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Build It – and They Won't Come

The *Fort Worth Business Press* has published several excellent articles and columns on Web marketing for small business owners. Most, if not all, of the articles discuss features websites should have. Although all of these features are important, incorporating them usually isn't enough to make the site produce inquiries and new business.

For those interested in a website that contributes to the bottom line, I would like to share two insights based on my experience building websites for my businesses and helping other business owners get the most from collaborating with the Web designers and developers to create business sites.

In the current climate, many small businesses and start ups don't have the money to bring traffic to their websites by paying per click. Instead, the owners plan to get visitors from search engines like Google, Yahoo! or Bing. If traffic from the search engines is part of the plan, the business owners need to know about search engine optimization (SEO).

For example, if a Fort Worth pet grooming business wants its website to be found at the top of Google when a potential customer types "Fort Worth dog groomer," the owner needs to ensure that the site is designed so that search engines can index the content and see that the site's pages best meet the needs of someone looking for a dog groomer.

Small business owners frequently find that they have a site that's not search engine friendly – after they have invested a lot of money to create it – and done all the things typically recommended to market it. Understanding the basics of SEO and planning for it at the beginning can prevent costly redesigns. SEO should really come before any of the design elements. Unfortunately, SEO, arguably the most important component of a website, is not considered at all, or only considered near the end of the project.

Small business owners don't know what they don't know, so they don't know to ask about SEO at the outset. They think, like I once did, that if they put up a site, the customers will come. Although there are many good Web designers and developers, not all understand a client's business, and most aren't trained in SEO, so a small business owner can end up with a beautiful site that doesn't attract customers or business.

The other element that every small business owner should consider at the outset is how he or she is going to measure results. To know whether a website is worth the investment, a small business owner must think carefully about how to measure results and which tools to use, including many free tools available directly from Google or other search engine companies.

Owners think they've built the site and are done, and oftentimes, the Web designers and developers move on to the next project. My website seeks to educate small business owners, who have passion and energy and want to ensure that they ask the right questions and get a website that works to build their business.

– Ron Sturgeon, Fort Worth