

Quick! Check these potential problems right now

There are a few things that people tend to overlook or to simply not check.

Check the contact information CAREFULLY on your website/marketing materials

You want to make sure it is accurate. Perhaps have someone read it off to you. For example, in my newsletter I found the address had the wrong ZIP code. A graphic designer I know had one digit wrong in her phone number.

And check whether it can be found easily

I just spent a ridiculous amount of time trying to find where an art class was being offered—you know—the actual physical place where it was meeting. The website made you go to the About page where you had to scroll to the “where to find us” page. Why make it so complicated?



By PNASH, Flickr

Check to see if GPS/Google Maps/Mapquest can find your address

If you are any type of location that people drive to (store, restaurant, hotel, attraction), have you checked that the address you give out works on GPS/Google Maps/Mapquest? Sometimes street names have changed or are new and do not show

up.

Check how your email and newsletters show up to recipients

Before you send out anything to the world, send yourself a sample. You want to make sure your name is spelled correctly, and how it shows up in the recipient's inbox. For example, someone I know was sending email that was coming from Email box 2 instead of her name. And just today I received an newsletter titled "Sample Newsletter" from a well known institution. These can result in people not knowing who you are and ultimately, not opening your email/enewsletter.

Go check these things right now. Fix them if they don't check out. You will be glad you did.

All I learned about WordPress I learned at camp

This blog is hosted on a website built on WordPress. Lots of blogs, and many websites, are built using WordPress because it is easy to use and easy to customize. Because WordPress makes it so easy to update your content, there are more organizations using WordPress as a content management system (CMS). If you use software such as Dreamweaver to build a website, you probably have to call your "web person" to ask him/her to make updates.

WordPress has built quite a large community of users and developers, many of whom have regular meet ups and discussion

groups. A very popular (and fun) way to get a large group of WordPress enthusiasts together is WordPress “camp.” These camps happen year round in cities worldwide. All are volunteer run.

This past weekend I attended Word Camp Philadelphia, and last month I went to Word Camp in Baltimore. I am trying to learn all I can about WordPress since I don’t have an IT department or anybody handling my website (which is a long story).

I learned a lot at Word Camp Philadelphia (and kudos to the organizers who made this volunteer run event run smoothly and professionally). Here are some main takeaways:

Make security a priority

All websites are vulnerable to hacking. There are several steps you can take to minimize the risk. Among them:

- Do not use admin as your log on name
- Have a strong password
- Always update to the newest version of WordPress
- Be sure your plugins are compatible and updated

Backup often

We heard this time and time again—make your back ups happen automatically. There are many plugins (free and paid) that make this easy. The one mentioned by many presenters was BackupBuddy.

Plugins are cool

Plugins are little programs that add functionality to your WordPress site. There are thousands of plugins available for download from WordPress.org, providing the ability to share posts, create backups, and add lots of bells and whistles. You

should keep plugins updated, and you should remove any you aren't using. Too many plugins can slow a website down, and create issues.

A few that were mentioned repeatedly were:

- All in One SEO pack
- AntispamBee
- Akismet
- Yet Another Related Post (YARPP) (running on this site)
- Digg Digg (for social sharing)

Content is crucial

If you don't have interesting and relevant content on your blog/website, why would anybody want to visit? Keep in mind that people don't like to read long chunks of text (as Jess Ostroff from Don't Panic Management put it: **TL;DR**, which stands for too long; didn't read). Also, to avoid long uninterrupted text is why we break up content using headings, bullets and images. To organize your content, you should use some sort of content management system. Jess Ostroff recommended DivvyHQ.com (paid) or the WordPress Editorial Calendar (free).

Websites should be accessible

There is such a thing as making your website "handicapped accessible." For example, blind people use web readers to visit websites. If you have images on your website, you should make sure to add alt text so that these readers can include a description of these images.

Another type of accessibility is for mobile devices. The newest version of the simple WordPress theme (Twenty Twelve) adjusts the dimensions of your website to make it fit to a mobile phone screen.

WordPress: it's not just for blogging anymore!

The most important takeaway is that WordPress is not just for blogging. Large organizations have already migrated their websites to a WordPress platform.

Go to camp already!

If you are interested in learning more about WordPress, I highly recommend going to Word Camp. However, not all camps are created equal and it may be worth it to travel to a camp that is well organized.

How much information are you requiring?

Yesterday on Twitter, someone posted about an event that sounded intriguing. I went to check out the link provided for details, thinking I would find time, place and cost, but instead I found a sign-up form. The form asked for: name, gender, date of birth, time zone, location, religious views, email and a password. I kid you not. Or, you could sign up using your Facebook login.

How much of this information are you requiring? **The**

information you require can be construed as a barrier to entry. You put up figurative barriers, at differing “heights” to reduce the amount of people that can access your offering.

Now, some people have absolutely no problem handing over any information that is asked of them. I used to know a woman who would even give out her social security number and her mother’s maiden name just to be on an email list. And then there are people like me, who guard their personal information zealously and will only give up the minimum for a good reason. For example, if the doctor’s office wants to know if I have had a surgery or take any medication. But why would I give an organization putting together an EVENT my birth date and religious affiliation?

This problem extends to the growing number of websites that require you to sign up with your Facebook account. Again, some people consider their Facebook profile public. And some—like me—don’t. Facebook has already compiled a good amount of personal information about you: where you live, where you are from, who your friends are, what your likes and dislikes are, your age and if you provided them with this info: where you went to school, your religion, your marital status and on and on.

You should consider exactly what information you require, and furthermore, you should tell people what you plan to do with that information. What exactly are you going to do to safeguard the privacy of that information?

Again, some people are pretty lax about privacy. But there is a continuum, and if your goal is to get more people (not fewer) to sign up, then you will have to consider that some people are not so comfortable handing over this information.

What are your thoughts? On a personal level, do you give any information requested, or do you fudge it? Do you sign in using your Facebook?

On an organizational level, how much information are you requiring and is all of it necessary?

Check your content much?

When was the last time you checked—and I mean thoroughly checked—your online content? Recently? Last quarter? Last year? When you launched the website?

If you haven't done it recently (within the past six months), I suggest hopping over to your website RIGHT NOW.

It's crucial to check for accuracy and relevance of your content. Here are a few areas you most definitely want to check and update if necessary:

- Contact information
- Product/service listing
- Pricing
- About page (everybody still with your company or in the same position?)
- Home page (what exactly is the first thing you are telling people about your company?)

People are using the web more and more each day to find vendors and buy stuff. An out-of-date or inaccurate website will make it difficult for those potential customers to do business with you.

What are you waiting for! Go do it now.

Is your website a communications failure?

Perhaps you spent lots of money and lots of time creating your website. You hired experts to design it and build it. And yet, you are not seeing the results you want. Why? It could be many things, or just one thing, but here are several failures I have found:

No contact information or not enough contact information. I just visited a website this week in which the contact us is strictly the customer service line. If you want to reach the actual corporate offices (you know, to speak to accounting, HR, marketing), you are out of luck.

Omission of important information/details. This week I visited the website for an upcoming PR event. Guess what information was not available ANYWHERE: the actual location of the event.

Too much information on the home page. Some websites have a very information heavy home page to the point that it is headache inducing.

An about page that doesn't say anything. The about page is your chance to explain who you are. Why use circular language and jargon that says nothing about you?

An ugly, dated design. Makes you look out of touch or cheap or both.

You have music. Enough said.

Readers, what have you run across that makes a website fail?

How to judge a business by its website

You may not be able to (entirely) judge a book by its cover (or so they say) but you may be able to judge a business by its website.

Let's start with the very basic question of does the business have a website? If the answer is no, that says a lot. Among other things, not having a website says that a business doesn't get how people search for information nowadays, or that it works strictly off referrals and very traditional advertising or that it is not tech-savvy.

However, most businesses do have a website. Some websites are better than others, and that often has to do with the budget allocated to it and also whether it is being handled by a communications person or a tech person (yeah...the communications person should handle this unless you want the website to speak IT).

A website is a necessary part of any marketing/communications strategy. Keeping that in mind, this is what should you look for:

Appearance and design: Does the website look good? Is it easy to read? If so, it shows this business has considered that potential customers' perceptions are important. Also, if it looks like it was designed in the 1990s, it shows that the business has not bothered to keep up with the times.

Clarity: What does this business do? It should be crystal clear by looking at the home page what kind of service or product the business offers.

About us page: Does this page provide you the information you need to consider doing business with this company? Or is it a lot of fluff and platitudes, short on substance?

Services or product listing: Does the website specifically list what services or products this business provides? How deep do you have to dig for this information?

Contact page: Does the business provide several ways to contact it? Businesses that don't provide a physical address and/or phone number and/or email are suspicious. They want to be able to contact you but not for your to contact or find them.

Freshness: What is the copyright on the website? When was this content updated and is it really up-to-date? If there is a blog, when was the last blog entry dated? Clearly, if a website lacks freshness, you have no way of knowing if the business still exists or in what form. For instance, if this is a restaurant website, and the menu is date Spring 2008, how do you know if they are still open for business?

Useful information: You need certain information to decide whether you want to contact a business or not: Does it work with your industry? Are there fees? What are the opening hours? Does this website give you the necessary information you need? For example, you are looking at a hotel website and you have a list of needs (location, availability of WiFi, restaurant on premises)—does the website provide you with the answers you need? In a hotel's case, does it list of room amenities and hotel services?

Easy to navigate: Is the website easy to use? Do you have to dig deep to get crucial information? If a website is not easy to use or navigate, it shows that the business does not understand what information its potential clients and customers need. Sometimes, it is a business decision to bury information on purpose (and this tells you a whole lot!)

You can read [5 Simple Tips for Better Business Websites](#) on OpenForum.com to see some more technical issues (like making sure a website is mobile friendly).
What would you add to the list?

Check your links

I know you need to add one more thing to your to-do list like you need to wake up Friday at 4 a.m. to watch the royal wedding, but do consider doing this with every blog post, website page, tweet, etc that you put out there:

CHECK THE LINKS!

Does your website have any broken links (or pages that don't appear correctly)? Does the sharing software on your blog work? All of it? When you post a link to a story on Twitter, are you sure the link is working?

Many of us do not check these very often.

Case in point: a blogger I follow has faulty sharing buttons on her blog. I read a good post by her, which I wanted to share on Twitter. I clicked on the link and all I got was a blank Twitter page—no title and no link. No good. I created a Bit.Ly short link and posted it anyway but she would have no way of knowing that the item had been shared unless her blog records ping-backs. I reported this to her, and I hope she is able to correct it.

Prevent this from happening by occasionally checking these links. Just sayin'.



The New York Times' Pay Wall

Yesterday, the New York Times announced its new subscription plan. Basically, you can read 20 articles on their site per month for free, and if you want continued access you will need to pay \$15 a month. This applies to your iPad subscription too. If you are a print subscriber, your digital access is included.

It is very telling that this announcement generated more than 2,000 comments on the New York Times site (more would have come in but the NYT shut down comments). I started reading through them, and the majority of what I read seemed to indicate that readers will not pay for access. The biggest argument: it is too expensive. The second biggest argument: NYTimes.com already carries lots of advertising.

Will the pay wall work? In my opinion, it will backfire for various reasons:

- **Human nature:** People do not like to pay for what they used to get for free. And, there are plenty of other news sites on the Web that are still free.
- **Work arounds:** If you click through on a Facebook or Twitter link to a New York Times article, you get around the paywall.
- **Too much money:** People are looking for ways to save money and paying for a digital subscription is probably an easy budget cut.

- **Fewer readers=lost revenue:** So say some people continue to pay for the content on the New York Times site. It will never be the same amount as the people accessing it for free. With fewer numbers, they will either have to charge less for their online ads (and lose revenue) or lose advertisers unwilling to pay for fewer impressions.

For many years, I was a subscriber to the New York Times print edition. I was a huge fan of their crossword puzzle and I loved the Sunday Times. But, the price was exorbitant. I had to stop my subscription. I missed the crossword puzzle, yes, but not the huge bill. People will do the same with the NYTimes.com site. They will miss it at first, but they won't pay for it because of budgetary constraints.

UPDATE: Just came across this article from emedia vitals, which says that some sites using the "metered model" have actually gained visitors. Is it that you think you get what you pay for?

Your thoughts? Take my poll.

[polldaddy poll=4741554]



Web and social media irritants

There are things that I see happening on social media and on the web that are irritating. They happen way too often. Here are my top peeves (and least of this week).

One of my top ten peeves of all time, and which I have

discussed before, is the **impersonal invitation to connect on LinkedIn**. In the past few weeks, I have received at least four or five invitations from people I don't know and who haven't made the slightest attempt to personalize the LinkedIn generated note "I'd like to add you to my professional network." I got one this morning, and I fired back a note telling the person in question that we hadn't ever met, and that a tip for her would be too personalize the note. She wrote back this really clueless note:

*Please accept my sincere apologies. I must have mistaken you for someone else. I thought I had met you at a XXXX function. I never send blind invitations.
I am currently writing for a couple of online magazines and am building local pr connections.
So sorry to be an annoyance.*

Why is this clueless? Because, a) she did send a blind invitation. She could have written something like, "We met at a XXX event last week, and I would like to connect with you here." And b) she is telling me she is using LinkedIn to build connections, which I interpret as using this forum to send out countless queries and newsletters , etc. So, she is not seeking to build a connection with ME, she is seeking to build her network to profit her work.

Other irritants are:

Blog posts that are not shareable on social media. And ironically, this post, from the All things WOM, from the Word of Mouth Association, IS NOT SHAREABLE. Has no share buttons. Really. How stupid is this.

Web redesigns that are not useful to the reader. The Washington Post redesigned their website and recently re-launched it. As far as I can tell, readers were not consulted. In a note to readers, sent THREE days after the re-launch the Post says:

The Washington Post is now even more essential and more in tune with the way you interact with news.

- *Follow stories as they develop and share your ideas as they evolve*
- *Watch events unfold with new video programs*
- *Know what's getting the most buzz and what's really happening in D.C.*
- *Get straight to your favorite coverage with destination hubs for Politics, Local, Sports and Opinions*

I guess what they mean by “more essential” is less stuff to read. Now I have to dig through the site to get to local news. And where are the blogs? Oh, and by screwing around with the site, lots of the Post’s blog RSS feeds were messed up. Nice going.

Using swear words on Twitter. I have written about this before, and I will again in light of this article in the New York Times. I swear all the time, just not on Twitter. Because Twitter is a broadcast medium that is also archived. What you say here is on the record for ALL to see. It shows a lack of thought to use your words carelessly.

Promoting yourself endlessly or worse, showing off on Twitter. There is one particular person, whom I just unfollowed today, who felt it necessary to be a braggart at every turn. It was things like this: “aren’t you jealous of my fabulous view?” with an attached picture. Why do I want to read this? Why do I care? Again, Twitter is a broadcast medium. What you say can be seen by 1000s of people.

Sending too many (or useless) email marketing messages. The AMA-DC was sending me four emails A WEEK. I told them it was too much. They unsubscribed me for criticizing them. And here is Entrepreneur’s take on why people stop following you. Read it and see that too many emails or too many posts irritate people. (And get this, I keep getting Comcast’s marketing

missives, even though they CANCELLED my account.)

Any of these get your goat too?

How to become irrelevant

How many blogs have you stopped reading? How many products have you stopped buying? How many ads do you ignore?

If you answered just one to any of these questions, the reason is because whatever the blog/ad/product/service has become irrelevant.

Some irrelevancy is by attrition—meaning that you will stop buying a product because you no longer need it (like baby diapers when your child is potty trained). Other irrelevancy is because you just don't care anymore or the information does not ring true.

How do you become irrelevant?

If you are a blogger:

- You write about things that people don't care about or are not interested in.
- You write about the same things over and over.
- You write about you, you and more about you.
- You never update your blog.

If you are an advertisement:

- You advertise the same offer, over and over
- You advertise an offer with tons of small print
- You advertise things that are just not true (we beat any price, for instance).
- What you advertise does not match reality.

If you are a product:

- You don't work as promised.
- You don't fill a need.
- You are not well priced.

If you are a website:

- You have outdated information.
- You look like you were designed in 1999.
- Your visitors can't find the information they need to make a purchase/visit your location/etc.

Basically, you become irrelevant when you forget what your audience needs or wants.

What makes you tune out marketing? Let me know what makes blogs/ads/websites/brochures irrelevant.