

If You Build It, They Will Come. But Will They Come Back?

By Kevin Leavell, December 2008
Pyron Technologies

This phrase, from the 1989 movie *Field of Dreams*, describes many organizations' initial belief about the web. In fact, early on, many eagerly developed a website only to find that the visitors or business from those efforts never lived up to their expectations. Businesses today are turning to tools like Search Engine Optimization and Pay Per Click Campaigns to drive visitors to their websites. Both of these strategies are excellent and can be used on some level for just about any organization out there. But the thing most often overlooked for a variety of reasons is the customer's experience once you get them to your website. Unfortunately, if they don't like what they see when they get there, they won't come back.

Usability, Functionality and Content, not necessarily in that order, have the biggest impact on your visitor's experience.

Usability refers to the basics. Is your navigation easy to see and use? Can people find the information you have to offer? Is your content organized from your customer's perspective or your organization's perspective? What do you really need your customer to know about your product or service and is your site delivering that?

Functionality refers to what your site does. Are you displaying images of your work that require a photo gallery and are those images frequently updated with your current projects? Do you have a contact us form on your site and is it easy to find and simple to use?

Today, we are going to focus on content. It can truly define your site assuming your visitors can find your content (Usability) and your website works the way it should (Functionality). Good website content can help you stand out from your competition. The challenge with visitors on your website is that it is a one way conversation. You don't have the power to assess where they are or ask questions to gain a deeper understanding of their needs. In fact, your visitors don't expect that. They are trying to get a better understanding of your organization and the products or services you provide without your direct input or influence.

Good content allows for a two way conversation with your visitor to take place even if you're not in front of them. Good content anticipates common questions your users might have about your organization or business. Good content changes and grows over time. Simple things like a Frequently Asked Questions page can have large impact on informing your customers before they pick up the phone. Adding video content of customer testimonials or product demonstrations gives your visitors the ability to view your information in a way that makes sense to them.

Visitor generated content such as product reviews or comments posted to a blog or forum can be powerfully persuasive in that they help your visitors get a more complete picture of your product or service from the very people using it. Tools such as these provide another voice in the conversation you are trying to have with you visitor.

So when you are thinking about content for your website, put yourself in your visitors shoes. What do you really want them to know and what tools can you use to say it in their words. A good exercise is to pay attention to how you look for information on the web, particularly when

you are looking for a product or service. What sites do you spend the most time on to get the answers you need? What information convinces you to purchase on one site over another? Is it video of a product being used, is it a simple customer testimonial, is it product or service information that provides a deep level of detail?

Today, just about everyone has built their field. And just about everyone has people coming to their field on some level. Just as some fields may have seating and others may not, websites have different levels of content. Consider what your website is offering your visitors and look for different ways you can use content to provide them with an experience that will keep them coming back.

Kevin Leavell is the SuiteFin Product Manager at Pyron Technologies. He offers over thirteen years of practice in the website development industry, including work with local organizations such as Northwestern Energy, Town Pump, Vanns.com, and Saint Patrick Hospital. Pyron Technologies, Inc. of Missoula, Montana, provides network solutions, medical technologies and website development to companies in Montana and throughout the U.S. Learn more at www.pyrontechnologies.com.