

**"The 5 Major
Mistakes of Web
Sites...**

**And How to
Avoid Them!"**

Are you a small business still trying to figure out how to take advantage of the Internet?

If so, you're in luck because what you are about to read will help you on your way to success. If not, read on to make sure your web site isn't committing these horrific mistakes that are inhibiting business for you.

We have designed, developed promoted over 350 small business web sites and have learned a great deal along the way. We have worked in at least 35 different industries and understand the needs of a small business web site very clearly. Whether you're trying to sell something online or simply trying to provide a professional presence for your company, you need to follow certain guidelines and rules for success.

How to Get the Most Out of This Report

- **Define your competition and what they are doing-** See if they are committing some of these mistakes and tweak your web site to differentiate yours from theirs. When I say "competition", I mean not just who YOU perceive as your competitors, but your *online* competitors. Go into any search engine of choice (Google, Yahoo, etc.) and do a search for businesses like yours. For example, "florists Torrance". Look at what comes up first and see what they are doing. It is critical you do this because every day, more and more people are searching for your products and services on the Internet and you have to understand who you are competing with.
- **Think about what you want from your web site-** Leads, calls, sales, happier clients? Whatever your desire, think of these things when reading through this report so you can brainstorm about how you can specifically apply some of these techniques and strategies.
- **Your web site is a sales person or customer service rep-** It is an employee and should be treated as such. You have to invest some time and money but if done correctly, it will pay big dividends. Think like this and you will be head and shoulders above your competition.
- **Take notes-** Write in the margins, draw pictures, write down web sites you like...it doesn't matter. I just want to encourage you to think about this topic you are reading about in a very focused manner so you can maximize your own time involved here.
- **Explore your options-** Talk to somebody about your current situation and what specifically needs to be done to make sure you are getting the most out of your web site. I will provide an opportunity for you to do this later on in the report, so read on.

With that said, let's get to the 5 Major Mistakes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'J' being particularly large and stylized.

John Rooney, Principal, Accelerate Online, Inc.

P.S. If any of these things don't make sense or you simply have questions, please email us at sales@accelerateonline.net and we will respond to you promptly.

Preface

For the purposes of this report, we will make two main assumptions. First, let's assume you have an existing web site. If you don't, email us at sales@accelerateonline.net or call us at 310.257.1926 and we'll advise you on the best way to get one put up.

A website can be an incredibly profitable tool when developed, maintained, and promoted correctly. Smart, aggressive, focused small businesses are taking advantage of this every day. Over 300 million people are now online in the U.S. and Canada, and the number continues to grow rapidly. Over \$85 billion is spent online annually. Without a web site you can't get your piece of that very tasty pie. This is not a sales pitch or strong suggestion for you to get a web site. **The simple fact is that every business needs a web site these days because your customers, suppliers and partners expect it.** If you do not have one, people will not want to continue to do business with you because you are not doing business in the 21st century.

Second, we will assume that you want to use your web site as an effective business tool. Lead generation, sales, customer service, provide information, etc. Some businesses (medium and large sized ones), don't pay much attention to their web site because they have more business than they can handle and don't care about their image online. As callous as that sounds, some businesses approach their web strategy that way. I hope and will assume for this report that you, as a small business, care about your presentation to the public and want to use your site to the best of its potential.

Now, let's talk about these mistakes...

Major Mistake #1-

Not Focusing On the Needs of the Visitors

How many times have you gone to a web site where you see a navigation bar that looks something like this?

HOME

PRODUCTS

SERVICES

CLIENTS

CONTACT US

Pretty standard, huh? Works great if someone already knows what they want from your site. The problem is that unless someone is pre-informed about your company and its respective offerings, they may or may not get the information (and experience) they want. Whether someone already knows about your or they found you through a search engine, **you need to speak to their needs and wants**. Your prospects' primary concern isn't that you've been in business for 25 years. They want information presented to them in a manner that speaks to them, not you. People will want to work with you if they see that you are going out of your way to appeal to them and their unique needs as opposed to telling them about all of your acronyms for your product names.

Let's assume you have an accounting firm focused on small businesses. What if the navigation bar looked like this?

HOME

HOW WE CAN HELP YOU

SMALL BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

TESTIMONIALS

GOT QUESTIONS?

Here's a site designed to give you an idea of what I am referring to:

<http://www.slimstix.com> (right click on the link and click "Open in New Browser")

Visitors want to know if you can **solve a problem for them**. Use your site to identify at least one common problem of your prospects and the benefit of using your product or service.

Another great example of what I am talking about is my friend Adam Urbanski's site. He is a small business marketing expert and has built a very successful business around his web site. <http://www.themarketingmentors.com>

Note how he uses effective headlines to grab your attention and focus on your needs as opposed to telling you all about himself. All the copy on the site is written in terms of the visitor and he provides valuable information. He doesn't try and sell them right then and there, rather provides information first and then will ask later. This "Give and You Shall Receive" philosophy is critical to success on the web.

Lastly, keep in mind that the **#1 thing people want on the Internet is INFORMATION**. No, not adult content, email, shopping, etc. They simply want information so they can then make a decision as to do business with you or not. Appeal to this need and you will begin to see a significant return immediately.

Major Mistake #2-

Thinking That People Will Magically Come to Your Site

One of the most common mistakes small businesses make is to assume that if there's a business web site, customers will suddenly start flocking to it. Once your site is up and running, you'll have to promote it so people can find you. An incredible-looking site is useless if nobody sees it! A typical small business owner will simply launch their site and hope for the best. The only people who visit it are family and friends. With this strategy, the web site is an expensive, static brochure and over time, so few people visit it that when they do, the content is outdated and not relevant. Lastly, most small businesses just assume that the company that designed their site will promote it and make sure it is highly visible. The truth and hard reality of the situation is that the **web designer is typically NOT responsible** for this at all. In fact, most designers and firms don't know the first thing about promoting web sites because the act of marketing the site requires very different skills and areas of expertise. Remember, it is your site and you have to make sure that it gets visitors.

Don't wait to start marketing your firm online. As soon as you are happy with your Web site, get going with the basics of online marketing. So, if there are millions of people online, how do I get them to come to my site? There are a few proven ways to get people to come to your site:

- **Search engines**- Google, Yahoo, etc. User types in keywords and relevant web sites are rendered as results
- **Email marketing**- sending a message to people who would be interested in your products and services (permission-based only...no SPAM). You typically have to buy a list of people
- **Banner advertising**- creating an ad for your web site and placing it on other people's web sites
- **Viral marketing**- promoting your site via online discussion groups, forums, message boards, email, etc. Remember that parody email that went around back in September 2004 of Bush and Kerry? Viral marketing at its finest!
- **Affiliate programs**- online sales people promote your web site in exchange for commissions or incentives on sales or leads generated as a result

People always ask me "So, what is the best way for my small business to get people to your web site?" Unanimously, the answer is **search engines**. All of the options above are great but the biggest bang for your buck is with the search engines. That said, you need to let all of them know about your site so they can come and visit it, understand what it is about and then index it accordingly. If you can get your site indexed in the major search engines properly, you will always have a steady flow of traffic to it.

I recommend at least five marketing efforts when you launch a Web site.

- **Submit to all the major search engines:** Google, Yahoo, MSN, AOL, etc.
- Be proactive in finding sites with which you can **trade links**.
- **Collect your visitor's information** on your web site-newsletter, special promotion, etc.
- Consider joining a **banner exchange** like bCentral's Banner Network or SmartAge's SmartClicks.
- Investigate **pay-per-click advertising**-pay only when someone clicks on your ad in the search engines.

With these five steps, you can set up an online marketing effort that will help ensure that customers come to visit the awesome new Web site you just built.

Amazingly, people will put forth all their time and effort to build and maintain a website, yet will fail to make it part of their marketing plan. Here are some things you can in addition to online marketing efforts:

- Put your web site address on every single piece of promotional material, advertising, and every business card by every employee
- Mention the web site in every TV and radio advertisement and placed on your signage
- Issue a press release about it
- Send a letter or phone call to your partners, suppliers and customers announcing it
- Use it in your email signatures

Remember, your website is more than an advertisement. It is a sales tool, a branding tool, and a sales prospecting tool. Unlike your employees who are only on duty 40 hours a week, your website is there 168 hours a week. 128 of those, it is by itself! **Put it to work by driving traffic to it.**

Lastly, the process of promoting and refining your website to maximize the response rate is an involved task. You can do the basics yourself, but if you may want to minimize your time and investment by hiring an experienced marketing team like ours who can do it for you. Make sure you know all your options. Then you can decide what will be most profitable for you. Email us at sales@accelerateonline.net for more info on how we can help your business.

Major Mistake #3-

Not Enabling or Motivating the Visitor to Take Action

Web sites that aren't set up for people to interact with them are doomed for failure. Further, even if the web site enables the visitor to interact, you need to motivate them to do so. Classic examples of this mistake are sites where you can't fill out a contact form, can't find the phone number or address of the business and sites where you can only read but can't download anything.

Think about it for a second. Your web site is not like a storefront. The interaction your web site has with its visitors is anonymous by design. This is one of the primary benefits of using the Internet...no pushy sales people or headaches, just the ability to go to a web site and see if they have what you are looking for. So, knowing that, you need to make sure you can find out as much

as you can from your site visitors when they come to your site. In short, you need to compel them to interact with you or your web site when they are there. You can keep track of where they come from, what keywords they search on to get to you and so forth (more on this topic of tracking your visitors later) but to make your web site as powerful a marketing tool as possible, you need to get the visitors to communicate with you. There are two types of interaction your visitors will have with you:

1. Passive- when they need to get a hold of you for information and call, email, phone or fax you.
2. Active-when you provide **something of value** to them in order to compel an interaction

The first type of interaction is almost completely out of your control. The second is completely different. What I am describing here is that when people come to your web site, you should **assume that they want information**. Provide them valuable information and content and they will be more likely to return to your site, contact you and hopefully do business with you. What do I mean by something of value? Email newsletters, free tips, reports like the one you are reading now, special coupons or offers, etc. You get the point. If you offer the right information to the visitor, they will happily provide you their contact information in exchange and all of a sudden you have a relationship with that visitor. It doesn't matter if they contact you immediately because now **YOU can market to THEM**. You don't have to wait to see if they come back to your site because you can communicate with them directly as a result of the information they provided to you.

Here's an example of what I'm describing. Say you're an accounting firm. You would create a place on your site where the visitor could sign up to immediately receive "Free Tax Advice Tips" and they would enter their name and email address. Then, on a regularly scheduled interval, you would send them the tips every week or whatever schedule you elect to do so. Let's say a visitor signs up on your web site in October when tax returns for individuals are not very relevant. If the visitor continues to get tax tips from you on a weekly basis, when you send your weekly tax tip in the month of February, you could let them know of your service offerings to assist them with their return. See what I mean? **Provide something of value and you will establish a permission-based relationship** with that visitor that will enable you to gain more control over the sales process and realize the best potential of your web site investment.

Without a doubt, one of the most important things your web site should be doing is collecting visitors' information. If you are not, you are going to kick yourself for not doing so in 3 years when you realize thousands of people have visited your site but you have not been able to capitalize on it.

Okay, so you don't want to have an online form? Fair enough. You still need to compel interaction though. Here's how:

- Display the phone number prominently on the site so the user doesn't have to search for it.
- Make sure the copy your site is going to make someone want to contact you. For example, at the bottom of every page you should have a line that leads the visitor through your site. So, if someone is at the bottom of your Products page, you might add a line of copy to the effect of "Find what you're looking for? Call us and we'll help you out. Also, check out some of our satisfied clients here." and you would direct them to another page in your site from there. Think of yourself as a tour guide. Don't leave people hanging on pages. Assume they are in your house and you are showing them around.

On a broader topic, the overall copy of your site should be as persuasive as possible. You have to make it as interesting and exciting as possible without overdoing it. Many small business owners direct prospects to a web site where they have more extensive content covering available services and products. I constantly get calls from people who have been successful at attracting prospects to their web site, but generate few sales.

Once prospects get to your web site make sure the content and visual organization moves them to take the action you want them to. Whether it is providing them with ample opportunities to fill in your service inquiry form, or including a subset of your product catalog in your web page navigation bars, help prospects move to client and customer status. If you have trouble with finding the right words or simply need help in this area, contact us and we can refer you to some very capable AND persuasive copywriters.

Major Mistake #4-

Not Being Master of Your Domain

We do a lot of redesign work as part of our business. This involves working with existing web sites. More often than I would like, I hear complaints from people who are dissatisfied with their web designer but who are afraid to move because a) the designer "owns" the name and/or b) the designer is holding the site hostage. The truth is, the designer should not (but may) own the domain name.

Domain names are "registered" with a company who has the authority to make the registration. During the registration process, the contact information for "Registrant", "Administrative Contact" and "Technical Contact" are entered. What often (unfortunately) happens is that the web designer's information is placed in every field. I am of the opinion that this is not an ethical business practice. At the very least, the owner of the business (i.e. purchaser of the website design service, aka "you") should be listed as "Registrant".

You can avoid this problem from the very beginning by being the person who registers the domain name or by explicitly instructing the designer to name you as "Registrant" when they sign up for the domain. When building a new site, I recommend finding a good domain registrar such as www.networksolutions.com or www.godaddy.com or www.register.com and registering the domain you like **yourself**. In fact, we insist on it for our clients because we don't want to own any more domains than we have to. It is your site and you should own the domain. Now, if you have an existing domain and don't own it (or you are unsure if you own it or not), you need to make sure you obtain ownership of it as soon as possible. The reason you need to clarify this as soon as possible is because the domain is simply a place to present the web site. You may have paid for and own the content of the web site (pictures, words, etc.) but owning the domain is something completely separate. I'll say it again for emphasis....**owning a domain and owning a web site are TWO DIFFERENT THINGS**. Make sure you own both. If you are not clear on your ownership status, call us and we can help you determine your status and get things corrected if necessary.

If you're ever in a situation where the designer *owns* the domain name, please be assured that a short letter from a lawyer should solve this problem for you. United States Trademark Law is well established in this matter and you can fix this problem very easily and quickly.

Major Mistake #5-

Not Keeping it Up To Date

Remember back in 1995, 1996, 1997...heck anytime in the mid to late 90's when everyone and their brother was getting a web site? Most small businesses put up a web site at that time and threw it up in hopes of capturing some of the "Internet gold rush." The sad fact is that most small businesses haven't touched it since then and it is old, dusty and antiquated. Your company has changed, your competition has changed, your customers have changed and your web site

needs to change also. **When someone visits your site and it looks like it was built (and last updated) back in the 90's, they will be turned off.**

As a medium, the Internet is growing everyday and due to things like better high speed connects such as DSL, Cable and Wireless and the large number of people using the search engines like a Yellow Pages book, you need to make sure your web site is up to date and consistent with your industry and competition. Believe it or not, people will make decisions on whether or not to do business with you based on how your web site looks. Case in point, a client we have who came to us a while back looking for a new web site.

When we interview the client to determine their needs, we asked this client in question why they wanted a new web site (they didn't have one prior). The client replied "Because one of our customers in the government sector said we couldn't continue to do business with them unless we had a web site. It's a requirement on their list of vendors they use." Now this client in question did not want any part of having a web site and didn't believe it would help them. As reluctant as they were in approaching their site, this is a great example of times and demands changing around you...even if you don't want to.

How can you make sure your site is up to date? Take a look at your site. Is it up to snuff with the competition? Do you know what your visitors want when they come to your site? Is the last press release from 2001? You can change the content pretty quickly as an immediate course of action and you can also consider design changes as part of your analysis. One point of interest on this topic is that a lot of the existing small business web sites out there were NOT developed with the search engines in mind. In other words, most of these sites are not optimized for maximum visibility in the engines and structurally could be inhibiting traffic to your site. We offer a free service to analyze your site for search engine visibility and you can learn more by emailing us at sales@accelerateonline.net with your name and the web site address you want us to analyze.

Additional Mistakes

Lastly, here are some other leading no-no's you should steer clear of:

1. **Shared web site addresses:** Many small businesses choose to set up shop in the online world with a Web site name or URL on Geocities, Angelfire, Tripod or MSN, rather than having their own Web address. Which company would you feel more comfortable buying from — www.members.tripod.com/joesaccountingfirm or www.joesaccountingfirm.com? I don't think I'm the only online shopper

who feels reassured by "real" business Web addresses. I've recently bought several gifts from an online company with a "no name" URL, and I'm wondering if the products will really arrive. A strong, easily recognized Web address is affordable for even the smallest business.

The same is true for e-mail addresses. If you are running a small business, it's a great idea to set up an e-mail address that uses your business Web address. When you send messages to potential clients, to your bank or to suppliers, joesmith@coffeespark.com (not a real site) **looks far more professional than "joesmith@aol.com."** Bypass this costly mistake by making your Web presence a professional one by finding a good Web address for your business and using it for both your Web site and business e-mail.

2. **Opting for Great Design Before Great Results:** If I had a nickel for every time someone said "Wow, what a cool looking web site!" When designing sites for our clients, I always ask them "Which would you rather have as a comment from your web site visitors?
 - a) "Wow, cool web site!"
 - or
 - b) "Your site's okay-looking but what I really loved was the service or product I found out about on it"

Go for results, not great design. Make a choice to have a successful site that sells, not something you would nominate for a Cleo Award.

3. **Sending mixed signals:** A web site that doesn't quickly convey the kind of business you are in and the products and services you offer to customers is a real turn off. Sounds like another no-brainer, but you'd be surprised at how many small business web sites leave you looking at them for minutes while pondering, **"What do these folks do?"**

The front or home page of your Web site should include a short statement of your business mission. Consider augmenting that statement with a photo or graphic that makes it clear what you do. Remember, people only care about what your products and services will do for them, not about what is you're offering.

Conclusion

We have talked a lot about what makes for a bad and a good web site. I know it is a lot to digest and now you know why some small businesses employ a full time web designer or firm to assist them with all of the things to keep up on.

There are TONS of people and companies who claim to do web design and online marketing. The reality is that very few possess the necessary skills to truly help small businesses. The vast majority of website developers are either techies or graphic artists, but not business experts. The right developer and web site partner for you will have experienced techies, artists, online marketing experts and business people on staff. That ensures that you have a full range of professionals who can help you cover all your bases. Make sure whoever you're working with understands you and your business. It will be critical to your web site's success.

Some business owners choose these partners based on the lowest price. While price is clearly a factor, it should by no means be the definitive one if your goal is to actually make money. I always tell people that if they want a cost effective web site, you can get an endless number of software programs and freelancers to assist you. However, **if you are serious about making the web work for you, you should consider a partner that can get you serious results.** At the end of the day, you need to focus on your business, not web design and online marketing. I can tell you as the owner of a small business myself, I wouldn't dream of trying to do my own taxes or bookkeeping to save a few bucks because I would probably spend a lot of time learning and then still get it wrong. **Choose the right web partner and choose to be profitable.**

About the Author

As CEO and founder of Accelerate Online, John runs and manages the firm, one he started with the focus of helping small businesses on the Internet.

Bringing over 12 years of sales, marketing and consulting experience in Internet, systems integration and application development, John's specialization is helping small businesses succeed on and offline.

John worked in a sales and client management capacity for Vanstar, a large systems integration technology firm before going to the Gartner Group where he was an instrumental part of developing the Internet Practice on the West Coast and worked with start up firms to help them build effective online businesses. Subsequently, as part of the senior management team at US Interactive, John

helped launch a full service Internet professional services firm, serving Fortune 500 clients in addition to small businesses. John then served as a Director at Deloitte Consulting/Roundarch, assisting clients to develop and market their businesses more effectively online.

John holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Rhode Island and did his graduate work at the Andersen School of Business at UCLA. John has spoken on several occasions to foreign countries about the value and potential of the internet. John is a member of the Association for Internet Professionals, Venice Interactive Community and Association for Internet Marketing.

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About Accelerate Online

Regarded as the "small business experts" when it comes to the Internet, Accelerate Online specializes in professional, cost-effective web design and Internet marketing for small to medium-sized businesses. Accelerate Online services national clients and local companies in the Los Angeles areas. All resources are devoted ONE job.....build successful businesses. Visit www.accelerateonline.net to learn more.

Special Offer

If any of what you just read resonated with you, we can help. As a way of thanking you for your time and attention, we will do a **Complimentary Analysis** of your web site to see exactly what you need to do in order to make the most of your web investment. Included in the findings report is a description of areas of improvement, competitive analysis and immediate changes you can make on your own to start profiting from your web site. Contact us at sales@accelerateonline.net or call us at 310.257.1926 for more details.