Websites

These days, most business buyers use the web to read news, research solutions, find vendors and learn about other companies. And whether they learn about your company online or through other means, most buyers and potential partners will review your site before they do business with you.

Your website is potentially the most powerful sales & marketing tool you have. A good site plays an enormous role in your sales process and can help you:

- ▶ Generate leads
- ▶ Nurture existing leads and move them closer to purchase
- ▶ Deliver information about your products & services in a compelling way
- ▶ Process orders, cross- and up-sell, and run special promotions
- ▶ Communicate with existing customers and distribution channels
- ▶ Generate publicity

Think of your site as an interactive brochure that speaks with different groups and converts visitors into prospects and customers. It's an extension of your brand and an example of the quality of work you do.

Although a site can be a substantial investment, it doesn't have to be expensive; it just needs to effectively communicate with your market and support your brand. Yet when you develop your site with richer content and some basic marketing functionality, you gain broad and potentially lucrative marketing capabilities.

BEST CASE	NEUTRAL CASE	WORST CASE
Your site is more than a brochure; it sells. You use it for a variety of internet marketing campaigns: Search, email, webinars, ongoing communications, publicity and more. Your content is relevant; you know how many leads your campaigns generate and what those leads cost. You can quickly create landing pages for campaigns so you can convert traffic into prospects.	You have a standard site with basic information plus a few press releases & newsletters. You've tried some internet marketing with mixed results. You know your prospects look at your site and it could be better, but it's no different than your competitors. There are bigger priorities than a site redesign, but you suspect that more content & functionality would give you more marketing power.	Your site works against you. It may be the design, content (or lack of), writing, or functionality. It doesn't support your value proposition and you can't do any internet marketing campaigns. You wince when prospects ask for the URL; you know they don't get a good impression from your site and your competitors look better and stronger. You can't quantify whether you've lost any business – but you know you probably have.

Key concepts & steps

Before you begin

Make sure you've tackled your brand strategy, corporate identity, messages and sales literature before developing your site. A site project may also flow from your annual marketing plan, particularly if you've decided to pursue more aggressive internet marketing campaigns.


Develop your project team and timeline

- ▶ Work backward from key deadlines to create your project timeline. Give yourself plenty of leeway since website projects can easily hit snags.
- ▶ If you're launching a sophisticated site, make sure you've included all of the relevant departments in your project team.

Define your needs

Before you hire a designer or developer, decide what your site needs to accomplish:

- ▶ Your major goals
- ▶ How the site will support online and traditional marketing campaigns
- ▶ How the site will help you generate leads, nurture prospects, communicate with your market, process orders, etc.
- ▶ The information and functionality you believe you'll need
- ▶ Whether a basic design is fine or whether you'll need something more unique and customized
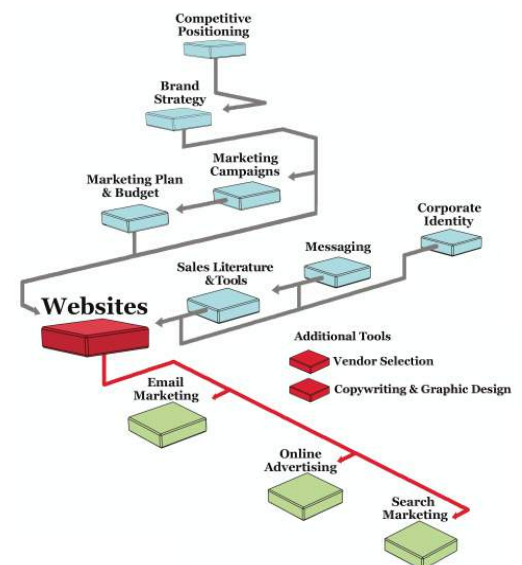
Develop your content

- Determine a preliminary game plan for your internet marketing efforts so that your site can support them.
- List the "users" who will visit your site: new prospects, existing prospects, customers, partners, media, job applicants, vendors, etc.
- Develop a list of the information and tools ("content") each user wants to find on your site.
- Review competitor and other industry sites for additional ideas.

Organize the content

Organize your content so users can quickly find what they need. You'll also incorporate Search Engine Optimization ("SEO") techniques to help with search engine rankings. For example, your home page is most important to search engines; if you don't have rich content on that page, you won't rank as highly.

Identify functionality you'll need

- You may want to display product details and process orders.
- Determine whether you want to let customers access their records on the site.
- Evaluate other functionality such as search, calculators, streaming video or other capabilities.

Develop your design requirements

Like your sales literature, your site should convey your brand. Use your regular color palette, typefaces and personality traits as much as possible.

Identify any last requirements

- Requirements for updating and managing the content
- Programming technologies you do and don't want in the site
- Reporting requirements

Qualify and hire vendors

Unless you have an in-house web development team, hire vendor(s) for design, writing and/or programming. Review their past work and talk with recent clients to make sure you're comfortable with their strategy and skills.

What's next?

Once you're finished your site, use it to communicate with your market and generate leads, especially through email, online advertising and search marketing.