



The Eight Characteristics of a Differentiated Website

By Paul Regensburg



RainCastle

Separate the experience of creating "a website that differentiates" from creating a website. In 2010, anyone can create a website. Surprisingly few can create a differentiated website. What are the characteristics that make a website differentiated?

BRAND STRATEGY

Brand strategy or positioning are fancy terms for professional differentiation. Listen to your customers, incorporate that intelligence into your own language and practice, share the kool-aid with your organization and feel great about being able to explain what you do with confidence while riding the elevator and talking to an impatient prospect. The website will come so much easier and faster when the brand is right.

AUDIENCE FOCUS

A website differentiates when it makes your brand strategy relevant to specific audiences so visitors enjoy a more personal experience. Understanding your audience is arguably the most important aspect of creating a successful web experience. There are many ways to make a website's navigation intuitive to its audience such as, emphasizing vertical markets, horizontal solutions, audience "roles" and navigation by business problem, to name a few. A clear understanding of your audience is essential for creating the right user experience.

DYNAMIC CONTENT

Differentiated content is key word rich, contains links to relevant content and is concise and to the point. Dynamic content can include text, images, video, audio and "non-gratuitous" Flash. If content is based in a solid brand strategy, crafting it will be a smooth process. Without that foundation, content will be the thing that slows down a website process.

CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Your website is a living, breathing collection of content. It maintains relevancy and utility by means of keeping its content fresh. In order to accomplish this, the keepers of the website need to be able to easily update content when they choose. Building a website on a content

managed platform enables the non-programmer to maintain their website and make changes or add content as needed. Taking it a step further, a content managed site also affords the ability to personalize the website experience by offering specific content to specific audiences thus making the site more relevant and a strong customer retention tool.

MARKETING

The web serves as the hub for an integrated marketing ecosystem that may include email marketing, direct marketing, webinars, events, PR and more. Landing pages on the website enable one to track responses to marketing programs and respond with the right offers.

OFFERS ORIENTATION

Differentiated websites encourage engagement and make it easy to contact you with ubiquitous, but not obtrusive phone numbers, contacts and forms.

SEARCH

Having a differentiated website means a lot more people can find you. Optimizing for search makes that happen. Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising can drive more traffic to your site as well. Just make sure your site's content and overall experience delivers.

DESIGN

The current trend in business leans heavily in favor of analytics and database-driven marketing, yet we and other firms like us are often judged on the appeal of the sites we create. Never underestimate the emotional power of design to motivate behavior and attitude. Design sells. Visit www.apple.com as a reminder.

I encourage you to share any differentiated websites you've found or your experiences and anecdotes on putting one together.

To learn more about RainCastle:

Visit our site at www.raincastle.com

Visit our blog, "Driving Rain," at <http://blog.raincastle.com>

Call 617.965.2681 x225