



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Web Site Essentials: Too Often Forgotten!

by Julie Ellenberger

Because all of us spend so much time on the Internet today when looking for a particular good or service, comprehensive, well-put together Web sites have become integral to a company's ability to garner new clients and satisfy current customers with the information and tools they need and expect. In fact, an effective Web site may be the largest source of credibility that businesses today tend to forget to develop and maintain at their fullest potential.

Meredith O'Connor, marketing and communications director at [Bates Communications, Inc.](#), a strategic consulting firm specializing in leadership development in communication skills, explains the important role that their Web site has played in the growth of Bates' business: "Aside from our president's book and referrals, our Web site is the number one way potential clients find us. We frequently get calls from potential clients saying they found us on the Web and now want to work with us."

What then could you be doing to get the most out of *your* Web site? Here are five essentials, helpful reminders of points that many of us know but often forget when it comes to building and sustaining a valuable Web site:

1. The initial impression makes all the difference.

If you haven't changed the look of your Web site in a few years, it's probably time! The first thing that current or potential clients see when they visit your site is extremely important. Sites that seem to work best are those that exhibit a high level of professionalism immediately and are easy to navigate—usually with a vertical and/or horizontal bar of links with more quick links at the very bottom of the page. Further, nothing is easier and more pleasing to the visitor than if all of the links and information they need is right there on the home page without having to search.

2. Post your published materials.

One of the most significant ways to increase your credibility—one that not enough businesses and individuals take advantage of—is posting copies of published articles or excerpts from books that you have written. Far too often, these articles are nowhere to be found on Web sites; and even if the individuals associated with that site are published authors, those visiting the site will most likely never know.

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"Companies and business people often post 'white papers' on Web sites, meaning that they haven't been published anywhere except that Web site," explains Ken Lizotte, chief imaginative officer of [emerson consulting group](#), specialists in transforming its client companies and individuals into thought leaders. "Therefore, when an article does get published, it offers a lot more credibility because of the implicit endorsement from a third party, such as a journal or major e-letter. So make sure your Web site visitors know this."

3. Keep it simple: make the key resources visible.

With all the potential information to post, it would be easy for your site to become overwhelming to the viewer, especially if poorly organized. Once articles and other materials and links are posted, make sure they are easily accessible, not hidden away in a confusing web from which the visitor will never be able to escape. Jack Maguire, chairman and founder of Maguire Associates, a research-based consulting firm serving educational institutions, believes that his firm's Web site is effective for this very reason. "It's functional," he says, "not overly flashy."

4. Leverage your connections.

A fourth great way to build business credibility is by including customer testimonials throughout your site. These enhance your reputation by showing the work that you've already done through the words of your satisfied customers. Also, make the most of your client listings or other business partners sections listed on your site. Link to these other sites and make sure they have your link on their respective Web sites, if possible. This one simple step could help increase traffic, enable you to obtain new clients who wouldn't have found you otherwise, and even raise credibility by linking to a well-known client or partner (such as Amazon). When you do post links, however, make sure to regularly check them in case any have become inactive.

5. Update, update, update!

Once you have your good-looking site in place with all of your important (and published!) content, this does not mean that your work is done. If your site is not up-to-date with the most recent news and information in your area of expertise, this can deeply affect your credibility in the eyes of your clients, prospects and colleagues.

Most importantly, always give people reasons to come back to your site again and again. Think about how you can more effectively keep your clients updated on your work, your published articles, your special events and any awards you may have received. With such liveliness and attention to detail, your site too can be one day listed among the greats.



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