

YOUR WEBSITE...IS YOU!

You are out shopping for healthy, designer food. You visit two health food stores. The first one is bright and cheerful: Its products are displayed pleasingly and its staff, with crisp, starched aprons on, are slim, friendly and helpful with smiles that twinkle. There is another health food store just across the road: Similar products. A fat, greasy-haired sweaty man, breath redolent of whisky, garlic and fermented cheese, egg stains on the front of his crumpled shirt, the middle of which strains to stay closed struggling to keeping its charge - a protruding belly - within, tired buttons at the ready to pop...comes to serve you.

You are your website: It is a reflection of who you are, your product, your service. Portray yourself as a trained, seasoned professional. Your website is the only contact your customers, potential and current, have with you. You must create an atmosphere that is pleasing to your buyers to make them want to stay and buy, and more importantly, to want to come back again and again. You want to aim for repeat business. The long and short of it is this: Your website can make or break your sales...and your business.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

What secrets can you apply in the design of your website?

1. Surfability

Do your research by visiting several websites. Note what make them appealing, attractive or the opposite. Always remember that visitors to your site have one goal in mind: They are either seeking information or shopping for a product. Your goal is to give them what they want without their having to search for it. It is a cardinal rule to make your site easy to navigate. Ensure that all the information is relevant to your product/service. Convince visitors that they absolutely need your product to solve their problem(s).

2. The First Impression Lingers...The Importance of your Main Page

The main page has a very specific purpose: It is the store front of your website where your visitor lands and from where she/he will shop. Therefore, this page must load very quickly and be easy to view. This is the first contact with your customer: First impressions can either close a deal or...lose this same deal which has exactly the same potential.

Make things simple: Ensure that links are easily viewable by your visitors and that these links will navigate your visitors to where they wish to go. Very often, a great choice is the use of tables when deciding how to design the main page of your site. If your page takes more than ten seconds to load even on a 56k modem, your visitor will click away, through impatience, or to save time, seeking information or products elsewhere. To speed up the loading of your main page, it is advisable to avoid large, or excessive, graphics. Too many banners or special effects often also cause a page to load slowly.

3. Make your Website Appealing to, and Easy for, the Eyes

* Colours

Mild colors are your best bet. If your site is a content site where your visitor will be doing a lot of reading, it is a good idea to keep to black and white. You can add color when using tables as a means to brighten up the page. However, always remember to keep the overall look of the page professional and appealing to your target audience that will be visiting more often.

* Screen Resolutions

These vary among monitors. It is, therefore, good counsel to set the pixels to a standard 800x600. You may also choose to set the tables in your web page to span a percentage of the page rather than a set number of inches. This will be sure to accommodate all screen sizes.

* Browsers

Bear in mind that a lot of Internet users will not use the same browser as you. Therefore, make sure that your site looks as good on other browsers as it does on your own. You can do this by downloading several browsers through which to look at your page.

Be aware that the overall look of your website is to make it attractive to visitors, which in turn appeals to emotions and, therefore, lead to sales and to make money for you. The appearance of your site, if properly designed, can be an excellent marketing strategy for your product/service.