

Is Your Website on Target?

Whether your organization is already on the web or your website is still just a New Year's resolution, use this checklist to ensure you're on target. You'll want to make the best use of this marketing tool.

- 1) **Positioning** – Does your website support your marketing strategy? In many ways the website is the ultimate marketing tool. Unlike advertising, in which you're limited to short, simple messages, your website can include more complete information. Be sure, however, that the main message about your product, company or organization is consistent with the rest of your marketing campaign. Do you have the right "look" to support your positioning? Are you consistent in the use of your logo, colors, and tag line? Are you trying to be professional or hip, serious or fun? Whatever your desired image, make the design and layout of your site "fit" your organization's objectives.
- 2) **Multiple Targets** – Does your organization have multiple targets? Websites make it easy to provide different information for each target. Vision Service Plan, for example, directs visitors to either the doctor, patient or employer sections of its site. Many association sites have special password protected sections for "Members Only." This allows you to customize the site content to the needs of specific audiences.
- 3) **Customer Focused Design** – You may be tempted to structure the site to match your internal organization. Instead, make your site customer focused. Organize your website so it is logical to navigate, from the customer's perspective, and creates an experience that gives users the information that interests them. "Whether your website is designed in-house or contracted out, make sure your designer is well versed in usability practices and designs the site around the user experience," advises web designer Shirley Kaiser of SKDesigns.
- 4) **Terminology** – Are you speaking your customer's language? The industry may call it domestic sparkling wine, but consumers still call it champagne. You know you sell fasteners, but your customers call them paper clips. Use simple, commonly used words to make it easy for customers to find you and navigate your site. Usability testing with representatives from your target audience can help you choose headings that are easy to understand, increasing the likelihood that users will get to the right information in the fewest number of clicks.
- 5) **Speed** – Are you fast enough? Web surfers demand instantaneous gratification. They will not wait for too many fancy graphics to load. In bricks and mortar retail, frustrated customers have to get back into their cars, drive, re-park and spend extra time getting to a competitor. On the web, your e-Commerce competitor is just seconds away with a few mouse clicks.
- 6) **Testing** – Have you tested your website among real users? Usability testing is an important part of the web development process. Usability expert Jakob Nielsen believes that as few as five interviews can identify 85% of the usability problems. Some research focus group facilities have installed special equipment, allowing design teams to observe users testing

their sites with a split video screen (picture-in-a-picture). You can see and hear the user's reactions and view the website simultaneously. Hugh Miller of Opinions of Sacramento confirms that more companies are testing their websites before unveiling them. Even if you don't conduct professional research, consider testing your site with a handful of customers at a tradeshow or employees you nab at the water cooler. Observe them trying various tasks and ask them to talk aloud about their experience. Listen to their expectations and reasoning as they move through your site. Their input will help you improve the usability of your site.

- 7) **Feedback** – Do you make it easy for web visitors to give you feedback? Provide a comment section and a link to your e-mail to allow visitors to give feedback about any problems they encounter, additional information they'd like or FAQs that should be added. You may even want to have a survey link on your site for more detailed feedback.

As with any element of the marketing mix, think about your website from your customers' point of view and make sure that you address their needs. Listening to the customer will help you keep your website on target.