

Why Have a Web Site?

You've got a website. It's got some cool graphics and information about your company and maybe even a shopping cart for selling stuff. You've tweaked your copy and checked your tags, yet **your visitors don't seem to do what you want them to do.**

It's time to take a step back and think about why you built a website in the first place.

"We had to have a website - everybody does!" This is the mentality of many business sites.

With that mentality, inevitably you'll end up with someone in upper management complaining that the site isn't getting enough results to justify the expenses. Or the CEO wants to know why the site's PageRank is only a four, and traffic patterns don't match last year's numbers. Suddenly, everyone's scrambling around to "fix" it. Sound familiar?

The problem is that **many sites are built without a clear goal in mind.** It sounds silly, but it's true. It's time to take two steps back and take a big-picture look at your website and why it exists.

What's the goal of your web site?

- To inform?
- To build a community?
- To gain valuable market research?
- To reduce support and customer service costs?
- To reach a broad audience with a message?
- To find sales leads?
- To conduct e-commerce?
- To gain advertising revenue?
- To brand your company?
- To build trust?
- To reduce printing and mailing costs?

These are just some of the many possibilities. Remember, **the web is** not just a marketing tool - it's **a business tool** as well. While it is perfectly okay to have an Internet billboard that simply contains contact information, why settle for that when your site can do so much more? Even the smallest local business can utilize the power of the Internet to be more efficient and to build revenue. Once you start thinking about it, it's easy to get excited about the potential for your site.

Get agreement

It's important to get all the departments within your company on the same page in order to **agree on priorities** from the start. After that, you've got to **agree on some goals**. Too many people have traffic as the goal of a website. But think about it; would you rather have 1000 people visit your site and do nothing, or have 100 people visit your site and take action? Does a PageRank of 7 mean anything to the real profitability of your company? These abstract, relative numbers don't make a difference by themselves, and should not be the ultimate goal of any website.

More important are things like new sales leads, an increase in average consumer satisfaction, decreased support calls, more newsletter subscriptions or completed surveys. These are all **measurable goals** that *do* mean something to your company.

Identify your target audience

Narrow this definition down to fit your particular customers. It's time to think like your target audience. What do they want to see? What information do they need? Why are they even visiting your site? If you can't get into their mindset, organize an informal focus group and ask them what they want. It's that easy! Let them poke around your current site and give you feedback. Usability issues can be identified during this process as well.

You may find you need a formal usability analysis, a redesign or new content sections. Sometimes it's even better to scrap the old site and start over from scratch. The important thing is that when you build a great site that keeps your users in mind, it will be **easier to get good links, good rankings and all around good results**. Your company and your customers will benefit - and best of all - you won't be as dependent on search engine rankings to meet your goals.

This article was written by Scottie Claiborne. Scottie is the owner of Right Click Web Services¹, a firm specializing in usability, search engine optimization, and Internet marketing.