

10

Essential  
Features of  
Every Good  
Website

TED360

# So you're in need of a Website for your business or organization?

**Creating a distinctive and effective Web site can be an overwhelming process. Here are a few things you need to have on your site and what you can probably do without.**

[source Mashable] The first thing you must do is secure a good, catchy URL. Make sure it makes sense for your business, doesn't have quirky spelling and is available on social platforms, too.

Once you've set up your domain, it's time to build out the site and make some big decisions. Here are "10 must-haves for your Website" that will ensure your customers have a positive experience on the site, improve your company's digital footprint and increase engagement with your brand.

## 1. A map your audience can follow

Sure, a Website should be aesthetically pleasing, but it's more important for it to be useful. Before you even pick a server or type an HTML tag, you should map out how you'd like the Website to work. This is important both for user experience and for SEO, since Google considers the content and structure of a site when it ranks for search. So, map out and mock up a design for the site — what designers call "wireframing" — and run it by a few friends to make sure it makes sense and is intuitive.

## 2. Business information is crucial

*Too often people try to build the Website they want, not necessarily the Website they need.* For example, many restaurant owners want music and this giant about page, yet they neglect the basic things like the menu, contact information and directions.

Keep text to a minimum when it comes to your mission statement, because you should be writing

things so people can skim — we all have short attention spans. Don't underestimate brevity — one or two sentences can be really powerful.

Depending on your business, you should have a few things on your Website that fall into the realm of "information." We know restaurants need a menu and a list of locations (ideally with directions or a map), but every industry has its necessary items. If you're an e-tailer, you need product images (and they need to be good pictures). If you work in the service industry and have a business that relies heavily on customer service and referrals, put some testimonials on your site. For example, a wedding planner could have one of her recent brides write about her experience with the business. A hair salon could have client testimonials about a stylist's skills and promptness. Tailor your site so that it offers the information users are likely to be looking for.

## 3. Contact information

We can't stress enough that most crucial business detail is contact information— which is why it has its own section. How many times do you visit a Website and it is difficult to find the contact information? Why isn't the number, email, address and a contact form easily accessible and visible? It makes a difference because there's nothing more frustrating than being unable to get in touch with a needed business or service.

When you put an email address or a phone number on the site, don't upload this information as part of an image — the number or address should be able to be clicked on or copied right from the site in order to place the call or send an email conveniently and quickly. Most smartphones these days have the ability to do "click to call" on the Web, so make the process as easy as possible for users.

Don't want your phone ringing off the hook? Just use an email address, but be sure you answer emails in a timely manner. And please, get an email address for your domain. Using Gmail — or worse, an AOL email address — isn't professional, and that's what you're striving to be. If you like Gmail's interface, you can use Google Apps to set up custom email addresses through Gmail.

#### 4. Clear navigation

A map is useless without a legend and a Website is useless without clear navigation. Make sure you use easy-to-understand and logical names for the various pages of your site — contact, about, FAQ, etc. Being clever or cryptic will just be a turnoff for users.

When developing your navigation strategy, you should consider a call to action. What is it that you want people to do on your site? Place an order? Email for a quote? Become a member? Come to your brick-and-mortar store? Call to speak with a customer service rep? Make your goals clear and obvious.

*Put yourself in the shoes of who's coming to your site.* What are they trying to accomplish? Think about the goal of your potential customer. Pepper the site with action items to help customer easily do what you want them to do.

#### 5. Security

If you're selling anything online, you need to put some effort into securing your site with an SSL certificate. The SSL will encrypt communications between you and your clients (i.e. a credit card number, Social Security number), which will allay their fears of providing such information, since there's so much identity theft on the Web.

#### 6. Integrating social media

Twitter. Facebook. Tumblr. YouTube. Pinterest. Google+. LinkedIn. Instagram. There are a lot of social platforms out there and you should promote your Web presence on them. Today, social media is critical part of marketing your business.

Integrating these platforms into your Website will help boost your SEO, improve your business' footprint on the social Web and build your following across numerous social platforms. Is it worth it to maintain a presence on so many social platforms? Yes — as long as you actually maintain your content, you'll keep your brand top-of-mind and keep users engaged. Social media is going to be with us for a long time and its worth the investment in time — it does make a difference.

#### 7. A mobile-ready version

Smartphones and tablets are driving an increasing amount of Web traffic, and the numbers are only going to grow as mobile devices become cheaper and more mainstream. Most task completion happens within one hour on mobile sites, meaning that people are often browsing on the Web with intent — they're looking to do something, buy something or go somewhere. If someone searches for a restaurant on his smartphone, he's likely to eat at that restaurant within the hour. So your Website must be readable on handheld devices.

Just a few years ago, designing for the Web meant designing for a computer, now it means designing for anything (laptops, tablets and smartphones) with an Internet connection, all of which have different screen sizes.

## 8. FAQ

People have a lot of questions. As you hear concerns from clients and customers, and receive feedback via email... gather up the most frequently asked questions into a list and offer clear, concise answers. Questions often revolve around company history, materials and ingredients used (for allergy reasons), shipping information, sizing (for apparel brands) and cancellation or return policies.

## 9. Good hosting

Don't mess around with "cheap" hosting. You need your site on a mainstream provider and it can cost as little as \$9-to-\$10 per month to have 24/7 technical assistance.

Not having good hosting can cost you in many ways. A slow site is frustrating, one that fails to load is obnoxious and both could turn off customers. But beyond annoying your users and increasing your bounce rate... since many search engine algorithms detect Webpage loading speed, poor hosting can also affect your rank in search engines.

## 10. Here are a few features you don't need

*Don't underestimate the power of simplicity.* Feel free to forgo these things on your Website:

- Music
- Flash
- Anything that autoplays, whether it's music or a video.
- Extraneous information and media (it will only slow down the page's loading time).