

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

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Introduction

Hello Website. Meet Business Owner. Business Owner, meet Website. You know the two of you could be really great friends. If you would just take the time to get to know each other and learn to work together, you guys could produce some pretty great results.

It's true, most Websites are overlooked and under appreciated. As a busy business owner, you most likely aren't treating yours right. Even worse, if you don't have one yet, you're missing out on working with the best ally your company could have. Allow me to introduce the two of you.

A Website can be a beautiful creature. Yes, it can be physically pretty but I actually am speaking of a different type of beauty. A Website can be a beautiful asset to your company. However, like most people and

even animals, it won't work for free.

In this book we will not portray your Website as most people think of a website, a jumble of HTML code or a tight little package of bits and bites floating out in cyberspace. No, we will portray and envision your Website as a living, breathing part of your organization. Not so much as pet, but more like a work horse.

And to get this horse to work, you will have to take care of it, treat it right, feed it and give it the attention it so desperately craves. This book is based on the hard lessons I've learned since 1999, the heart of the internet boom.

I have learned the in's and out's the ups and downs of Website design and marketing. I know the natural personality of Websites. I am an 'expert breeders' so to speak. We have successfully nurtured hundreds of Web

sites. Some from creation and sadly some on the brink of death.

The wonderful thing is that Websites are not born, they are created. What the heck does that mean? It means that you hold in your hands the very power of life and death. Hope and despair. Victory and defeat.

In direct proportion to what you put in to it, is what you will get out of it. Actually, when you and your Website really get to know each other, when your Website can truly trust you to take care of all of it's needs, it will produce for you exponentially more than it requires. That is where it really gets fun.

The bottom line is you'll get to understand how to make your Website work!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Put Up Or Shut Up

I discovered something today as I sat in a meeting with a potential client.

A Website can be a great tool. It can be the work horse you dream it to be. It can put quite a few dollars in your pocket. It can make your phone ring.

There is one thing it can't do though. It can't make a bad product good. It can't make a poor business great. It can't make an angry customer happy. The bottom line is that you **MUST** deliver the goods.

If you are reading this book and you know your business is poorly run, your products are crap and you treat your customers just like your products.....well good luck, that is all I can say to you. No Website in the world can make up for all of that.

If you ain't got the goods, you better find some real quick because if you don't, no amount of marketing is going to cover it up. Customers may try you once but if they feel tricked or cheated or used, you can forget about them coming back to you.

Before you look at new ways to redesign your Website or research your new marketing plan, make sure you actually have something to advertise. No fluff, no gimmicks, no tricks. Either you have an excellent product or service or you don't.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Does My Small Business Need A Website?

How many months has it been since you went looking for information in the yellow pages?
How many minutes has it been since you asked your favorite search engine?

I think you just answered the question about whether or not your business needs a Website.

Without a doubt, Websites are the most overlooked vehicle of advertising for small, owner-operated businesses. Every retailer needs one. Every dentist, lawyer, accountant and minister needs one. Every café, restaurant, coffee shop and nightclub needs one. Every wholesale supply company needs one.

I'm not suggesting that all these need to accept online orders and actually transact business online. I'm just saying that everyone listed in yesterday's yellow pages needs to be available

on today's internet. It's where your customers expect to find you.

Properly constructed, a Website allows your prospects to gather information from the privacy of their computer monitors. What are the questions you answer every day? And what, exactly, do you say to customers when you're speaking to them face-to-face? This is exactly the information that needs to be available on your Website.

The internet is heaven-on-earth for the 49 percent of our population that's introverted.

Introverts prefer to gather information anonymously, unlikely to dial your telephone number except as a last resort. Even more unlikely is that they'll choose to walk into your store and engage a chatty salesperson.

49 percent of your customers prefer to know what they're coming to buy before they

walk in your door. And even the extraverted, chatty 51 percent will appreciate an informative Website that functions as an expert salesperson during the hours you're not open for business.

Don't think for a moment that your customers aren't already online.

Every time a client tells me their customers are too old, too rich, or too traditional to be online, I immediately gather a crowd of them and ask, "How many of you have used a search engine in the past 7 days to research a product or service you were considering?" I raise my own hand.

The hands raised in echo are never less than 85 percent of the crowd. Launch a Website. Make it interesting. Make it look good. Feed and care for it regularly and watch your sales begin to climb.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

It's All About The Flavor

Sometimes it's not about the ingredients, it's about the flavor.

A few years ago I tried guacamole for the first time. I had seen it and been disgusted by it all my life. The color, the consistency, yuck! I especially didn't like the fact that it was made from avocados. Thanks but no thanks.

I don't know what actually drove me to try it, probably my wife pushing me, but when I finally did.....what?.....it actually tasted....dare I say....delicious! I am now an official guacamole freak....even though I still don't care for avocados, I love my guacamole!

So what is the point, I am glad you asked.... sometimes in business we are forced to be the bearer of and deal with bad news. Maybe a project deadline is missed, maybe a meal is cold, maybe your widget fell apart in your

customer's lap. Whatever the problem may be, you are going to have your fair share. That's just life.

I honestly believe that the flavor in which you deal with people is far more important and usually overshadows the actual problem.

Allow me to illustrate: I was out to lunch today at a nice restaurant. I decided to share a meal with one of my friends and asked the waiter to have the meal "split" in the kitchen before they brought it out to us. In the past they brought it out on one plate and we had to cut it up and divide it between us at the table...a mess and a hassle. So now I am sure to ask.

Well, you can guess what happened right....the meal came out on one plate, not split onto two plates like we had asked. Not a big deal really, but still we had to send it back and wait another 5 minutes or so for our meal.

A small problem. Not a big problem. However,

the "flavor" in which the manager responded to us is what made a small problem a big problem. He seemed angry and upset and put off that we asked to split the meal in the kitchen.

Yikes, what is the big deal? Why did he have to act like that? Did that make us feel welcome or at ease or happy to be dining there? Not really, actually we felt like we were one big giant inconvenience. No one wants to feel like that, no one.

So many times in business we can all find ourselves in the same situation. We have a small problem with a customer, it is our fault, and we make it into more of a problem than it needs to be because of our flavor. We should be kind, understanding and above all respectful when dealing with customers. A little bit of good flavor can cover up a really bad situation. It will benefit them and you. Trust me.

Sprinkle on the flavor!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

1966 Plymouth Belvedere

You can tell me that stories don't matter. You can tell me, but I won't believe you. Stories are what can set your business apart from your competition. Stories are why Americans spend about 30 hours a week watching TV. Please allow me to illustrate.

The 1966 Plymouth Belvedere was an overall decent car. A midsize sedan, it was somewhat spacious, stylish and dependable. Not a bad car. Not an amazing car, especially against today's standards. So would you buy one for \$160,000?

Last January in Arizona hundreds of people wanted this 1966 Belvedere. The bidding started at \$5,000. After several intense minutes of hopeful bidding, one lucky man placed the top bid for \$160,000. Why? That car cost less than \$5,000 when it was first made. Even in mint condition today it might sell for

\$50,000 at the most. Why did this man easily pay triple the market price?

Because this 1966 Plymouth Belvedere came with a story.

"This car is well known nationally as "The Bank Robber Car" because of its fascinating history. It was originally owned by Chicago police officer, Clem Messino of Harvey, IL.

In an effort to subsidize his income, Mr. Messino was using this car to escape the authorities in several successful bank robberies in both Illinois and Indiana.

Eventually the police were on the lookout for this elusive and swift white Belvedere so Mr. Messino painted his car black. Though a clever idea, Mr. Messino was eventually apprehended and is currently incarcerated for his crimes."

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Secret Hidden Bonus

Today I opened up a brand new package of Glad Force Flex garbage bags. I love those bags, they stretch without breaking no matter what you put in them! We have used them in our kitchen for almost a year now and they work great! As I opened the box I received a delightful hidden bonus. A free "Big Bag"...a sample of the big force flex bag...free!

I know you probably are thinking, "What is the big deal? This guy needs to get a life!". However small and insignificant that free bag was, it actually had quite an impact on me. The reason was not the bag...the bag in and of itself is nothing truly amazing. The thing that really "hit" me was that no where on the outside of the original box was there any indication that I would find a free "Big Bag" inside. No fancy artwork, no hyped up "Free Bonus Bag" copy. Nothing.

That impressed me. Why? Because they could

have (like most businesses) tooted their own horn. They could told me before I bought the bags that they were giving me a nice bonus inside. They could of used the "freebie" to sell more boxes of bags. But they didn't.

I felt like I had received a secret little bonus for being a good customer. Instead of advertising, it felt like a reward. I know it probably cost them very little to give me that free bag and I know it benefits them as well because after I try and love the "Big Bag" I might start buying them for around the house.

But I felt like they touched on something important, even though they may of done it accidentally. They promoted their products, advertised their company, and got my attention in a way that I welcomed. I was please to receive it. I was actually thankful. How often do you hear that about advertising?

The moral of the story? Sometimes it might be a good thing to throw in a little extra bonus at the end of a purchase or transaction. Don't announce it, don't advertise it, don't promote it. Just quietly give it to your customer and watch them be amazed.

Your Website is the perfect vehicle to do just such a thing. You can send a free coupon through email to a new prospect. You can feature a client on your Website. You can offer a little extra something for a little extra nothing.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Bootstrap it – Save Your Cash

Take it from me, when you are starting a business, save your cash. Don't go out and buy a new computer or a new desk or a new whatever...just because you now have a "business" and that is what "businesses" do. It can be tempting. You just have to have that \$1200 projector. You just have to have that \$400 Blackberry.

Well, here is what I have to say about that. You don't! You absolutely don't. What you need is ideas, hard work, ingenuity, integrity, marketing and people. That is what will make or break you, not your gadgets or pens or suits.

I have done this. Back in the day when I would start a new business venture it always started out with a list of stuff that I needed to "get started". Sometimes a big list, sometimes a small list. But I always started my business by spending money.

Think about that, it is kinda silly really. You want to start a business, most likely to earn money, so what do you do? Go out and spend money! The more stuff I can buy the better! Silly, silly, silly.

For every penny you drop on a new leather bound journal folder thingy, you have to earn back from your business. The more you spend up front, the more "in the hole" you are. I know you might be thinking, "But I have to invest money up front, my business requires it. I can't get this thing off the ground if I don't have this or that....blah, blah, blah!"

Okay, yes, there are some businesses that do require some substantial cash up front. If you are drilling for oil or trying to produce a vaccine for cancer, yes you're probably going to have to drop some cash.

But most businesses, and you know who you

are, do not require you to get a home equity line of credit. Think about this....Pizza Hut spent about \$80,000 per second for their commercial during the Super Bowl. How many slices of pie do they need to sell just to recoup that investment? Answer...a lot!

The point is you should watch every dime like a hawk. Don't spend...earn. That is what business is about. The biggest spender does not win. Trust me.

Now back away from your credit card, slowly, slowly.....good.

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An insider's guide to a website that works.

What's In It For Me?

That is the question every potential customer that stops by to visit your Website is asking. Consciously or not, the thought goes through their brain every time they read your sales presentation and every time they visit your store or log on to your Website.

To be successful in marketing and in business you MUST answer that question for your customers. Is it a better price, superior quality, exceptional service or speedy delivery? Whatever it is, you need to clearly and quickly present it to them on the home page. Your website should gently whisper this potent message over and over and over again. On every page of the site. Let them know what's in it for them.

To do this in a meaningful way for your customer you must translate features into benefits. For example instead of saying, "This airplane has 2 Rolls Royce Super Turbine engines which

produce 40,000 pounds of thrust", you would say, "You can go from Dallas to Los Angeles in under 2 hours which will save you valuable time and enable you to be home for dinner with your family."

That is translating features into benefits. Do this throughout your website when describing your products and services and watch your sales go through the roof.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

I Don't Mean To Brag

I honestly do not. That is not the point. I simply want to encourage and inspire you to make your business succeed.

Last month I wrote an article about Website marketing. It was a decent article that hopefully offered helpful information to those who read it. It was published and sent out in a e-newsletter that reaches almost 1 million readers.

The article took me about 1 hour to research and write.

As a direct result of that 1 article we received \$4750.00 in work from two new clients.

Not bad for 1 hour. Not bad for spending \$0.00 on advertising to those clients.

A simple free article was all it took to attract and engage those clients. You can do the same

thing. I want to encourage you to take advantage of free publicity. There are thousands of e-newsletters and Websites out there that are absolutely starving for content.

Take one hour out of your busy month and research and write an article about your industry. It can be about anything you think your customers would find interesting.

But the key is for you to write it. Don't copy it, don't steal it, don't take the lazy way out. Use your brain, start the juices flowing and write it yourself (It's very easy once you get started). And don't push or plug your company or services. It should be informative and interesting not full of underhanded sales pitches.

Readers will smell that 47 miles away!

Then simply send it to Websites that you think might find it interesting for their audience. You will be flabbergasted by the results. Read-

ers will be informed, and will see you as the informer, the authority in your industry.

I made a commitment to my company to write one article every month. You should do the same.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Oh Go Join A Club!

Yeah, you can spend \$80,000 on an ad in Time Magazine or you can go join a club which is usually free and probably offers more opportunities for growth than shelling out all of those dollars. It's a lot less painful too!

Joining a club or becoming a member in an organization is a great way to market your company and your Website. I decided to join the my local chamber of a few months ago. They offer meetings and mixers at least once per month which will put me in contact with plenty of new clients and businesses that need our services. No matter how many mailers you send out or ads you run, nothing can replace a good handshake and a face to face relationship. People choose to do business with people they like. It's that simple.

Your Website should be a mirror of your personality. (Warning: You must have a half way

decent personality for this to work in any sort of positive way!) It should reflect your charm and charisma and character. It should speak to your visitors in your voice. Every page should contain a little bit of you. Making it personable makes it better. Training your Website to speak and act like you takes time but believe me the benefits are worth it.

Okay, back to the club thing. Not only will you meet loads of new contacts, you usually will have the opportunity to be a speaker and educate your fellow members. This positions you and your business as THE authority in your industry. That's what you want to be isn't it?

There are tons of choices....industry organizations, your chamber of commerce, community groups, booster clubs, biker clubs, sports clubs, political groups, etc.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Your Website Is A Plant (Water It!)

Can a business really make money online? That is a great question and I hear it all the time.

From small business owners to large corporations, everyone wants to know. Really, it is the only question that matters if you are a business owner paying for a Website every month.

What is the point of having some billboard out in cyberspace?

In my opinion the answer is yes. A huge screaming yes! I have worked with clients in the past that want a Website created and published to the Internet as soon as possible. When we tell them about things such as search engine positioning, keeping their site up to date and interesting, blogging, researching the best way to advertise online and analyzing competitor's Websites, they don't want to hear it.

That is where I see the problem enter the

scene.

Not because those clients don't purchase services from my firm, but because I know how disappointed they will be in 6 months to a year when their site is doing nothing, selling nothing, and informing no one. I have seen it happen about 58 times.

The simple truth of the matter is that a Website is a living, breathing creature and in order for it to succeed it needs a huge amount of attention (visitors), plenty of watering (content updates) and tons of sunlight (marketing).

I know from past experience (my own included) that without one of these critical things, a Website will not survive, let alone be profitable.

After all is said and done, isn't that why you would want a Website, because it will put more money in your pocket?

So let's review how you can make money online.

1. You need customers to come to your Website. The way you get them is.....
2. You need excellent marketing to a very targeted audience. The more targeted and focused your marketing is, the more successful it will be.
3. You need to keep your site informative, interesting and fresh. You need to become the authority in your industry. I believe that 80% of Websites fail to keep visitors because the information on the site is dull, boring, and anywhere from 3-4 years old!

Start watering. Your Website is so thirsty!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Listen Up!

Knowing the thoughts of your customers and your potential customers can yield invaluable results. This week my team and I conducted surveys of local businesses that have Websites. We called them up and asked them about 12 questions each. All but one were very excited to help us out.

Half of what they told us we totally expected. The other half shocked us! They had excellent ideas that we had never even thought of!

What I have discovered (more than a few times) is that a good majority of the time our customers want something completely different than what we thought they wanted. I've seen it and heard about it in all kinds of industries.

We as the business owners are so far inside our own "universe" that sometimes we can't see clearly when we step outside of it. Its' like

waking up in the middle of the night when some blasts on the lights. You can't see clearly. We can come to know our products and services so well that we lose sight of what our customers think or want or know or hate.

It can be a great thing to conduct a simple survey using your Website. You will learn things that will have you scratching your head and re-working your products/services and especially your marketing.

Success in business rests upon the simple idea that you find out what your market wants and then you give it to them.

Find out, take the time to simply ask them. You might end up being the only one in your industry that actually takes the time to do it.

Do you think their could be a reason God gave us two ears and only one mouth?

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You Got What?

Giveaways can be great marketing tools. Especially around holidays and birthdays.

Think about this for a minute. If you give something away to your customer that they are interested in, that will probably make them happy, right? Happy people usually tell someone why they have such a big smile on their face. You'll have GOOD word of mouth advertising coming from a happy customer to a potential customer.

As Mastercard says, That is priceless.

There is one important thing in this equation. Something that must never, ever be overlooked. I mean never. You can't give away crap. (sorry, I had to use that word!) You can't give away something that nobody wants. The secret power of giveaways lies in the giveaway. The more the "perceived value" is to the customer,

the more impact and effectiveness your give-away carries.

A great example of this is the website called "In Bubble Wrap". Everyday they give away some kind of great giveaway, something their target audience really wants.

If you want to give away junk, save it, you will actually probably do more damage than good. But if you want to spend "a couple bucks" on an investment in your future, give away something with a huge amount of "perceived value".

Make their friends ask, "You got what?"

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An insider's guide to a website that works.

Do It Like Horatio

In the spring of 1903 on a whim and a fifty-dollar bet, Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson set off from San Francisco in a 20-horsepower Winton touring car hoping to become the first person to cross the United States in the newfangled "horseless carriage".

At the time there were only 150 miles of paved roads in the entire country, all of them within city limits. There were no gas stations and virtually no road maps as we know them today. Most people doubted that the automobile had much of a future. Sixty three days later Jackson would prove them wrong.

Now I have to agree with you, that sounds nuts! You're probably saying that this guy was out of his mind. Well he very well might of been, but I can tell you one thing, he had guts. He was bold and he stepped out of the "safety" of normality and is now recorded in history forever.

The point is to do something different. There are a million alternative choices to advertising with banner ads or through pay-per-click. Take some time and sit down with your staff and BRAINSTORM. Yes, I know it takes time and it can be difficult, but the results will be beyond your wildest dreams.

Brainstorm how to make your Website better. Improve your content. Redesign your home page. Change your button names. Update your error pages. Add a toll free number. Make your site only 1 page. Add descriptive photos. Add video.

Don't get stuck in the "rut" of doing the same things you've always done. Break out of the box and make some noise. Market outrageously! Your Website will thank you, it will finally have some visitors stick around for more than 4 seconds!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

You Need A Website

This is chapter for those of you reading this book who still do not have a website. You need a Website! Think about it. You may not have a huge staff or a magnificent office building to bring your clients to, but you can have a Website just like the big boys.

The Internet has completely leveled the playing field.

According to a recent report from web hosting company Interland, 56% of US small businesses can attribute some portion of their annual sales to having a presence online.

In fact, 78% say they benefit from having a Website. Particularly, over one-half think their site gives their company more credibility, while 33% say it is their strongest marketing tool.

All of the small businesses surveyed had some sort of online presence, but for an idea of just

how many small businesses in the US are online, the US Small Business Administration found in June that 81% of US small businesses have Internet access, and yet just 30% have Websites.

That statistic absolutely shocks me. Every business should have a Website. If created properly and nurtured faithfully it can add credibility and increase client trust without you having to lift a finger. And it works when you can't.

At a conference a few months back an auditorium of millionaire business owners was asked to, "Raise your hand if you've used the Internet to research a possible purchase within the past seven days." Their upraised hands and arms made that room look like a wheat field at harvest time.

The Internet is rapidly becoming the number one medium for small business. It has become the ultimate product catalog, information en-

cyclopedia, sales brochure and travel guide.

I don't know how much louder I can bang this drum.

My goal is not to kick a dead horse, but if you are reading this book on how to care and feed and maintain your Website it just makes sense that you should have one!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

A Mind Like A Teeter Totter

It's a fact. From the time we wake up in the morning to the time we rest our little heads on the pillow, we are judged based on the way we look, speak and carry ourselves. It may not be right but it is the truth.

The same holds true for your Website.

From the first second that a potential client sees your Website they have already starting forming impressions about your services, what type of product you offer and how much your prices might be. I know, it doesn't seem all that fair but it happens all day, everyday.

The exciting part about the whole process is that you have a pretty good say in what those first impressions might be. Good or bad, it is up to you. Design, words, quality and clarity are all tools you can use to kindle that first impression in your customer's mind.

And it's not just Websites.

The same holds true for business cards, brochures, mailers, postcards, TV ads, newspaper ads, whatever means of marketing you use.

Most businesses don't realize or even care about this. That is why they continue to pump out the same old, boring, unprofessional garbage year after year. It is a sad thing to witness when you know that with just a little extra effort and professionalism their sales could be much higher if not through the roof.

A business card is not just a business card. A Website is not just a Website. They are the launching pad for first impressions and it's up to you which way you wish to send the shuttle.

Show your Website that you care....design it so that it is simple, clear and beautiful.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

You Shall Be Known By Your Deeds

There is story in the bible about King David's Mighty Men. These guys were the toughest, strongest and fiercest fighters on the planet. One of them took on over 300 enemy soldiers by himself. Let's just say you would've definitely wanted to be on their good side!

This story got me thinking about business and Websites. There is a line in this story towards the end that says, "And they were known by their deeds." Isn't that something? To think that someone might actually be known by what they do instead of what they say.

"And they were known by their deeds."

Isn't that the exact same way that your customer feels about you? That is a powerful statement. It means that the Mighty Men had a great reputation because of what they did not because they "talked the talk". The same goes for you and me.

No amount of fluff or fancy words is going to increase your sales if your service or your product is horrible. It just can't happen. Think of it like this....No matter how many times you tell me that your boat is unsinkable, that it is the safest boat in the harbor, I am not getting into it if I can see fish swimming through the holes in the bottom.

The bottom line is to improve your service, improve your products, improve your people, improve your attitude, improve your Website; then sit back and watch what your customers say about you.

It will spread faster than any traditional marketing campaign you could put together. Talk is cheap...You shall be known by your deeds.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Warning: Hot Air Alert!

Show me 99% of writing on the internet and I'll show you a huge jumble of hyperbole, fluff, platitudes, and yawnably unbelievable, black hole nothing words.

Words like cheapest, excellence, service, quality, quick, convenient, and best are promiscuously thrown about advertising with reckless abandon.

These empty words are the tools of the lazy communicator.

They do absolutely nothing to communicate why you're the best solution for your customer. Why you're an exceptional value. Why or how you solve the problems that nobody else solves. They build no believable case for your product or service. They just get lost in the mumbo jumbo of marketing...trust me, you and your wallet do not want to go there, it's a scary,

barren and yet very well trodden path!

Regardless of your product or service, you must build a case. But the fact is most businesses go on year after year churning out the same junk that does nothing more than get their name out there, if that. They create Websites that are simply brochures. Websites that are malnourished and poor designed.

They just create NOISE that adds to the confusing mass of information flooding consumers.

Take some time out of your busy schedule and write good copy for your Website. Write in a way that communicates, inspires, and educates people about your business. Write to tell a story. Use words that have some meat.

Don't wrap your Website up in "jargon". Write like you speak, like your talking to a real live person standing 2 feet in front of you.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Marketing Madness

Who are your best customers?

Let's think about this for a minute. Are they the ones that buy the most, give you the least amount of grief, or are they the ones that recommend their friends?

The answer is none of the above. Your best customer is your current customer. The customer that is doing business with you today.

Sometimes I think we spend so much time trying to market to and acquire new customers. Yes, I did just write that.

Now that I think about it, it might be impossible to market too much. However, my point is that if we are not careful, sometimes we can spend all of our time on trying to acquire potential customers while neglecting the ones we already have.

You have probably heard the statistics about how it is much cheaper to keep a customer than to acquire a new one. And it's true.

Think about it, your current clients and customers have already chosen you over your competition, they already know where you are located and they are already happy with your product or service (or they better be!)

Take time to follow up with your current clients for no reason at all.

Send them movie tickets or a thank you card or a gift certificate to Outback (my favorite!). Surprise them, keep them excited about your business and they will continue to reward you time after time.

Think of an additional product or service you can offer to your existing customers. Market it as a special promotion for current customers only.

Most of the time, if you take the time to think about it, there is always something additional that you can "upsell" to your customers.

Maybe it's a new subscription or an updated part or a new service. Of course, it has to be something that will legitimately help them. You never want to deceive or "burn" your customers. Otherwise, you'll be out of business and you'll have no customers.

But take a minute and think about this. Devote 15 minutes to a brainstorming session. It costs you hardly anything and you'll be surprised at how often they say YES!

Your current customers want to buy from you. Just ask them!

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The Proof Of Desire Is In The Pursuit

I was involved in a meeting today with a few event planners and one of our clients. The discussion centered around an upcoming promotional event that we are conducting for this client. The ideas were flying around the room like teradactyls and the planning was progressing very smoothly. We were all getting very excited.

Then all of a sudden...bump...bump....bump

That is the sound of us hitting one major roadblock after another. You see, our client was being stingy. Yes, that's right, I said it. This person just could not get over saving a few pennies here and a few pennies there. Time after time they would come up with "ideas" that would save them what would amount to about a whole nickel!

What blows my mind is that this event is for

promotional purposes. Newspaper ads will be run. Postcards will be printed. Posters will be plastered. Websites will be created. The goal of all of this is to attract people.

And I know that thousands of people will come. And when they do they will find that the client decided to cut corners. Yes, just in the little things, but what you've always heard is true, 'It's the little things that make the difference'. Poor quality food here, not enough lighting over there. For the life of me I can't figure it out.

I believe that as business owners we need to reward our customers.

And I mean reward them with something that will leave an impression on them. Not a coupon for 10% off. Not just a thank you card (although that is a fantastic idea), but something of value (to the customer) that shows that you care about

them and value their business 1000 times more than your competitors ever would.

The proof of desire is in the pursuit.

This client says that they want customers. They say they want to increase sales. Talk is cheap. I say take out your wallet and let IT do the talking.

Of course I don't mean you should blow the entire years budget on a new BMW for your latest client. No, what I am saying is that you shouldn't pinch pennies and cut corners in rewarding your customers or promoting your business.

Your customers will notice. And they will remember and they will show their appreciation with through their wallets.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

How Tall Are You?

Are you 5 feet tall? Maybe 6 feet? Maybe even 7 feet tall?

How do you know? Because you measured right? Well, you just made my point for me. Thank you!

You see Websites are very much like height. If you don't measure it, you don't know it. Sure you can guess and try to come up with something, but in business that means guessing with your money. Not many people like to do that. (I don't blame them!)

I have recently spent a lot of time researching the Restaurant business. Let me tell you, that is a tough business. I always wanted to someday open a restaurant but after discovering the facts, I don't think I ever will. According to the National Association of Restaurants, the average profit margin for an American restaurant

is 5.6%! No that is not a typo! I was shocked to learn this.

The point I am trying to drive home is that I would never of known had I not done the research. Spending a little bit of time in the beginning can save lots of headaches later on. Whether you are starting a new location, launching a new Website or considering purchasing a new business, do your homework!

Measure and track and analyze every single penny in your business. If you want to make any money from your Website it is absolutely imperative that you have some sort of web statistics program. You have to find out what pages are being viewed, what links are sending you traffic and where customers are leaving your site.

If you don't measure it, you don't know it. If you don't know it, you can't improve it. For the record, I am 6 feet tall!

Hello, Website

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Into The Deep Blue

Today I was able to attend a local networking meeting and meet quite a few nice people. Little did I know I was about to go deep sea diving.

Let me explain. The meeting was really upbeat and enthusiastic. At one point during the meeting 2 business owners were give 7 1/2 minutes each to tell the group (about 40 of us) about their business and what they do.

It was 7 1/2 minutes each of inside details, little nuances and industry specifications. I kept thinking to myself, what are these people talking about? To be honest I didn't really care about their topic to begin with but when they dove in so deep, the water was way, way over my head.

These speakers had 40 people giving them their undivided attention and they almost put

us all to sleep. I took notes as they spoke. Here is what I wrote: Speakers---Too much inside information, way too complex----Talk about the audience!

Get me involved. Make me laugh. Tell me how your business relates to me and how I can benefit from what you do.

Seth Godin had a good post on his blog a few weeks back about this. Though it was in the context of writing, the same thing applies to speaking.

He said, "If you're writing for strangers, make it shorter. Use images and tone and design and interface to make your point. Teach people gradually. If you're writing for colleagues, make it more robust. Be specific. Be clear. Be intellectually rigorous and leave no wiggle room."

Here is the point:

When you write text for your Website, keep it

simple and focus on your visitors. Let them lead themselves into the depths of the deep blue. If they want to go there, they will ask to go there (through their clicks).

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Cheapskate Alert!

Yesterday I spoke with a good friend of mine in the construction business. He was telling me how his company had lost a bid on a recent project. His bid was about \$500k and the company that won the bid was about \$330k. That is a huge difference!

He was stunned because he could not imagine how the company that won the project could possibly pay for materials, pay it's employees and still have money left over for profit. At the price they charged they would have to do the job in half the time my friend expected it to take. Maybe they can do it, maybe not. We will have to wait to see.

This got me thinking about the mind set of consumers. So often (especially in business) we are apt to choose the least expensive route. Whatever will save us the most money. Whoever says they can do it cheapest.

I've been down that road myself and for some products or services, yes, cheapest is best. But for most, cheapest is not best and in fact (I have learned) is not usually the cheapest.

"You get what you pay for", the old saying goes and you probably know it's true. Does a Hershey Bar taste exactly like a Ghiradelli chocolate bar? Does a Saturn run exactly like a Infiniti? Does McDonalds taste exactly like a Ruth Chris steak? Is your experience at Days Inn exactly like the Waldorf-Astoria?

I think not.

All of these examples provide the same basic product or service. However the second company in the example goes way beyond the basics. They provide the greatest services, excellent technical achievements, superior performance, extra attention, and extraordinary quality.

Do they cost more? Sure. Do you get more?

Absolutely!

And think about this: I have purchased products and services that appeared to be the cheapest but had to replace them or actually go out and buy their competition because their quality was so poor.

Think about it. If it sounds too good to be true.....

You actually do get what you pay for. My Mom was right!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Just Sprinkle The Pixie Dust

Passion, desire, integrity, drive. These are a few of the traits necessary for success in any endeavor. These qualities are difficult to teach and can be even more painful to learn.

When most people see a thriving business or a successful entrepreneur, the usual assumption is the owner came up with some new scheme, a fresh new angle or a fancy gimmick.

Most people would say that he got "Lucky". Forget about the trials, mistakes and countless battles fought and lost. He was simply "Lucky". The businesses that have the hardest time succeeding on the web are those that are looking for the latest gimmick or new angle. They think there is some sort of secret formula or pixie dust that they can sprinkle over their Website and their business and "Kaboom!", instant success, instant sales, instant customers.

The only real secret power is to find your special and unique story and convey that to the world as convincingly as possible. If you are looking for magic pixie dust, that's where you can find it.

Let's use an example of a local restaurant. If the place is known for lousy food and dirty dishes, good advertising would never be enough to save it. However I can hear the chef proclaiming, "Your job is to bring more customers through our door, if you bring them in, we can feed them." Can you see how stupid that sounds?

If you drive customers to your Website but you disappoint them as soon as they enter, it was all for nill. They will not return. Worse yet, they will probably tell a few people who also won't return.

For a more successful Website you need to do one thing only: tell your unique story in a

convincing way. Be true to who you are and the customers will come.

You will be shocked at how it will impact the success of your Website and your business and ultimately your wallet.

Focus on that and let your competitors play with the pixie dust!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

The Problem Isn't Your Price

The number one reason that customers don't buy from you is not price, not location, not service. It's trust. People are afraid of you not following through on your word, of buying a lousy product, of not getting the service they need.

When they finally make a decision to purchase from you it will be because they can trust you.

Small businesses usually have limited resources which translated means limited funds. They can't afford to blow the budget on a deal gone wrong. When selling to small businesses your number one goal should be to establish trust and eliminate doubt.

One of the best ways to establish trust is by using testimonials and word of mouth. Word of mouth testimonials are worth their weight in gold, silver and platinum all combined!

Prospects know that you can't buy such praise for any amount of money, so the impact of one glowing referral after another will overwhelm their doubts.

The best part about testimonials is that they are free!

Don't be afraid to ask your clients for testimonials. If you've treated them great and exceeded their expectations they will jump at the opportunity to help you out.

Once you have them feed them to your Website! Testimonials are like vitamins for Websites. They make them strong, healthy and ready to go to work!

The number one thing I find missing from most Websites that can instantly improve sales on each one is testimonials. Real, personal testimonials with a name and location and even a photo. Even better are video testimonials.

You can get them for free, but they don't come cheap!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Why Should I Buy From You?

One of the best things you can do for your Website is to differentiate it from your competition. This is key to making money in business. The professors call it a USP, a Unique Selling Proposition.

I call it “Why should I buy from you?”

That is the question you must answer. That is the question every potential customer wants the answer to. Answer that and you most likely make the sale.

There are quite a few business owners who I have spoken with that have absolutely no clue why anyone would or should buy from them. That is amazing to me. If they don't know, how are their customers supposed to know? Let's just pretend that you are one of those businesses that hasn't got a clue why anyone should buy from you (of course that's probably

not you!) Well, we need to discover the reasons why and then tell your customers. How do we do that?

1. Identify what you do well.

Are you the fastest, the largest, the cheapest, the most expensive? Are you open all night, do you have the most locations, do you offer free delivery? The point is to find something you do well and then EMPHASIZE it! BIG TIME!

2. Stack it up against your competitors.

Once you have a list of what your company does well, compare it to your competition and find the one or two things that they could never claim.

That is your USP! If you offer nothing unique or special that your competition can't offer, well then why should we buy from you? You need to do some business soul-searching and develop

or invent some kind of new “edge” or “service” that will provide the all important answer to your customers.

3. Tell Everyone

Once you have discovered your USP shout it from the rooftops. Make it the heart of your Website and your promotions. Make it the heart of your business and your employees. Drive it deep within your organization.

It comes down to this, you must really perform your USP or otherwise it's just a gimmick and that will hurt more than it helps.

Go for it, I dare you. Take the time to sit down and identify your USP. Right now? Yes right now. Can't you hear your Website visitors, their asking for an answer!

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Go Get Tested

It's a proven and documented fact. When customers enter a retail store like Best Buy for example, most people go to the right instead of the left. Would that be important information to you if you owned Best Buy? It would to me. How do they know that information?

They tested!

In the same way, Website testing and evaluating is critical to success on the Internet.

In order to know what your customers want, what they don't want, what works on your site, what doesn't work, what confuses visitors, what increases sales, etc....you need to test. Period.

How do you do that? Well, I will tell you how we do it.

We recruit 10-15 people who are representative of our clients target customers. We show them the clients Website and ask them to do some of the tasks like add things to their cart, perform a search, find the contact info, etc. While they are doing this, we take really really good notes.

The information we collect is priceless. We know what works, what stinks, what colors are best, what phrases are best, which buttons get clicked (and which ones that don't), how long visitors remain on certain pages, what "path" most visitors take through the site, etc.

Is it time consuming? You bet.

Is it worth it? You bet.

Not only will it keep you from losing sales because of poor layout and design, testing actually reveals how to increase sales substantially.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

Did you hear the big news! We just signed on Willis & Taylor Construction as our newest web design client!

Who the heck cares!?!

(Besides us of course) Who really gives a flying hoopala? Is that the kind of news you want to read about? Do you want to receive that little nugget of info from us in our newsletter? Probably not. Unless you're my Mom.

The point is this: When you update your Website or send out a newsletter, make it useful. Here is a little hint we can all write down and try to remember: No one really cares about your company except you and your staff. People only want to know what's in it for them.

When you update your Website put something interesting on it. Make it useful to the visitor.

When you send out your newsletter, spend some time researching and write something worth reading. That is the only way you will reap anything of value from your internet endeavor.

The first step is to find out who is likely reading your newsletter and visiting your Website. Then jam pack both of them with good, original, interesting content. Visitors will return. Subscribers will be happy. You will be known for your wisdom and knowledge.

Here are some ideas: Conduct and publish the results of a survey, write an article, conduct an interview, create a contest, give something away, offer a discount.....the list goes on and on.

Talk to your customers in their own language about them, not you. Honestly, no one really cares that much about you.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Summer In My Back Pocket

This was the summer it had finally happened. My dream realized after so many long summer days wishing and longing for a taste of freedom. This year I was armed with my Boaters Safety License.

That summer was one of the best vacations of my life. I was free to drive the family boat anywhere I darn well felt like (as long as my mom could see me from the shore!). Freedom called my name with every wave and I answered the call boldly. I cruised around like I owned the place while "Whoop! There It Is" blasted through the radio.

Those are the days to remember. The great days of years gone by. I bet you have stories just like mine. There are times that if you close your eyes and concentrate really hard, you can sometimes see it.

That was a special time in my life. I guess that's

why I keep this old, torn, faded paper card in my wallet even to this day. It helps take me back there and remind me of the wind in my hair as I whip across the lake.

Does your Website carry this type of emotional weight? Statistics show that almost 95% of paper advertising through the mail gets pitched. Almost 70% of visitors to the average Website leave within 5 seconds. It doesn't connect. It doesn't mean anything to the customer and therefore it doesn't matter.

Getting more customers from your Website is simple. Tell your story. Be real and authentic and genuine. Stop screaming "1/2 Off Clearance Sale!", and start talking with your customers like they're your friends.

Take the time to connect with customers not through coupons but through conversation. Tell your unique story and you will have more customers than you can handle.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

It's Not Always About Your Price

I've just spoke with a client who we started working with today. The client wants a Website for his business.

We've won the job despite being much more expensive than our competitor's quote.

As I always try to do, I asked why our proposal won his trust and his approval. The client's answer was pretty much what I hoped it would be.

1. We actually listened. We assessed his needs on a very detailed and specific level.

2. We took the time to research his problems and we provided a real solution.

This client needed a Website designed and launched ASAP, he needed us to write most of the copy for the Website and he needed an idea

on how to market the Website.

We addressed all those individual issues, gave many examples of our past work, provided references and got a new client!

The client told me our competition basically asked, "How many pages in the site? What colors do you want to use?"

Amazing! Here is a hint...whoever spends the most time wins! When you take the time to assess your customers needs, they will take the time to notice.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Ransom Note

It is probably the last thing you would ever want to receive. It brings bad news and usually nothing good can ever come of it. It's the dreaded ransom note.

A hodge-podge of different letter styles and fonts meant to conceal the author and to evoke fear and confusion to the reader.

Thankfully you'll probably never receive one.

I on the other hand get them all the time. Intimidating messages. Angry tones. Fearful styling. I am talking about the 3 metric tons of junk mail and advertisements I collect from our mailbox every day.

99% of these ads are so ugly, so unimpressive and such an eye sore I can hardly stand to look through them. There is absolutely no continuity. No sense of professionalism. The ads

scream and shout as they each try to out do each other with bigger logos and even bigger discounts. It is an utter mess.

Please don't send ransom notes to your customers. If you want your business to grow, don't do it. Focus on keeping a continuity to the look and feel of every ad, every letter, every piece of marketing that you create. Great companies do this.

Consider Starbucks. Even though each store is unique, they all have a very common thread. You instantly recognize the logo and the warm feeling of the interior.

The one sure sign of an amateur small business who probably won't be around much longer is it's "ransom note" marketing material.

It appears as if the brochure and business card and Website could be from a separate company.

Avoid this mess. Establish a clear and consistent "voice" and style. Don't make it hard for your customers to recognize you. Help them identify your business. Help them remember you by presenting the same image over and over, time after time.

Consistency is the key. No more hodge-podge, run of the mill, crazy fonts, wacky colored paper, mysterious messages. No more. It ends today.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

If You Build It They Will Come..... NOT

I am sure that most of you do not need a lesson in the “hard knocks” business of the Internet. Simply setting up shop and waiting for the orders to come shooting in does not work. I know. I have tried. As have many of you.

Did you ever stop to wonder why?

In my case, I was selling a great product at a great price and instead of that gushing waterfall of orders I was expecting, I ended up just hoping for a small trickle.

Was the product the problem?

No, the same product (sometimes an inferior product) could be found on much larger websites that were selling it like ice cubes in the Sahara.

Was the price the problem? No, the same product (sometimes an inferior product) could be found on much larger websites that were selling it like ice cubes in the Sahara.

Was the price the problem? Absolutely not! I was killing myself by trying to compete with the “Big Boys” and I ended up slashing my prices to the point where I was making a few nickels on each order. And I only ever received a handful of orders. You do the math!

That seems to blow the whole “Better Mousetrap” myth right out of the water doesn't it? You know the one Ralph told us about. “If a man can make a better mousetrap than his neighbor...the world will make a beaten path to his door.” Its sounds great and I bet you might have been lured by this promise just as I was. I hate to say it, but Ralph Waldo Emerson was wrong.

A better product, a better price. Those two

things are not the secret. The secret is better marketing and a better Website.

The simple truth of the matter is that your Website is a living, breathing creature and in order for it to succeed it needs a huge amount of attention (visitors), plenty of watering (content updates) and tons of sunlight (marketing).

When I say “better website” I am not talking about new amazing graphics or breathtaking flash animation. A better Website means a site that is fast loading, informative, and easy to navigate. Your Website does not have to look amazing it has to be amazing.

The number one reason people get on the Internet is because they are looking for information. Your job is to supply that information. Your job is to keep a steady supply of new and fresh information coming to your visitors.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Is your Website old and stale? Was your last update back in 2003? If so, what do you expect when it produces nothing for you?

Would you plant corn, walk away, never water it, never give it sunlight, never give it fertilizer and expect it to yield a crop. Of course not, that would be insane! Yet there are many businesses that do just that with their Website. It's absolutely crazy!

The way to increase online sales is to keep your Website updated with fresh content and to update it often. Statistics show that visitors return to a site an average of 7 times before they buy for the first time. By keeping your Website loaded with great content you will ensure visitors will return time and time again and you will be seen as an industry leader and expert.

I can hear you saying it already. "Where do I get fresh content?" You create it! That's what

makes it fresh! You can write articles, take pictures, gather testimonials, add user reviews, start a blog, update statistics, do research, there are tons of ways to keep your site fresh.

Once you have added great content, your next step is to do it frequently. I recommend at least 4–5 times per week. If you do this I guarantee that you will see your website traffic increase dramatically!

The final piece of the puzzle is marketing. This is the easy part. Over 80% of the people that start looking for something on the Internet use a search engine. The search engine Google performs over 200 million searches everyday! With that kind of traffic you can see what a gold mine search engines can be for your business.

The best way to tap into this hurricane of potential visitors is to get your site listed in the

top 1 or 2 pages of the major search engines. This can be tricky but if done yourself, it can be free. There are many techniques (some good, most not) to enhance your position but we will get into that in another article. There are also many search engine optimization services out there (some good, most bad) that can help you for a wide range of fees.

The other option to getting listed on search engines is to advertise with them. Google Adwords is one of the best in the business and is extremely targeted. You choose the keywords that relate to your product or service and your advertisements are only shown when someone searches for those words. And you only pay when someone clicks on your ad. And you set the price you are willing to pay. It is a great idea and I have personally seen businesses increase by over 500% by using Adwords.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

After all is said and done, isn't that why you would want a Website, because it will put more money in your pocket?

Okay, we are done. We have laid the ground work for the basics of how to create a Website that works, a Website that is profitable.

So as we end our time together, let's review how you can actually increase sales and make money online. Lets simplify in 3 easy steps how to make your Website work and how to start succeeding on the internet.

1. You need customers to come to your Website. (Obviously, you say) The way you get them is.....

2. You need excellent marketing to a very targeted audience. The more targeted and focused your marketing is, the more successful it will be.

3. You need to keep your site informative, interesting and fresh. You need to become the authority in your industry. I believe that 80% of Websites fail to keep visitors because the information on the site is dull, boring, and anywhere from 3-4 years old!

If you would like help getting your website to start working for you we offer a 22 step Monthly Marketing & Maintenance plan that might just be perfect for you.

You get more details at www.thirdandgrand.com/website-marketing.php

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

About The Author

The year is 1999. I decide to leave Eastern Michigan University and head west....to follow my dreams.....not dreams of hollywood stardom....dreams of internet riches! It was the middle of the internet bubble! My brilliant idea was to start selling cactuses online. Needless to say, that didn't work out so well.

However, I did learn to create my first website. After that, I created my second site, selling Christian CDs and books. That also wasn't the home run I was hoping for, but I was really starting to enjoy this website thing.

From there I started designing small sites for friends, family and local businesses. I knew I had found my passion. Within a couple years we were designing web sites for Fortune 100 companies in my parents garage.

Yes, it's true, we painted the entire garage an

ugly lime green for creative inspiration!

We've come a long way since then. We've added team members and worked for hundreds of clients but creating amazing websites is still what we love to do.

My name is Sean Alsobrooks and at my web design company Third & Grand, we guarantee results. If you don't love your website, if we don't deliver on everything we promised then you don't owe us a dime.

When we accept a new client it's because we know we can deliver a solution that will increase their bottom line. With years of hard learned experience, we only provide the highest quality craftsmanship on every single project.

We have a talented team in place to create beautiful design, deliver websites quickly, and dedicate extraordinary attention to your

business goals.

We truly believe we are the luckiest people on the face of the earth. Everyday we get to dive face first into our obsession: Designing beautiful web sites for growing businesses.

We love this stuff! This is our passion and we hope you'll agree that the results show in our work.

www.thirdandgrand.com

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

Real Life Testimonials

"Third & Grand was a pleasure to work with. They took the time to understand what we wanted and really designed a website that looks great and meets our needs.

The site was completed in the time frame that they promised and they have even made themselves available for follow-up questions once it was complete. I would highly recommend Third & Grand to anyone who needs a quality website."

-Kimberly Davidson, Marketing Manager, IEC

"As a complete novice to the entire website world, I could not have picked a better design company than Third & Grand. Not only did they walk me through the entire process of building my company's site, but they were beyond helpful and patient with me.

My site is 100% completely what I had dreamed for and it's only because of the talented people at Third & Grand.

Cassy Harlo, Voice Actor

"Third & Grand is a creative and professional company who is always prepared to answer my questions about my website. They are not only talented and kind, but a team with whom I put my total trust. Thank you for a job well done."

Eric Reynolds, Living Spaces

"Third & Grand does their job well and with excellence. I get complements on my website from clients around the world. They are amazing people and designers, of whom I would recommend without any reservations."

Charles Graham, Missionary

"Third & Grand did an outstanding job on our web site. They were fast, effective, and great to work with. I whole heartily recommend their web design services."

Mark Weimer, CEO, Global Media Outreach

"Third & Grand allowed us to work at our pace and remained in constant communication to better their understanding of our vision for our website.

As we grow and our website needs change, we will be calling on Sean to apply his creative skills to help take our company to the next level."

Cherre' Hendren, H.B. Barrington Co., Inc.

Hello, Website

An insider's guide to a website that works.

“Sean, let me again just say I am so very grateful and thankful to you and the job you have done. You did a wonderful job and are anointed and appointed at what you do. You have shown great integrity and character. Great job and thank you!”

Pastor Matt Pollock, Strong Tower Family Church

“Sean loves what he does and it shows in his work. He is passionate about his work and that carries over into his everyday interaction with his clients. Before I chose Third & Grand I did a lot of research. Sean answered all my questions and said, ‘Even if you do not use Third and Grand you can always call me and I will answer any questions you have’. I was sold with his eager and honest approach. Thank you Third & Grand! I love my website!”

Linda Lorenz, Silpada Jewelry

“I cannot even begin to tell you how great our new website looks. I absolutely love what you have done. Thank You! “

Josh Miller, Miller Financial Inc.

“I truly believe that the team at Third & Grand are clearly among the most talented and prolific web developers in the world.”

Troy Lyndon - CEO, Jesus Technologies

At Third & Grand We Believe:

You deserve a website that works. Almost anyone can make a website. Heck, with a few lucky mouse clicks, my 3 year old nephew could probably make one.

The difference is that we create websites that are not only a work of art but actually work. They are a joy for the user. Simplicity and clean design are the key.

We are armed with integrity, passion and experience and were convinced that if a website comes with instructions, it simply doesn't work.

One more thing you should know; we work fast. For crying out loud, a website shouldn't take 6 months to create!