8 QUESTIONS AN INNOVATIVE COMPANY NEEDS TO ASK

BEFORE OUTSOURCING A NEW WEBSITE

By **Reality2** A Branding & Marketing Agency

WHAT SHOULD YOUR WEBSITE DO?

No question, the first thing is to communicate clearly what it is your company does, and why it's different. This is easier said than done. Many innovators, especially in the technology industry, get so excited about their products and features that they lose sight of the one thing that makes them truly unique and valuable to their prospects and customers.

Next, your website has to reflect your company's personality. The type of design and graphics you choose are key here, but also the "tone" in which you speak. For instance, do you want to be perceived as friendly and caring, or fast and efficient, or...?

Goes without saying that your new site shold be mobile responsive and SEO-friendly. Other practical considerations: what response mechanisms do you need? Do you want to offer eBooks or white papers, capture contact info, show videos, feature a blog, tie in with a marketing automation solution (like Salesforce.com)? And of course, you have to be able to easily make changes yourself.

2.

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO IMPRESS?

Or said another way: who are the people that you're trying to engage with your website? This of course is important because it will determine not only the content on the site, but also the "language" that you use. For instance, in the health care industry, you would speak differently to a hospital administrator than a doctor, since each has different concerns.

Your website may have to address the issues of different groups, which means creating different sections or pages for each. Main thing is, you need to have a thorough understanding of the various "personas" you'll be addressing, so you can communicate this clearly to your web developer.

If you're using a web development company that understands this, such as a full-service marketing agency, the process will be much simpler, since they're used to doing this kind of analysis.

3.

WHO SHOULD BUILD IT?

To be fair, we're a little biased here. We believe that using a full-service marketing agency, as opposed to a "web-design" company or individual, is the way to go.

Why? Well, most of the points we mention on the previous pages are the issues that a marketing agency deals with on a daily basis.

A crucial point: Who is going to do all the writing? Most company executives don't have the time to organize all the points that need to be communicated or the expertise to write everything that needs to be written. A web designer or tech-focused developer will say: "Give me all the copy and I'll create and program a great design."

Sure, you want a beautiful website, one that's easy for you to update and for your users to navigate. But unless it's built on a solid marketing foundation, it will be superficial and not do justice to your ideas. So, choose your developer carefully.

4.

HOW BIG SHOULD THE WEBSITE BE?

The main factor is, of course, how much do you have to say in order to accurately represent your company? A small to midsize technology business can usually do it in 5 to 10 pages.

Depending on the number of products or services you offer, you may need more than that. You don't want pages that are too crowded, although today's extremely deep pages let you pack a lot of information without running into that problem. Try to keep pages "airy" with short paragraphs and plenty of space.

Another consideration is cost (see next page). Obviously, the longer the site, the more you will be charged, so you should avoid unnecessary pages. Many web developers have a "per-page" price, especially for extra pages that go beyond an initial agreed-to estimate. But not all pages are created equal. Your developer will estimate based on the amount of information, whether it's spread out on various pages or packed in fewer.

5.

HOW MUCH SHOULD YOU PAY?

Ahh, the big question! Here the answer is an unqualified: It depends. You've no doubt seen ads offering "a complete, amazing website for $500." Or one for "a dollar". Or better, free!

If you're reading this, your business is probably not a little bakery on Main Street. So forget all that. You need a website that will portray your company the way you see it: As an enterprise built on a rock-solid foundation, with spectacular products and a simple, yet life-changing vision (isn't that the way all innovators see their companies?)

The point is, all that doesn't necessarily come cheap. Some very smart people are going to spend a lot of time figuring out what it is that you do. Developing a tight strategy, writing, designing and programming a multi-page website. Depending on the size and complexity, you're looking at somewhere between $15,000 and $35,000. Of course many mid-sized companies spend a lot more (the sky is the limit!).

6.

WHAT WEBSITES DO YOU LIKE?

This one is simple but it can be very helpful. Since there are many ways to present the same information, it's important for your Web developer to understand your preferences (and dislikes).

Verbal descriptions can be misinterpreted, so the best way to tell someone the kind of website you like is to show them one. Or better, show them five or six, or ten. Tell them what it is that you like: Is it the simplicity, the way products are shown, the color choices, the type of photography?

You can start by reviewing your competitor's websites. What's good about them? What's not? But go beyond that and look at websites that you like in a variety of industries (of course, the GE website you love may be a little over your budget, but your developer will let you know what's feasible, so don't be afraid to dream here).

WHAT ARE YOUR COMPETITORS DOING?

Obviously, studying your competitors' websites is the simplest way to find out what you're up against.

You no doubt know what their capabilities are and how you stack up against them, but look carefully at what they're saying and how they're saying it. Are they being truthful in their assertions? Are they exaggerating (God forbid)?

Doing this type of analysis is helpful in two ways: One is that, while you don't want to copy what they say, there may be issues they've worked through in the process of doing their websites that can be educational to you. And two, you want to make sure that your website sets you apart and doesn't repeat what they say (at least not exactly!).

8.

WHAT'S THE BEST TIME TO DO IT?

Ideally you should have a beautiful, perfectly organized and skillfully programmed website when you open your doors. Unfortunately some times, details like buying desks and paying rent get in the way.

So…the next best time is after you've been in business for a while (using the website you paid a dollar for) and you've learned a million things about your business by actually being in business.

Now you're ready to reposition the company to account for new realities both internally and out in the world, which itself has been changing rapidly. Maybe you've even made some money!

You're more sure of the direction your business is taking, the points you want to highlight and the statement you want the website to make. As a matter of fact, this is probably the ideal time to tackle the project.

Reality2 is a full-service branding and marketing agency with a focus on complex business-to-business assignments. We've spent more than 30 years working with innovative companies in just about every category from software to healthcare. Our background as an agency gives us the advantage of quickly understanding a client's business and products and being able to craft a powerful message, as well as develop a cohesive brand. In addition to websites, we create complete, integrated marketing campaigns.

Questions?

Contact Farida Fotouhi

farida@reality2.com

310 826 5662 Ext. 1

Visit our main website:

Reality2.com

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