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Warehousing Web Sites: Time for a Tune-up?

by Jim Bierfeldt and Jonathan Hochman

Things mechanical tell you they need maintenance. Doors creak. Shutters rattle. Cars sputter when they should surge.

Not so with Web sites, which limp along quietly even when they need attention. As a result, this critical part of your marketing mix gets ignored as you address “noisier” issues like nervous customers and slippery start-ups.

What are some symptoms of a neglected Web site? Inaccurate content, dated design, slow-loading pages and few site-generated sales leads. If you haven't taken stock of your Web site in a while, consider a tune-up.

Update Your Content

Have you ever apologized for incorrect content on your site? Join the club. Most times, you're too busy to notice. But your site's visitors *do* notice outdated content. For many, it's their first (and last?) interaction with your company. A neglected site portrays a neglectful approach – not an

image an inventory management business can afford.

When developing content, consider going beyond “brochure-ware” copy that simply describes your services. What “How to...” articles can you or your company's experts write? Content that helps visitors solve problems can be far more valuable to them than a bulleted list of features. And it can differentiate you from competitors by positioning you as an expert.

Update Your Design

In Web sites, as in personal interactions, first impressions count. Sites that are attractive and easy to navigate communicate professionalism and will reduce your bounce rate (percent of people who visit your site but quickly leave via the back button). Not sure whether your site design passes muster? Ask somebody with marketing expertise for an honest, critical opinion.

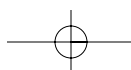
One of the common design

problems we see in warehouse-related sites is overuse of photos. While photos add context and visual interest to the site, most visitors don't need to see multiple large photos of warehouse aisles and forklift trucks to believe your facility can handle its goods. More importantly, search engines assign little weight to photos. Their spiders, used to index your site's content, skip over photos and go to the next place they see words.

If your site design is truly outdated and the menu structure is no longer relevant, a complete makeover, rather than a tune-up, may be in order.

Update Your Code

HTML, the authoring language used to create Web content, is constantly evolving. Outdated code can result in slow loading pages and sites



that don't work across all browsers. In contrast, pages coded by an experienced Web developer improve user experience by loading quickly and reliably. They also cost less to maintain and produce better search engine visibility.

Seek Inbound Links

A properly coded site with solid content will help increase visitor traffic. But for consistently high search engine rankings you'll need other Web sites to link to your site. Search engines monitor links to your site and use the quantity and quality of these links to assign an importance rating to your site. In general, the more links you have from high-quality sites the better you'll rank. To determine the number of inbound links to your site and those of your key competitors, go to the link popularity check at www.marketleap.com.

Securing inbound links is an ongoing process. You can tackle it yourself or get help from a Web marketing firm. If you want to get smart quick on link building, visit

the link building section of www.netconcepts.com.

Promote Your Site

Many Web site owners seem to subscribe to the theory "if we build it, they will come." Not necessarily so. Your marketing program must include a plan to promote and drive traffic to your site. The primary means of Web site promotion are:

- search engine optimization (SEO)
 - the science of getting your Web site to rank high on searches for specific keyword phrases
- online advertising

SEO can be highly effective, but it may be difficult for you to outrank your competitors for popular search terms. In these cases, paying for search traffic can work. For example, pay-per-click (PPC) programs allow you to pay for certain search terms like "food-grade warehouse in Chicago." Your ad appears next to the natural search results and you pay a small click charge every time a searcher clicks on the link to your site. For a sim-

ple article on the differences between SEO and PPC, go to <http://en.wikipedia.org> and do a search on "search engine marketing."

Web sites don't tell you they're sick. Occasionally you need to bring them in for a check-up to make sure all systems are in good working order. If you haven't had a check-up in a while, make it happen. Your sales pipeline will thank you for it. ✦

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Buyer Beware

Spot the top five web marketing scams

1. **"For just \$29.95 per month, we'll submit your site to 10,000 search engines."** There are three search engines that matter to your business: Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft Live.
2. **"Your site doesn't rank."** Rankings depend on what keyword phrase you choose, so more reliable performance indicators are the number of visitors to your site and where they came from.
3. **"You need our \$449 maintenance package to keep your search engine rankings."** Many so-called Web marketing "experts" do all the real work up front, but charge monthly fees for ongoing search optimization. In reality, this ongoing work consists of pushing a
- button to run a ranking report and sending it to you monthly in a pretty package. Fees for these canned reports can run into the thousands and may be the highest-margin business since pet rocks. You *should* invest in an ongoing search marketing program, but seek firms that deliver real value.
4. **"We'll tell you the secrets Google doesn't want you to know."** There are no secrets. Professionals know how to rank, but it takes time, money and effort.
5. **"We guarantee top rankings."** Nobody can control the search engines or the competition, so beware of guarantees. Anyone can get a site ranked high for an obscure, unused search term.