

wisely. If you need support for this, check out the sites that have figured it out — Amazon.com, CNET.com, Microsoft.com. Mimic what you think works.

3) Outrunning the bear

It's an old joke: Two friends face a threatening bear. First friend: "How do you expect to outrun the bear?" Second friend: "Don't have to; only need to outrun you."

Likewise, when it comes to your Web site, you might not need to become the Amazon.com of (fill in your product, here). Maybe you only need to make your site better than those of your competitors. Visit their sites, see what they're doing — then make it so.

The Web is an arena that can easily absorb as many resources as you'd care to deploy. Remember "return on investment." Be realistic. Don't be afraid to start small, and phase in your development. The bottom line you save might be your own.

4) Remember the Web demographic

Along those same lines, you don't need to build your site to entice the entire known Web universe; you need only make it enticing to your target market -- actually, only the part of your target market that's online.

While the Web demographic is ever expanding, statistics show that folks online are better educated, have more money, tend toward middle age (31-years old or older), and are split evenly between men and women. Apply this Web visitor profile to the demographics of the audience you're trying to reach, and develop your site accordingly.

A few other things you might want to remember about the Web demographic: CEOs don't surf. Indeed, no one is really surfing anymore -- no one has time!

People online are busy, and on-task. They're using the Web as a big consumer report. They are looking for what they are looking for, and they don't want to waste a whole lot of time looking for it. The good news: if you deliver what they're looking for, they'll remember you.

5) Visitors don't care about what YOU want to tell THEM

Site owners might not like this one, but here it is, anyway. When it comes to site content, visitors don't

much care what YOU want to tell them. Rather, they care about what THEY want to know — commonly, a solution to their pressing interest, issue, need, challenge or concern. And they want it quickly, so they can get back to their lives.

Remember, if someone is visiting your site, they are actively engaged in a task. They've already had to turn on their computer, connect to the Internet and maybe use a search engine or two. This level of effort on their part differs greatly from, for example, passively watching a commercial while munching popcorn on a recliner between plays.

While folks watching the game on TV might not mind the overly loud, obnoxious 15-second ad spot designed to cut through the clutter and grab their attention, someone who's engaged online DOES NOT want to be forced to sit through your 40-second Flash movie, or wade through your company mission statement before they see if you can help them. This sort of content can be there — indeed, it might make sense to be there — just make sure it adds value for them (or, at the very least, make sitting through it a *choice*, rather than an obligation). If it takes too long, count them gone.

The good news is, if you figure this out before your competitors do . . . well, see number 2, above.

6) Too many bells and whistles can drown ANY message

Flash movies, animation, streaming audio and video -- cool technologies? You bet! Necessary to your Web site? Only if they add value . . . for your targeted visitors.

Before commissioning studio time for that video-clip of the CEO reading the latest corporate news release, you might check out your site to see what's there right now. You might be better off confirming that your URL has been registered with the major Internet search engines, or that an articulate, customer-focused person is regularly responding — within 24 hours — to visitor inquiries in the "contact us" e-mail inbox.

Flashy content is nice, but if done for its own sake, it can get in the way of your message . . . seldom a good idea. Know what's on your site. Walk before you run. And don't underestimate the power of keeping things simple.

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