

Seven Steps to Web Success

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Introduction

If you think about it, a Web site is simply another medium you're able to use to persuade people. You might want to convince someone to buy your product or call your company for more information. You may want to simply offer free information, but you're still trying to convince people that what you're listing on your site is credible.

So, the simple answer to how to make a successful Web site is to know what process will be most persuasive for your particular audience and focus on using those methods when it comes time to build or re-build your Web site.

Now, that statement opens up a whole can of worms doesn't it? How exactly does one discover the best way to go about persuading an audience? Especially since the majority of visitors to your site will only give you a 15-second chance? That's the purpose of this document.

The most important rule to Maximizing the Web for Your Business is to seek continuous education from those who are doing it right.

I've been in the Web site creation business since 1996 and last year alone spent well over \$10,000 on attending seminars, buying books and tapes, and long distance phone calls talking to experts. You'd think that after a number of years in the business, I wouldn't have to learn anymore, right?

In truth, it took me a few years thinking I knew everything before I really started to Maximize the Web for my own business. That moment came when I finally exercised humility and started aggressively learning techniques and strategies from other experts.

The Internet is changing so fast; it really is hard to keep up with—even for a full-timer like me. I’ve discovered that the more I invest in continuous learning, the more successful my projects become and the more I’m able to help others become successful too.

So, I’d like to make a bold suggestion to you right out of the gate. If you walk away from reading this document having taken to heart only one advisory statement from me, I would be this:

If you want to truly Maximize the Web for your business, make a commitment today to invest your time and money to continually educate yourself and stay current with techniques people are trying and using.

Buy all the books and audio recordings you can that are produced by or in collaboration with experts in the Internet field. Attend any seminar that comes your way. Get to know the speakers who appear at conferences. Ask an expert out to lunch. Invest in coaching services from someone that IS doing what you WANT to be doing. Make Maximizing the Web for Your Business a daily pursuit.

I’ll be referring you to several useful products, services and utilities throughout this document; some of which were produced by myself and some created by others. Each that will help you make leaping strides toward Maximize the Web for Your Business rather than short steps--but only if you take advantage of them. Remember always that I suggest them because I have benefited myself from what they have to offer.

It has been my experience that there are seven main keys to a successful Web site. They are as follows:

Success Key #1 – Design with the Goal in Mind

Steven Covey tells us, in his award winning book titled Seven Habits of Highly Effective People that we need to begin the pursuit of any goal “with the end in mind.” Beginning a Web site project is no different. The more clearly you can envision it’s goal, the more focused you can be on attaining it.

When I offer my free consultation with a potential client, my first question is this: “What do you want the goal of your Web site to be?” Some of the common responses I’ll hear to this question will be:

- “I want to have a resource where I can post sales we’re having”
- “I want to feature our catalog on-line”
- “I want to have lots of pictures of our products so that we don’t have to send so many brochures through the mail”
- “I want to showcase our new facility”
- “I want a Web site because I was told I have to have one”
- “Well, how much can we do for less than \$1,000?”
- “I want to be able to post our events on-line all by myself”
- “I want to do something that no one else is doing on the Web”

If you’re not sure of your own answer to this question, don’t feel too bad. Almost none of my clients answer my question with the response I’m looking for. I’ll explain.

Every one of those examples I listed above came from actual clients of mine when they were prospective clients looking for a Web Services Provider. Each was in the business of selling a product or service. One was a non-profit organization. All wanted to increase their revenue by using the Web as a vehicle.

If your business offers a product or service and you want a Web site to help with that sales effort, then your primary goal should be one or a combination of three things:

1. Get the sale immediately
2. Get a phone call or e-mail from Web site visitors requesting more information from you
3. Or at least get a name and an e-mail address from as many visitors as possible so that you can potentially sell to them later

Why would you want to design a Web site with the sole purpose of getting someone's e-mail address? Because, if you accumulate an e-mail address from someone, that means they're interested in you or what you have to offer, but may not be ready to buy from you yet. Acquiring e-mail addresses is a great way to make a sale...later.

Success Key #2 – Know Your Audience

Although it's tough to know which surveys to believe when it comes to published Web usage, I pay close attention to my own statistics. My main HereNextYear.com Web site logs suggest that about 65% of my site visitors use Internet Explorer, whereas roughly 25% use Netscape. Just 10% or use some other type of browser.

I also know what search engines they used, what keywords they typed while on the search engine and what page of my site they entered on and exited from.

This is an important example how it is possible to know who is visiting your Web site and the type of technology are they using. The greater challenge is to discover this information *before* your site goes live. Here are some tips.

Design your site to complement the equipment used by the majority of your prospective site visitors

If your Web site will be directed toward non-technical visitors or older audience members, it's likely that many of them will set their monitors' screen size to 800 X 600 resolution. Those with limited vision will likely set their monitors to 640 X 480. A group of graphic artists will typically have huge monitors so they can see every detail. Web programmers love things that are small. They'll typically have their screens set to 1024 X 768 or higher. This is important because your content will be displayed differently depending on your visitor's monitor screen size.

Know the Internet life style of the majority of your visitors

When will your visitors tend to visit your site? At work? At home? At midnight? Before breakfast? Why do people visit your Web site? What should their expectations be when they get there? How Web savvy are they? Do they know to click on buttons to go to other pages or to scroll down to view more? Do your visitors have any fears about doing business on the Web? Will they prefer to talk to a live person or will they be content with communications by e-mail?

These are all questions to ask yourself to make sure you know as much as you can about your audience before you spend the time or money to code your first page.

Success Key #3 – Study Your Competition

This is the item that all but a few insightful executives and Web Service Providers overlook. It's so tempting to believe we know our competition so well or that it's not important at all to know what our competitors are doing.

Sure, it helps to know if a competing company is offering a special sale today; but you need to know more than that before building a Web site for your business. You need to know what techniques of persuasion have been implemented, what psychology style has been adopted, and how are those strategies working for your competition. This knowledge can only be attained by visiting those competing Web sites and studying them.

Sounds pretty time consuming, doesn't it? That's why most people don't have successful Web sites. They don't bother to take the time and study what's already being offered on the Web.

If you want to truly Maximize the Web for Your Business, become passionate about attaining your goal. Be willing to spend the time to make it happen.

Here are some tips to look for in your competitions' Web sites:

Site Layout – What type of graphics did your competition choose, traditional or flashy, dynamic or static? What primary colors did they use for their site theme and backgrounds? Have you seen the same exact look of your competitors' sites in other places on the Web or is it obvious that they invested in a custom job? Is the site full of plain text that looks like the owner of the company produced it using MicroSoft Word's "Save-As HTML" function? Or, do you get the impression that a team of skilled designers, programmers and copywriters were involved in the process?

Functionality – What functionality features can be found on your competitors' sites? Do they have a search area where you can enter a keyword and arrive at a directory-style page displaying all of the pages on the site that include that keyword? Can you take a facility tour on their sites because they've incorporated panoramic video? Is there any type of database integration or specific utility that caught your eye on those sites that know would be helpful to prospects and clients for your industry?

Purpose – Can you page through your competitors’ sites and identify their true focus? Do they want you to call for more information? Complete a form to have a brochure sent? Submit your e-mail address to get onto their newsletter distribution?

Visitation – How many people really visit their sites on a daily or weekly basis? Sure, you might see a counter at the bottom of the page but this has become a cliché because publicly displayed counters can be manipulated so easily. Most Web designers I know will strongly resist adding a counter to a page for public viewing. A better idea is to setup an anonymous e-mail account at Yahoo.com or something similar and send an e-mail to a contact on the site saying you might be interested in advertising on their site and would like to know the visitation.

Areas of Weakness – What was the first thing that came to mind the first time you visited your competitors’ Web sites? Did the front pages load too slowly? Did they go overboard with Flash animation that drove you crazy and you couldn’t find a “Skip Intro” link? Did they leave out one of the most important reasons people buy the product that you sell? Did they sell features rather than benefits? Did the wording appear cold and uncaring or was it warm and inviting?

Think of a Web site as you would the game of golf. There will always be room for improvement! There will always be elements of your competitors’ Web sites that were made extremely well...and those that really would require a major overhaul to be even moderately successful. Use these weaknesses to make your Web site stand out and you will accomplish your goal. There are always ways that competitors’ sites could be improved. No Web site is perfect. Remember that you can improve your Web site in many areas to out-do your competition.

Success Key #4 – Give the People What They Want

Have you ever attended a seminar where the speaker says something really intriguing with the promise of going into more detail later but conveniently runs out of time? How does that make you feel?

This approach seems to be the trend with Web sites today too. Many Web designers have adopted the style to make you believe that if you just click on a certain image or link, you will find the information you were looking for. Suddenly, just when you think you've reached your desired destination, two or three pop-up windows launch with links to other sites. Just as it sinks in that you are now two or three more mouse clicks away from getting the information you wanted, you attempt to close out the windows and 10 or 15 more sessions of your browser launch!

If you want your site to really stand out, simply give people the information they're looking for. Most Web sites don't accomplish that one simple task. They try to go for the sale too quickly. If your goal is to sell something, give people what they want to see first and then just be up-front and honest with your audience that there is a product to buy. Here's what you wanted—now let me show you how you can get even more.

Remember to use professionalism in your message, good grammar and clean spelling. Nothing says "amateur" more quickly than not knowing the difference between they're, their and there or it's and its, or two, too and to.

Once your visitors have received what they came to your site to see, it's your obligation to instruct them what to do next. Imagine that I am one of your Web site visitors. [I need something. I've found and visited your site to find the solution. I've had my problem presented and options discussed. I've also been educated that there's more.] Now is the time to provide the means for a more comprehensive solution to be offered. This solution requires a fee.

As a site visitor, I would be fine with this. I wouldn't feel as though I was being lured only to buy something if you provided the information I was looking for originally. But, if you deny me of the information I wanted to see and put the sales push on me, I won't buy and I'll never come back.

One simple way to guide people to take a next step in the sales process is to offer contact information on your site. Provide them with a way to access your phone number and e-mail address from every page of your site. Make the act of contacting you just one click away and people will use that function.

Many people with Web sites choose to make their contact information very difficult to find. This is a huge mistake in my opinion. If you want to gain trust with your visitors, you need to adopt the attitude that you “can't wait” for a prospect or client to contact you. When people contact you through your Web site, it's the perfect opportunity for you to demonstrate how fast you can respond.

I remember the time when a prospect sent an e-mail message to me on a Sunday night. I saw the e-mail come in and responded to it within about 20 minutes. The prospect was amazed and called me the next day to hire me to implement his company's Web site.

One of the easiest ways to out-do your competition is to simply respond to contacts made through your Web site. Most companies design their Web sites hoping it will *limit* the need for contact with clients and prospects and just increase the sales. Where that preference came from, I'll never know; but it sure offers a simple opportunity for you to demonstrate better customer service.

To truly give people what they want, you need to give them MORE than they thought they wanted.

I remember registering to attend a \$1,000 seminar several months ago. About a week after I registered, a box was delivered to my home. It was full of cassettes, books, reports and a couple of videos! I'm still working on getting through all of those materials. The value of what I learned from the contents of the box alone was worth the price of the ticket to the seminar. The seminar itself was worth four or five times the amount I paid to attend.

Money is tight these days for everyone. We're all more careful about our spending than ever before and more skeptical too. If you're trying to sell something for \$10, make your client feel like she would've spent \$100 for the same thing. If the item has a \$100 price tag, make your offer worth \$1,000. If you're selling tickets for \$1,000, make it worth \$10,000!

Increasing perceived value is accomplished by guaranteeing results or guaranteeing satisfaction “or your money back” and offering tons of free bonuses.

One of the software products I sell is the Cyber Security Pro Suite, which protects people from computer viruses and hackers. It sells for just \$97 but we GIVE several additional items to each buyer as bonuses. Those bonuses alone have a combined value that exceeds even the cost of the product by more than \$25. You're welcome to see how it works at www.TrueComputerSecurity.com.

Now the bigger question is why all of the bonuses? People use bonuses in different ways. For me, giving bonuses is a chance to show my genuine desire to give people a better deal than they can get anywhere else. People that have bought things from me in the past know that I'm going to give them their money's worth no matter what they buy from me. But, people buying from me for the first time don't know that reputation yet. So, I need to barrage them with enough information visually on the sales page so that they see the value before they buy it.

There's one other note about guarantees that I'd like to share. You really need to have a money back guarantee in almost any buying situation involving the Web. People want guarantees that their money will be used wisely. People want guarantees that your product or service will do what you say it will do. Always offer a money back guarantee. If your product or service is not good enough to make such an offer, go back and refine it before trying to sell it.

Even if you've done the best job at trying to gain peoples' trust, most people will not trust you until after they've received something from you. That's why a free report like this one is such a helpful medium. Free reports are great ways to gain trust from your readers without them having to risk money. But, it's the guaranteed return of money that really gets people to take the next step. Without it, your sales will be dramatically reduced.

Success Key #5 – Bring Them Back for More

If you've had any sort of sales training, you learned that it takes an average number of seven contacts before a prospect will buy from you. I've heard the most successful Internet marketing experts present that the number of times you need to contact a Web site visitor to make a sale is much higher than seven, more like 12-15 contacts.

How do we get this many contacts with prospects within a short amount of time? Here are some suggestions:

Make a point to continuously add new informational content to your Web site.

Adding new content to your Web site at least every week should be one of your goals. Know in advance what new content you will be adding so that you can encourage your site visitors to come back at that time to view the new information that has been posted.

Add the ability for site visitors to easily add their e-mail address to your distribution list.

When people request to be added to your distribution list, they've "opted-in" or they have given you permission to send e-mails to them regarding their topic of interest. That way you can send them routine updates of new information and special deals you're offering.

Offer a newsletter or tip of the week.

By routinely and repetitiously sending educational and industry-specific content to a group of people who want to receive this information, you will all of a sudden find yourself being considered an expert in your industry. It's much easier to sell a product to a group of people who trust your advice and think of you as an expert in your field than if they're just hearing about you for the first time.

There are many more components to this step that I offer an educational resource called [Maximize the Web for Your Business](#). This is a detailed, step-by-step educational resource that I created for a client originally. They liked it so much that they strongly encouraged me to add it to my product line. It offers 21 steps for choosing a product or service to create and a chronological checklist for building your own sales empire using the Web.

As you look at your competitors' Web sites, look for links to sign-up for a newsletter, or content that will be "featured next week," or at least a method for adding an e-mail address to receive updates and free information. I bet you will find that the most successful sites on the Web will have those features.

Success Key #6 – If You Build it, Don't Expect Them to Come

Once you have the Web site completed and a means for people to repetitiously be in contact with you, only then will you be ready to open the floodgates. If you do not have all of the previous components in place, please do so before launching any type of promotional campaign or you will be throwing away money and lost sales.

When people think of promoting a Web site, their first sentence of discussion usually includes getting listed in search engines. “How can I get in the top 5 results in 25,000 search engines?” That’s the most common request I get.

Somewhere along the line, we got conditioned to believe that search engine promotion is really all we need to do to promote *any* Web site. Experts popped up everywhere to help us create the perfect keywords, page titles and descriptions to improve our placement on the search engines. For some, this strategy worked and sales increased. For most, there was little if any change in Web sales. Now people are more confused than ever as to how to market their Web sites.

The answer to successful and efficient promotion of your Web site is back in Success Key #1 – to know your goal and #2 - know your audience.

How will the majority of potential visitors to your site look for your company? Will they go to a search engine or will they use the Yellow Pages? Will they ask a friend or will they listen to the radio? Will they drive a car down the highway where they can see sign ads or do they stay home most of the time? Do you already have a list of people who might be interested in what your site has to offer or do you need to create the interest from scratch?

In the beginning stages of creating a successful Web site, it will be hard to do everything all at once. You will likely have a limited budget and you will be (and should be) cautious about where to spend money. You will probably find yourself attempting to focus on promoting your site in certain ways first and other ways a few months later.

I’ve found that people are quick to spend several thousands of dollars to attain a fancy multi-page site. But, then they will often expect to pay only \$100 for search engine promotion thinking that’s all they’ll have to do to get 100,000 visits a month.

If we could all have the courage to spend just \$1,000 on a simpler site and a few thousand dollars on promotion, there would be many more successful Web sites out there.

Success Key #7 – Test and Measure

The beauty of the Web is that you can test individual pages with certain promotions and measure your direct response. You can easily register multiple domain names (www.sitenum1.com, www.sitenum2.com, www.sitenum3.com) and point each of them to a sub-domain of your main site. For example:

www.sitenum1.com points to www.yourmainsite.com/sitenum1
www.sitenum2.com points to www.yourmainsite.com/sitenum2
www.sitenum3.com points to www.yourmainsite.com/sitenum3

You can even get more elaborate with testing by assigning a simple CGI script to your pages. I call it the Click Tester for lack of a better name. Essentially, you setup two Web pages that sell the same product but take different sales approaches. You assign your primary URL (www.yourcompany.com) and then command the script to send the first visitor to Page A, the second visitor to Page B, the third visitor to Page A, the fourth visitor to Page B. At the end of the day or week, you can view an administration area to see which page brought you the most sales. The page that brings the most sales within your test period is the one you will want to use for promotions on a larger scale. I offer this script for free when you buy my detailed instructional document [Maximize the Web for Your Business](#).

Most Web site hosting companies will offer a means for you to track visitation to your Web site. This should be a free service offered by all Web hosts but it's sometimes an additional cost. If your Web host does not offer any way for you to track activity on your site, refer them to www.mrunix.net/webalizer. It's a free utility that can be loaded on any Web server.

That's why your Web host shouldn't charge you anything—because there are perfectly good solutions out there that are free. If your Web host just totally ignores your request to supply statistics for you, contact me at Marty@HereNextYear.com and I'll direct you to my own recommended Web host.

So, what exactly should you be tracking? Here's a list of the basics:

- **Number of Unique Visitors** – Most systems will log a user's computer location so that if the person comes back for another visit, he is not considered a unique visitor but a repeat visitor
- **Summary by month** – This is the number of visitors and number of pages within your site that received visits
- **A graphical display of total visitation by month** – It's important to be able to view trends over time, which is easily done through graphical representation of history
- **Daily statistics and graphics** – By watching visitation on a daily level, you can spot days of the week that are more active than others
- **Hourly statistics and graphics** – Spotting hours of the day that your site is most active will help you confirm the Internet Lifestyle of your audience
- **Visitation for each page of your Web site** – This is important to know so that you know where to focus your development efforts for the future. If no one visits page 5 but a thousand people visit page 6, you might choose to expand page 6 into its own category and re-write or discontinue page 5.

- **What page people are entering your site from** – It's quite common for people to enter your site through a subsequent page rather than your Home page. If your most popular entry page does not encourage the visitor to move toward your Site Goal, you're losing potential sales.
- **How did people arrive at your site?** - Did they type in www.yourcompany.com? Did they find your site on a search engine? Maybe they clicked on a banner ad or a link on some other site. Either way, it's important to know so you can measure your promotional efforts and understand where your promotion strategy needs work.
- **If the visitors came through a search engine, what search terms did they use to find your site?**

Most people feel that they just don't have enough time to test and measure. But this is one of the secrets to having a successful Web site versus one that will lose money and waste time.

In Summary...

There are many components needed to have a truly successful Web site these days. If you apply these Seven Steps to Web Success to every Web site you're involved with, you will be ahead of most. Remember to always:

Success Key #1 – Design with the Goal in Mind

Success Key #2 – Know Your Audience

Success Key #3 – Study Your Competition

Success Key #4 – Give the People What They Want

Success Key #5 – Bring Them Back for More

Success Key #6 – If You Build it, Don't Expect Them to Come

Success Key #7 – Test and Measure