

Your Personal Branding Website Design, Look & Feel

A clean, confidence-inspiring site will do a great job of pre-selling whatever you're promoting – either the business or a product. And as we've previously discussed, warmed up, willing-to-buy prospects will convert to customers or business partners much more easily.

The most important thing to remember is that your website should be fool proof. So organize your content in a way that will take your prospect from beginning to end without any hassle.

The very instant your visitors land on your website, they'll (consciously or unconsciously) form an immediate opinion, so your first impression is critical.

Your website will either help to keep your visitors engaged and receptive, or it'll turn them off.

Obviously, you want your prospects to be receptive and feel comfortable, but what if you have zero design or html programming skills? No problem ...There are great companies that can provide you with turnkey website templates. (I sent you the links to these already.) They make it easy for anyone to create a clean and professional looking website without the guesswork or Computer Science PhD.

Now, if you already have some decent design skills and you know html programming, fantastic, but even then, keep your design clean and simple and leave all the bells and whistles where they belong ... in the circus!

The look and feel of your site goes deeper than just it's graphics and overall design. The actual appearance of your WORDS is also important. For example, here are a few things to avoid or correct:

- * ALL CAPS EVERYWHERE - No need to shout every word of every sentence.
- * Glaring spelling typos - Nothing says amateur faster than tons of typos.
- * Over-use of colored text and flashing graphics - **Epecially in a single sentence.** Stick with black text on a white background and use some **red** and **yellow highlights** sparingly. **Red** has the power to grab more attention than any other color and is best used for headlines. Leave the flash and animated graphics for gambling sites; they don't belong on a personal site for the most part.

The layout design of your site should be clean and easy to navigate for your visitors Google's site is one of the best examples of simplicity.

Keep in mind that reading online is done much differently than reading offline. People tend to scan text, so keep your paragraphs short with plenty of white space.

Scanning eyeballs love visual breaks so scattering photos and images throughout your site help things flow better.

Stay away from dark background colors like black with white text. Not only is it difficult to read, but for a personal website, it might not necessarily give people a good vibe or first impression about you.

The bottom line is you can't go wrong with black text on a white background. It's the standard in web design for good reason - it's easy to read. Why make things more complicated than they need be?

Save the “cutesy” colors and fancy borders for a family and friends only site rather than a site created for profit.

Also be sure to use bold, italic and highlighted text accents sparingly in your website copy. Too much of a good thing will ensure that nothing stands out. It can also give the impression that you’re trying to hard to make your point.

Website Navigation

Website navigation is how people get around your site.

Styles of navigation:

- Embedded links - The most basic form of navigation.

- Breadcrumb trail - Used for organizing large amounts of information.

- Left/top/pop-up navigation bar - Most common, generally usable.

- Tab navigation - When breaking into a few primary categories.

- Site map - One-stop shopping for everything on a site.

Some people like to have buttons or links towards the top of their site in a straight line, and some prefer them on the left hand side.

And others prefer not to have ANY navigation buttons or links on the top or the side.

The most basic form of navigation is the embedded link. An embedded link (hyperlink) can be anywhere you link text within the body of the page to another page or website.

This style of navigation is one of the best ones to use on your website because it doesn’t distract your visitors as they read your content in a linear fashion. The links become more intuitively placed.

As a general rule of thumb, when you add embedded links that go to other sites, have those links open up to new windows (you’ll be able to do this by choosing “New Window” when creating links in whatever website building tool you use). This way, your main personal website will remain loaded in your visitor’s browser. .. even if they venture off to another part of your website.

Website Background

I suggest using a solid or lightly textured dark background with a white column down the center. It helps to focus your visitor’s attention right where you want it. .. on your story and pictures.

Use psychologically effective colors - The color blue suggests quality, trustworthiness, success, seriousness, calmness - it’s the perfect choice for your personal web pages.

Be sure to avoid purple, which connotes uncertainty and ambiguity. It’s also best to stay away from busy, heavily textured backgrounds that distract your visitors.

Website Font Styles

For font style choices, it’s best to use a 10pt or 12pt Sans Serif font like **Arial** or Verdana for the main text areas of your site, and a 16-18pt **Tahoma** in red for headlines and sub-heads.

In the offline world, Times New Roman is the font style of choice. It seems to work well in print but it's a little harder for people to read on a computer screen.

San Serif fonts work best online because they're easier to read and scan. I've seen some people mix and match, but that's purely a subjective choice.

By the way, you will want to keep most of my embedded links to other sites or pages down towards the bottom of the main page so your visitor isn't distracted as soon as they land on your site.

Remember, the purpose of your personal website is to sell and brand YOU, not our opportunity, or product ... at least not right away. There's plenty of time for that later, after you've got their undivided attention. If you allow people to bypass reading your story by clicking one of your other links, they may find what they're looking for, but there's a good chance you'll miss the opportunity to have them get to know who you are and how you can help them.

And if you're the kind of person that likes to make things complicated - don't!

Again, check out Google.com if you need reassurance that simple and clean works. They can afford the highest-paid graphic designers, but they seem to stick with simplicity - big clue there. Flashing, blinking graphics **don't** foster trust. .. and frankly, most of the time it just bores people and makes them want to click their browser's 'back' button.

Also avoid using blinking text, awards buttons and banners at all costs! Having these types of things all over your site is a dead give away that you're an amateur - seriously. Less IS more ... and on the Internet, simplicity rules the day.

By the way, if you want to have a few little special effects on your site, that's fine, just don't go overboard, use them sparingly.

Website Builders

If you're "technically challenged" like me and need a solution to build your website, you can get what's called a WYSIWYG editor (pronounced Wiz-zee-wig), which is short for what you see is what you get. A WYSIWYG website builder enables you to see on your monitor exactly what will appear when your web pages are published and live on the Net. These days, building your website can be as easy as point and click, copy and paste. (These types of website builders were included in email I sent you with all the links.)

Pictures

The words you use on your website are very important, but a good picture is worth a 1,000 words ... it also adds some extra spice and interest to your site.

I'm a big fan of using real photos on your personal website because I know that your prospects can relate better with someone they can actually see. I can't tell you how many times I get calls from people I've never met before who tell me they feel like they've know me - simply because they've read our story and seen us on our site at www.ExploreFreedom.com/clendenin (which is fixin' to be brought down and replaced with more of a personal branding web-site.)

If a prospect can see a picture of you and put a face with a name, and your competition on the other hand is just sending people to an anonymous replicated site .. guess who's going to have a better chance of building trust and rapport?

That's right! YOU!

Let's face it, just about anyone can throw up a business website for a few bucks, but to succeed, you need to establish trust and curiosity within the first few seconds someone lands on your site.

You must be seen as both believable and authentic. Trust is that essential lubricant that allows business transactions to take place, both in the physical world and in the cyberworld.

We know that large companies spend tens of millions of dollars to build a brand. This type of branding is for association in the mind of the consumer, and a belief that a company with so much invested in its reputation won't disappoint its customers.

Investments in brand development pay rich dividends, but smaller companies like home-based businesses and mom and pop retail stores don't usually have big budgets to establish a national brand. Instead of relying upon an established reputation, they're required to build trust and confidence from the moment a potential prospect lands on their site (or walks in their store).

Big companies might have their big brand, but small companies have the advantage of a personal face to represent their business - and that personal connection is the missing link in most online businesses these days.

So be sure to sprinkle in some personal photos of yourself (and your family, spouse, children, pets, etc.), use whatever you're comfortable with.

The Internet is such a cold and sterile place, your pictures will earn you tons of trust building equity when someone lands on your site and sees you as someone they can relate to.

Tips To Optimize Your Photos For The Internet

Once you've chosen some photos to include throughout your story, you'll need to make sure your photos are optimized for the Net before you use them to ensure your site will load fast.

Here is a common mistake when it comes to pictures. I was once asked to look at why a very simple web page (with one small image and about 750 words of text) took almost 30 seconds to load ... on broadband!

The answer was simple and it's a mistake that is made a lot.

The original image was way too large and was scaled to a small image size visually in a web site creation program, not an image editing program and the size of the original file was 2 megabytes, which is extremely large for any website.

Even when you resize your image on your web page to the size of a postage stamp, you really haven't done anything to reduce the image file size at all. All you're doing is telling the browser to re-scale the image, but not reduce its file size.

The image that you thought is the size of a postage stamp is still that same large 8 x 11 inch image that takes over 30 seconds to download unless you shrink it down using a graphics program. A digital camera and/or scanner have default settings intended for a printer, not the web, so your images need to be reduced in size and resolution. And when you use an image editing program (like Photoshop) to reduce the size of the original image (and you save it as a JPEG or GIF), you can create not only a smaller image, but a smaller file size as well.

Then your edited images will load quickly on your visitor's computer.

The two main image formats you need to know about because they're the ones recognized by all web browsers are JPEG and GIF. These JPEG (pronounced Jay-Peg) and GIF (pronounced Jif - as in Jiffy Peanut Butter) image formats are compressed to load quickly. That means that information has been organized inside the file in a special way in order to minimize the file size as much as possible.

The difference between JPEG and GIF is the way that they compress the data. Without getting too technical on you, JPEG compression is designed to optimize photographs or images with fine gradations of color and this is the type of compression I recommend you use for your personal photos.

GIF compression is designed to optimize images that include animation or large areas of continuous color so they really don't apply to photos; they work better for animated buttons and accent graphics though. This happens because you're actually losing information. Also notice that the color in each example doesn't change at all. Colors aren't lost in JPEG images.

When you use JPEG compression, you'll just be trading off between image quality and image file size. So when it comes to working with pictures on the web, the best method to decrease the file size is to decrease the quality.

Image Resolution

With most of the commercially available digital cameras out there, you'll find that the digital images they produce are normally much higher quality (resolution / dots per inch) than a typical monitor can display. Most monitors display images at 72 pixels per inch. So a higher resolution image (such as 300 pixels per inch) will be lost on the computer screen, (but not in print).

So for web sites, using a graphics-editing program, you should reduce your image resolution size to 72 pixels per inch.

Another method to reduce the size of your images (while saving them as JPEGs) is to crop out any 'dead' area. For example, you could crop the borders in any of your images if they have some excess imagery that's not important to see. I do this all the time with my personal pictures.

Image Editing Software

If you don't yet have an image editing software program, the good news is that you don't need to go out and buy an expensive solution. Most people don't need programs like Photoshop just to optimize photographs for the web. There are freeware programs like Irfanview at www.irfanview.com that do a great job of compressing JPEG images for the web. It has standard tools built in to help you decrease the file size of any image you want to use on your website.

It also has a great little side-by-side comparison view that allows you to quickly ‘fix’ those dark pictures you might have from your digital camera or scanner. You simply load the original image and then use the ‘save as’ option on the file menu to give the file a new name (and reduce the file size at same time). Best of all, it’s FREE.

(Be sure to save your file under a different name from the original scanned image, otherwise your original image will be saved instead of the newly edited version, and this process can’t be undone.)

The Irfanview program is about as dummie-proof as you can get and has default settings that do a decent job of JPEG compression while maintaining excellent quality for the web.

TIP - The default quality setting is usually 80% for Irfanview; however, 70% or 75% quality is still fine for the web.

If you end up using another graphics program, follow the instructions on reducing the quality because most graphics programs are set at a high quality default resolution for printers (not monitors).

Above all, your goal is to keep your images small in size, no more than 30KB each, but preferably 12KB or less if at all possible.

HOMEWORK:

Compile and edit your photos. It’s time to compile and edit your photos so they’re ready to strip into your website content. It’s best to create a separate folder to store these in on your computer so you can easily access them. The more organized you are, the less frustration you’ll have when it comes to bringing everything together.

Display Testimonials

Never underestimate the power of adding testimonials on your site.

When it comes to sharing your story, testimonials from others you’ve worked with (either sponsors or people you’ve sponsored or sold products to) can be a powerful magnet to get people to want to do business with you.

Audio testimonials are great but for now, let’s get your written testimonies on your site. We will deal with audio and video after we have you up and running.

You may already have some prepared testimonials that you can use, but I’ve found that asking a few customers, or successful downline or upline EcoQuesters to write their own for you can be powerful, especially when they mention you in their testimonial as someone who’s contributed to their success.

In your prospect’s mind, this will be a solid confirmation that you’re a leader and a professional that will lead them in the right direction, and will instill the belief that they can’t fail with you by their side.

To add more credibility, when possible, use full names with their permission, the city and state where they live, and if appropriate, a phone number or email to contact them.

HOMEWORK:

Compile and collect testimonials - Written testimonials for now. Request people send you a photo to include with their testimonial as well to give them more authenticity.

Provide Full Contact Information

It's funny that some people want to build a large thriving business online without talking to anyone. While it's true that most of the process can be automated when things are set-up properly, but in my experience, only a very small percentage of highly skilled marketers can actually make anonymous sales and enjoy a secure, passive, residual income long-term.

And automated relationship building can only work up to a certain point, primarily to get your prospects to take action and pick up the phone to call or email you.

You will see that a lot of your online success resulted from actually taking the conversation with your prospects offline.

The phone, combined with the Internet, is probably the most powerful winning combination you can have - it's the ole' one-two punch.

Why?

It seems real simple, but when people have questions, some of them don't want to send an email; some people want to just pick up the phone and get their questions answered ... immediately!

Be happy to oblige them and make more money because of it!

So, make sure that everyone can find your phone number easily!

In other words, don't be elusive. To get the best possible results, make yourself accessible. Providing contact information also demonstrates your willingness to perform customer service. This is where most marketers fail online, they unintentionally "hide" behind email or a website, or just don't want to bother with having to actually talk to people. HUGE mistake!

What they fail to recognize is how many tens of thousands of dollars they're leaving on the table for someone else (like you and me) to gladly snatch up with open arms.

So, provide your phone number(s), e-mail address, ICO or AOL IM, and street address if applicable (We use our home address - more credibility, especially locally.)

Oh, and here's one bonus tip - If you have a toll-free number with voicemail (and they're so cheap these days you really should have one), always make sure to show your direct number, as well.

Toll-free numbers only work within limited areas and you don't want to shut out the rest of the world, and without a direct number, most international prospects won't have any other way to call you. A voicemail service attached to your business line ensures that you won't be caught off guard when a prospect decides to call you unexpectedly from Timbuktu at 3 AM in the morning! If all calls go to a remote voicemail, you can then call them back on your terms, and when you're prepared.

Another thing to pay attention to is always be clear about what it is that you want your potential prospect to do. How should they respond?

Offer as many options as you can, and answer your phone when people call you.

Most people want an immediate response so don't keep them waiting for whatever it is that you've promised. The harder they have to work to get in touch with you, the more business you'll lose. So be clear about what you want them to do.

Since any long-term business relationship is built on a solid foundation of trust, focus on trust building in all your communications and prospecting and recruiting will become much easier. Once you start filling up your prospect pipeline, you'll understand the true meaning of this.

Tweaking, Editing, Brushing and Polishing ...

After you've written your first draft, you may find that you need to tweak, reorganize, add, and delete things to keep everything in sync and flowing properly.

Are you happy with your first draft? (You DO have something written down by now, don't you?)

Good. Now it's time to look for ways to "say it better" with the most important rule - "The tongue test."

HOMEWORK

Read your story out loud (slowly) - Pay close attention to how it feels coming off your tongue. You might be shocked at how many clunky sentences and grammatical errors slipped by the first time around. If it sounds ok, it will be. If it doesn't sound right coming out of your mouth, it doesn't belong on your website, tweak it or delete it altogether.

If you're not happy, fix it and make it better, but don't think that it has to be perfect before you can share it with the world.

Anytime you add new content to your site, give it the tongue test before posting it. And if you're REALLY daring enough, get yourself a tape recorder and record yourself as you read your story aloud. Listen carefully to your own words. Do you cringe, or does it sound natural to you?

Your personal website will be a constant work in progress, it's never "perfect", nor does it need to be. Editing your content might seem like a lot of work and that is because it IS ... but remember this one last "rule" ... No one's gonna grade you so don't take it too seriously or drive yourself crazy ... just HAVE FUN!

It's all about communicating (which you already know how to do since you know how to talk). Is all this effort worth it?

Well, once you put your web page up, it can earn you money for the rest of your life. Nuff said. Ok, done yet? If not, then go peck away at your keyboard for a while and then c'mon back ...

So are you happy with how your story flows? I mean, really happy with it? Does it effectively express exactly who you are and address the needs and desires of your visitors, and provide the information they're seeking?

Great! Congratulations! You're ready for primetime!

HOMEWORK

Publish your website! - It's finally time to bless your story and content as being "done" and publish it for all the world to see!

Once your site is up and published, every now and then, step back and ask yourself, "Does my site look clean and easy to follow, or is it cluttered and hard to read and/or look at?"

After a while, you might find yourself tweaking and editing things on a regular basis. I don't think a personal website is ever really "finished." Just like with any living, breathing thing, it's in a constant state of evolution.