

A large, thick blue circular arrow graphic that loops around the central text box. The arrow starts at the top right, curves around the top and left, and ends with a triangular arrowhead pointing towards the center.

LoopFuse Marketing Best Practices Exchange

Taking Your Website to the Next Level

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Overview

Your website is one of your most important marketing assets. It attracts, educates and informs customers, business partners, investors and other potential stakeholders in your business. It communicates your brand to the public and should help start the sales process and possibly enable sales via e-commerce capabilities.

Whether you're creating your first website or whether you're looking for ways to increase the effectiveness of your current site, this paper will provide you with tips from web marketing experts to help you meet your goals. The paper will cover issues like:

- Branding – what does your website say about your business? What “vibe” does it give off?
- Tips for creating a website that meets your business goals and doesn't cost a fortune.
- Analytics - How do you know whether my website is achieving its business goals?
- And more...

Branding Do's and Don'ts

Your website will communicate information about you and the products or services you offer. Your “brand” is your company's identity (company name, logo, slogan, etc.) and more importantly, the qualities people associate with it. Your website says a lot about your brand, and not just via the messaging on your site. The way your website looks and how people experience it say a lot about your brand and your company too.

Best Practices Recommendations:

Practice	Implications
Thoroughly check for misspellings and broken links.	An error-ridden website is a bad thing. Unfortunately, it can create the impression that you are just as careless creating your products or delivering your service.
Invest in a nice website design	You want to make a good first impression on visitors. Nicely polished website designs can be created easily and inexpensively (more on this later). Under-investing in design can put you at a disadvantage; especially if your competitors' sites look more polished.
Review competitors' sites	Compare your site to your competitors on a regular basis. Study key messages, special offers, look and feel, etc. Make sure you're keep pace, AND look for ways to one-up them. For example, is your messaging similar? If so, then consider adding customer testimonials, or a pricing info or maybe use video or audio to communicate.
Make it easy to find and get info or resources	The Internet has transformed the way people shop for Business-to-consumer (B2C) and Business-to-business (B2B) products and services. They often expect to be able to educate themselves on your offerings, and if they like what they see,

	then they will continue the purchasing process. So, make self-education easy for the user.
Be mindful of dated content	If you have brochures with publication dates on your site, update the publication content and dates from time to time, so they seem current. If you have press releases with datelines or dated announcements on your site, be sure to keep more news coming out, or remove the dated content. If the latest news on your website is over 6 months old, visitors may assume that there's nothing going on at the company. Keep news up to date to create the impression that you're business is lively.
No "under construction" signs	Better to publish a small, but complete site instead of a large site with lots of links to "under construction" dead ends. This can frustrate users and may lead them to believe that your website isn't the only thing that's not ready to do business.
Aren't iPads cool?	Not if someone's using one to view a website full of Flash video or Flex content; the browsers on the Apple mobile devices don't display Adobe Flash. Keep mobile device access in mind; and make sure all those people browsing sites via devices experience your site in a positive way.

Building or Upgrading Your Website without Spending a Fortune

You don't need to have a web marketing budget like Apple Computer to have a productive website. Website development and web marketing technology have come a long way over the last several years, and now small businesses are able to create sophisticated websites at an affordable cost.

Setting a Website Strategy

Start by carefully considering the goals for your website. Answer these two questions to help you set a strategy:

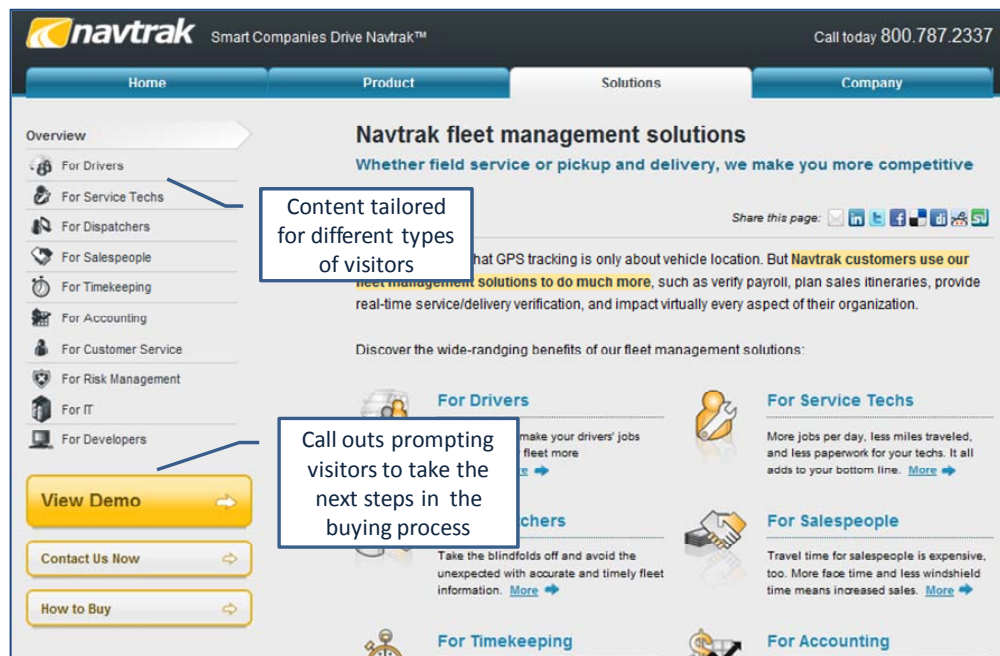
- Who do I want to attract to the site?
- What do I want them to do/learn when they get here?

Create a list of different visitor "types." Be as exhaustive and specific as you can.

Consider a maker of vehicle fleet tracking technology. The company enables companies with mobile delivery, sales, or service people to know where the vehicles are, if they're on schedule, if they're safe, if they're speeding, or if they're following the most efficient routes, etc. Here's how they might answer the questions above.

Who do I want to attract?	Why are they Visiting?	What Info do we need to provide?	What action do we want them to take?
Companies with fleets of delivery, sales or service vehicles (Note: This example is for illustrative purposes, so it's being kept simple. In reality, one could (and should) be more specific; drill down to specific people/job titles within these companies, or companies of certain sizes or within specific industries or geographic locations, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To learn whether fleet tracking technology can improve their business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overview of product features and benefits • An on-line demonstration of the product • Competitive comparison info • Product cost info • Ordering information • Customer success stories or testimonials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up to download a white paper or to access an on-line demo, etc. • Contact us to set up a sales consultation
Prospective Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To see if we have job openings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job openings • Photos of our business and the people who work here. • Description of the company culture to see that this is a good place to work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a job application
Other visitor types could include...the media, potential business partners, investors or suppliers.			

As you can see from the webpage shown to the right, this analysis helps you determine what information you'll want to put on your website and how you'll use it to grow your business.



You'll also end up with a clearer picture of how to measure the site's success (e.g., what % of visitors visit the "How to Buy" page or sign up to view the demo or contact you for a sales consultation). You could also include demographic details for each audience such as gender, age range, income range — a graphic designer would find that information useful to help create a design that appeals to your largest target audiences. Again, **the more exhaustively you think about your audiences, the better you'll serve them** (in all areas of marketing in fact, not just on the web).

Getting your Website Built

It's common for medium to large-sized companies to spend anywhere from \$20,000 to \$500,000 on a website design and development effort. These projects often involve specialized web and creative marketing consulting firms that perform the analysis described above and then design and build a site to fit the need.

Here is a high-level outline of the website development process that the big firms follow, with tips on how to do it for less.

1. Create an "Information Architecture"

An Information Architecture (IA) describes the pages your site will need in order to fulfill its goals. In its simplest form, it's pretty much the menus on the website. The benefit of having an IA is that you end up with a content (webpage) creation "to-do" list that's easy for people to work on. A good IA leads to a site that is more organized, better polished and easier for people to use. A large company may spend thousands of dollars on weeks' of IA consulting time. Here's how you can do this yourself in a couple of hours.

If you analyze your audience well, as was done in the fleet tracking example above, you can figure this out yourself. Here's a high-level IA for a cloud-computing consulting company website.

Home	Cloud Transformation	Solution	Partners	News & Events	About
Header Link: Search	Why Cloud	What We Offer - Overview	Solution Partners	Media Coverage	Overview
Header Link: Contact us	Definitions	Our Approach	Technology Partners	Analyst Reports	Leadership Team
Header Link: Follow us on Twitter	Moving to the Cloud	<i>Transformation Roadmap</i>		Webinars & Events	Customers
Why transform/modernize	Success Stories	<i>Legacy Code Capture & Reuse</i>		Press Releases	Board
Latest News	Resources	<i>Transformation</i>		Awards	Investors
Industry Spotlight: Banking	<i>White Papers</i>	<i>Deployment</i>		Subscribe	Careers
Webinar Sign Up	<i>Demos/Videos</i>	Our Technology			Contact Us
Cloud Transformation White Paper	<i>Case Studies</i>	<i>Cloud Reference Framework</i>			
Footer Link: Privacy	<i>Data Sheets</i>	<i>Enterprise RIA Platform</i>			
Footer Link: Sitemap	<i>Downloads</i>	Our Expertise			
		<i>Transformation project resources</i>			
		Fixed-Cost Projects			

The IA above is documented simply in a spreadsheet. There are more sophisticated ways to capture the IA of course; visit Wikipedia to learn more: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_architecture

Another way to do your IA: Find other businesses like yours, and follow their example. Look at several sites to compare different ways of organizing information like yours. And then create an IA that combines the best of the best ideas.

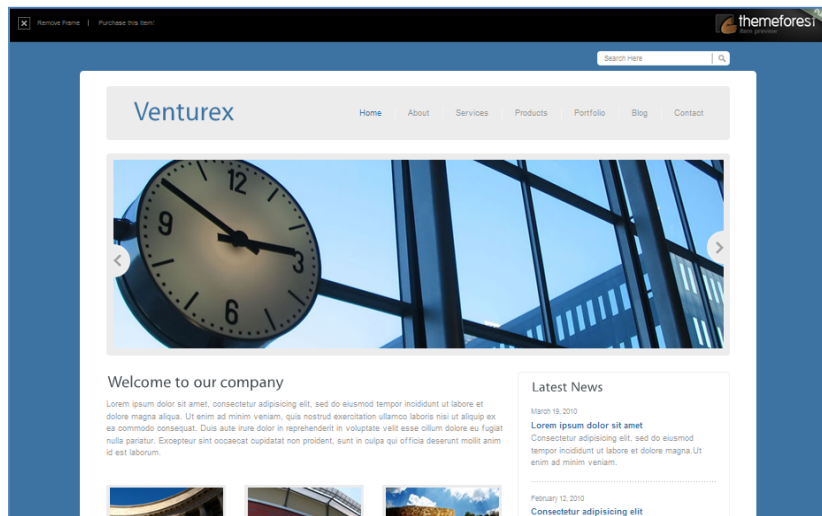
2. Get a Nice-Looking Website Design

It used to require the relatively expensive services of a creative marketing or graphic design firm to get a polished, custom website design. It often takes weeks or even months of going back and forth with your designers until you agree on a look.

Of course, there are faster, less expensive options, which require just a little web development (HTML)

experience. There are hundreds of really nice looking website design templates available for about \$25 from sites like www.themeforest.com. You'll need a few days of a web developer's time to get them installed and customized, and probably a little bit of graphic designer time to create or customize your logos and find stock images to put into the theme.

Susan Davis, Vice President of Marketing for Infobright, which develops and markets a high performance, self-tuning analytic database and a Loopfuse customer, provides her thoughts on the importance of website design:



“At Infobright, we invested in a professional website design that we believe reflects well on the company. One of our key objectives was to make it clear what product and value we deliver (a high performance, low cost, easy to use analytic database), and what the best uses of our product are through visible solutions buttons. We have prominent links to download our software or contact us, so visitors can get instant access to what they need. We also are continually adding content to the site, such as notices of new events and webinars and new industry or technical white papers. We also make changes to the site itself from time to time to keep it fresh and to enhance its value to visitors and as a lead generating vehicle.”

3. Getting ready to add content - even fancy stuff like discussion forums and search

One of the big website decisions you’ll make at some point is whether to use a content management system (CMS). A CMS is software that makes it easier to edit your website, especially if there are multiple people making changes to it or if you have a big site with lots of web pages. Here’s what a CMS does:

- The CMS keeps your web pages safely and securely organized and maintains a revision history (in case you want to undo changes)
- It divides your web pages into sections, which can be reused on every page, like the website footer and header, etc.
- Lastly, CMSs typically include lots of pre-built content options that you can integrate into your site, like search boxes, discussion forums, blog sites, etc.

A CMS usually takes a little technical expertise to set up. The great news is that there are several great free content management systems, like Drupal (www.drupal.org) and Wordpress (www.wordpress.com). Making it even easier are sites like Bluehost.com that enable you to pick a website domain name, and then automatically set your web for you (hosted on their computers) complete with a CMS installed and ready to go.

4. Creating Forms

Getting website visitors to sign up for additional information or to join your mailing list is what turns a marketing information site into a sales tool that funnels prospects to your sales people. This is called “lead capture,” and we’ll write an entirely separate article on the topic but that doesn’t mean it’s difficult to do.

Turn-key website templates often include a simple sign up (“contact us”) form. The information visitors enter is usually emailed to you. It’s hard to use customer information contained in emails though; you usually have to transcribe it to a spreadsheet or a customer database in order to track customer sales status or perform emailings to your followers. Even if you have just one or two sign ups a day, it can be burdensome to keep up with the data entry.

A better approach is to integrate lead capture with your website and LoopFuse makes this very easy. You tell it what data items you want to collect from people, and it generates HTML to put in your web page. When people fill out the form, their info gets stored in LoopFuse where you can easily divide

people into different types of prospects and do emailings to them, etc. If you have a customer relationship management system (CRM) like Salesforce.com, Loopfuse will also transfer information to those systems, where your sales people can log notes about them and their sales status.

5. Finding Help

Even though web marketing has made great strides to enable “Do it yourselfers” to be more effective, you may run into situations where you’ll need some deeper website development experience, usually on a temporary, contract basis. Resources might include:

- Graphic designer
- Web developer
- Content management (CMS) consultant
- Information architect
- Marketing strategy

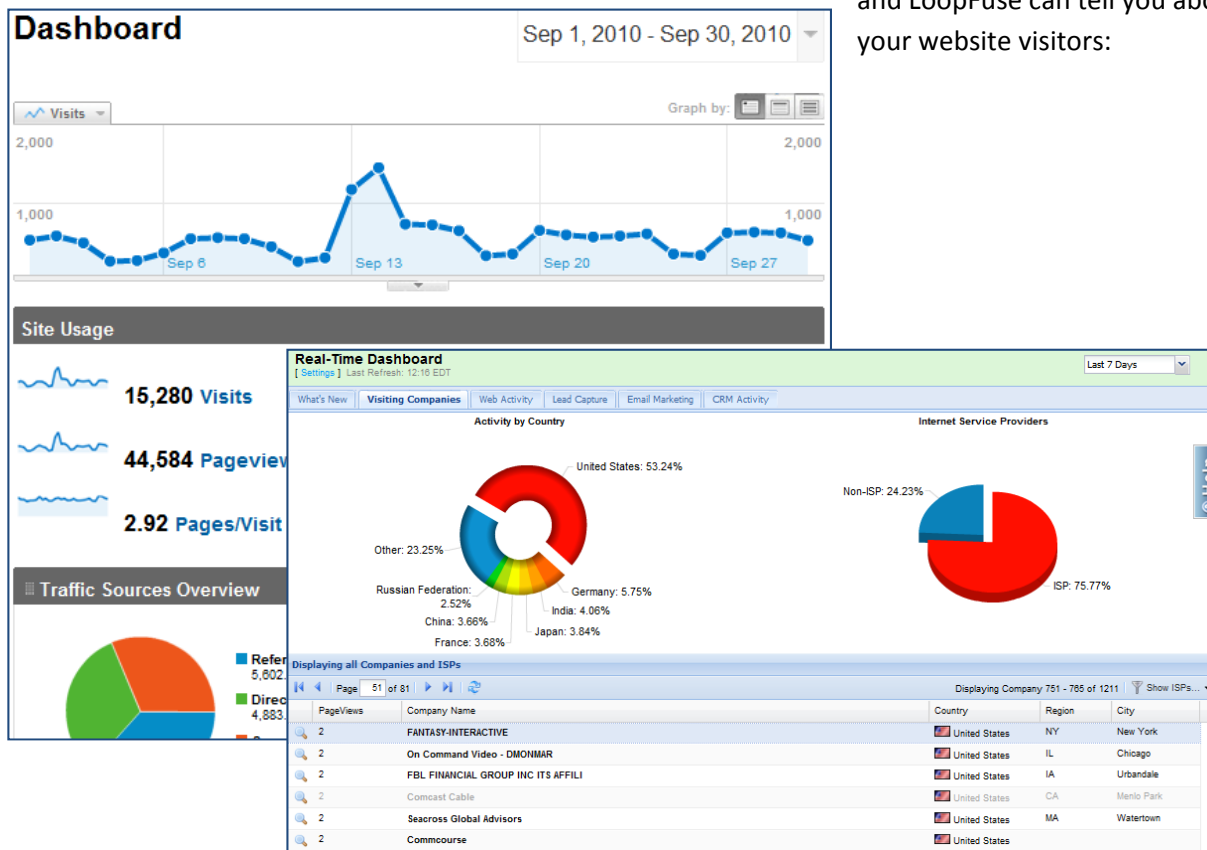
The best way to find these resources is via word of mouth or personal references. Call into colleagues at other companies to find out who they use and recommend. Promoting contract marketing employment needs via social networking sites like LinkedIn.com can also be very helpful. Craigslist and Odesk.com include registries of contract web marketing pros. And you can always do a web search for resources in your area.

Analyzing Web Performance

Lastly, you'll want to be sure you measure how well your website investment is paying off. It's actually very easy to learn how many people are visiting your website, where they're from, whether they registered, how they found your website, etc. This information is very helpful—it shows you how well your awareness generation programs are working (e.g. advertising, PR, etc.) so you can figure out which ones to keep investing in, or drop.

Setting web analytics is easy. Sign up for Google Analytics or LoopFuse FreeView (or both!) and follow the instructions they provide for adding their analytics to your site; it's very easy to do, and here are

some samples of what Google and LoopFuse can tell you about your website visitors:



Additional Info / Next Steps

Hopefully you found this paper helpful. Be sure to stay tuned for more from the LoopFUSE Marketing Best Practices Exchange blogs and read public discussion on this topic, including lots of other tips and tricks shared by web marketing experts.

Future papers cover topics such as:

- Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
- Sales & Marketing machine (Lead qualification, nurturing)
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
- Pay Per Click Advertising
- PR/Social Media/Networking
- Mass Emailing
- Events marketing
- Direct mail
- Advertising
- Marketing Launches
- Reporting