

## Business & Finance – News Article

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Heading: **Website Content....WOW or Wimp Factor???**

Few people would dispute that establishing a website is a key priority for any business operating in any sector, yet one of the first things we should ask ourselves is, 'what are the driving forces behind building a website in the first place?' When I've asked this simple question of fellow business operators at informal gatherings, I've been rather amused and somewhat stunned by the majority of answers offered. One of the most prevalent has been: ***"my competitors had one, so we believed we should have one too"***. Another simple question I've often asked is, 'Do you know how much traffic your site generates and whether visitors investigate the site fully?' I shudder to say it, but the insignificant proportion that can answer this question with any sort of conviction is, to say the least, frightening.

Unfortunately, these answers are very much indicative of the importance that many proprietors have traditionally and still do place on their web presence. At the other end of the scale there are those who have taken the time to implement a basic statistical package to monitor their traffic and very importantly, they've also ensured that their "Search Engine" ranking is maintained at the highest possible level to ensure optimal lead generation. These two components, which can be very cost-effectively implemented, are proven to have a significant impact on the site and subsequent enquiry rate and revenue streams attained. There's no rocket science involved in this, it simply means that the larger your audience, the more chance you have of securing a successful relationship. Even a basic statistical package can provide invaluable information that helps fine tune site content and accurately indicate how best to capitalise and expand on the components of the site that are working well.

"Statistical Monitoring" and "Search Engine Ranking" are useful tools in order to attract attention to your website but of course this ability is futile unless you can ensure your content is good enough to make them 'stick'. It's all well and good to generate high traffic and monitor your site well, but if it's lacking in the crucial "WOW" factor, you can still lose the audience's attention in the blink of an eye. To emphasise this point, if one stops for a moment and looks back just two or three years, you suddenly realise how the Internet, associated communications and more importantly we, the audience, have evolved. With broadband connections at the ready, the newly turbo-charged Internet user can now consume sites at breakneck speeds. This is sensational stuff, but it can also mean the "Kiss Of Death" for a very high proportion of websites. To elaborate on this, we'll use the analogy of the TV remote control where we have the ability to flick through 40+ mind-numbing channels in rapid fire succession until something finally grabs our attention and forces a determined

finger off the remote. If you haven't noticed by now, broadband connections have rapidly become the equivalent of the TV Remote control for websites.

If you're not concerned by this....you should be! Many of us have invested heavily in our web presence and I'm sure I speak for the majority by saying that I'd be concerned if each visit to my home-page was nothing more than a Teflon coated ricochet in the direction of a competitor's site. We now have a new generation of internet users seeking considerably more than overly bloated static pages of information, peppered with animated Gif's and the odd flat static digital photo. The bar has been raised and there is a new kid on the block and it's called "**Active or Rich Content**". Providing informative editorial is a pivotal requirement, but it has rapidly become only part of the equation for the complete website experience. If we don't give our visitors instant gratification and that immediate "WOW" factor when they hit our home pages, like the TV remote, a finger will press the button and our sites will be unceremoniously dismissed in a heartbeat.

Put simply, what we are attempting to highlight here, is the ability for a website to immediately grab the audience's attention and entice them to investigate the site more thoroughly. Active content can take many different forms; it can be just a simple photographic slide show or an animated presentation, in fact anything that can visually, audibly or interactively set the site apart from our competition. The interesting thing is that many websites already contain elements that could be used in active content or multi-media presentations, but in many instances it's fragmented over the website or buried so deeply that the audience has to laboriously trawl through the site to find it. The trick is to gather this content and make it easier for the audience to access.

So what's this all mean? Well in our own organisation's quest to provide that instant "WOW" factor and site 'stickiness', it became a statistical reality that if you're going to grab the audience's attention you have to do it from the outset and hit them with your best shot. Just like a stand-up comedian, if they don't get the audience on side with the first gag, it becomes an uphill battle to retrieve them from then on. This means, we should all be thinking about our "home pages" and what initial impression it offers a first time visitor. Does it elicit a Whimper or Wow from the audience?

It's crucial to clarify that we're NOT talking about long-winded animated "splash" pages that do nothing but waste time and frustrate the audience. We're talking about a highly visible means or point of access, directly on our home pages, that instantly showcases the high impact, visual content of the products and/or services that our respective businesses have on offer. Based upon the statistical research available, once we have the audience's attention by using active and rich content, it's far easier to passively or actively coax them into the site where the more traditional forms of content such as editorial provides the substance to what we are offering to the website visitor. Put simply.....we start using the sizzle to sell the sausage!