottom line results will be achieved. The involvement of a web designer to create or update a site can be stimulated by an event internal to the client's business such as a new program, approach, product line or offering that the client wants to push - but that event may have a very different level of importance for the potential website visitor.

Businesses that need site updates or maintenance, very commonly want to change just a little bit but get great marketing results through traffic development and subsequent conversions. I very often see sites that don't have basic "website experience" needs addressed and therefore cannot benefit as they should from marketing because they can't perform the conversion once visitors get to the site.

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The web designer is an external, fresh face without hardened notions in your area of business and also hopefully an expert (albeit with their own personal opinions) in several important areas of the "website experience," including:

- The ability to view how a site will be used by newbies
- The ability to see if the sales presentation is effective and attractive
- The ability to see if site navigation is easily understandable
- The ability to read copy and feel compelled (or not) to take action
- The ability to evaluate site functionality (forms, shopping carts, search, etc.)

While some Website owners do have one or more of these skills, it is the job of the designer to advise you on website best practices in these areas. What you want to convey through your website IS important for the designer to hear, but then a good

developer will bring ideas as to what the best ways to improve the business experience for all concerned are.

Ultimately the decision on what and how to convey the message lies with YOU, the client, as it is YOUR money. However, with my company, our "web developer" service is really about business development and success, I do have to take a tough-love stance at times and refuse business or strongly advise against what I consider to be a fatal decision. I'm not the last word by any means, but I am usually the one in the hot seat for expectations of website success.

Please email YOUR Internet Questions to asknetman@thenetcave.com

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