

11 Critical Website Marketing Mistakes You Can Easily Avoid

By [Deborah Taylor](#)

Introduction

New business owners – and even old business owners – are often swamped with things to do. Cash control, inventory management, hiring, training, display set-up and tear-down, bookkeeping, the list goes on. Even if your business exists only in the virtual world you've probably got a to-do list that seems to never end. Now everyone is telling you that you simply must be online, or if you're already online, that you need to learn about Internet marketing to get your site in front of potential customers. But where are you supposed to find the time and energy to learn about online marketing in addition to all the other work you have to do? Relax. It's not that complicated. There are, however, a few things you need to know to avoid the biggest online marketing disasters. Armed with these tips about what you should never do, you'll be well on your way to a profitable online marketing adventure.

Failing to Collect Email Addresses

Imagine if once a week you could call up every one of your customers and tell them what you have on special that week, all about that new line of handbags you just got in, and that you're planning a big sale on shoes next month. How do you think that would impact your sales? Well that's what email marketing is all about, but without the massive amount of time required to call every customer in your database.

If you're not collecting email addresses from interested visitors to your business or website, you are missing out on one of the biggest marketing opportunities on the Internet. Visitors who voluntarily provide you with their email address are giving you express permission to market to them. They are pre-qualified sales leads, and much more likely to buy from you than a random visitor who finds her way to your site via Google. It makes sense then that you should be cultivating this relationship right from the start. Even when your traffic is low, the most important thing you can do for the future of your business is to begin building a list.

The dark side of email marketing is spamming. Sometimes new business owners are so excited about their product or service that they want to tell the world. While there's certainly nothing wrong with a little enthusiasm, you have to keep in mind that just because someone gave you her business card does not mean she wants to get marketing emails from you. You must have permission first. That's what the CAN SPAM act is all about.

Of course email marketing is vital to the success of any Internet marketing campaign, but just as vital is making sure you're not abusing the trust of your customers. Never send marketing email without express permission. Manage your email marketing with a service such as AWeber and you'll never have to worry about spamming. They'll handle all the details for you, so you have one less thing to worry about.

Failing to Do Adequate Keyword Research

Your customers are looking for you, and they're looking online. According to a survey by WebVisible, 82% of consumers search for local businesses online, and 50% turn to the Internet first, before resorting to older technology such as the Yellow Pages. Sadly, 39% have trouble finding local businesses online, even though they are looking. If your business offices are totally virtual, then chances are good 100% of your potential customers are looking for you online. It's imperative that you understand how they're searching, or they'll never find you.

The key to getting your business found is to know exactly what your customers search for, and that means doing keyword research. Keywords are simply the words or phrases a customer types into Google or another search engine to find the service or product they need. Knowing what these words and phrases are and using them appropriately in your online content is the trick to getting your site in front of more potential customers.

If you have a local business, Google Local is your ticket to being on the top of the search engine results page within your own community. Combine Google Local with a targeted keyword search, and your business site will be at the top of the list

before you know it.

If your business only has an online presence and no physical location to fall back on, keyword research becomes even more important. Rather than relying on location-based searches for customers, you're competing with the whole Internet. Knowing how users are searching for you is the only way you're going to be found.

Expecting Instant Traffic

You might have seen the Intuit commercial in which the owners of a cute little ice cream shop build their own website and find themselves at the top of the SERPs instantly, and with a store full of happy customers who (presumably) found them online. Unfortunately, Internet marketing is just not that easy. Like anything, successful online marketing requires a sustained effort over time, not a hit and run approach.

Conducting keyword research and getting listed in Google Local is a great start, but it's only a start. The next step is continued promoting using the tools available online, like article marketing, pay per click campaigns, email marketing, and frequent updates to your site. The more you promote the more traffic you'll see. Over time, your site will become more self-sustaining and require less work to maintain.

Not Identifying Your Target Customer

So many new business owners, when asked who their product is made for, say enthusiastically, "Everyone!" While your product or service may be used by everyone, everyone is not your customer. Learning to identify your target market and focusing on them will grow your business. Focusing on everyone will only result in a fragmented message that no one listens to.

Instead, spend some time figuring out exactly who your ideal customer is. The more you know about her, the better your ability to market to her becomes. Try to discover how old your ideal customer is, what her level of education is, what her family situation is like, how much money she earns, how she spends her leisure time, and even what her religious affiliations are. As counterintuitive as it seems,

the more focused you can be on serving this one customer, the more your sales will increase.

Using Free (and Unreliable) Hosting Providers

It is possible to set up a website for free using Blogger or a number of other free hosts. While this might seem like a great way to save a few dollars, think carefully before spending time developing a site on a free host.

First, the terms of service on these hosts make it legal for the hosts to delete your site at any time with or without cause. You will have no recourse, and all the work you've put into building traffic and a mailing list will be lost. Second, your site will not look professional or inspire trust in your customers. Will your clients want to buy from you when you can't even be bothered to invest a few dollars a month in a proper hosting company?

For about \$10 per year you can have your own domain name, and less than \$10 per month will buy enough server space to host your site. More importantly, you will be in complete control. You'll never have to worry about ads appearing on your site, or content being lost forever when the provider decides to "clean house."

Ignoring SEO

SEO, or search engine optimization, is the process by which we make our sites easily discoverable by search engines. There is a wealth of information available on the topic, and you can hire an expensive consultant to take apart your site and rebuild it piece by optimized piece if you like. However, the simplest and most cost effective SEO strategies start with using a good, clean site template, avoiding excessive flash and java script on your site, and old-fashioned off site marketing. Combine these three things with solid keyword research and usage, and you'll have a good head-start on SEO for your site.

It's well worth it to take the time to learn about the most important aspects of SEO before deciding which site platform to use. Content management systems like WordPress give you a head-start on SEO by taking care of the basics for you. Your site design and file structure will already be optimized for the search engine

spiders, so you don't have to worry about the technical details. Plugins, or small bits of code that add functionality to your site, can be used to further improve your search engine rank by serving up useful title tags and meta-descriptions.

Making Your Site Difficult to Use

Even more important than making your site visible to search engines is to make it useful for humans. Have you ever tried to buy from a website, only to find that you have to register first? Or tried to sign-up to a mailing list and been forced to provide unnecessary and private information? The more difficult, complicated, and invasive your site is, the less likely a visitor will stay – or buy.

A good rule of thumb for an email opt-in is the ten-second rule. If it takes your visitor more than ten seconds to sign-up for your mailing list, it's too complicated. Also, make sure your shopping cart is free of unnecessary rules and restrictions. Should your buyer really have to register an account in order to buy? If you can't come up with a compelling reason, then don't require it.

Building a Static Website

Years ago when the Internet was young, it made sense to put up a website that was static and unchanging. Today, however, people expect content. They're hungry for it, and the search engines are eager to provide it. That site that hasn't been updated in a year (or more!) is going to slip out of sight pretty quickly.

Additionally, Google loves new content. Like the neighborhood cat, the more you feed it, the more it will come looking. And every time Google comes snooping around your site, you have another opportunity to show the world – and more importantly, your customers – what you have to offer.

Improved technology means it's easier than ever to update your site. You no longer need to hire a web designer every time you want to add pictures or change prices. Simple content management software like WordPress allows even casual users to make changes to their sites as easily as they can type up a document in a word processing program.

Failing to Analyze Traffic

Getting traffic to your site is an important step, but keeping them there is the next big hurdle you face. The best way to do that is to have a deep understanding of where they've come from (referring sites), what they're looking for (keywords), and what they find once they arrive (most visited pages). It's a simple process to set up an analytics package on your site. Google has a free but very powerful statistics tracking package available at [Google.com/analytics](https://www.google.com/analytics) which allows you to track all sorts of information, including the three items mentioned here.

Analyzing the traffic is only the first step, though. Once you know where your traffic comes from, you can increase your marketing efforts in that area. Knowing what keywords your audience is searching for allows you to target your article marketing efforts. Finally, knowing what your top pages are means you can produce more content of a similar nature, thus bringing in even more potential customers.

Giving Ad Space to Your Competitors

You've no doubt seen Google AdSense blocks strewn around the Internet. They're those small, unobtrusive ads you see in the sidebar when you search Google, or sometimes on a website in the middle of the page. Whenever a visitor clicks on the ad, the site owner earns a small amount of money. At first glance, this might look like a great idea for earning a bit of cash without doing much work. All you have to do is put some ad blocks on your site, and wait for the click.

While that is true for certain sites in certain niches, it can be a very bad decision for a business website. The way Google serves up those ads is by analyzing the text on your page and searching through its database for relevant advertisements. So if your business is quilting supplies, the ads that appear on your site are going to be for quilting supply dealers just like you! Every time a visitor clicks an ad on your site, you'll earn a few cents, but you'll very likely lose a sale.

Failing to Use Social Media

YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook are among the most heavily trafficked sites online

today, and if you want to connect with your customers, you should be using these services. For example, you could post how-to videos on YouTube to show-off the features of your newest sewing machine. Or you can start a Facebook fan page where you can post store specials (and links to your YouTube videos). Customers who become a "fan" will have instant access to every update you make, keeping you in constant touch. Twitter is a micro-blog platform that is perfect for posting tips, invitations to special events, and for keeping an eye on what people are saying about your brand.

Large companies like Zappos and Comcast are dominating social media, and often have hundreds of thousands of followers, host huge events, and sponsor giveaways that cost millions. Don't let that discourage you from using social media as a means to market your small business, though. Encourage your customers to follow you on Twitter by offering them a free eBook or other downloadable (and inexpensive to produce) item. Sponsor contests on Facebook with a prize for the fan that brings you the most new fans in a specific time frame. Or offer a prize to the customer who uploads the best fan video to YouTube.

Before you know it, you'll have a thriving fanbase eager to spend their money with you. Not only that, but you'll be enjoying the some of the best low-cost marketing available. In Internet marketing circles it's called viral marketing, but you probably know it as word of mouth advertising. Get out there and get social, and it will work for you, too.

Are you making any of these deadly website mistakes with your new business? Don't be too hard on yourself, we all started somewhere, and the learning curve of online marketing can be pretty steep. Now that you know about these mistakes, you can take steps to avoid them, and instead of wasting time and money on useless marketing ploys, you can be increasing traffic and growing your business.

Here's to your success!!

About the Author:

Deborah Taylor is a diversified administrative professional with more than 25 years of varied and progressive experience in all areas of office management and administration. President of [AVA Business Services](#), Deborah and her team provide Virtual Assistance and local Freelance support for today's global marketplace.