SIX MYTHS EXPLAINING THE MOST COMMON PERCEPTION OF WEBSITES AND WHY THEY ARE WRONG.

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS OF BUILDING A CORPORATE WEBSITE
“That’s the thing about the internet: it doesn’t simply help us find the best thing out there; it has helped to produce the idea that there is a best thing, and, if we search hard enough, we can find it.”

– Aziz Ansari

INTRODUCTION

According to Statistic Brain, only 53% of small businesses had a website in 2014. In a day and age where people rely on the internet to decide what to wear, what to cook for the evening meal, and even which automobile or home to buy, a website is a vital part of any company’s success.

THE GLUE THAT HOLDS EVERYTHING TOGETHER

Only a little more than a decade ago, a company’s mere presence online made it seem authoritative within its industry or niche. These days, though, simply being online is not enough. Websites must be robust and part of an entire network of tools designed to improve a company’s success rate. A website is the connection between consumer relationship management (CRM) software, enterprise resource planning (ERP) software, social media tools, marketing automation, and sales automation. It is the glue that holds everything together.

The six myths on the following pages explain the most common perceptions surrounding websites and why they are wrong.
MYTH #1 – DESIGN A WEBSITE, AND THEY WILL COME

“Everything in life is somewhere else, and you get there in a car.”

– E.B. White

Take a few minutes to think about your vehicle. It takes you to and from work each day, it gets you to the grocery store, and it even takes you to places where you can relax or have some fun. Without even realizing it, your car plays a vital role in your overall comfort. In many cases, it even signifies your status in life.

WHAT OUR CARS SAY ABOUT US

We all know someone who owns a wonderfully fast (and wonderfully expensive) sports car. In some cases, these people spend extra money on luxury cars in order to impress their friends, family, and coworkers. In other cases, these individuals buy these cars to satisfy their own desire for luxury, speed, or status. In fact, our cars say a lot about us as people. Others will look at our cars and form ideas in their minds about us. If we drive minivans, people see us as family-friendly. If we drive four-door sedans, people view us as practical. If we drive a luxury sports car, people may see us as risk-takers and people who aren’t afraid to push the status quo.

WHY YOUR WEBSITE IS LIKE AN AUTOMOBILE

If you take the time to think about it, your website is the delivery system for your clients and customers. Imagine someone sitting at home, performing an internet search, and coming across your website. They will open the door, step inside, and take a look around – much like they would in your car. At this point, it is up to your website to “drive” this visitor to make a purchase, schedule an appointment, or take any series of next steps. It is often the very first association with you and your company that people have, so you want to make sure that you make a great impression.

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With all of this talk of luxury cars, beauty, and status quo, the first idea many corporate website owners have involves designing their website like a Lamborghini. This vehicle certainly stands out, and the first thing people think when they see it is, “Gosh. This person must be incredibly successful.” Although the luxury and expense of a Lamborghini can certainly appeal to others, the truth is that people rarely think about others when they purchase such a car. Therein lies the problem. If we design our websites like Lamborghinis, we are essentially designing it for ourselves and our companies—not for anyone else.

Users will form an opinion about your website 0.05 seconds after it loads, according to Kinesis Inc., a Portland-area marketing firm. This means that while it is important for your website to grab a user’s attention, it is also important for your site to be practical. Remember that your website is not for your pleasure, unlike a Lamborghini. It should be designed with the users in mind, much like a bus. A luxury bus is inviting. It shows your visitors that you care about their experiences with your company. It provides a much better opportunity for you to please a larger demographic.

Your website is, in essence, your company vehicle. It invites people in, takes them on a sightseeing tour, and inevitably drops them off at their intended destination. It is your goal, then, to provide as many people as possible with a smooth ride and an enjoyable experience overall. This is why you do not want a Lamborghini. You want a luxury bus designed with your target demographic in mind.
MYTH #2 – BUILDING A USER PERSONA IS TOO EXPENSIVE

“Getting to know someone involves curiosity about where they have come from – who they are.”
– Penelope Lively

DISCOVER YOUR CLIENTS

Now that you know your website needs to be built for your clients and not yourself, you will need to take some time to discover your clients. You likely already have some marketing information available to you. For instance, you might be aware that based on market research, your target demographic consists of middle-class adults between the ages of 25 and 45. You might also know that the majority of your visitors reside on the west coast in the United States. Putting your website in front of the right people is expensive, but contrary to popular belief, it is not too expensive. In fact, it could be one of the best things you do for your company.

Basic information about your target demographic is certainly important information to have, but does it constitute an actual user persona? No.

Before you can build the optimal corporate website, you should understand your clients and visitors on a more personal level.

- What do they value?
- What is their average disposable income?
- How many people live in their households?
- Are these users experienced with a variety of technology and, more specifically, are they experienced with the product or service your company offers?

This information is incredibly useful when it comes to building a user persona. This persona can help you put names and faces to the people that you want to view your site and ultimately purchase your products or services. When the creation of your website is built around the
overall user experience, as it should be, you need to know everything you can about your demographic.

It does cost time, and it does cost money. Nonetheless, when the right people view your website, there is truly limitless potential. There are four steps to website development that you should consider in tandem with the user persona. They are: Think, Design, Code, and Optimize.

Now, with all of this in mind, consider two different types of clients.

CLIENT 1

This client is in a bit of a hurry and already understands his market. In this case, the “think” process involves developing the sitemap and wireframes only.

He has someone who installed Photoshop for him once and he does all of their website design, so there’s no need to worry about that. As for content, the client doesn’t need that right now either, as he has thought out all of the content before contacting us.
This client cannot do the coding on his own, so this is not an area to skimp.

The client realizes that we didn’t include some aspect of our users in the site, so now we need to go back and make a new part to the website. (See myth 6.)

In the excitement of a new website, marketing has changed the entire messaging of the product and what we came up with the first time is no longer working.

The client is not happy with the contact page. The image they wanted is not displaying properly, so the entire thing must be coded and redesigned. (See myth 1.)

The client is now over budget due to the coding “flaws”, and he has no further ability to maintain his site or ask for help in maintaining it. There is very little activity on the site as it lies dormant, and the company sees no measurable change.

Clients who believe they can skip identifying the user persona before diving into the coding part of the process are bypassing one of the most important parts of building a corporate website. Please bear in mind that these numbers are purely an example and do not represent the actual costs of the services.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{THINK} & \quad \{ 10k \\
\text{STRATEGY} & \quad - \\
\text{DESIGN} & \quad - \\
\text{CODE} & \quad 30k \times 5 \\
\text{OPTIMIZE} & \quad - \\
\text{GRAND TOTAL} & \quad 160k
\end{align*}
\]
CLIENT 2

THINK

This client would like to test the water before spending anymore capital. At this stage, we start with user persona and create things like sitemaps, experience maps, templated wireframes, lead generation strategies, and maybe user testing that all coincide with the user persona. By the time this process is complete, the client has a well-rounded view of what the site will look like on the functional side of things.

DESIGN

Now that the strategy is in place and we know what to do, we simply design the website to satisfy that strategy. We create content with SEO in mind. The user interface begins to take form.

CODE

After the design has been put into place, we set to work on coding the website itself along with any apps or tools that will make the site the center of your digital marketing campaign.

OPTIMIZE

Following site launch, it is necessary to keep scanning analytics, testing the hardware, and initiate A/B testing. The site is live, but it is also alive and the optimization step allows us to get the absolute most from it.

With all of these things in mind, here you see an example of what it might cost to build a website for this particular client.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THINK</th>
<th>10k</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STRATEGY / USER TESTING</td>
<td>5k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGN</td>
<td>10k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODE</td>
<td>30k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPTIMIZE</td>
<td>15k per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRAND TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>70k</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a nutshell, construction workers will often use the phrase “measure twice, cut once” in order to reduce wasting their resources due to a failure to preplan. Building a user persona before putting coding measures into place works in much the same way. Coding is one of the most expensive processes in website building, so it is important to make sure it fits the company the first time. When we spend more time in the beginning understanding who the user really is, we can avoid the costs and repetition.

For example, if you want to implement user testing, simply print out a copy of the wireframes and ask your coworkers or walk-in consumers which menu design they prefer. It will only take a few minutes for you to gather some very valuable information, and this is long before the coding process ever begins. You know exactly what type of menu style you want up front, so you can save yourself valuable time and money in the future.
MYTH #3 – FOLLOWING THE THREE-CCLICK RULE WILL DRIVE RESULTS

“Any fool can make a rule, and every fool will mind it.”
– Henry David Thoreau

Years ago, there was an understood rule that if a visitor could not access the information he or she wanted in three clicks or less (or in two taps or less on a touchscreen device), then the site was too difficult to navigate. Fortunately, this is not the case. In fact, it gives us the perfect opportunity to demonstrate two parts of this particular myth.

DATA SHOULD CHANGE FREQUENTLY

While it may be very true that the data validated the three-click rule in the past, the data can and often does change. Within the last few years alone, the internet has evolved and changed drastically. Only 10 years ago, Web 2.0 began to radically transform the way people used the internet. The dust from the dot-com bubble began to settle, allowing us to take a very good look at what was happening within the digital landscape.

Because the dot-com bubble continued to affect the overall stability of the internet and the variety of technology connected to it, the internet kept changing – again and again, over and over. These days, we no longer refer to the internet as Web 3.0 or Web 4.0; it changes far too frequently for that. In today’s day and age, we mark new generations of the internet based on the size of the mobile devices used to access it (phone, tablet, or phablet), the resolution of the display (720p, 1080p, 4k), and even the new companion hardware that seems to become more sophisticated with every passing year (smart watches, other wearables, and internet-connected home appliances).

When it comes to building a corporate website, the developer must be aware of how their users will access the site in this multi-faceted environment. Because the technology moves and changes so quickly, it is important to keep our websites – and the data we collect about them – up to date.
INTERESTING CONTENT IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS EASE OF NAVIGATION

In falling back to the three-click rule, many of our clients used to believe that they could forgo interesting content in favor of making their websites easy to navigate in just a few clicks. Although ease of navigation is certainly important, the site has to be interesting and appealing along the way, in order to hold the user's attention. Remember – the user is on a grand luxury bus, and it isn’t necessarily about the distance he or she must travel. His or her experience is determined by the quality of the ride.

In every generation of the internet, there are a few things that will always provide users with a great experience. First, the site must be easy to navigate. Forcing users to search endlessly for the information they want most will only push them away. Next, the site must have great content along the path to the user’s destination. This content can help distract the user away from the number of clicks it takes to get to the ultimate destination. Finally, you must provide the users with opportunities to make decisions for themselves along the way. Attempting to funnel a user into a particular page can frustrate visitors more than help them.

So, how do you build a website with simple navigation? This all falls back to the sitemap and templates. These should be one of the first things your team develops. The content and meaningful decisions will fall into place once you have done this. Think of it as a balancing act. You want to guide the user along while he or she looks at the site, but you also need to make sure you give that user the opportunity to make choices along the way that are important to him or her.

If you want to view a great example website that ties all of this information together, check out www.Toyota.com. On this website, users may click 50 times or even more before they find the exact car, truck, or SUV they want. By the time they make their decisions, they have waded through some 50 pages of information while trying to decide on the perfect trim or color. This website guides the user through the pages, step by step, so that the user has to put very little thought into actually navigating the site. There is absolutely no denying that Toyota’s site breaks the three-click rule dozens of times over, but they still enjoy plenty of traffic each and every day. Why? It’s because users can enjoy this same experience regardless of whether they are using a wide-screen monitor, a smartphone, or even a tablet. It’s one of the best and most rewarding luxury bus rides on the internet.
MYTH #4 – INFORMATION “ABOVE THE FOLD” IS ALL THAT MATTERS TO USERS

“Scrolling is a continuation; clicking is a decision.”
– Josh Porter

CALL TO ACTION

The term “above the fold” refers to the front page of a newspaper. It is used to express the importance of the top half of a newspaper; the part that consumers will see before they make their purchases. This content must be designed in such a way that it catches the consumer’s eye and prompts them to buy. If the consumer reads more than what is located above the fold, it makes no difference to the newspaper publisher. That consumer has already purchased the newspaper, so the above-the-fold content has already done its job.

Websites, on the other hand, do not work like this. Consumers do not have to pay to enter a website, and they can consume all of the content inside without spending anything but their valuable time. This means that a website is a fantastic opportunity to present what a company does and who they are, but more importantly, a website allows the user to make meaningful decisions along the way. The industry refers to this opportunity as a “Call to Action”, or CTA.

Simply put, a CTA is the primary opportunity for a website to engage with the user in a way that above-the-fold content simply cannot. Many clients will want to simply place the CTA above the fold, and kill two birds with one stone. However, there is some research to suggest that no one really looks above the fold anymore.
STUDY #1 - LukeW

According to www.lukew.com, the current technology provided by touchscreen devices, the varying screen sizes, and even the consumer’s expectation to find the CTA above the fold has led to a generation of people who begin to scroll before the page even finishes loading.

![Scroll Depth Graph]

Most viewed area is just above the “fold”
Many scroll before page fully loads

STUDY #2 - MARKETING EXPERIMENTS

A second study by MarketingExperiments.com focused on a website’s ability to capture leads. They created two versions of a website for Sierra Tucson, a treatment and recovery center. The first version, which was considered the “control”, featured a two-column layout with the CTA placed above the fold at the top right of the screen. In the second version, considered the “treated” website, they used a long-form format to include some additional information, and they placed the CTA at the very bottom of the page. Surprisingly, the “treated” website generated 220% more leads than the control, even though the CTA was found at the top of the page. As you can see, the “data shows” that users are more likely to click on a CTA when it is not located above the fold. With this information in mind, how can we utilize it in our own website design and development? The best way to see the differences and how they can influence the overall effectiveness of a site is to compare four simple elements two sites. These elements are:

- Who we are.
- What we can do.
- Proof of our product
- CTA

25M SESSIONS
In the two examples below, the very same elements are used on the pages, but in different orders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEBSITE #1</th>
<th>WEBSITE #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who we are</strong> – We are a leading developer in technology that can help keep every home safer.</td>
<td><strong>Call to action</strong> – “Click here for more information on how you can obtain Cougarfree™ and keep the cougars away!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What we can do</strong> – We protect your family by creating 24/7 protection from stray cougars that may wander into your neighborhood with Cougarfree™.</td>
<td><strong>Who we are</strong> – We are a leading developer in technology that can help keep every home safer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proof of our product</strong> – Studies have shown (“the data shows”) that homes are 80% safer with Cougarfree™.</td>
<td><strong>What we can do</strong> – We protect your family by creating 24/7 protection from stray cougars that may wander into your neighborhood with Cougarfree™.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Call to action</strong> – “Click here for more information on how you can obtain Cougarfree™ and keep the cougars away!”</td>
<td><strong>Proof of our product</strong> – Studies have shown (“the data shows”) that homes are 80% safer with Cougarfree™.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first website, in the left-hand column, seems to tell a story that makes sense to the user. Even if users have already scrolled past the website intro (and the data shows they do!), they still understand what the product does and how effective it is. At this point, they have developed enough confidence in that product and the company to buy the product by the time they come to the CTA at the very bottom of the page. The second website, in the right-hand column, is a perfect example of a bad website. It screams “Buy me!” long before it provides the consumer with any real information to help build their confidence in the product or the company. By the time the user has figured out what it is he or she is supposed to buy, the CTA is all the way up at the top of the screen, and he or she has to scroll back up to find it. In the majority of cases, the data shows that the user will simply close the site due to the frustration.

If you do not feel confident with placing the CTA at the bottom of the screen – or anywhere below the fold, for that matter, feel free to compare. You can choose different CTA placements on the site and see which one returns more leads. Once you have the data, you will agree that the first scenario above is by far the most effective since it presents information in a chronological order.
MYTH #5 – CONTENT COMES LAST

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”
– Benjamin Franklin

“We don’t need content yet,” says someone in your strategy meeting. “We create content all day. When the website is ready, we can enter the content in a few days before it launches.”

All too often, people push off the content until the very end of the website development process. Digital Trike's experience is that while it may seem like a good idea in theory, the actual launch date is never what anyone has planned.

Website designers utilize the Lorum Ipsum tool, which provides basic “dummy” content in Latin to help fill in empty gaps where content should be. With this tool, designers can adjust anything at all, from font to color, and from spacing to alignment. They can even adjust alignment with objects, pictures, and icons. It sounds very simple, and the company may even believe that it has saved time and money by pre-designing the layout in such a way.

However, in almost every scenario, things go bad once the content actually arrives. All of the careful planning, spacing, and consideration becomes a moot point when there is simply too much content in one area and not enough in another. That beautiful design that Lorum Ipsum helped create is now nothing more than a pipe dream. The navigation is too big. The caption that was supposed to be one line is now three, and it is spilling over into the space where you had planned to put your CTA.

There are two ways to fix these issues. The first is to rewrite the content in such a way that it fits the planned layout of the page. However, if you have waited until the very last minute to create that content, then chances are good that you just won’t have time to do this before the schedule launch date. The designer can certainly rework the layout, but once again, this is a time-consuming process that can also push back the launch date. Because the developers have already built the templates, your client will need another cycle of coding to rebuild the templates to the new design.

If you failed to plan for great content from the start, the development cost can more than double. Furthermore, referring back to Myth #2, it is likely the beginning of a few more rewrites.
DEATH TO LORUM IPSUM!

If someone in your strategy meeting says, “We don’t need content yet. We’ll just use dummy text for now,” be the person to stand up and ask them what the real content will look like. Although Lorum Ipsum can provide some visual understanding of how a website will look, it should never be a stand-in for the real thing.

To be perfectly honest, most of the website users are coming to the site for one reason and one reason only – the content. It is the single most important element on a site, and it deserves ample attention from the very beginning of the project, yet people tend to push it off until the very end.
MYTH #6 – LAUNCH WITH ALL OR NOTHING

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

– Lao Tzu

TEMPLATES AND PHASED INTEGRATION

Corporate websites are very, very large. They often contain hundreds or even thousands of pages that need to be integrated into a website, and the task of converting everything over to a newer, more user-friendly website seems like a daunting one, indeed. Everyone wants to get the new site up and running, and even the data shows that the users find the new site appealing.

However, one of the greatest fears among big companies is that it will take far too long to change and update everything. Because of this, some websites remain in the development stage for eternity. In fact, some spend two years or more developing the next website, and by the time they are finally ready to launch, all of the technology, data, and design they have used is already outdated and obsolete.

Recently, Digital Trike helped resolve a similar issue with a well-known Fortune 500 Company. This particular website contains some 1500 unique pages of content and seven vertical markets, and at first, moving it to a new website seemed nearly impossible. This organization faced several issues, including:

- Outdated design and user experience.
- Inconsistent marketing messages across their vertical markets.
- A non-responsive website

In order to help make their website more relevant, Digital Trike focused on two core ideas: templates and phased integration.

We converted 1500 pages into templates and found that there were no more than 20 individually-designed layouts. Each page on the site looked the same, almost as if they were using a generic “Contact Us” page with the only differences in the address and contact number. This way of simplifying things meant that we only had 20 pages to update rather than 1500.

Once the templates were identified, the company then focused on standardizing their
marketing message across each one. They also ensured that each of the seven vertical markets had consistent branding. Because of this, design could happen very quickly – they already had their content updated and ready to go.

Lastly, Digital Trike implemented a development cycle for each of the 20 new templates. In the first month, there the header navigation and footer were updated, and for the next 10 months, the focus was placed on updating two templates per month. In just under a year of development, a massive 1500-page corporate website was completely updated to a responsive design with more consistent marketing throughout all of their verticals. It looked impressively modern and relevant within the industry.

Unless you want your luxury bus to spend years at the mechanic, the process of simplifying the pages into templates and phasing the integration is vital.

CONCLUSION

When you can view your website as luxury buses designed to take web visitors on a guided tour of your company, you have already conquered the first step in effectively building a corporate website. In a nutshell, the bus must be aesthetically pleasing in order to catch the passenger's eye, it must contain everything that the passenger would hope to have on a luxury bus, and it must transport that person from one place to another without any hiccups along the way.

Be willing to come forward with your own unique ideas for branching out. There are plenty of ways to test these ideas and find out if they will work. Unless you focus on finding a way to incorporate these ideas into the luxury bus, they will consistently fall short. Over time, the carefully-planned and well-designed luxury bus will keep current with the Internet and changing technology, and the corporate website that no one thought would ever come to fruition will become an industry standard.