

Building a Better Fire Protection Website That Brings Business

By Tamara Matthews

Think of the website like a fishing boat where each page of content is like a baited line thrown into the Internet sea of fish.

What has your company website done for you lately? We live in an age where technology advances at high speeds and, like it or not, we've all got to keep up. The website of yesterday doesn't accomplish the goals of today. If you haven't updated or even thought about your website in quite awhile—say, since the first iPhone was released—now might be the time to analyze whether your site is doing the best it can to bring new business to your company.

What makes a successful business website in 2011 and beyond? Believe it or not, you shouldn't have to drop thousands of dollars on bells and whistles in order to have a successful website. These days the emphasis is on performance, and there are a myriad of very accurate tools to measure how a website is performing.

Because of technology and current trends, websites are no longer static marketing pieces that can be set up and then ignored. In fact, online marketing companies are encouraging business owners to view their website as an extension of their staff. "A lot of businesses think of and treat their website like an online brochure," says Ben Landers of Blue Corona, an online marketing and analytics company that has worked with several NAFED members. "We try to get people to transition into thinking of the website as if it were a virtual sales rep. It should be tracked and monitored just like a real sales rep." Might it be time to consider firing your underperforming website?

Whether you have a significant budget or just a small sum to make a few changes, the following suggestions could help enhance your website's performance.

1. Evaluate What You Have

Effective websites are constantly monitored. You should assess your website before you spend money on any major changes. Landers says that for companies looking to make changes to their website, "The first step would be to evaluate, in more accurate terms, what they have today before taking any steps or making any decision with respect to what they should do moving forward."

One method of evaluation is to add tracking tools, such as Google Analytics, to your website. This will give you access to a wide array of data, including number of visitors to each web page, average time spent on each page, and which web browsers visitors use.

After making use of tracking tools and looking at the data, you may find out that your website gets little traffic. According to Landers, "just generally speaking, less than a thousand visits per month indicates an issue." As discussed in several of the tips below, there are certain things you can do to help potential customers find your website. For some companies, an increase in visibility may be all their website needs.

On the other hand, the tracking tools may reveal that your website is in fact getting many visitors. Where are all the new customers then? In web parlance, this is what is called a low conversion rate—many visitors, but few are converting into customers.

Website traffic problems and conversion problems can be addressed with some quick fixes—which is great news for companies with few marketing dollars to spare. But, let's

face it, you may be more than ready to make your website look nicer. "Really, today, the technology on the web changes so fast," says Landers, "that you really expect your website to have a three-year life expectancy."

The right time for a full rebuild will depend on the current needs of your company. For Heather Truong, marketing coordinator for Ideal Fire & Security in Texas, the timing fell in line with changes to the company. "We just acquired another company and that's what prompted us. We have several different service companies, and we built it with that in mind, that we could let everybody know about all of our companies at one time."

For other companies, a rebuild can be a means to attain much needed improvements. Matt Hulce of Cofessco Fire Protection in Michigan says a rebuild gave their website "better navigation, better content from an information standpoint, more technical information, more space to give periodic updates."

2. Help the Search Engines Find Your Website

If your website gets little traffic, it might be time to rebuild the bones of your site, something that can be done without spending a dollar on web design. There is a lot going on behind the visible flesh of your website, and every business owner and marketing manager should be aware of SEO (search engine optimization) principles.

Basically, applying good SEO principles means making sure your website appears high on the search results, hopefully at the top, when someone types related keywords into a search engine. In order to get there, your web pages need to be populated with those keywords, among other strategies.

Here's a fun game: type some sort of fire protection product (fire extinguishers, for example) and the city where your company is located into a search engine. Which websites come up first? With luck, your company is right up top. If you see your competitors first, however, it is time to look into SEO. The order in which websites appear (rank) on a search query is directly related



to how well your website applies SEO principles.

There are many strategies on how to increase website ranking, and for those who want to know more, there are many books full of tips. For the intents of this article, however, it's important just to know how essential SEO is to the success of your website. According to Landers, "It has the best long-term residual value. More people click through organic results than anything else."

3. Introduce Valuable Content to Your Site

The days of the website brochure are over. Having your company's address and contact information online is great, but why not do more? Websites provide the consumer with a chance to learn a lot about a company. Potential customers researching service companies online, without a doubt, are asking themselves one resounding question: Can I trust these people? Customers want to choose a company that will get the job done right. So, how do you gain trust online?

Customer Endorsements. A few flattering words never hurt anybody. Sure, you're happy to provide references when asked, but why not make that information open and easily available right on your website?

Personality. What makes your company different from your competitors? Websites are a good place to give potential customers a sense of who you are as a company. Family-owned? Share your company history. Strictly professional? Show off your credentials. "Most companies spend more time worrying about site design than about the words on the page. But the most memorable sites convey personality and perspective in their homepage content, which immediately sets them apart."¹¹

Knowledge. If you have a wealth of information on your website, potential customers will see that you know your stuff. And if you impart that knowledge in a way that gives them a better understanding of the life-safety systems they may need in their building, they will feel more empowered in their decision making. "Every company should try to establish and promote itself as THE authority for what they do," says Landers. "What a company can and should do to differentiate itself from its competitors is make its website the ultimate resource that answers the implied questions that their prospective clients have."

Besides, more pages of information will mean a better search engine presence for your website. "Think of the website like a fishing boat where each page of content is like a baited line thrown into the Internet sea of fish," says Landers. "There's almost a perfect correlation with the number of pages and the amount of traffic a website gets."

4. Consider Online Advertising

Just like a print ad can lead people to call your company for information, an online ad can urge potential customers to click through to your website. While Google's pay-per-click program is popular, Landers has

found LinkedIn's advertising platform to be promising. "One of the benefits of LinkedIn is I can target the ads to specific companies, to members of a particular group...if the fire protection company is B2B, if they're marketing to other businesses, they can market directly to a building engineer or a facilities manager, within a target geographic area, and even to specific companies...You don't know that they're in the market...but you only pay if they click on your ad anyway. If they are in the market or they're just starting to shop around, your ad is very likely to resonate with them and attract what I would consider to be a very qualified click."

5. Turn Clicks into Sales Leads

Congratulations—people have found your website! Now what? You'll have to decide which actions you want a website visitor to take. Do you want more people to call in for information? That telephone number better be visible on every page of the website. Do you want a visit to your website to lead directly to a request for proposal? Make a simple, easy to fill out online form that you can respond to quickly. "The easier you make it for people to contact you, generally speaking, the higher your conversion rate goes," says Landers. To urge potential customers on, make sure your



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website has language that encourages them to take the next step. “Creat[e] a path for your customers to get more involved with you. To move them along, include relevant calls to action or ‘triggers’ on each page of your site, not just your homepage.”¹

6. Enjoy the Results, and Don’t Forget to Update and Monitor

The good news is, unlike most other marketing efforts, when you’ve done the right things with your website, you’ll know it. “We’ve had customers call in before actually commenting that they like the site—the look, the feel of it,” says Hulce of Cofessco. “Which, of course, from our standpoint you always like to hear. You spend the time and money to do an update like that, you like to hear some really unsolicited feedback.” Truong of Ideal Fire was similarly satisfied, “The company we worked with was extraordinary. They’ve been able to tweak and make things right. We’ve had a lot of success, so I’m pretty happy about it.”

After putting so much work into updating your website, don’t let it go static again. Putting up fresh content keeps your website active and catches the attention of search engines. “The CMS, content management system...is what allows you to keep your website fresh and updated, and it allows for a non-technical person to do that because it’s very intuitive...the CMS program is very important to the ongoing success of your website,” says Hulce. In addition, keep those tracking tools in place so you can sit back and watch the positive results flood in. If your website does well enough, you just might have to give it a raise! ❖

Tamara Matthews is the communications coordinator for NAFED and the editor of Firewatch!

References:

1. Handley, Ann. “Nine Reasons Your Site Isn’t Driving Sales,” *Entrepreneur*, August 2011. Available at: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/220027>. Accessed August 15, 2011.