Building a Successful Website Begins with the Name

A FEW ISSUES BACK, I WROTE ABOUT DIRTFT, AN INITIALISM THAT STANDS FOR *DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME*, BUT SOME SAW "DIRTY FOOT" AND WONDERED WHAT IT MEANT. MEANING MUST TRANSCEND SYMBOLS, SO EXAMINE AT ANY DOMAIN NAME YOU'RE CONSIDERING WITH A JAUNDICED EYE AND A DIRTY MIND.

WhoRepresents.com is a site that provides contact information about the agent who represents various celebrities. Unfortunately, no small number of people read the domain name as WhorePresents.com. Oops.

When Experts Exchange set up a website to highlight subject matter experts, they quickly found that most people read the domain name as ExpertSexChange.com. Later, they added a hyphen to get Experts-Exchange.com.

And there's PenIsLand.net. The site actually sells pens and their intent was for people to read the name as PenIsland.net.

Mole Station Native Nursery, a company in New South Wales, Australia, specializes in plants native to Australia and uses the domain name MoleRiverNursery.com. That's considerably better than their initial choice, MolestationNursery.com, which of course they hoped people would read as MoleStationNursery.com.

Your Domain Name is You

SPEND SOME TIME TRYING VARIOUS COMBINATIONS OF CAPITAL LETTERS IN THE DOMAIN NAME YOU THINK WILL WORK. ASK PEOPLE YOU KNOW TO LOOK AT THE NAME, TOO.

And don't save a few bucks by not registering a domain name. You can save $15 or so per year if you don't have a domain name and you could save around $100 per year by using the free site hosting that most Internet service providers include. Instead of Blinn.com, my domain name would be www.wowway.com/~wblinn/ and that doesn't engender a lot of confidence.

Your first choice for a domain name will probably already be taken. Millions of names have been registered and all short names have been gone for years, so you'll need to create a longer name, possibly with hyphens, so that each word is clear.

Choose a COM domain if you can. Top level domains such as NET, ORG, and INFO aren't as memorable and prospective visitors may end up on a competitor's site if the only difference between your site and your competitor's is that you're using INFO and the competitor is using COM. There's no shortage of tools to help with the decision. For a useful list, see http://vandelaydesign.com/blog/tools/tools-to-find-right-domain-name/.

Happy Thanksgiving
William Blinn Communications

Hosting isn't free. Even *free* hosting isn't free. If you use a free service, you may find that it serves ads along with your Web pages, that you don't have much space to work with, that features are limited, and that if too many people try to use the site, they'll be blocked by bandwidth limitations.

Well regarded hosts such as BlueHost.com in Orem, Utah, will host your site for about $100 per year, provide excellent uptime, give you a lot of disk space, and allow plenty of traffic.

Functionality Counts

A site can be beautiful but useless. You've probably encountered over-designed monstrosities that play a Flash movie before allowing you to enter the site. Even worse, there are some sites that work only if you have certain plug-ins installed or use a specific browser.

Websites can be functional without being ugly, but if you must err on one side or the other, err on the side of functionality. If people can't figure out how to navigate your site, they'll head back to Google and pick the next site on the list.

Vincent Flanders (*Web Pages that Suck*) detests what he likes to call *mystery-meat navigation*, links with no indication about where they go. Creating a site with mystery-meat links is both rude and self-defeating. When users can't figure out what to click, they'll just hit the back button go elsewhere. Give users a clear way to navigate.

Unless you're an entertainment company, a singer, or an actor, people won't have come to your website to be entertained, Nor to be impressed with the design (unless they're looking for a designer). Make the site work first, then make it pretty.

Google is not your client. If your primary concern in developing the site is search engine optimization (SEO), you'll short-change the people who visit your site. Yes, it's important to get the SEO right, but it's equally important to make a site that can be used by humans. Design for people first and then do what you need to do to make the site work properly with the various search-engine spiders.

Be sure to keep your target audience in mind and design a suitable experience.

There aren't any secrets to developing a dirty-foot website, but it does require considerable attention and concentration. Ω

Is Your Data Safe Anywhere?

It seems like a new data breach is announced about every 3 days and you might begin to feel that crooks can get anything they want. Unfortunately, too many people make the job child's play for the crooks.

Between July and September of this year, there were 320 breaches reported worldwide, an increase of nearly 25 percent compared to the same period last year, and more than 183 million customer accounts and data records containing personal or financial information were either stolen or lost.

SafeNet provides a quarterly review of data breaches and the latest report shows that banks and retail stores were responsible for 73% of the stolen records: Financial services (42%) and retail (31%) took the top spots among all industries in terms of the number of compromised customer accounts and data records. These were followed by breaches involving technology and personal online accounts such as e-mail, gaming and other cloud-based services (20%). Identity theft took the top spot among the types of data breaches, accounting for 46% of the total.

There isn't much you can do about banks and stores, but you do have control over things such as passwords. Tsion Gonen, chief strategy officer at SafeNet, says that far too many breaches have involved data that has not been stored securely. One of the most common passwords is "password". Really. So that's the first thing a crook will try. A dictionary attack can check millions of common and uncommon words (from *aardvark* to *zyzzyva*) faster than you can say "My account has been hacked!"

Retail stores have been consistently hit hard with breaches, but increasingly thieves are going after social media accounts and e-mail accounts. Unlike data breaches where losses can be covered by banks, Gonen says "once your personal photos or private messages have been accessed and leaked online, there's no fixing that. Those items will be forever in cyberspace for your future employers, friends, and family to access."

No password should ever be just a single word. The best passwords are at least 15 characters long and contain upper and lower case letters, numbers, and symbols (example: pn$yF8yj#uXN@HNgVmT). That kind of password is impossible to remember, but applications such as LastPass (www.lastpass.com) can remember it, and hundreds of other passwords, for you.

One alternative involves combining several words and numbers: Maybe you lived at 12345 North Street in Omaha when you were growing up and you had a pet cat called Tiger. From that you could create a memorable password such as Tig3R@Omaha12345NorTH. Note the use of a 3 in "Tiger", the addition of the at sign, and the mixed capitalization.

To keep information out of the hands of crooks, it's your responsibility to outsmart them! Ω