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Website Best Practices Checklist

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(Revised) February 2011

Website Best Practices Checklist

1. Registering Your Domain Name

Select an appropriate website domain name that easy for users to remember. Ensure it is registered under your (company) name so it stays with you when changing web hosts or web developers.

2. Selecting a Web Developer

Due diligence is required when looking for Web Designers/Developers. Consider the following:

a) Experience Matters

- What is the developer's strategy? (does s/he understand your industry)
- Do the developer's skills match the company's needs? (possible areas of expertise include information architecture, coding/development, human/computer interaction, design, marketing, etc.)

b) Test their work. Consider the following:

- Companies in a similar industry.
- Sites with similar applications.
- Sites that reflect what you want as your website grows and develops.
- Success of their own site.

c) Request References. Ask clients about:

- Customer Service.
- Attentiveness.
- Knowledge.
- Helpfulness.
- Meeting deadlines (time/budget).
- Post project support (availability).

d) Evaluate the Provider. Consider the following:

- Size (smaller/younger –may be less stable, but you may have more influence if you are a large client).
- Rates (for additions, modifications, maintenance).
- Outsourcing (any third parties? coding?).
- Warranties.

3. Content Management System (CMS)

Ensure the website allows you to the manage content so you are not forced to contact your developer for updates. Note: it may be necessary to contact a professional if updates require change to coding. Consider the following:

- The site needs to be scalable, meaning that as your business grows, your website can grow with it.
- Identify desired editable features in advance and submit list to developers. Possible elements include: mast head images, rich media, Call To Actions (CTAs), page creation, well as content.

- Ensure Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) are used for website presentation (fonts, colors, layout, etc.) instead of tables to keep excessive code out of the way. This leaves a clean and concise interface for the search engines (assists with SEO).
- Ensure site is pixel perfect, error free and cross browser compatible (ie: Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Chrome, etc.).
- Ensure you understand the limitations of the system.
- Request a demo of the back end.

4. Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

Optimize your website for high ranking in Search Engine Results Pages (SERPS). A search engine friendly design involves factors such as menus, content, CMS', URLs, naming conversions, site structure and hierarchy. Consider some of the following:

- Keywords and Phrases (unique to each page).
- Page Titles Tags.
- Meta Data.
- Alt Images Tags.
- Strategic (reciprocal) links.

** above considerations must be relevant and meaningful.

5. Navigation

Ensure site hierarchy is clear and easy to use. Navigation links and tabs must be appropriately labelled (intuitive). Consider offering a variety of navigation aids, such as breadcrumbs, site map and/or search boxes. Test navigation hyperlinks to ensure they are in working order.

6. Content and Presentation

Ensure high quality (meaningful, useful) content, which is applicable to your target markets, is posted. Consider the following:

- Identify your audience's points of interest. Write enticing product/service descriptions. Choose colourful nouns and active verbs that convey emotion. Add life to your sentences by replacing invisible verbs like "go" and "have" with dynamic ones like "explore" or "embrace". Give your site visitors a glimpse into the future so they can see how purchasing from your company will improve their lives. Abstract from Keep Exploring: Canadian Tourism Commission Brand Guidelines
- Include rich media (photos, video, etc.)
- Ensure content is timely. Post new information frequently. Remove outdated content.
- Include value-added content.
- Techniques of writing for the web must be used, such as headings, bullet point, short, streamlined paragraphs, white space.
- Content should be organized in a consistent manner.
- Ensure fonts, font sizes and font colours are consistent throughout site. Ensure background is high contrast colour.
- Make certain content is free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- Ensure contact information is included.

7. Call To Action (CTA)

Include strong CTAs (linked to objectives) throughout your site. They add focus to your site and offer direction to visitors. Use active language. For example, “Buy Now”. Use of colour and images is an effective way to draw attention to elements.

8. Graphics

Include high quality images throughout your site to engage users emotionally as they consider your business for products and/or services. Consider some of the following:

- Use photos to show real content, not just to decorate your website.
- Thumbnails offer users an overview of photos; they can select the images they wish to enlarge.
- To ensure graphics download quickly, ensure the correct image file format is selected. Balance image quality with file size so speed is not an issue.
- Use descriptions to explain the main subject in your picture.
- Avoid using splash or intro pages to welcome users to your site. Splash pages merely act as a roadblock to users as they search for information.
- Avoid using watermark images. These interfere with the users viewing pleasure.

9. Functionality

Ensure website all elements of website are functioning appropriately. Consider the following:

- Acceptable loading time.
- Internal and external hyperlinks are active.
- Forms function as expected.
- No JavaScript errors are generated.

10. Copyright

Copyright in a work exists automatically when an original work is created. In cases where work has been created by some else, for example web page design or content, ensure your contract addresses who retains the copyright. A certificate of registration is evidence the creation is protected by copyright and that you, the person registered, are the owner. It can be used in court as evidence of ownership.

For more information on copyright protection visit: http://www.cipo.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/cipointernet-internetopic.nsf/eng/h_wr00003.html?OpenDocument

- To show your copyright, add the following to the bottom of your pages:
Copyright (or ©) *Year* *Your Name* For example, Copyright 2010 John Doe

11. Analytics

Make use of web analytics to measure site statistics and analyze traffic behaviour. Analytics can help you monitor visitors and users, optimize your website and formulate a sales and e-marketing plan.

Other Web-based Marketing Considerations

1. Free Google Tools (<http://hubpages.com/hub/Googles-Free-Marketing-Tools>)

[Google Analytics](#) analyzes your traffic, telling you where it comes from and what happens to it once it enters your site. It helps you improve your results online. With Analytics you can focus on campaigns and initiatives that will give you a return on your investment and help you improve your site to convert more visitors.

[Google Sitemaps](#) will put your newly created pages into the Google Search Index quickly. This is a file that is uploaded to Google as you add new pages on your site. Google Sitemaps is one of a variety of tools from Google Webmaster.

[Google Places](#) allows you to create a free business listing. When potential customers search Maps for local information, they'll find your business: your address, hours of operation, even photos of your storefront or products.

[Google Product Search](#) helps shoppers find and buy products across the web. As a seller, you can submit your products to Google Product Search, allowing shoppers to quickly and easily find your site. After you upload your product information, items will appear on Google Product Search and may be displayed on Google.com. Your store and products will be shown to shoppers when they type in search terms relevant to your product offerings. Shoppers simply click on your listing to be brought to your site.

2. Social Media Marketing (Free Tools)

Social media marketing is the process of promoting your products/services (experience) through social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Social Media conversation is comparable to word-of-mouth endorsement. As these sites see a great deal of traffic, they can be an invaluable marketing tool.

3. Mobile Website (<http://www.nubiq.com/white-papers/GrowingUseofMobileWebsites.pdf>)

The Mobile Web has now moved into the mainstream market, with a growing amount of information available to users on the move. The Mobile Web is all about discovering the right content when you need it. Its advantages are obvious – information access whenever, wherever. With mobile devices fast becoming the primary interface to the Internet, business opportunities are ripe. By establishing a Mobile Web presence, potential customers will be able to find your business with greater ease. Mobile marketing translates into new revenue opportunities, new communication forums and new promotional possibilities.