

7 WEBSITE RESOLUTIONS FOR 2007

BY A. CHARLOTTE RILEY

It's a brand new year and we have all made the usual resolutions—and perhaps even broken one or two already! But what's the resolution equivalent of "I'll be a better person" for your website, the lynchpin of your online marketing efforts?



If you are looking for a few ideas on how to increase your online success, here are seven website resolutions you should make in 2007.

SKIP THE INTRO

Consistently, a “splash page”—usually a graphic intro page—is one of the biggest Web design mistakes that a business can make.

“Why force visitors to click past something that does not add value to the site to get to what they’ve likely come for—information?” says Kathryn Presner, president of Zoonini Web Services, a Montreal-based Web design firm. “People don’t want to sit watching a large spinning logo or something that tells them it’s loading.”

Splash pages contain little or no text information. As your homepage is considered very important by search engines, if yours does not contain any readable information, then there is a good chance that your site will not be rated very highly in any search results.

KEEP IT CURRENT

Was your last bit of company news from 2002 or perhaps your most recent press release is from 2004? Nothing says “customer alienation” like old announcements, outdated product info, and links that no longer work. Fresh content tells visitors that your company is vibrant, active, and “with it”.

Always remember that the reason a prospective client is visiting your site is to access information, so make sure it is there and make sure it is current. And, as an added bonus, search engines rate sites with content updates higher than those that stagnate.

BYE BYE FRAMES

Frames, once a handy designer method for keeping parts of the website constant while another part could be scrolled independently, are a big no-no as search engines may have trouble accessing the content. Presner says that if search engines are able to get into a framed site, they often end up indexing the content portion of the page only. The result is a page in search engine results that has no company logo or navigation on it: content without context or brand.

Don’t think you could tell a frame from a Flash page? No problem. Fire off an e-mail to your designer or Webmaster and ask them this: “Is each and every page of my site able to be crawled by search engines?” If your site is designed in frames, or there are other prohibitive elements such as pages designed completely in Flash, then 2007 is the time for a site remake.

EVERY PAGE NEEDS A PURPOSE

With search engines delivering specific page results to user queries, more and more site traffic is directed to pages deep within the site. This means that some visitors may never see your homepage. What it also means is that every page of your website needs a purpose. It can be as simple as: try

our demo, get more product info, sign up for our newsletter, etc. The site must be built on visual and textual cues—a sort of “Press here!”, “Do this” approach that guides the site visitor through the sales process, increasing your conversion rate.

THERE’S MORE THAN ONE BROWSER

In the corporate world, people sometimes forget that not everyone in the world is using the latest version of Internet Explorer on a PC to view their website. There are potential customers using Macs with the Safari browser, and a growing number of surfers switching to the Firefox browser. Warns Presner, “If your designer doesn’t check your site using various browsers and platforms, you may be unpleasantly surprised to find that the text on your site is so small that it’s completely unreadable on a Mac, or that your impressive corporate client list is obscured by an overlapping photograph in Firefox.”

DON’T TREAT YOUR SITE LIKE A BROCHURE

A common error is to use the company brochure and product sales collateral as content for a website. Don’t forget that people read differently on the Internet and tend to scan rather than read. So, cutting and pasting your latest product brochure onto your Web page isn’t going to make the grade.

Information needs to be presented in “scannable” chunks. These are easily read cohesive sections of information. Make use of meaningful headings, shorter paragraphs, and bulleted lists. Edit without mercy to get rid of long, dense blocks of text. While you’re at it, keep the tone friendly and use active verbs.

KEYWORDS—ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR KEYWORDS!

What are your company’s keywords? Keywords are phrases that your target market uses in major search engines when searching for a product or service like yours. One of the most common stumbling blocks for companies is finding niche keywords and thinking like a potential client.

Too many companies focus on the broadest terms, instead of specific terms that their customers would use. Use geographic location, as well as product and service specifics to help narrow your keywords. So, if you are a Toronto-based landscaper, your keywords are not simply “landscaping”, but “Toronto landscaping company” or “Toronto lawn maintenance.” Then make sure your specific keywords are incorporated into the content, headings, and the title of the appropriate Web page.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Make a resolution this year to take a serious look at your online marketing efforts. These few tips will go a long way in pleasing your two most important site visitors—your prospective clients and the search engines. **E**

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