

SEO Friendly Redesign

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What We are Looking For

A growing number of our potential clientele come to us with websites that have been up and running for some time. Most inquire about search engine placement services they want performed on their website. All too often we are seeing websites that have not been designed with even the simplest considerations for search engine friendliness. It is important to note that not all websites are created equal – some website designs will perform better when it comes to search engine placements than others.

After a brief initial analysis with a client's website we have found that it usually falls into two categories. The first being websites having the ability to produce highly successful search engine placements. These types of websites do not appear to have any "road blocks" in place due to any design or structural flaws and generally they are suitable to begin an extensive SEO campaign. Everything is in place with the overall design structure for our team to perform the tasks needed to carry out a successful placement campaign.

The second type of website we encounter are the ones that may or may not look aesthetically pleasing and/or contain major site-wide structural flaws that can harm your placements. These are the clients we strongly recommend a website redesign for and is the topic for this article.

Why not get the most "Bang for Your Buck" when it comes to spending your marketing dollars? A properly redesigned website will attract new visitors to your product or services and the search engines will be able to promptly and properly index your content, potentially resulting in better placements.

This category of website often includes a variety of issues that can harm placements or even turn away visitors. When we assess a website redesign for a client we make good use of a quick checklist to give an on-the fly analysis of what potentially is wrong with the current design. When walking through the following list with a client, it is easier for them to visualize some of the fundamental flaws that they might have. The following is a snap shot of what we look for:

1. Navigation

- a. The type of navigation used on a website is perhaps one of the single most important factors when considering a redesign. Hardcore SEOs will always advocate the use of "text only" navigation on your website. There is no doubt that the search engines have little trouble following each page linked via this method, however one can be restricted aesthetically on how the navigation looks to a visitor or search engine.

A good rule of thumb if you incorporate a graphical method (or Flash) of navigation is to definitely include a link-only version of those links at the bottom of each page. For larger websites only include the top level of each section. The addition of a site map page is also a must and the listing of these links should be displayed as text.

Regardless on how fantastic your website looks or how relevant your content might be, if the search engines cannot spider through and index this content – nobody will find it.

2. Content

- a. The content itself should be clear and easy to read. Visitors to your site should not have to endlessly hunt to find what they are looking for. The proper organization of content will logically help you organize the all important titles or themes for each page. Make your best attempt to present one message per section (or page) when organizing your material. See also Section 6.b

3. Doorway, Splash, and Hidden Text

- a. Particularly with older web designs we see designers and site owners alike have attempted to incorporate some very “old school” frowned-upon SEO tactics or design methods. These commonly include doorway pages, splash pages and the use of hidden text. To help with analyzing whether or not your site currently utilizes these “black hat” tactics read Jim Hedger’s [“The Top 10 Worst SEO Tactics”](#)

4. Cross Browser Accessibility

- a. Although Internet Explorer still dominates as the number one browser there are other browsers to consider when considering a redesign. Thankfully this is not as big of an issue as it once was however take the time to view your current website in different browsers - flip between Internet Explorer and Firefox for example. Chances are you will see each browser has its own traits for displaying web pages. In some cases important elements of your design might be lost or not show up on as you intended.

5. Focus of Message

- a. So many websites lack a concise message. Are people able to understand what you are trying to say? If we find that the answer is no, we inform the client that their site is a good candidate for a redesign. By addressing this issue it will greatly assist in developing successful strategies for a search engine placement component to your project. The use of organized and clear content does in fact open more doors for a wider scope when it comes to performing any SEO tactics on a website.

6. Other “Nuts and Bolts”

- a. Quick Loading
Do visitors need to wait to view your website? Even graphically heavy websites should load quickly – images and content should not only look attractive but must also be optimized to load quickly for all visitors to your website.
- b. Page Titles
Page Titles are extremely important when considering your redesign. For additional detailed information on the importance of page titles corresponding to the actual page content read Ross Dunn’s [“Is Your Website Search Engine Friendly? Your Personal Checklist”](#). Ross digs deeper into the subject and provides you with a guide to do a self analysis of your own website.
- c. Meta Content and Alternative Content
Although it is widely known that the inclusion of Meta Tags is not as important as it once was with the major search engines these days it still is prudent to have these included within the code of the site itself. We often come across high-end designs for companies of all sizes that do not even include Meta content.

7. Templates - Off the Shelf Solutions

- a. Currently there are wide arrays of “Off the Shelf” website templates available online and there are definitely some templates that are better than others. One common problem with these templates is that you are somewhat restricted to the template itself. Unless you have a bit of graphical and design knowledge the final result will always be “what you see is what you get”. By incorporating a custom design you will always have the flexibility to alter the look and feel without having to struggle with manipulating the template.

So What do I do Now? Not to Panic...

It is important not to panic if you find your website falls into one or more of these design mistakes. Nine times out of ten the hard work you put into your initial design can be translated and or transplanted into a website that both works for your visitors and the search engines alike. Content and imagery can be reworked and optimized to fit properly into your newly created online presence along with additions that may fill holes that are found along the way.

I am hoping the information I have provided assists you in determining if your current website is up to par for a maximized return with your search engine placements. If you wish to find out more or need to ask questions please feel free to contact [me](#).