

SEO FrightSites: Top Thirteen Worst Website / Search Issues seen in 2K5 (Part 2)

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Following on the six site design sins from last week, here is the completion of the list of thirteen SEO Website / Search Issues from Y2K.

7) Sites designed entirely in Flash

Flash is an incredibly cool design medium that enables animations, sound, video and user interaction with websites. As the web and the designers who work on it become more sophisticated, Flash is being used more often. Unfortunately, Flash files are often used without search engine spiders in mind. While Micromedia did distribute a Search Development Kit to help search engines decode information phrased in Flash files, it is still very difficult to perform SEO services on a site designed primarily in Flash.

Sites designed in a coding language search spiders can easily read and understand tend to fare much better in organic listings. The best advice for using Flash files is to embed them in a page designed in a more standard format.

8) Use of MS Word HTML generator

Did you know that a MSWord document can be saved as an HTML document? If you didn't, I am sorry to report it is possible. The problem is, MSWord documents saved as HTML documents have a bazillion or so lines of extraneous code and tend to perform quite poorly in search engine results. They are hard to work with from an SEO perspective as well. Removing extraneous code from a MSWord document can be difficult, even when using Dreamweaver.

9) Poor site maintenance, updates

Every town has a storefront that never changes and that store never seems to be very prosperous. Websites need to be updated and maintained, they are sort of like a storefront that way. There are actually two issues being addressed under this heading.

Maintenance: Many website owners do not properly maintain their websites. Some sites look years out of date while others continue to carry links to sites that no longer exist. We've even come across some sites with product information for items the business no longer carries. While operating a business in the real world can take a lot of time, the Internet is an active place of business. Spiders and live-visitors need to see a well maintained website to take the business seriously.

Updates: We have been preaching the values of regular site updates to clients for years. Adding fresh content to a site is important on so many levels. Google, for example, uses the rate at which new content is added to a site as a guideline when judging the relative importance of that site. Fresh content also increases the on-site inventory of documents that might achieve search engine placements.

Live-users also appreciate new content as it adds value to their experience at your site. As many online business owners understand, Internet users are a lot like regular shoppers. They follow patterns and

purchase from places they are comfortable. Giving visitors a reason to revisit your site is always good for business.

10) Ignoring emerging technologies or pre-existing payment programs

This point follows the maintenance and update point for a good reason. For some website owners, the Internet is their primary place of business. Unlike brick and mortar operations, there is no physical location to purchase items, all sales are made online. That means the website is the store. Like their brick and mortar equivalents, online stores need to use a variety of tools to attract customers.

XML based sitemaps that feed information to the search engines via RSS is an example of a beneficial emerging technology that is being ignored by the majority of webmasters out there. Blogs, podcasting, social or industrial networking and the purchase of PPC advertising are others. By ignoring emerging technologies, business owners can miss vast groups of potential clients.

Online business is dependent on the electronic transfer of funds. For most that means using a credit card. Some people don't use credit cards and others use them only for specific purposes. There are several types of online payment systems that are not dependent on credit cards, the most well known being PayPal. Surprisingly, relatively few online businesses accept PayPal as a payment option. How many brick and mortar businesses still use an abacus and a cigar box as the cash till? Aside from a few quaint grocers and herbalists in the older part of my town, I don't know anyone else who even knows how to use an abacus. That's the power of technology. There are still a few brick and mortar stores who refuse to honour bank debit cards or credit cards. By refusing to use newer technologies, their businesses either stagnate in a previous century (which in some cases is a welcome respite from the 21st century), or lose customers like myself who rarely use coin or cash.

The last three frightening things for SEOs are not on-site related but have an enormous sway on how our industry evolves and the practices we employ.

11) Over-reliance on Google Results

Google remains the most important search engine in the world. A strong placement on Google can make the difference between success and failure for many online businesses. Over time, Google has come to dominate the search sphere but as businesses affected by the series of Jagger Updates this month are learning, Google listings can be a very volatile place to do business in.

That shouldn't be an issue for webmasters and online businesses as there are literally dozens of other marketplaces aside from Google. EBay is an example. There are other search engines as well. Yahoo, MSN and ASK all offer excellent search results and can collectively drive similar levels of traffic as Google. At the end of the day however, it must be noted that Google offers a heck of a lot of bang for the marketing buck and search users continue to love using Google.

It is strongly recommended that webmasters concentrate on getting strong organic and PPC placements at the other search engines and work to cultivate that business. Learning about and taking part in the Yahoo Publishing Network is a good alternative for webmasters and bloggers who want to diversify the advertising that appears on their documents. MSN is about to introduce a series of webmaster and business development features in their soon to be released paid advertising program.

12) Google's use of DMOZ information

Google is again reverting to DMOZ descriptions on some sites in its listings. This means that Google is querying DMOZ for sites to include in its general listings. This can be a potentially damaging thing for a host of reasons.

First of all, it is not very easy to get a site listed in the DMOZ directory. The backlog is huge and editors at DMOZ seem to find reasons to not include sites they feel are designed for marketing purposes only. Some website owners and SEOs have waited for years without word on the status of their submission to DMOZ.

DMOZ editors are better known for following the DMOZ system than they are for accuracy or marketing acumen. If a mistake is made in your description, it is often quite difficult to get it corrected.

13) Misunderstanding the role of the SEO sector

SEOs are not miracle workers. SEO, as a profession is a combination of good website designers and good online marketers. We do not control or even directly manipulate search engine rankings. For the most part, we don't even reverse engineer algorithms any more. We are simply online marketers who have learned a great deal about how search engines work and how they rank websites. Our technical job is to make client sites as friendly as possible for search engines. Our marketing job is to make the site as friendly as possible for live-visitors, to advise our clients about changes in the search sphere that might affect them for good or for ill, and to take action on items that might not be beneficial for clients.

We cannot make a site jump from number eight to number three, at least not with any guarantee of success. What we can do is make a website or document available to as many search engine spiders and search engine users as possible. We can help select keyword phrases and arrange them properly on the page. We can help with site design and structure, and leave trails for spiders to complete the submission phase. We can't however tell Yahoo, Google, MSN, ASK or any other search engine to promote our client's sites higher in the organic listings. If we could, we would charge a heck of a lot more.