EZ Tips – 2014 Website Must Haves

By Chris Bachman | January 2, 2014

Each year I like to take a look at the **Top 10 Website Must Haves** and see how they have changed over the year, or stayed the same. Note the new entries, they are important.

1.   Contact

Contact – Make it easy for people to connect with you. Your site should be a doorway to doing business with you. Once you have invited them in be ready to talk, respond, answer questions. How would you feel if you walked into a store that looked great from the outside, had a lot of neat stuff once you entered…and yet, there was nobody there to help you? Ideally, contact info on every page.

2.   Title & Description

These are meta tags and all too often forgotten or ignored by those who just don't know better. These are probably the two most important items on your new-site check list. The first thing these do is to tell the search engines what you think the website page is about. Provided your content backs this up the search engine will believe it and place you in the SERPs accordingly. The second thing these two tags do is to capture the viewers attention (Title) and then convince them to click over to your site (Description). That is important…get it?! Remember: Every page should have its own, unique Title and Description tags. DO NOT use the same ones over and over.

3.   Mobile Compatibility (2014 !)

Depending on your type of business it is safe to say that upwards of 70% of your clients are searching for you on mobile devices, i.e. tablets and smart phones. Simply speaking, most old format website designs simply don't work well on these devices. It is sort of like reading a book while looking through the wrong end of a telescope. Or the images are dysfunctional, the links don't work, etc, etc. People won't tolerate websites that don't work well on their mobile devices and will most likely skip your website in favor of one that does. How much business are you losing….? Get Analytics installed and gain some perspective.

4. **Content – Informative, Helpful, Fresh…Content (2014 !)**

The search engines have thrown down the gauntlet. Clean up your website or go home. They mean it. The internet is littered with garbage websites and Google has now stepped up to state that they are buying the garbage and rewarding the content driven sites. If terms like Content Clusters, Info Stacking and Long Tail leave you scratching your head, it is time for some expert help and advice on how to breathe new life into your website before it starts slip sliding away.

5. **Spiderable links**

If your links can't be spidered you may have pages that search engines just won't see. This is especially true if you have not created a special search engine specific site map or registered the pages properly.
It is also true if you haven't paid attention to the limitations provided by some smart phone systems.
One way to make sure your links are spiderable is to have a list of at least your key pages with links along the footer. Another way is to include text links within the site content.

6. **XML sitemap or URL List**

Forget the old fashioned site map. It is passé. What you need is a site map specifically designed for the search engines. What I refer to here are site maps in either a .xml or .txt format. Make sure you create at least one and keep it updated. If you have over 25 pages or make changes regularly to pages then use the .xml format. If yours is a set-it-and-forget-it format then a .txt will work fine. Not sure you have one yet? Finding out is easy. Just type in your website address with each of these extensions: **www.yourwebsite.com/sitemap.xml** or **www.yourwebsite.com/urllist.txt** If you have one it will show. If not, you don't.

7. **Test in IE, Firefox, Chrome and Safari**

Just about everything works in Firefox, and Chrome and Safari are pretty easy too. However, IE is created by techies who live in a MS world unto themselves and with each new version you might find tools and code that no longer work properly or produce unintended results. This is especially true with older websites. Make sure your website is tested and works in all the major browsers.

8.   **Unique content**

Don't copy and paste someone else's content into your website. 1) It is stealing. 2) It makes you appear like a copy cat, 3) It could create a "duplicate content" issue with the search engines. The search engines are overwhelmed with garbage content and one source of this is duplicate content. So, when they see a page that has specific content and has been up for 3 years suddenly mirrored on another page somewhere, they have a tendency to not index the second page. Worried about duplicate content? You can check your content, or search for others "borrowing" yours at **CopyScape.com**.

9.   **Purpose**

What is your site meant to do? Have a clear purpose in mind and convey that with each page. If someone lands on a page they should know in an instant what the purpose of that page is. In fact, have friends evaluate your website and tell you where it is confusing, doesn't deliver, or loses its way. You may be surprised.

Remember too, ranking is not the end all goal. Conversion to what you want to have happen is. You can have a website at #1 with 5% conversion and I'll take the one at #9 with 30% conversion any day.

10.   **Be part of a plan**

A website is a tool, not an end-all silver bullet. It should be part of a bigger plan that may encompass: social media, print, advertising, referral programs, an affiliate network, resources, etc. Get the big picture in place and determine what you need the website to do. You may find that it can do much more than you initially thought, or you may discover that your plans for it fall far short of what they really should be. A professional, strategic plan can give you a big picture of what you have and need, putting it down on paper and providing you a game plan for how to get from where you are to where you want to be.

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